“Land Ahead” - Formulating a Ground Maneuver Concept

Guy Tzur

Setting Out
In the winter of 2013 I accepted the responsibility to command the IDF’s ground forces. I think it is superfluous to explain the excitement and the weight of responsibility that gripped me when I took over, this time more than ever. Yet looking back, I attribute that feeling to, among others, three formative experiences that I went through during my years of military service - experiences that played a significant part in shaping my actions as Commander of the Israel Defense Force Ground Forces.

The first experience belongs to the 1982 First Lebanon War in which I served as a platoon commander and deputy company commander in an armored battalion. That war was, of course, full of different combat experiences. But looking back, I remember the First Lebanon War mainly as the end of an era which was defined by an absence of doubts in the IDF regarding its toolbox. The First Lebanon War was a national experience full of doubt and controversy, but as a young officer, I experienced the centrality of ground forces maneuver as a response to almost any tactical, operational or strategic challenge. This centrality was never questioned – it's how we were raised.

The second experience came during the 2006 Second Lebanon War. The war found me playing a key role - Commander of Division 162, an active-duty formation. Naturally, my working hypothesis was that the division and its troops would be quickly deployed. Frankly,

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1 Major General Guy Tzur serves as the Commander of the IDF Ground Forces.
I was not surprised by the prevailing mood, at least at the beginning of the fighting. That mood reflected the decision-makers’ feeling that any accomplishments from a significant ground forces maneuver would be similar to or less significant than those from an effort based on firepower. The costs, however, would be heavier, far heavier. On July 13 we arrived at the Northern Command Headquarters and requested to be included as an additional division participating in a ground maneuver in Lebanon. Our request was approved, at that stage, but only for planning purposes, and on July 19 we were officially assigned to Northern Command’s order of battle, and took responsibility for the eastern sector of Lebanon. On August 10, ahead of a decision on the primary maneuver of the war, which was scheduled for August 11, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert called me personally. It seemed that the decision about a major ground operation, a move which the government had already been avoiding for more than three weeks, was a heavy burden on him. The Prime Minister wanted to clarify with me directly whether it was reasonable in my opinion to wait another day before making the decision. The conversation took place in light of heavy pressure from the army, which was justified in my opinion. The forces deployed on the ground, waiting, were vulnerable, and prolonging the wait could extract a toll. “Change of Direction 11” achieved its ground objectives, although at no small price in casualties to our troops, though not an especially unusual level. However, at the end of the war the thing that was seared into my memory was the difficulty the decision-makers exhibited in launching a ground maneuver.

The third experience occurred when I was head of the General Staff Planning Division, where things seemed clearer. It quickly became obvious that each circumstance must be examined on a case by case basis.

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2 The operational order for Operation “Change of Direction 11” was issued on August 8, but its implementation was postponed several times.
3 The conversation was documented on the Israeli television show “Uvda” that was accompanying me that day as part of the IDF Spokesman’s Unit policy at the time.
case basis - delaying a ground assault until the last moment seems plausible and sometimes might be very appropriate. If the strategic goal of an operation - deterrence - can be achieved by using only counter standoff fire, without endangering our forces, then this would appear to always be the better alternative. So it was during Operations Cast Lead, Pillar of Defense, and Protective Edge.

But still, something in the specific optimization of the decision-making felt unhealthy. Cumulatively, it seemed that Hamas and Hezbollah enjoyed relative immunity in their territory, and from round to round they displayed improved and growing capabilities. As head of the Planning Division, I realized that the sense of certainty provided to decision-makers by intelligence and standoff fire, applies, relative to ground operations, not only to force employment, but also to force design. The contribution of precision weaponry acquired by the air force is tangible and clear. Considering the aerial superiority of the Israel Air Force (IAF) in our environment, this contribution is dependent on only one thing - quality intelligence. Investing in the coupling of air and intelligence is the most obvious investment to be made, from the perspective of the General Staff, in order to achieve tangible operational goals, i.e. the erosion of valuable assets of the enemy. Moreover, the ratio between achievements and every shekel spent, seemed not only highly obvious, but also relatively worthwhile.

