

No India, no super-sparta

• By OSHRIT BIRVADKER

Five months ago, the “Super-Sparta” address captured the harrowing dissonance of a nation at war. The momentum of the speech was defined by a brutal paradox – a people whose hearts were buried in the darkness of Hamas tunnels, watching the clock run out on their captive loved ones, while their military might was being felt across the Middle East. From the pulverized Houthi headquarters to the smoldering docks of Hodeidah, Israel projected a Spartan resolve.

Amid these operational triumphs and mounting global condemnation, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented a jarring portrait of a democracy pivoting toward absolute self-reliance. He offered the vision of an autarkic (economically independent) fortress as a shield against diplomatic isolation.

Yet, this “Spartan” ideal collides with the harsh realities of the 21st century. In a hyper-connected world, a closed economy is not a strategic sanctuary, but a precarious illusion that ignores the realities of modern statecraft.

But the real message wasn't about looking inward; it was about looking Eastward. Israeli Eurocentrism has run its

course, and the limits of Western dependency have been laid bare post the October 7 massacre in 2023.

Rather than pursuing the hollow phantom of autarky, Israel is pivoting toward a new Asia-centric reality. In this emerging world order, Asia, with India at its helm, is becoming an indispensable pillar of Israel's national security and its very survival.

Into this strategic vacuum, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's arrival this morning serves as a resounding declaration of intent. It illustrates how the world's largest democracy and the Middle East's only true democracy envision a shared future, signaling the end of transactional courting and the dawn of an intimate partnership.

In a stark departure from 2017, India no longer arrives as a mere consumer of Israeli innovation, but as a primary stakeholder in a shifting world order. As a rising titan in the global balance of power, India is leading the departure from unipolarity, an old order that has spent the last few years in a protracted state of visitation, mourning the loss of its global hegemony.

Modi's presence in Jerusalem, occurring as Western capitals waver, signals that the Israeli “Super-Sparta” has secured a



PRESIDENT ISAAC Herzog meets with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2023. In the emerging world order, Asia, with India at its helm, is becoming an indispensable pillar of Israel's national security and its very survival, the writer says. (Israel Presidential Press Office/Handout via Reuters)

strategic anchor that is not hesitant to wield its power. This is the moment when the “Look East” doctrine turns into a solid reality, woven with defense contracts and trade corridors, clarifying that New Delhi is the primary engine of Israel's strategic depth in a fractured world.

Following the October 7 massacre, Modi was the first to

condemn the murderous terrorist attack. The Indian support did not end with declarations alone; it catalyzed a big and fundamental change in Israel's national security equation that will never return to the status quo. For the first time, the historical asymmetry that characterized the defense equation has narrowed. New Delhi

was provided with vital munitions and advanced military technologies during apocalyptic moments of diplomatic and morale-related nadirs.

This assistance served as the ultimate proof that the “Make in India” initiative is no longer just a vehicle for Indian military modernization against China and Pakistan. Instead,

it has evolved into an Israeli existential necessity. In an era where European support is increasingly dictated by political caprice, the ability to maintain joint production lines with a reliable partner has become Israel's primary insurance policy for strategic continuity.

Netanyahu's “Super-Sparta” has evolved. An absolute independence is a mirage in a world where economies and security are inextricably linked. Israel's path to resilience lies in choosing strategic partners who share its scars.

India is that partner.

Having endured the relentless shadow of terror, India is no stranger to the threat of radical Islam, an ideology that seeks to overwhelm its civilizational fabric. The Indo-Israeli alliance represents a profound strategic alignment between two democracies that refuse to yield to the forces of religious fanaticism.

Israel is far from alone in its pivot toward New Delhi.

The global community, as well, recognizes India as the new center of gravity. The historic free trade agreement (FTA) recently signed between India and the EU provides the critical momentum required to breathe life into the IMEC project, placing Israel at the very heart of a new global trade map. This is a path meant to stream

investment, jobs, and large-scale trade into the region, exactly what Israel post-war needs, igniting the regional integration that was brutally hijacked in October.

