

# THE ISRAELI SECURITY DOCTRINE ADAPTING WITHOUT ALTERING CORE PILLARS

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**Abstract** *This theoretical paper explores the resilience and evolution of Israel's national security doctrine, the Israeli Security Triad, arguing that its core pillars—deterrence, early warning, and decisive military victory—remain fundamentally intact despite recent conflicts and the rise of asymmetric warfare. Analyzing decades of historical events, military strategies, and geopolitical developments, the research focuses on how the doctrine has responded to both conventional and asymmetric threats. The findings indicate that while modern asymmetric challenges have prompted the adoption of new technologies, such as AI-powered early warning systems and missile defense, and the introduction of a fourth "defense" pillar, these represent adaptations to modern conflicts rather than an alteration of the original doctrine's core strategic principles. This study contributes to military doctrine theory by illustrating how states can integrate advanced technologies and adapt strategies to new forms of conflict without abandoning foundational principles, offering practical insights for military strategists on balancing innovation with established frameworks. The paper provides a fresh perspective on maintaining doctrinal integrity through flexible adaptation in the face of constant threats. Future research could explore similar doctrinal adaptations in other nations or the ongoing evolution of Israel's fourth pillar, particularly concerning AI and cybersecurity.*

**Keywords** Israeli Security Doctrine, Deterrence Strategy, Asymmetric Warfare, Military Innovation, Early Warning Systems.

## INTRODUCTION

The Israeli security doctrine, a cornerstone of the nation's survival and strategic posture since its inception, has been subject to continuous scrutiny and debate, particularly in light of the evolving and often volatile geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. The enduring relevance of this doctrine is underscored by the persistent threats Israel faces, ranging from conventional state-level challenges to the complexities of asymmetric warfare waged by non-state actors. Recent events, notably the intense warfare dynamics in the region involving Israel, Gaza, Iran, and Lebanon following the attacks of October 2023, have reignited discussions about the doctrine's potential transformation. This paper addresses the central question of whether these contemporary challenges have led to a fundamental alteration of Israel's security doctrine or if the doctrine has, instead, demonstrated a capacity for adaptation while preserving its core tenets.

This article posits that despite significant tactical and technological adjustments, the foundational pillars of the Israeli security doctrine—deterrence, early warning, and decisive military victory—remain fundamentally intact. The introduction of a fourth pillar, defense, is presented not as a radical departure but as a necessary adaptation to the changing nature of threats, particularly those of an asymmetric character. The purpose of this article is to describe the Israeli national security doctrine, pinpoint key historical and recent events that have influenced its application and perception, and demonstrate through an analysis of Israel's military behavior and strategic responses that the doctrine has adapted rather than undergone a fundamental change. This analysis will explore the interplay between the traditional pillars and new defensive measures, the integration of advanced technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the ongoing debates surrounding concepts such as "decisive military victory" in the current security

environment. By examining these elements, the paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the resilience and evolutionary nature of one of the world's most tested security doctrines.

The Israeli security doctrine, something that we could also call the Israeli security triad (Meridor & Eldadi, 2019), was introduced by the first Prime minister of the country David Ben Gurion. It consists of three main pillars that are intertwined and complement each other. The cutting edge military technologies introduced by Israel during the last decades have not changed the doctrine, but on the contrary were created and introduced in the military complex namely to strengthen the three pillars of the security triad. While some observers, including an esteemed scholar and friend with whom I recently discussed the matter, believe Israel's doctrine has changed significantly in the last year, I will argue the opposite in the following sections.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a theoretical and qualitative research methodology to analyze the evolution and resilience of Israel's national security doctrine.<sup>1</sup> The approach is rooted in a comprehensive review and analysis of historical events, military strategies, official doctrinal statements, academic literature, and current geopolitical developments relevant to Israeli security.<sup>5</sup> The core of the methodology involves:

1. **Conceptual Analysis:** This involves defining and examining the core concepts of the Israeli security doctrine, including "deterrence," "early warning," "decisive military victory," and the more recently emphasized "defense." It also scrutinizes the concepts of "adaptation" versus "fundamental change" within the context of military doctrines to establish a framework for evaluating the observed shifts in Israeli strategy.