Ground forces, however, constitute a huge mass of forces and the adaptability of the ground forces to the conditions of the new warfare is an expensive and complex endeavor. It is necessary to counter the threat of modern anti-tank missiles; to provide the infantry with the capability to fight in scrub, built-up areas and underground; to cope with the threat of IEDs; to enable logistical stamina and so on. All these actions need to be carried out in large numbers without it being clear exactly what the operational and strategic benefits employing these forces would bring. The general inclination, from the viewpoint of the General Staff, to invest only the essential minimum in ground forces force design, suddenly seemed to have an internal logic.
Still, the weeks of indecision during the Second Lebanon War and their consequences - the strategic dissatisfaction that we felt as opposed to the continued strengthening of Hamas and Hezbollah - together with the memories of my youth, all instilled in me the uneasy notion that something needed to change. Instead of criticizing the decisions made in recent years, one has to look inward and ask the question: Is it necessary and possible to provide the IDF with another type of maneuver - a maneuver that would enable decision makers to feel confident that its benefits would be worth the price that we would pay? Obviously the price should also depend on the opportunity cost that we would pay for a lack of maneuver capability.

A debate regarding the required balance between ground maneuver on the one hand and airstrikes on the other has been underway in the IDF for years. It is clear that the background to this debate is the changing nature of war in recent decades and the Israel's clear tendency to favor standoff fire operations - at least in the past 20 years. “Maneuver reluctance” is a concept that has been quite common in the discourse among senior military ground officers.

Usually the intention in using the term “maneuver reluctance” was to point out the fact that the decision makers are reluctant to use a large ground force in a deep and decisive action and prefer standoff fire operations. One also needs to note that these kinds of operations – Accountability and Grapes of Wrath, the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead - usually end with a sour taste in the mouth. Even the conclusion that from operation to operation the strategic challenge posed by Israel's enemies was only getting more severe was already present in the discourse. It was clear to everyone just how elusive the notion of a “decisive defeat” of our enemies had become in an age when they are no longer Arab regular armies. At the same time, in the absence of

4 Tamir Yadai and Eran Ortal, “Cycles of Deterrence’ Paradigms - Strategic Patterns and Doctrine at an Impasse.”
such a notion, it seems that we are destined to launch more and more “sour” operations, frustrating periods of waiting, (overly) delayed decisions to engage in an overly limited ground attack and the further strengthening of the military threats against Israel.

Still, “maneuver reluctance” does not define the problem adequately. A significant number of senior officers at Ground Forces Headquarters thought that the main problem still lay in the willingness of decision makers to make the right decisions. My opinion is that in the past, faced with the expected achievements as defined, we mostly employed intelligence and standoff fires because we were able to attain those achievements by using them. The truth is that we defined the expected achievements with regard to the price that we were willing (or unwilling) to pay. However, while one can argue about past decisions, it seems that in the next wars, facing the challenges posed by the enemy and in order to achieve the objective within a reasonable time, we will have to provide a more complete response, based on all the tools available to the IDF, including ground forces maneuver. When we asked ourselves: in the future, in the next war scenario, will it be clear and unambiguous that the IDF will be required to execute a broad ground offensive? The answer was “yes.” But alongside the positive answer we realized the level of difficulty that would accompany this decision. Accordingly, we decided to initiate a process to try and introduce a type of maneuver to the army, whose capabilities would cause all doubts about its employment and expected outcomes to be erased.

When we decided in the ground forces that we needed a serious thought process that would address the question of ground maneuver, we faced a real dilemma. Two approaches were debated: One was inclined to engage in a thorough process of operational analysis, in which detailed intelligence analyses would present the ground forces with the variety of operational challenges facing us - the threat of anti-tank missiles, complex combat areas in mountainous scrub and in built-up and dug-in areas, the challenge of IEDs and the like. A clear and detailed
exposition of the multitude of challenges would enable us to split into work teams, led by the corps commanders, and develop operational responses to the various challenges. It’s hard to resist the systematic logic of this process, and in fact, in April 2014 this was the prevalent tendency among us.