The gravity of Indian power has transcended politics, capturing the strategic focus of the world's foremost technology giants. The International AI Summit held last week underscored India's role as the new frontier for innovation. As the world's eyes turn toward New Delhi, Israel must act decisively to weave its unique, innovative DNA into this massive ecosystem. Engaging with a market of over a billion people is no longer a choice; it is the 11th commandment in a shifting world.

To achieve this, a regulatory breakthrough is required, primarily the signing of an FTA. Despite Israel's minute size compared to the Indian giant, it has immense value to contribute, such as Israeli disruptive thinking and “chutzpah”, which remain sought-after commodities for Indian growth. In this win-win equation, where Israeli innovation meets Indian scale, lies the path for Israel to become the “Super-Sparta” that Netanyahu envisions.

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India and Israel: A partnership that beats asymmetry

• By RAN KOCHAV

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's next visit to Israel could do more than generate headlines. It could lower the friction that constrains the defense relationship and help India and Israel deepen cooperation at a moment when they are confronting the same strategic problem: how to defend societies and critical infrastructure against air and missile threats in an age of saturation.

This visit should not be read as a test of political warmth. It is a capability checkpoint: Can Israel and India translate diplomatic proximity into practical mechanisms that reduce the cost asymmetry of modern air defense?

For both countries, the past two years have underscored a hard truth: Air and missile defense is no longer a supporting function. It is a national strategic instrument that buys decision-makers time, maneuver space, and crisis stability while denying adversaries an outsized strategic payoff.

One of the lessons of recent conflicts, especially Operation Sindoore (May 2025), is that air defense determines the political room available to leaders during limited conflict.

But in the “Saturation Age,” where low-cost drone swarms, loitering munitions, and missile salvos can overwhelm defenses, the core challenge is economic. No country can sustainably fire interceptors worth millions of dollars at targets that cost only a few thousand. If air defense becomes financially exhausting, it becomes strategically brittle.

Modern air defense cannot remain a collection of isolated missile batteries. It must transform from a static, linear shield into a dynamic kill web – an integrated network that combines early warning, command and control, kinetic interception, elec-

tronic warfare, cyber, and non-kinetic (“soft-kill”) effects under a single operational logic.

The objective is to defeat saturation by distributing sensing, fusing data, prioritizing targets, and applying the cheapest effective effect rather than defaulting to expensive interceptors.

India is moving in that direction. During Operation Sindoore, it relied on a networked C4ISR architecture known as IACCS (Integrated Air Command & Control System), designed to generate a unified air picture by fusing inputs from ground radars, airborne platforms, and even civilian sensors.

The next turning point is the creation of a multi-service Joint Engagement Zone (JEZ), a seamless engagement environment where different services can share data and coordinate fires at speed.

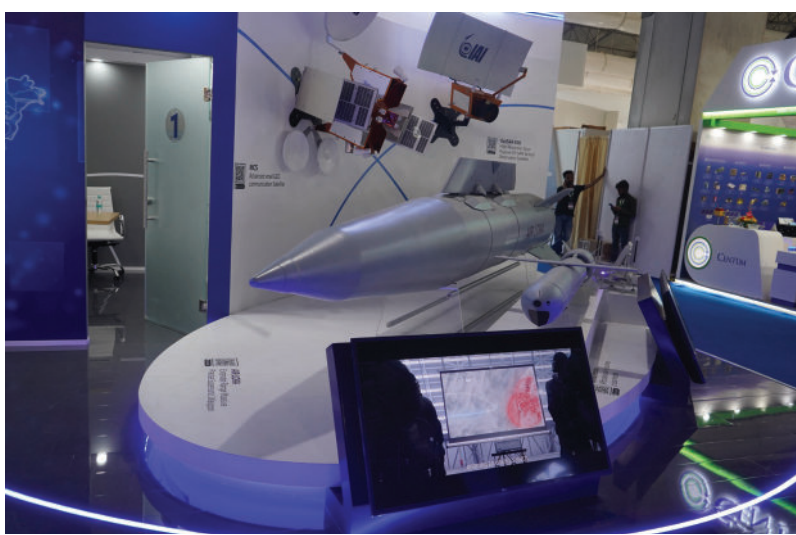
India is working to connect the air force's IACCS with the army's tactical air defense command system, Akashteer, and expand integration across additional regional nodes. Yet the remaining gaps, especially the challenge of real-time interoperability, still matter, because saturation attacks compress decision time. Any delay becomes a vulnerability.