2. **Historical Review and Event Analysis:** The study undertakes a review of significant historical events that have shaped or tested the Israeli security doctrine. Criteria for selecting these events include their perceived impact on doctrinal thinking, their illustration of the doctrine's application, or their representation of new types of threats (e.g., the 1967 French arms embargo, the Yom Kippur War, the Second Lebanon War, various operations against Hamas and Hezbollah, and critically, the October 2023 attacks and subsequent conflicts). The analysis focuses on how the doctrine's pillars were applied or challenged during these events.

3. **Strategic Document and Literature Review:** The research draws upon a range of sources, including declassified or publicly available Israeli strategic documents (where accessible), academic publications from security studies and international relations scholars, reports from think tanks (such as the Institute for National Security Studies - INSS), and statements by key Israeli political and military leaders.<sup>1</sup> This review helps to understand both the stated doctrine and its interpretation and critique by experts.

4. **Comparative Analysis:** The paper implicitly compares the stated tenets of the doctrine with Israel's actual military behavior and strategic responses, particularly in light of recent conflicts. This helps to assess the consistency between doctrine and practice and to identify areas of adaptation or potential change.

5. **Process Tracing (Adapted):** While not a formal process tracing study, the methodology incorporates elements of tracing how the core pillars of the doctrine have responded to specific evolving challenges over time, particularly the rise of asymmetric warfare and the integration of new technologies like AI.

The justification for this theoretical and qualitative approach lies in the nature of the research question, which seeks to understand the conceptual continuity and adaptation of a national security doctrine. Such an inquiry benefits from in-depth analysis of texts, historical context, and strategic reasoning rather than quantitative data collection.<sup>1</sup> The methodology acknowledges the limitation that some doctrinal shifts may occur covertly; however, by analyzing overt actions, statements, and expert analyses, the study aims to provide a robust interpretation of the doctrine's evolution. The selection of sources and events is guided by their relevance to the core tenets of the doctrine and their significance in the broader discourse on Israeli security.

## INTRODUCING THE SECURITY TRIAD

The first pillar is the deterrence, where Israel adopted the strategy of cumulative deterrence—a hybrid between deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial. It is based on the assumption that adversaries will abandon their goals after repeated failures in the face of Israel's military power. This concept has been a key element in Israel's strategy, influencing its military and diplomatic posture over the decades (Rodman, 2023).

Historically, Israel's application of the principle of deterrence has been illustrated in various significant military conflicts and operations. From the Suez Crisis of 1956 to the conflicts in Lebanon in 1982, Israel's actions have often aimed to restore or prevent the deterioration of its deterrent capability. These actions have included full-scale wars, targeted strikes—such as the attack on Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981—and limited military operations, like retaliatory raids and deep penetrations into enemy territory during the War of Attrition between 1968 and 1970. Each action was intended not only to neutralize immediate threats but also to reinforce the long-term perception of Israel's military strength and resolve (Yaniv, 1987).

To provide a broader perspective, the sole aim of this pillar is to prevent any attack on Israel. Israeli deterrence has proven immensely effective within the paradigm of conventional warfare, as we can observe that no state actor has initiated a full-scale war with Israel in recent decades. However, while highly effective in deterring conventional state actors, this approach has been less successful in addressing the complexities of asymmetric warfare. In fact, one could argue that Israel's conventional deterrence might have contributed to the rise of non-state actors and proxies, such as Hezbollah and Hamas, who appear to be "immune" to the traditional deterrence model. These groups engage in irregular warfare tactics that fall outside the scope of conventional military deterrence, thus challenging the effectiveness of this pillar in the modern security landscape.

