

# COMMENTARY

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## **Israel's Plans for Indian Defence**

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The ninth edition of Aero India 2013, organized by the Indian Ministry of Defence concluded on a grand successful note. It was held in Yelahanka Air Force Station, Bengaluru, between 6 and 10 February 2013. This mega exhibition on aerospace, defence and civil aviation is a platform which is very significant for bolstering business in the field of aviation, globally. Around 607 companies, including 352 foreign and 78 official national delegations were believed to have participated in the event. According to the Indian Defence Minister A.K. Antony, such a large participation by the national firms was an indication of the 'country's growing presence in civil and military aviation'.

Like in the previous aero show, Israel displayed some of its state-of-the-art defence systems. The Israeli Ambassador to India Alon Ushpiz, inaugurated the Israeli pavilion, and was accompanied by the Director General of Ministry of Defence (Israel) Major General Ehud Shani, Deputy DG and Director of DSDE, Amir Kain, Israel's Defence Attaché to India, Col. Avi Peled, and representatives from various Israeli defence industries. Some of the major defence firms that participated were Rafael Advanced Defence Systems Ltd., Israel Aerospace Industries Ltd. (IAI), Elbit Systems Ltd. There were others like Accubeat Ltd., Aeromaz Ltd., Controp Precision Technologies Ltd., Orbit Communication Systems Ltd., Orion Advanced Systems Ltd., etc. which showcased their products.

During the inauguration, the ambassador acknowledged the security challenges shared by both the countries, and how the defence cooperation has become an 'integral part of the growing multifaceted relationship'. All the Israeli firms that participated have specialized in their own ways in developing defence equipments which are quite helpful in navigation, communication,

remote sensing, and security surveillance applications on air, land and maritime platforms. Furthermore, firms such as Elbit Systems focused more on helicopter solutions, advanced electro-optics, airborne warning systems, military communication systems and radios. Alongside these, its Hermes 900 Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) with a new configuration to adapt maritime missions was also introduced during the exhibit. Mega firms like IAI displayed its items such as Barak-8 air and missile defence system; advanced Helicopter Rehearsal Autonomous Safety & Training System ('THRUST'), developed by IAI's MLM Division; 'EHUD' Autonomous Air Combat Manoeuvring Instrumentation (AACMI); Skimmer, which is an integrated naval helicopter package with sensors and various avionic interfaces (from *Israel Aerospace Industries* website).

The Aero India 2013 show was not only a platform where Israel exhibited its advancement in the field of civil and military aviation but an opportunity to tap the Indian defence market. As it is, both the countries have robust defence cooperation and are trying to expand further. Israeli firms such as Elbit Systems, Rafael and IAI have involved with India in various major programmes by supplying advanced technologies for India's military services. In order to clinch more deals, these arms suppliers have begun to foray into the private domain along with their interactions with the Indian state-owned firms. Moreover, over the period of time, India has become a strategic market for the Israeli defence industries, particularly considering the volume and the requirements to sustain the growth.

For Elbit Systems, India has emerged to be an important partner as this South Asian country's demand for helicopter and transport aircraft fleets has increased. As a matter of fact, Elbit and India's HAL have joint partnerships in various programmes, especially in training and simulation systems. Taking their relationships to new heights, in early February 2013, India's Bharat Forge Limited and Elbit Systems Land and C41 Ltd. announced a Joint Venture Company (JVC) to address India's requirements for the most advanced artillery and mortar systems solutions. According to a press release by Elbit Systems, "The JVC will offer solutions in the Artillery Guns & Mortars segment based on technologically advanced products operationally used worldwide, such as the ATHOS 155/52 Towed Gun System, the ATMOS 155/52 Mounted Gun System and the upgraded 130 mm M46 Gun to a 155/45 Gun (KARAN)". Such development is an indication of a maturity reached by both the countries by venturing into joint-venture programmes apart from their traditional seller-buyer relationship.

Furthermore, on the sideline of Aero India 2013, on 7 February, India's Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) and Israel's Elbit Systems Electro-optics-Elop Ltd signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to jointly develop Compact Multi Purpose Advance Stabilization System (CoMPASS) for naval applications. According to *Israel Defence*, CoMPASS is "a surveillance system intended for day and night applications and includes a colour camera, a 3rd generation

Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) sensor, a Laser Target Designator and Rangefinder (LTDRF) as well as automatic tracking and command and control capabilities”.

While Elbit Systems made some headway as mentioned above, there were no reports of IAI clinching such deals with India during the Aero India 2013. However, IAI’s President and CEO Joseph Weiss expressed that new opportunities and increasing competition from other foreign firms are driving his firm to expand its foothold in India. During the opening ceremony of the show, Weiss praised the achievements made by IAI while producing some finest technologies and related solutions applicable to the Indian requirements. Moreover, with new demands put by India on offset agreements, competition is expected to soar in the near future. As a result, Israel needs to maintain its consistency while cooperating with India in defence sector. For this, not only IAI but also the other Israeli firms have to understand carefully the evolving and changing ‘rules of the game’ in the Indian arms bazaar. For example, during mid-2012, India announced that it would buy French-manufactured MICA air-to-air missiles worth US\$1.2 billion along with the upgrading of IAF’s 51 Mirage 2000 fighters. If such trend continues, then it will pose a serious constraint to Israel’s supply of such weapons systems.