The second approach was less clear. It was proposed to me by Col. Eran Ortal of the Dado Center, in whom I found a professional partner from beginning to end. This approach sought a thorough and critical examination of the ground forces themselves. “We need to talk about the broader context of ground maneuver;” they said. Furthermore, this context is not limited only to changes in the character of the enemy, from regular armies to organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah, but is also related to the resources crisis, social limitations and other changes in the IDF agenda. These were general arguments whose practical meaning was not clear. Still, a question, which was asked during one of the consultations stuck in my mind: “Why would we find new answers, of a kind that we did not find before?” Indeed, we all our previous force design workshops were held within the operational analysis approach. Moreover, this is more or less normal operating procedure taking place at Ground Forces Headquarters.

Another important element, which supported the adoption of a long and critical learning approach, was the “Ma’asei Aman” process (which literally means “intelligence undertaking” in Hebrew but is a pun on a biblical term for a work of art). This strategic learning process, led by then head of Military Intelligence, Maj. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, had already led to the formulation a concept for intelligence-centric warfare which then developed into a practical combined arms organizing principle, and it was evident that this process had changed the IDF Intelligence Directorate in other ways. That being the case, Ma’asei Aman was an example of
the complexity and huge investment required for a process of the second type, but also of its practical potential.\(^5\)

The decision was made - in the spring of 2014 we initiated a broad strategic learning process called “Land Ahead”

**Difficult Beginnings**

How does one kick start a service-wide learning process? How does one breach the veil of skepticism, sometimes to the point of cynicism, which characterizes us to a great degree, especially in the context of “strategic thinking?” In the spring of 2014 we put the emphasis on gaining the cooperation of the heads of the different corps, of the brigadier generals in the service and of a group of leading commanders, in formulating the process itself. After a difficult series of discussions we reached a number of joint decisions:

**The first decision: Driving the process** - We agreed that this unique context, compelling the ground forces to launch a new thought process was associated with several dimensions. The first dimension – the strategic and operational dimension – includes the disintegration of regular armies, the rise of standoff fire wars, the new and complex battlefield and instability on the borders. The second dimension - the context of the relations between the ground forces and the IDF – include trends such as the reduction of the order of battle, cuts in training budgets, increased demands of routine operations that threaten the service’s force design, the “Reserve Service Law,” and the decreased budget. The third dimension - the national context – includes the fact that offensive ground maneuver has become an undesirable last resort, as evidenced in recent campaigns, changes in the army-society relationship and its significance for recruits to the ground forces, etc. Finally the technological context – Have we truly exhausted the

\(^5\) Aviv Cochavi and Eran Ortal, “Ma'asei Aman- a Permanent Change in a Changing Reality.”
potential of the networked and digital world and the rapid
development of the missile domain as a way to change how we
think about solutions to the current challenges?
The second decision: The process outline - In my view, it was critical
that the leading decision-making forum within the ground forces, a
group of brigadier generals in the Ground Forces Headquarters and
several division commanders, would be partners from the outset in
decisions about the learning process and its design. We held a
special meeting which dealt with the distinction between staff
processes and regular discussions, and the manner in which critical
and creative learning processes could take place. At the conclusion
of two sessions we reached an agreement on some of the principles
of the process: (1) Dividing the process into a design phase, aiming
to formulate a new concept, and successive phases of planning and
realization, aiming to turn the concept into reality, and to sustain
the conceptual process with further insights “from the bottom”; (2)
The management architecture of the design phase was to be based
on thematic work teams, headed by brigadier generals, which
would provide the central forum with critical analyses of issues to
be defined; (3) A schedule - we formulated a plan for the design
phase, intended to last until the autumn of 2014.
The third decision: The learning concept - The forum agreed on a common learning approach, consisting of five principles: (1) A joint establishment of designated process drivers (the strategic challenge, the resources challenge, the national challenge and unrealized potential); (2) emphasizing creativity in the design phase (even if, at this stage only, it were to come at the expense of practicality); (3) Command leadership – the investigative processes in the teams will be led by the appointed commanders, not by subordinate officers; (4) Investigation based on historical examination – a retrospective examination of the processes we went through to allow the working groups to expose the historical origins of some of our concepts and perhaps enable a renewed critical study of their validity; (5) An approach to discussions where each speaker would explain their reasoning. This would make it possible to discern links and common points between different views, instead of wrangling over them.
What is our common approach to the process?