The events of October 7, 2023, represented a catastrophic failure of this deterrence pillar against Hamas. Neither Israel's formidable military posture nor the economic inducements offered to Gaza dissuaded Hamas from launching its large-scale attack.<sup>8</sup> This failure was not just against a "second-rate hybrid military-civilian substate entity" but also exposed the limitations of deterrence against determined adversaries guided by extreme ideologies and willing to undertake actions perceived as suicidal.<sup>8</sup> This profound lapse has forced a re-evaluation of the efficacy of deterrence, particularly concerning non-state actors, and has led to a shift in understanding that deterrence alone cannot prevent attacks from jihadist enemies. The INSS policy paper (2025) also implies that the October 7th attack signifies a failure of deterrence, as the enemy was not sufficiently deterred.<sup>12</sup> For deterrence to be effective, it often relies on the enemy's vivid memory of previous decisive encounters, a factor that was clearly insufficient in this instance. This raises critical questions about whether this pillar, while still central, requires a fundamental rethinking in its application to such threats, rather than just adaptation.

Thus when the deterrence fails it triggers the second pillar of the triad – the early warning. The early warning systems, which are an essential component of national security, rely on the effective combination of intelligence gathering and analysis and are the primary function of Israel's intelligence services. This critical function not only anticipates and forecasts potential attacks but also significantly enhances the country's defensive posture by enabling timely and effective mobilization and deployment of military assets. The primary advantage of early warning is that it provides the nation with the capability to either absorb an impending attack more effectively or to carry out a preemptive strike, depending on the strategic choice made in response to the threat.

Israel's experience with early warning systems, demonstrates how evolving warfare and advanced technologies continuously reshape the effectiveness of these systems. In the past, during conventional interstate conflicts, Israel used its intelligence capabilities for early warning to anticipate large military operations (Rodman, 2023). The best example that comes to mind is how during the Six-Day War, Israel utilized its intelligence data to launch a preemptive strike, effectively neutralizing the threat before it materialized.

Furthermore publications like General Yossi Sariels book "The Human Machine team: How to create synergy between Human & Artificial Intelligence that will revolutionize our world" point out the extensive

work that has been going in Israel over the last years in enhancing the early warning pillar using cutting edge technologies powered by artificial intelligence. The author, \*Y. S. (identified as Brigadier General Yossi Sariel)\*, who used his initials to sign his book and revealed his true name by mistake was the chief of Israel's most vanguard intelligence Unit 8200. General Sariel summarizes that the future of early warning systems lies in the successful synergy between human intelligence and AI, paving the way for more secure and sustainable national security strategies (Y. S. & B. G., 2021). During the 2014 Gaza War (Operation Protective Edge), Israel used high-tech AI-powered systems for early warning and threat detection. AI algorithms analyzed data from various sources, including drones and ground sensors, to identify and predict rocket launch sites. This capability enabled the Israeli Defense Forces to intercept and neutralize threats more effectively, demonstrating the practical benefits of AI-enhanced early warning systems (Y. S. & B. G., 2021).

However, the October 7, 2023, attacks also exposed a significant failure in Israel's early warning capabilities. Despite detecting Hamas's military drills, tunnel expansions, and even fragments of attack plans, Israeli intelligence misinterpreted these as routine activities, believing Hamas was deterred and focused on governance.<sup>11</sup> This misinterpretation stemmed from a flawed reliance on technological superiority without an equal investment in human intelligence and real-time battlefield awareness; key indicators were overlooked, and decisions were delayed.<sup>11</sup> The INSS policy paper (2025) confirms this, noting that the principle of warning, which involves deploying military forces to prevent or neutralize a surprise attack, experienced a significant lapse.<sup>12</sup> In response to these failures, changes are being implemented. For instance, the IDF's Home Front Command has rolled out a new alert system for its mobile app to provide earlier warnings for long-range ballistic missiles, such as those from Yemen, giving civilians more time to prepare before sirens sound. A new air force command structure, the "Participation and Borders Air Group," has also been established for real-time coordination between air and ground units to counter infiltration attempts and increase surveillance along high-risk borders.<sup>11</sup> These adaptations highlight an effort to rectify the shortcomings in both technological application and human-led analysis within the early warning pillar.