In 2012, IAI had clinched a few important arms deals with India. One of them was the contract worth US\$958 million secured by IAI from India’s military, in October 2012, to upgrade its Searcher Mk II and Heron I UAVs. Indian military establishment currently used about 100 Searcher and 50 Heron I UAVs. The upgrading program would introduce new technologies developed recently consisting of “more compact, capable and reliable avionic equipment, improved propulsion” (from *Defence Update*). It is believed that India had already acquired some 150 UAVs from IAI since the 1990s. In continuation to its effort to secure the Indian market, in December 2012, BEL and IAI signed a MoU for cooperation on Long Range Surface-to-Air Missile (LRSAM) ship-defence systems projects. This system will be based on Israel’s Barak missile system and provide India with an advanced, seeker-based missile capability (from *The Hindu*). According to this MoU, BEL will take up the responsibility as ‘the chief integrator and will produce main subsystems’, while IAI will serve as the ‘engineering development authority and will produce subsystems as a key subcontractor’ of the former (from *Israel Defence*).

With regard to the UAVs, no major deal was signed between India and Israel during the aero show. However, besides Elbit Systems, IAI displayed ELM-2055 SAR/GMTI Reconnaissance System for manned and unmanned aircraft; ELK-7071 - Integrated UAV COMINT/DF System, which is integrated in many UAVs such as MALE or HALE; ELL-8385 - Integrated UAV ESM/ELINT System, which is compact and light weight, and useful for long-range, high endurance tactical and strategic ELINT data collection and analysis. Other items included ELM-2084, which is multi-mission radar useful in locating hostile weaponries, detection of mortars,

cannons, missiles, detection and classification of airborne targets, anti-missile interception systems, etc.; ELM-2052, which is an advanced Airborne Fire Control Radar (FCR) designed for air-to-air superiority and advanced strike missions; ELL-8251 - Escort Jammer System (EJ), which is an advanced early warning system that can suppress all types of enemy Air Defence Surveillance and Fire Control radars on the mission flight path, installed on fighter aircrafts for airborne missions; ELW-2090 Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) which is useful for long-range surveillance, air and naval operations, network centric warfare operations, etc.; ELI-3360- Maritime Patrol Aircraft, which is designed for fast-deployment of independent asset, maritime domain superiority, and is 'equipped with a powerful Sensor-Suite and a Mission System to effectively integrate the sensors' data'. (Descriptions of the displays by IAI were adapted from its website).

In the UAV category, IAI showcased Heron-I MALE UAS which can withstand adverse weather conditions and which is easy to operate during strategic and tactical missions. Further, Bird Eye 400 and 650 UAS were also displayed. This system is an 'advanced solution for low echelon forces to obtain real time intelligence, independent of higher echelon sources'. This firm also displayed Panther UAS, which is a uniquely designed fixed-wing VTOL UAS; Ghost rotary mini UAS, which is a versatile and highly manoeuvrable UAV system, especially suitable for urban warfare. Considering the rising security threats and challenges facing by India today, most of these systems are quite applicable. Some of them will enhance India's strategic surveillance along the frontiers, and the maritime security as well. The purchase of aerostat radars and UAVs from Israel could help India in spotting surreptitious guerrilla attacks and to thwart a similar event like the Mumbai carnage where the intruders infiltrated using dingy boats.

From these developments, it is very clear that Israel has carved its niche in India by supplying some of these sought-after weapons systems with the exception of bigger platforms such as aircrafts. The magnitude of the defence cooperation between the two is evidenced by the volume which is estimated at about US\$10 billion over the past decade. Effectiveness of the Israeli-made military systems, liberal policy of its technology transfer, and less-expensive defence products (as compared to others) have contributed immensely to the success of this cooperation.

Despite the aforementioned developments, there are uncertainties that loom large as to how far both the countries can uplift their arms trade. Even though the Indian defence budget for the fiscal year 2013-14 has been hiked by 5.3 per cent to US\$37.46 billion, it seems inadequate for the modernization for the Indian armed forces. Particularly, the IAF and the Navy are likely to face impacts as both the forces are likely to sign big contracts in the coming year. And, most of the deals signed between India and Israel pertained to these two areas. Further, the present day Indian defence establishment is engulfed by the VVIP helicopter deal kickbacks. In the past, Indo-Israeli defence cooperation had been plagued by such allegations of bribery and corruption

in arms deals. In early-2012, India banned Israel Military Industries (IMI) has been banned for 10 years. Such incidents not only undermined Israel's credibility as a reliable arms supplier but also tarnished the Indian political and bureaucratic systems. It should be in the best interests of both the players to preserve the integrity of this successful relationship.

Finally, the bilateral relationship between India and Israel will continue to be driven by these close defence ties and shared national security challenges. And, preserving the current momentum should be the focus of both the countries.

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