1. A common approach regarding to the factors require us to rethink

2. We understand the tension between the need of the organization to be practical and ‘over practicality’ as a familiar barrier to learning. The response to the stress-learning process in distinct phases (design, planning, realization).

3. Commanders take responsibility investigation of past and future, and the discussion of them is the personal mission of the management. No ‘staff work degradation’.

4. We understand that a new reflection on the present and the future depends on investigating our past. A historical investigation of the past enables us to understand who we are and what motivates our actions, while enriching the debate about the gap created between our habits and a changing environment.

5. From a practice of debating ideas to the reasoned sharing of perspectives. We are expected to have an opinion. Unlike a discussion concerning decision making, learning is concerned with the creation of new and shared knowledge domains, preconditioned on the ability to explain the point of view being presented.

Figure 2 – A common approach to the process, from the initial presentation of “Land Ahead,” June 2014

In June 2014, we held the first discussion over the content of our investigation. During the discussion we agreed on a common definition of the purpose of the process, and on the scope of our investigation. We defined the goal very broadly - to engage in force design for the ground forces to provide an essential and relevant response to the challenges facing the IDF in all routine, emergency and war situations, in an ever-changing reality. We outlined the scope of the investigation in a manner that would allow us later on to appoint specialized investigative teams for each aspect of the problem. So inter alia, we designated “maneuver reluctance” as an issue related to the strategic objective of engaging ground forces in an era of standoff fire wars; The “IDF and the ground forces” - how to integrate the ground forces within the general IDF concept of how to response to an enemy threat; questions relating to the
Ground Forces Headquarters’ role as a learning system; the resources challenge - the inability to meet the increasing costs of the necessary weapons systems; the issue of reserve forces; army and society; and technological potential.

Figure 3 - Scope of the investigation, from the brief presentation of the Ground Forces Commander - “Land Ahead,” December 2014
Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans, said John Lennon. While we were consolidating the Ground Force’s learning process about our future, a rapid escalation took place in the Palestinian theater in June 2014. It initially took place in Judea and Samaria after the abduction of three Israeli teenagers and the search for them, followed by events in the Gaza Strip. On August 7, Operation Protective Edge was launched and the Ground Forces Command was mobilized to play its part in preparing the forces for combat and supporting the fighting itself. We spent time, all of us - from the Commander of the Ground Forces, the Ground Forces Chief of Staff and the corps commanders, to the last of the officers and NCOs in the corps, brigades and the various staff departments - in Gaza, in logistics bases, in deployment areas, in the advance HQs and with the troops in order to contribute as much as possible to increased operational effectiveness in combat. Combat is our finest hour – the devotion, friendship, creativity and initiative - these were all valiantly exhibited in the face of the enemy and the threat to the citizens of the country.

But there was a fly in the ointment. When we finished Operation Protective Edge and the long and detailed debriefings that followed, the spirit of piercing self-criticism spirit that had up to the summer driven the “Land Ahead” process subsided a little. The fact that the ground forces fought in the Gaza Strip a stubborn and valiant fight, as well as the scope of the activity that we had all experienced that summer, largely dulled the sense of discomfort that had initially served as the basis for “Land Ahead.” The IDF had launched a ground operation, the forces fought and fulfilled their missions - could it be that the process was no longer necessary?

October-December 2014 – Reconsidering our course through historical self-examination
During the operational debriefings, I too thought, briefly, that we had in fact received the learning process that we wanted. Operation Protective Edge demonstrated the essential role of the ground forces and provided a rich platform for inquiry and conclusions that would provide us with a work plan for a long time. The service was immersed in debriefings and in work plans in order to implement the lessons learned. Still, in the end, we recalled that the offensive during Protective Edge was only launched after an enemy attack, within our own territory, through tunnels. In Protective Edge too, the purpose of the ground offensive was very limited. In fact, Protective Edge was in essence not an unusual event in relation to the IDF's operations in Gaza and Lebanon over the last two decades.