Detection and interception: Where saturation bites hardest

The most difficult layer to build is the detection layer. The hardest targets to identify are low-flying threats with small radar cross-sections, such as small “kamikaze” drones. India operates airborne early warning platforms, including Netra and Israeli Phalcon aircraft, but availability constraints remain an issue.

The future requires large-scale deployment of distributed sensors, including compact radars and electro-optical systems, to feed the air picture and prevent swarms from exploiting gaps.

On interception, India is man-



MODELS OF the Air Lora, an extended-range massive precise supersonic weapon, and Wind Demon, an affordable air-to-surface cruise missile on display at the Israel Aerospace Industries stall during the ‘Aero India 2025’ show last year. (Abinaya Kalyanasundaram/Reuters)

aging a layered approach. For long ranges, it employs the Russian S-400 system. For the mid-layer, systems based on Akash and jointly developed Barak-8 (MRSAM) play a central role.

For point defense and tactical ranges, India is shifting toward systems such as QRSAM and upgrading legacy anti-aircraft guns (including L-70 and Shilka variants) with proximity-fused smart ammunition to provide a cheaper, scalable response to drone swarms. This reflects the economic logic of saturation: Expensive interceptors cannot be the default answer for low-cost mass threats.

This is where Israel's value proposition becomes strategically relevant. The India-Israel technology interface is already a component of India's air defense posture, particularly through the jointly developed Barak-8 family and early warning platforms such as Phalcon.

But the deeper advantage lies in how Israel thinks about integrated air defense as a continuously evolving operational enterprise: architecture design, battle management, rapid iteration, and the translation of operational lessons into upgrades.

The global lesson from both Ukraine and Israel is that counter-saturation requires a system of systems supported by distributed, semi-autonomous decision networks.

Ukraine's experience with integrated EW-and-fire networks (such as Kvertus Atlas) and Israel's counter-drone systems (including Drone Dome) point to the same operational principle: The winning combination is detection, electronic disruption, and kinetic fires, orchestrated by a single “brain” that prioritizes targets and prevents national ammunition stockpiles from being exhausted.

The real ceiling is industrial, not diplomatic

If Modi's visit is to matter in defense terms, it must address the issue that now defines the ceiling of cooperation: industry.

India's push for indigenization is a strategic program to turn India into a global defense manufacturing hub and reducing dependence on single-source supply chains. In air defense, that means developing critical components domestically, including seekers and secure communications channels, rather than relying on external suppliers.

Israel understands this constraint. Remaining relevant in India's defense ecosystem requires alignment with India's domestic production goals – through models that privilege local manufacturing, long-term integration, maintenance and overhaul (MRO), and the transfer of tacit operational knowledge into Indian organizations.

If Israel frames the relationship as “more exports,” it will hit a ceiling. If it frames it as capability acceleration inside India, it becomes harder to reverse politically and easier to scale.

India also has incentives to be flexible when it recognizes Israeli value that accelerates Indian self-reliance: architecture and integration expertise, an iterative upgrade culture, and proven experience in fielding capabilities under operational pressure.

In the Saturation Age, the advantage in air defense is determined less by the quality of any single interceptor and more by the depth of the industrial ecosystem behind it: production tempo, maintenance capacity, spare-part availability, software and sensor upgrade cycles, and supply-chain resilience.

Economic asymmetry is not solved by technology alone but by the ability to manufacture, sustain, replenish, and upgrade quickly and affordably.

Local production + MRO + rapid upgrade cycles reduce life-cycle costs, raise operational availability, and reduce vulnerability to wartime supply disruptions.

A strategic opportunity

Modi's visit should be evaluated by whether it delivers mechanisms. In air defense terms, three concrete directions stand out:

1. Integration as the “nervous system”: accelerating interoperability between IACCS, Akashteer, and the JEZ concept to enable real-time joint engagement and kill-web logic.

2. Counter-saturation layers that are scalable and affordable: building stronger soft-kill layers (EW/cyber) alongside cheaper kinetic options, leveraging a division of labor between Israel's strengths in integration and protection and India's strengths in scale and deployment.