After the deterrence has failed and a hostile action towards the country is in course and when the second pillar – the early warning fails to intercept, predict and inform on this hostile action towards the country, the last part of the security triad is triggered - the military decision. In the realm of national security, the Israeli doctrine has long emphasized the pursuit of decisive military victory as a fundamental goal once hostilities commence. This strategy is based on the belief that only a clear, unconditional victory can convince the enemy of the futility of military confrontation, thereby preventing future conflicts. Historically, Israeli security leadership has adhered to this philosophy, arguing that anything less than a decisive victory could lead to subsequent challenges to the concept of deterrence, potentially resulting in more conflicts (Rodman, 2023).

According to General Gadi Eisenkot, the former Israeli Defence Forces Chief of staff, the traditional concept of military resolution has shifted towards the concept of decisive military victory in strategic discourse. This means not only destroying the enemy's operational capability but also achieving complete psychological and physical dominance, forcing capitulation. This approach emphasizes the need to leave the enemy unable to continue the conflict, ensuring a comprehensive and long-lasting victory. Achieving this goal requires a swift and decisive response to threats, aimed at restoring deterrence and stabilizing national life through the demonstration of strength (Eisenkot & Siboni, 2019).

Professor Chuck Freilich on the other hand states that the traditional Israeli defense strategy does not prioritize achieving a decisive military victory, considering it unattainable. Instead, Israel aims to conclude conflicts on enemy territory by destroying enemy forces under favorable conditions. This goal was realized in the wars of 1948, 1956, and 1967, and to some extent in Lebanon in 1982, as well as during the Second Intifada. However, Israel has encountered difficulties in achieving decisive results in the War of Attrition, the Yom Kippur War, the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War, and various operations against Hezbollah and Hamas (Freilich, 2018).

However, the emergence of asymmetric warfare in the 21st century has nuanced Israel's approach to achieving decisive victory. While the traditional line of thought, which supports decisive victory as essential for lasting peace and security, remains present, its practical applicability and effectiveness in the

face of modern warfare dynamics are being reconsidered and debated. The question that arises is whether empirical evidence and experience support the idea that decisive victories lead to long-term deterrence.

The conflict following October 7, 2023, has brought the debate around "decisive military victory" into sharp focus. Prime Minister Netanyahu's rhetoric centered on "total victory" against Hamas, yet the practical meaning of this remained ill-defined beyond the destruction of Hamas and hostage return. The prolonged nature of the war in Gaza and the difficulties in completely eradicating Hamas's military and governance capabilities<sup>14</sup> lend credence to Freilich's skepticism about the attainability of such a victory against entrenched non-state actors. The INSS policy paper (2025) notes that while Hamas's military capability was operationally defeated, remaining elements continue guerrilla activity, making decisive victory elusive without a complementary political process.

The concept of victory itself is being re-evaluated, with distinctions made between tactical, operational, strategic, and even grand strategic victory. A tactical victory involves annihilating enemy forces in battle and controlling territory. An operational victory, largely achieved in most of Gaza according to some analyses, means dismantling the enemy's fighting system. However, a strategic victory, which would remove the enemy's military threat for many years, requires fundamental changes on the ground, including loss of popular support for militants and sustained security control, often beyond purely military means.<sup>15</sup> Some analyses suggest that "total victory" in Gaza is most likely to be a strategic victory, a multi-year process involving continued military action alongside civilian governance and economic rehabilitation.<sup>15</sup> This evolving understanding contrasts with Eisenkot's emphasis on swift, comprehensive dominance and capitulation. The ongoing conflict seems to highlight the immense challenges of applying traditional notions of decisive victory to asymmetric warfare, potentially pushing the operational reality closer to Freilich's assessment, even if the political aspiration leans towards Eisenkot's ideal.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, some analyses indicate a departure from the "swift, offensive operations" tenet of the "Decisive Victory" doctrine, with Israel preparing for a long siege in Gaza, which also challenges the traditional interpretation.