It was necessary, then, to reinvigorate “Land Ahead” with renewed energy. Not an easy task in the fall of 2014. A proposal was made for a “genealogical” debate - placing Operation Protective Edge within the historical context of ground operations in recent decades, in a way that would allow us to engage in critical self-examination. Such an examination might allow us as a group to examine Protective Edge from a more balanced perspective, despite the experiences and emotional commitment that we had experienced over the summer. The truth is that I did not attribute much significance to the “genealogical” debate. What could we be told about ground operations, most of which we - me and the senior officers of the service - had personally participated in, that we did not already know? Therefore, on the basis of the proposal, we held the first discussion after Protective Edge within a limited circle of eight participants.

The discussion that took place that October surprised me. A systematic and intelligent exposition of the history, familiar to all of us.

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6 The process was guided by Col. Eran Ortal, from the Dado Center, who greatly helped with the methodological context of the learning process.
7 From the field of genealogy – family tree research. Investigation of the past as a way to expose our old premises and to reconsider them.
us, allowed us to reveal the gradual and slow process that had effectively shaped, over the last few decades, the IDF’s combat concept and the ground forces concept within it. We had all taken part in this process, but our awareness of it was low. The historical overview allowed us to formulate a common awareness of the links between the strategic trends of the Israeli government in the 1990s, trends in philosophy and military endeavor in the West (“Effect-based Campaigns,” the Kosovo and Gulf wars, etc.), and trends in the IDF (standoff fire operations in Lebanon in the 1990s alongside the threat of ground forces operations – a method “imported” to the Gaza Strip after the year 2000). It was a heated debate, as all of us had participated in the operations being presented on the screen and we all had something to say in their defense or condemnation.

At the end of the debate we achieved progress in two dimensions: In the first dimension, we made real progress in defining the problems of the ground forces. It was clear that on the one hand, the State of Israel considers ground operations to be too dangerous and expensive in human life, and on the other hand, the state considers these operations as bearing very limited relevance to the main threat from the enemy - rocket fire at the Israeli home front. We found a direct correlation between the relevance of ground forces to the threat to the home front, and the willingness to employ them. In Operation Defensive Shield there was no doubt that only by occupying Palestinian towns and returning to an approach of searching for and arresting terrorists would we be able to reduce terrorism in Israel. During Protective Edge it was clear that only a ground force could find the tunnel shafts and destroy them. In other operations the ground forces were employed only as a last resort and for limited purposes.

In the second dimension, the discussion - which was not only intellectual, but also emotionally turbulent experience – filled the participants with the sense of crisis that we had lost, without which we could not make progress in the process.
A few weeks later, we brought this debate to the top decision-making forum of “Land Ahead” - the process had been restarted. But something was still missing. It was not clear that all participants in the process understood that we were looking for real change, an intellectual leap, unlike the previous continuity in the ground forces concept. It seemed that some of us still believed that by using “more of the same” - more Trophy Active Protection Systems, more Namer APCs, etc. – we could herald a new era. The solution was to stage another historical discussion aimed at illustrating the distinction between continuity and major leaps at critical junctures in the history of the IDF and other armies; thus clarifying the difference between evolution and continuity, and the larger perceptual leaps for which we had gathered.

In the framework of the discussion we identified two historical case studies exemplifying success in organizational disengagement from traditional patterns of action due to a changing reality, and a daring implementation of innovative concepts.

