India-Israel Relations

Mains: *GS II – International Relations*

Why in News?

In the event of recent trends of India's growing strategic dependence on Israel, there is a need for a foreign policy balancing national interests, moral values and regional peace.

How Have India-Israel Relations Evolved Over Time?

- **(1947–1991) Ideological Distance** – India opposed the UN Partition Plan (1947), recognised Israel in 1950.
- It recognised PLO in 1974 and Palestine in 1988, reflecting its NAM commitments and support for Palestinian rights.
- **(1992–1998) Normalisation** – Established full diplomatic relations amid post-Cold War geopolitical changes.
- **(1998–2014) Defence Partnership** – Expanded military cooperation, particularly during the 1999 Kargil War.
- **(2014–Present) Strategic Consolidation** – Indian PM's 2017 visit to Israel, Israel PM's visit to India 2018.

***Indian PM** is the first PM visited to Israel after its establishment.*

Organisation / Initiative	Members / Purpose
I2U2	India, Israel, UAE and USA
IMEC	India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor
MASHAV	Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation
DRDO-IAI	Joint defence technology cooperation

What Are the Major Areas of India-Israel Cooperation?

- **Defence and Security** – Israel is an important supplier of UAVs, precision-guided weapons, radars and missile defence systems.
  - **Barak-8** – Jointly developed by India's DRDO and Israel Aerospace Industries.
  - **Heron UAVs** – Support intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.
- **Agriculture, Water and Food Security** – Israeli expertise in drip irrigation, precision farming and protected cultivation supports agricultural modernisation.

    - Centres of Excellence promote advanced agricultural practices.
    - Cooperation includes desalination, wastewater treatment and efficient water management.
- **Science, Technology and Innovation** – Collaboration in artificial intelligence, biotechnology, robotics, cybersecurity and space technology.
    - Joint research, startup partnerships and technology transfer strengthen innovation ecosystems.
- **Trade, Investment and Connectivity** – Bilateral merchandise trade (excluding defence) reached approximately $10.77 billion in FY 2022–23.
    - **2025** – Bilateral Investment Agreement signed to facilitate mutual investments.
    - **2026** – India–Israel FTA negotiations commenced.
    - **I2U2** – Promotes cooperation in food security, clean energy and infrastructure.
    - **IMEC** – Offers opportunities for connectivity between India, West Asia and Europe.

Why Is Israel Important for India's Strategic Interests?

- **Defence modernisation** – Access to advanced military technologies strengthens India's defence preparedness.
- **Counterterrorism** – Intelligence cooperation helps address cross-border terrorism and emerging security threats.
- **Technological advancement** – Collaboration supports indigenous innovation in AI, cybersecurity and advanced manufacturing.
- **Agricultural productivity** – Israeli expertise improves water efficiency, crop productivity and food security.
- **Economic diversification** – Expands trade, investment and technology partnerships.
- **West Asian connectivity** – Strengthens India's engagement with Mediterranean and European markets.

How Does India Balance Relations with Israel and Palestine?

- ***India*** *follows a policy of strategic engagement* with Israel while supporting Palestinian self-determination.

Israel	Palestine
Recognised in 1950	Recognised in 1988
Full diplomatic relations since 1992	Supports independent Palestinian statehood
Defence and technology cooperation	Developmental and humanitarian assistance
Recognises Israel's security concerns	Supports the Two-State Solution

India's Approach to the Gaza Conflict
• **October 7, 2023** – Condemned Hamas's terrorist attacks and civilian killings. • Called for the release of hostages and protection of civilians. • Supported humanitarian assistance, restraint and de-escalation. • Continued advocating a negotiated Two-State Solution.

- **Significance** – India's approach seeks to protect its strategic interests without abandoning its historical commitment to Palestinian rights and international law.

What Are the Major Challenges in India-Israel Relations?

- **Defence Autonomy** – Excessive dependence on imported weapons creates vulnerabilities in supply chains and wartime preparedness.
  - Limited indigenous manufacturing and technology transfer can constrain defence self-reliance.
- **Palestinian Question and International Law** – Civilian casualties and humanitarian suffering in Gaza raise concerns regarding international humanitarian law.
  - Unconditional support for Israel could undermine India's anti-colonial legacy and credibility among the Global South.
- **Strategic Autonomy and Geopolitical Pressures** – Growing defence cooperation with Israel and the US may constrain independent foreign policy choices.
  - Excessive alignment with geopolitical blocs could weaken India's traditional strategic autonomy.
- **Regional Instability and Energy Security** – Escalation involving Israel, Iran and other regional actors threatens energy supplies, maritime trade and Indian diaspora interests.
  - Instability in West Asia can disrupt connectivity projects and remittance flows.
- **Neighbourhood Security** – Unresolved tensions with Pakistan and China increase India's dependence on external military capabilities.
  - An excessive military-oriented approach may undermine diplomatic opportunities for regional stability.

What could Be the Way Forward for India?

- **Strengthen Defence Self-Reliance** – Promote indigenous defence manufacturing under Atmanirbhar Bharat.
  - Prioritise technology transfer, joint research and domestic production.
  - Diversify defence procurement to reduce external dependence.
- **Pursue a Balanced West Asia Policy** – Maintain strategic relations with Israel while supporting Palestinian statehood.
  - Strengthen diplomatic engagement with Iran, Palestine and Arab countries.
  - Consistently uphold international law and humanitarian principles.
- **Prioritise Neighbourhood Diplomacy** – Address outstanding disputes with Pakistan and China through sustained dialogue.
  - Strengthen regional cooperation through BIMSTEC and other regional platforms.
  - Reduce security vulnerabilities through peaceful neighbourhood relations.
- **Deepen Developmental Cooperation** – Expand Israeli collaboration in agriculture, water management, renewable energy and advanced technologies.
  - Promote joint research, innovation and mutually beneficial investments.
- **Uphold Values-Based Foreign Policy** – Balance national interests with human rights, international law and humanitarian obligations.
  - Strengthen India's credibility as a voice of the Global South.
  - Promote peace, non-violence and international cooperation.

What lies ahead?

- India–Israel relations have evolved from diplomatic distance to a comprehensive strategic partnership.
- While Israel remains important for India's defence, technology and economic interests, strategic cooperation must not become strategic dependence.
- India should pursue an independent, balanced and values-based foreign policy that safeguards national interests while supporting Palestinian rights and regional peace.

Reference

The Indian Express| India needs a moral compass on Israel