In the last decade a fourth pillar of the Doctrine has been introduced by high ranking officers of the Israeli military establishment, the Pillar of defence, that has emerged due to the character of the asymmetric attrition warfare with non-state actors. Today, Israel is increasingly focusing on strengthening its defensive capabilities to protect against those unconventional threats. The construction of extensive security fences and the implementation of civil defense measures, such as the distribution of gas masks and reinforced shelters, reflect a shift towards a more balanced military doctrine that includes defense as an essential pillar. This strategic shift is further evidenced by significant investments in missile defense systems like Arrow and Iron Dome, which have become central to Israel's current military strategy, despite initial resistance from military leadership (Eisenkot & Siboni, 2019). The pillar is a reaction of the impossibility of the early warning systems to predict asymmetric hostilities, many of which are not planned and are conducted by lone wolf attackers. Those could be people who woke up given morning and decided to conduct a killing spree.

The debate surrounding this fourth pillar centers on whether its introduction constitutes a mere "adaptation" or a "fundamental change" to the original doctrine.<sup>8</sup> Incremental adaptation refers to actions that maintain the essence and integrity of an existing system or process, making minor adjustments or improvements.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, transformational or fundamental change involves altering the core attributes, goals, or foundational assumptions of a system, potentially leading to a new paradigm. This often includes questioning the effectiveness of existing systems and addressing power imbalances.

The argument for adaptation, which this paper supports, is that the first three pillars remain the primary focus, and defense merely complements them against threats for which early warning is less effective.<sup>5</sup> However, one could argue that adding a new pillar inherently alters the structure and balance of what was conceived as a "triad." If a core pillar like early warning is acknowledged to be partially ineffective against prevalent asymmetric threats, and a new pillar is introduced to compensate, this could be seen as a significant structural modification rather than a simple enhancement of existing components. The sheer scale of investment in defensive systems like Iron Dome and Arrow, and the strategic reliance

on them, might also suggest a rebalancing of Israel's security posture, potentially shifting focus and resources in a way that alters the doctrine's essence more profoundly than mere adaptation.

The events of October 7, 2023, provided a stark test for this defensive pillar, with mixed results. While multi-layered active missile defense systems like Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow proved spectacularly successful in intercepting thousands of rockets and missiles from various fronts, enabling a semblance of normal life, the forward physical defense of communities bordering Gaza proved "appalling", leading to devastating consequences and mass evacuations. This failure of ground-level defense, despite the success of high-tech aerial defense, underscores the complexities and challenges faced by the defense pillar and may necessitate further significant adjustments, potentially increasing its centrality and further challenging the traditional "triad" concept.

## EMERGENCE OF TECHNOLOGY

Now that we have a basic understanding of the Doctrine, let's briefly dive into why cutting-edge military technologies were and continue to be developed in Israel and how they have become intertwined with the military. Many Israelis describe their country as a nation-in-arms. Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has faced constant hostilities, ranging from major wars to asymmetric warfare as mentioned above. The pivotal moment that accelerated Israel's military technological advancements was the French arms embargo, introduced by Charles de Gaulle in 1967. This embargo followed the Six-Day War, during which de Gaulle condemned Israel's preemptive strike against its Arab neighbors, marking a significant shift from France's previously pro-Israel stance. This decision had profound effects on Israel's international relations. On the one hand, it forced Israel to seek alternative military suppliers, such as the United States, which became its primary arms supplier in the years that followed. On the other hand, it emphasized Israel's need to reduce its dependence on foreign arms and led to the creation of a robust domestic military industry. Due to the embargo and the constant fear of annihilation Israel began to develop its own military technologies, producing drones, naval vessels, tanks (such as the Merkava tank), and advanced combat weapons. These developments allowed Israel not only to meet its own defense needs but also to become one of the world's leading producers of military technology. Today, Israel is recognized globally for its innovations in defense, exporting drones, cybersecurity solutions, and missile defense systems to countries around the world.

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) represents the latest frontier in this technological drive, impacting all pillars of the security doctrine.