The first event that we examined was the development of the Haganah organization prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, and the decision of David Ben-Gurion to dismantle it and establish the IDF. The roots of the Haganah were in a prior organization, HaShomer, which was established in 1909 and which was primarily intended to protect Jewish settlements and their agricultural lands from Arab rioters and brigands. HaShomer was essential at the time it operated. But the transition to British rule in Israel in 1917 and the formation of new challenges, required it to “stretch” - organizationally and conceptually - which was beyond its ability due to a loss of assets and internal legitimacy. The establishment of the British Mandate significantly changed the reality in which the Jewish population functioned, and a new need arose for protection against ideologically and politically motivated

Arab gangs in the framework of a national struggle. Effectively, as a popular-mass organization the Haganah was an organizational expansion of HaShomer, which was now relevant for dealing with the threat of disturbances coming from the Arab population. With the approaching end of the British Mandate and the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel, Ben-Gurion understood that a quantitative development would not suffice and that a qualitative “leap” was necessary, as he put it:

It was necessary to “break the vessels” [colloquial Hebrew for shattering the consensus] - because the security regimen which had existed for many years and which had been a great blessing, no longer applied to the new needs and conditions, and shattering vessels is not easy for us, even when they’re obsolete; For even the “revolutionaries” among us are fundamentally devout conservatives, and we sanctify the shell even when its contents are empty, it was not easy to shatter the vessels, but no less difficult was the other thing - setting up new vessels.  

As with any proposal for a change, Ben-Gurion’s proposal to turn the Haganah into the IDF threatened the internal security environment of the state in waiting, igniting a fierce struggle which was not concluded until the onset of the 1948 War of Independence. The opposing argument, whose main proponent was Israel Galili, Head of the General Headquarters of the Haganah, were reasoned, varied and highly motivated by a passionate belief that the change was essentially wrong. The establishment of the Haganah following HaShomer was indeed a significant organizational development, but the magnitude of the change prevented its opponents from recognizing the irrelevancy of the Haganah in light of the future challenges. Ben-Gurion persisted and decided that “We must learn from within the storm of war. And learning also means forgetting things that have become obsolete,

9 This was a post factum explanation given by PM David Ben-Gurion in a speech to the Knesset on June 20, 1950. See David Ben-Gurion, *Army and Security*, page 233.
being weaned off old habits [...] we have to learn a **new doctrine**, the doctrine of a regular army and of modern war, which we haven’t experienced till today.”\(^{10}\)

On the eve of the Declaration of Independence the National Headquarters of the Haganah was dissolved. Thus ended Ben-Gurion’s struggle to transfer authority and responsibility for the army to the government, and with it the administration of the war. It was also the end of the old security regimen, which no longer suited the needs of a sovereign state.\(^{11}\) Ben-Gurion had to overcome strong organizational tendencies which pushed for conceptual and organizational continuity. According to his testimony, and historical studies reinforce this, it required tremendous intellectual and leadership effort. It was important for me to emphasize this to the senior ground commanders’ forum.

**The second historical process** analyzed within the historical portion of our discussion was the development of military doctrine in the West. From the formation of mass armies in the Napoleonic era, through the takeover of the battlefield by artillery until the stretching of this rationale to breaking point in World War I, up to the formulation of the idea of Blitzkrieg on the eve of World War II. The compulsory military draft, which became prevalent with the advent of the French Revolution, gave rise, during the Napoleonic era to the concept of the people’s army and brought a real revolution to the European battlefield. During the American Civil War there were close to 3 million combatants on the battlefield. Within the “traditional” European organization of the American troops, technology and industrialization processes were now integrated and firepower had a major impact on the battlefield. The ability to annihilate the opponent increased, and about 630,000 soldiers were killed in the fighting. Four decades later, in the Russo-


