

# Why India matters to Israel's security future

• By PAUSHALI LASS

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits Israel on 25-26 February, it is far more than a ceremonial trip. Modi will address the Knesset, participate in an innovation forum in Jerusalem, and pay respects at Yad Vashem. Each stop reflects the depth and breadth of India-Israel relations: political trust, technological cooperation, and a shared understanding of existential threats.

For Israelis, this should be viewed not merely as a defense-focused engagement but as a strategic turning point – one with implications for the security of both the Middle East and South Asia.

## A democracy that understands existential threats

India, the world's most populous democracy and one of the fastest-growing economies, is no stranger to danger.

India not only faces conventional military threats from nuclear-armed neighbors but also the spread of radicalized Islamist ideologies across its borders. Groups inspired by extremist narratives seek to destabilize India internally and regionally.

This dual challenge, of conventional and ideological threats, gives India a perspective uniquely aligned with Israel's own security reality. Both nations understand the necessity of countering ideologically driven violence decisively, while protecting civilian populations and infrastructure wherever possible.

This shared understanding – that survival requires strategy, foresight, and operational excellence – forms the foundation of trust between Israel and India. Israel does not need to explain the logic of defending itself; India already grasps it.

## The emerging threat axis

The regional security picture underscores the urgency of India-Israel cooperation.

Pakistan, a nuclear-armed state with a history of sponsoring proxy terrorism, is modernizing its missile and drone capabilities with assistance from China and Turkey. Former Israeli prime minister Naftali Bennett recently warned that Turkey is becoming "the new Iran" – projecting ideological and military influence far beyond its borders.

A Turkey-Pakistan axis, backed by Chinese technology, threatens two democracies – India and Israel – with the same mix of missiles, drones, and proxies. The scale of the threat, combining conventional military risk



INDIA'S PRIME Minister Narendra Modi is seen addressing his supporters last year. Modi's visit to Israel will be far more than a ceremonial visit, the writer says. (Stringer/Reuters)

with radicalized ideology, is unprecedented.

Neither country can afford to face it alone. The India-Israel partnership is therefore not optional; it is strategic insurance.

## Why Israel should care

Israel has long relied on the United States and Western Europe for military and diplomatic backing. That alliance remains essential, but recent years have exposed its fragility. Public opinion shifts, elections change policies, and arms deliveries can become bargaining chips. Rising antisemitism in the West demonstrates that support cannot be assumed.

India offers something different: reliability rooted in shared experience. Its approach is pragmatic, interest-driven, and consistent. India shares intelligence discreetly, invests in co-development, and prioritizes security

outcomes over moral posturing.

And India's scale is a game-changer. Its defense budget for the fiscal year 2026-27 is a record high at roughly \$94b. – one of the largest in the world. But India is not just buying equipment; it is investing in its own future.

Under the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (self-reliance) framework, India plans to use Israeli technology to build systems in India. This allows the Indian industry to scale production across a vast country while embedding Israeli expertise into locally made equipment.

For Israel, this creates a significant opportunity.

Israeli technology can be applied at scale in India, reaching a large and dynamic market while contributing to advanced, battle-tested systems. It is a true partnership: Israel provides cutting-edge innovation and operational know-how, while India provides manufac-

turing power and strategic reach.

For Israeli defense industries, it offers stability and growth. For both nations, it strengthens a partnership that is increasingly central to regional security and long-term strategic planning.

Over time, this could allow Israel to diversify its strategic dependencies and rely less exclusively on Western goodwill.

## Critics in India miss the point

I must mention here that not everyone in India supports Modi's trip to Israel. Many critics, particularly among the liberal and left-leaning circles I spoke with during my recent visit to India, as well as what I read in Indian news, frame it in "moral" terms, suggesting that closer ties with Israel imply complicity in an alleged "Israeli genocide in Gaza."

This perspective often reflects the narra-

tives presented in academic circles and mainstream media, rather than the realities on the ground.

But foreign policy cannot be guided by hashtags, social media narratives, or one-sided opinions.

India faces real threats – conventional, asymmetric, and ideological. Civilian casualties in conflict are tragic, but groups like Hamas deliberately embed themselves among civilians and openly call for Israel's destruction – the very intent of genocide. It is important to distinguish the actions of a terrorist group from the tragedy of war; casualties alone do not constitute genocide.

Some Indians also hold the misconception that Israel is a European settler-colonial outpost. I remind them that the Jewish presence in the Land of Israel stretches back thousands of years, with archaeological evidence and historical artifacts found across the country.

Once people learn about Israel's diverse Jewish communities and the multicultural reality of modern Israeli society, they are often surprised. This firsthand awareness demonstrates why visits – both at the official level and for ordinary citizens – are essential.

A heads-of-state meeting like the one between Netanyahu and Modi can open doors for future dialogue and people-to-people understanding, allowing individuals to experience Israel's diversity and vibrancy directly.

## Beyond defense: civilizational affinity

This relationship is about more than missiles and AI systems. As an Indian-German who has visited Israel repeatedly since October 7, 2023, and witnessed the resilience and humanity of Israelis under attack, I see something deeper: two ancient civilizations within vibrant democracies, both entrepreneurial, innovative, and resilient.

Cooperation between the two countries already spans agriculture, water management, cybersecurity, and start-ups – and this is only the beginning.

Prime Minister Modi's visit is just the opening of doors. Ultimately, I am hopeful for more people-to-people connections and that citizens of both nations will travel, meet, and engage. In doing so, they may discover what I have: despite differences, we share civilizational and cultural similarities, a commitment to diversity, and more in common than we often realize.

*The author is a German-Indian writer, intercultural educator, and geopolitical analyst, dedicated to strengthening ties between Israel and the global community.*