3. An industrial pathway that turns platforms into an ecosystem: moving from “systems” to industrial depth co-producing critical components, investing in secure communications, institutionalizing sustainment, and embedding upgrade capacity in India.

A deeper India-Israel defense relationship requires disciplined design: an alignment with India's production imperative, and an Israeli posture that prioritizes integration, sustainment, and ecosystem-building over one-off sales. If both sides pursue this, the partnership can turn a financially exhausting problem into a sustainable capability advantage.

In 2026, the question will be whether the relationship produces a defense partnership that is scalable, resilient, and economically survivable under saturation – a partnership that can beat the asymmetry.

The writer is a former IDF Air Defense Command chief and former IDF spokesperson.

LETTERS

Huckabee bests Carlson

Kudos to *The Jerusalem Post* (February 22) for three excellent articles on the Tucker Carlson/Mike Huckabee interview (and hats off to Ambassador Huckabee for his principled parrying of Carlson's mean-spirited attacks).

The *Post* highlighted several “untruths” Carlson unleashed in his effort to delegitimize Israel; I would like to quote a few of Carlson's additional spurious fabrications. Carlson False Fact #1: “Netanyahu's parents did not speak Hebrew... how do we know that Netanyahu's ancestors ever lived here?”

The inconvenient (for Carlson) truth: Netanyahu's parents lived in Israel and did speak Hebrew. Netanyahu's mother actually was born in Petah Tikva in 1912. Netanyahu has grandparents (and even at least one great-grandparent) who lived in Israel.

Carlson False Fact #2: Israel “has a higher standard of living... than the United States. Why are we sending all this money to a country that has a higher standard of living than ours?”

The actual truth: The US standard of living is significantly higher. Recent figures place US per capita

income at around \$84,000 to \$86,000 (2024), while Israel is around \$54,000–\$60,000.

Carlson False Fact #3: “There are many more Christians in Qatar than there are in Israel.”

The real truth: Israel has about 185,000 Christian citizens; Qatar has virtually none (and conversion there from Islam is prohibited, carrying severe penalties). While there are at times hundreds of thousands of temporary foreign residents (many of whom may be Christian) in Qatar without citizenship or permanent rights, millions of Christian tourists come to Israel annually. These facts undermine whatever hostile point Carlson was attempting to make.

Carlson False Fact #4: “Stonehenge is 3,000 years older than any building built by the descendants of Abram in this country.”

The fact: The gap between Stonehenge and Israelite structures is closer to 1,800 years. Carlson's 3,000-year figure is inaccurate and exaggerated.

There are many more examples of Carlson playing fast and loose with truth – always to Israel's detriment. The inescapable conclusion is that he is tainted and biased for reasons we can only wonder about.

Again, high praise to Huckabee and the *Post* and for

adept handling of the interview and its coverage.

YAIR WEBMAN
Jerusalem

Annexation complications

Regarding “Ahead of elections, Israel looks to annexation” (February 20) by Yaakov Katz, it is very important to consider the potential negative consequences if Israel annexes Judea and Samaria.

If Palestinian residents are not given the right to vote, Israel will no longer be a democratic state. If they do, it will no longer be a Jewish state. Annexation would anger the US and other nations, which could harm efforts to obtain a positive future for Gaza. It could reduce the chances for normalization of ties with Saudi Arabia and other Muslim nations, as well as the likelihood of their joining the Abraham Accords. It could result in sanctions, reduced foreign investment, and trade frictions that could harm our economy. It could also increase already widespread antisemitism, hatred of Israel, and our current migration deficit.

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Shoreh

Be careful before you predict

Zvika Klein gives a fascinating picture of the demographic changes among Israeli voters (“Parties should start taking note,” February, 23) Using statistics that show first-time voters as identifying as right-wing, he extrapolates to predict new party alignments and voting patterns in coming elections.

I would suggest, however, that before we react in either direction, we should consider that answering a poll is a far cry from standing at the ballot box. Issues present on election day, political personalities, and not least of all, the phone call from a trusted friend the day before elections, all impact that final moment of dropping the ballot onto the box. That is, of course, assuming that these new voters come out to vote at all.

In the last analysis, the political process will continue its course, with these new voters taking their still unpredictable place within it.

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