\(^{11}\) See Zehava Ostfeld, *An Army is Born*, Volume I, p. 79.
Japanese War of 1905, the machine gun became one of the most significant factors on the battlefield, alongside rapid artillery fire. Although the number of troops was much smaller, relatively, than in the European and American wars (about 300,000 soldiers on each side), the great danger to which the forces were exposed, due to the massive use of fire, gave birth to a characteristic that would be an ever growing feature of future wars - trench warfare.\(^\text{12}\) For 100 years the West experienced a dramatic process of expanding armies, the development of industrial firepower, and the denial of mobility on the battlefield, as reflected in the phenomenon of the fortifications and trenches in the American Civil War and the Russo-Japanese War. Still, field manuals continued to advocate frontal attacks at all costs.\(^\text{13}\) The tank made its first appearance during the First World War – with the potential to return maneuver to the battlefield through the combination of an internal combustion engine, armor and firepower. Its technological potential was demonstrated during that war at the Battle of Cambrai (1917), the first battle in which tanks were used en masse, achieving a deep penetration of the German rear defenses. Still, most Western armies missed the inherent conceptual potential embodied in the internal combustion engine (tanks, airplanes) for returning deep maneuver to campaigns. The Soviets and the Germans embraced the potential and actually converted it into a combat concept, while the French, preferring “more of the same” - established the famous Maginot Line. **Will we, the commanders of the ground forces who bear responsibility for the current historical moment, succeed in identifying the next potential, in rejecting the temptation to continue developing within our familiar comfort zones and to really embrace change?**

This was the question at hand.

\(^{12}\) See Jonathan B.A. Bailey, “Military History and the Pathology of the Lessons Learned: the Russo-Japanese War.”

\(^{13}\) Ibid, p. 209
In the analysis of both of these historic cases the “signs of innovation” could be gleaned before the conceptual leap was made. Perhaps in retrospect the paradigmatic leap can be explained by the fact that there was already an anchor, however small, to hold on to. In the event of the dissolution of the Haganah and the establishment of the IDF, the Palmach (elite strike companies) a semi-regular organization, could be pointed to as a predictor of the future configuration of the army and of the nature of its employment, while in the case of the armored warfare, the employment of tanks in the Battle of Cambrai, during the World War I (1917), could be pointed out as the anecdote marking the breakthrough of armor as a having future conceptual potential.

Can we transform successful anecdotes from our recent past, for example the 2004 Operation Days of Penitence, into real conceptual tools promoting change?

Following this chapter of historical and genealogical self-examination, we summarized what we had learned: It is very difficult to distinguish a historical need for change (history is replete with instances of non-recognition of this kind); usually the first signs of change appear “at the bottom,” and it is necessary to identify them as such and to exhaust the perceptual opportunities; even after the need for a change and its direction have been identified - organizational change is difficult to achieve and fraught with obstacles.

Although the process had been restarted, it was fairly clear that at this point, winter of 2014, we had lost nearly four months. Assuming that “Land Ahead” was not just a philosophical exercise, but a process designed to formulate a new work plan for the Ground Forces prior to the discussion of the IDF’s new multi-year plan, which was due to take place in the spring of 2015, it was clear that our program needed to include significant change. Therefore, in November 2014 we rebuilt the process, while making some tough decisions, as follows:

1. Unlike our original intention, the renewed “Land Ahead” would focus only on ground maneuver. Border Defense, Ground Forces
headquarters, the employment of reservists, and other issues that we had designated to be dealt with, would have to wait.

2. Unlike the previous “Land Ahead” program, we would have to conduct this process relatively quickly, through simultaneous progress in several channels.

3. Although we had originally wished to incorporate the wide participation of more junior ground forces personnel in the process through working groups, in the new format, there would be a limited number of working groups, whose main task would be a critical processing of the concept that would emerge in the primary forum.

Thus we formulated a new learning format, in three channels:
At the center of the process would be the central learning channel – the forum of the leading Brigadier Generals of the service, selected division commanders and representatives of the other services and the General Staff. This channel would evaluate the enemy; would address the issue of achieving a decisive defeat - its nature, role and significance; would define the problem at various levels (strategic, operational and tactical) and would examine potential sources of change in the Ground Forces concept, capabilities and organization.