Table 1: Integration of AI in the Pillars of Israeli Security Doctrine

Pillar	Specific AI Systems/Applications	Function/Contribution to Pillar
Deterrence	Pegasus spyware, Red Wolf facial recognition, AI-driven social media analysis , potential for predictive analysis for threat neutralization.	Enhances persistent surveillance, profiling of potential threats, can create an implied threat of preemptive action, and potentially shapes adversary perception through information operations.
Early Warning	Habsora/"The Gospel", Lavender, AI-powered Home Front Command alert systems, developments by Unit 8200.	Rapid identification of potential threats (objects, infrastructure, individuals) through analysis of vast intelligence data (SIGINT, GEOINT, HUMINT, social media), improved and more timely public alert systems.
Decisive Military Victory (Offensive Capabilities)	Targeting systems: Habsora/"The Gospel", Lavender, "Where's Daddy?", "Fire Factory". Autonomous/Semi-autonomous systems: Drone swarms, Unmanned Ground Vehicles (UGVs) like RONI, Talon, Panda, Vision 60 ("robodogs"), Rooster Advanced munitions: SPIKE LR II missile. <sup>3</sup> Subterranean warfare: Exodigo underground mapping.	Accelerates the "kill chain" by rapidly identifying and prioritizing targets (infrastructure, individuals), enables autonomous or semi-autonomous strikes, enhances situational awareness for ground operations, and provides capabilities for mapping and engaging in complex environments like tunnels.

Defense (Defensive Capabilities)	Active missile defense: Iron Dome , David's Sling , Arrow systems. Border security: Red Wolf facial recognition Legion-X C2 for unmanned vehicles , AI-assisted video analysis.	Real-time analysis of projectile trajectories, threat prioritization for missile interception, enhanced detection of small/low-flying objects (drones), facial recognition and automated surveillance for border control, command and control of unmanned defensive assets.
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As indicated in the table, AI is not merely an adjunct but an increasingly integral component of Israel's security apparatus. In early warning, systems like "Habsora" (The Gospel) and "Lavender" process vast amounts of surveillance data to identify potential targets, from infrastructure to individuals, at a speed far exceeding human capability. Unit 8200, Israel's elite signals intelligence unit, is central to developing these AI capabilities. For achieving decisive military outcomes, AI drives targeting systems like "Fire Factory" for rapid strike planning, enables drone swarms for coordinated attacks, and assists in complex operations such as mapping subterranean infrastructure with tools like Exodigo. Defensively, AI algorithms are crucial for the success of missile defense systems like Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow, enabling them to analyze trajectories, prioritize threats, and intercept incoming projectiles with high accuracy. AI also enhances border security through facial recognition systems like Red Wolf and automated video analysis. This pervasive integration of AI aims to maintain a qualitative military edge and address the challenges posed by modern warfare.

As the country continues to implement its military strategy in the face of new threats, the introduction of a fourth pillar demonstrates the need for ongoing innovation, especially as Israel navigates the complexities of asymmetric warfare.

## CONCLUSION

The failures of deterrence and early warning systems during the October 2023 attacks highlight a critical juncture for Israel's security doctrine. While Prime Minister Netanyahu's current military strategy focuses on the third pillar—decisive military victory—it also raises important questions about the future of the doctrine. As Israel continues to face asymmetric warfare from non-state actors like Hezbollah and Hamas, the doctrine's traditional focus on deterrence and military resolution may require further adaptation. Israel's security establishment has already begun exploring additional strategies, as seen with the introduction of the fourth pillar – defense, designed to address unpredictable, asymmetric threats that traditional early warning systems cannot always intercept. This evolution suggests that while the core principles of Israel's security doctrine remain intact, the complexities of 21st-century warfare necessitate ongoing innovation. Ultimately, the success and the international public outcome of the military operations in Gaza and Lebanon will serve as a test of whether the traditional doctrine can still secure long-term deterrence or if Israel must more fundamentally rethink its approach to national security in the years to come.

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