Alongside the central channel we set up an experimental and war games channel. This channel was designed to test the key ideas originating in the central channel, challenge them, deepen and enhance them and provide additional “meat” for the discussion in the central channel. This was supposed to be the “laboratory” of “Land Ahead.” The heads of the Ground Forces Division and Manpower Divisions, two brilliant officers imbued with a sense of mission who had begun their jobs during that summer, proposed incorporating “Learning from Friction” into the process in order to challenge emerging ideas and to help refine them. Between December 2015 and April 2015 we held at least four simulations and war games, some at the level of Colonel, with the participation of representatives of the other services and the General Staff, and
others through the platform of the Division Commanders Course, and a dedicated joint war game with staff officers of the Northern Command and the 479 Corps and its divisional headquarters. These games not only advanced our understanding of the concept that was forming at the time, but also greatly contributed to the expansion of the conceptual discourse being carried out in the service to all leading IDF commanders.

The third channel was actually a steering committee for the entire process, which included the Ground Forces Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Hagai Mordechai, and a small group of officers. Members of this team made decisions regarding the content to be discussed in upcoming sessions of the central channel and engaged in a learning process with an intimate group in order to process the insights gained in the other channels, and to bring them before the central, broader learning team, as a basis for further common learning.

In November 2014, we began our self-exploratory journey again.
Figure 4 - The main steps in the learning process after Operation “Protective Edge,” in the central channel. On the sides - the war games and experimental channel and combined insights from other external processes.

“Land Ahead” – Formulating the concept
We headed forward on a new course. The critical historical discourse enriched us with the insight that, for a change, we had to look within ourselves – it was the ground forces that should offer a different strategic outlook that would serve, in turn, the new decisive defeat concept of the IDF. The additional contribution of our historical observation provided a bright light for us. We found in an almost forgotten case, the 2004 Operation Days of Penitence, an example of an innovative and very successful employment of a combined ground-air-intelligence force. Furthermore, we realized that there were two necessary conditions for conceptual and organizational change in any organization: The first - the desire to change. The ground forces, as an inclusive name for the group of its senior commanders, must badly want to change. It is no easy thing, even if the need for change is clear to an outside observer, it is quite obvious that such a change will necessarily be painful and force many of us to abandon our comfort zones. Since the obstacles to change are large, a second necessary condition should be present – a recognition, by the organization, that change is possible and realizable. Without a belief in the possibility of another “horizon,” the strategic process is bound to get stuck at the usual stage of cynicism so common among us, and remain as just another description, even if very intelligent, of the problem.

As mentioned above, the historical debate had provided us with two levers for both the first condition - a sense of a real crisis, a direct result of the examination of the history of the last 20 years (i.e. this is not a temporary crisis); and the second condition - the ability to make a change. Regarding crisis, in a previous learning process carried out in the ground forces, we had already noticed that the enemy usually sees first, shoots first and disappears –
before we had a chance to react. Regarding opportunity, we found that the right combination of air and ground forces, in conditions of unified command and control, and a rapid decision-making system, could prove tremendously effective against an enemy which is a master of the art of elusiveness. Of course, since 2004 (Days of Repentance) the enemy had learned our operational practices so the potential we found was contingent upon new and creative ways of realizing our potential.

From this point, the learning process sought to exhaust two channels of deliberation: First - a definition, as precise as possible, of the problem that needed solving. Second – a search for all possible and potential transformations, and an exhausting debate about their benefits and the possibility of realizing them. For the first channel we chose a primary reference outline to help us focus the debate. We identified Hezbollah as a rigorous and representative case study of the new type of the enemy for whom the IDF should be prepared, and we studied deeply its combat concept and future force design trends.

We understood that in order to achieve decisive operational defeat against this type of enemy - an enemy hiding in well-prepared, complex defensive zones, basing its offensive mainly on intensive rocket fire at our home front from extensive launch areas deep within its hinterland - two things need to be done simultaneously: On the one hand, to strike heavily at the enemy’s centers of gravity, and on the other, to effectively suppress its activities across these enormous areas. The puzzle, then, is how to do both at the same time, without significantly increasing the IDF order of battle. Since the enemy is well prepared for defensive ground battle, it is necessary to do all this while ensuring a low rate of casualties among our forces, and within short time constants that will save the home front from weeks spent in bomb shelters.

In the second deliberation channel, headed by the Ground Forces Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Hagai Mordechai, we scanned with a fine tooth comb the conceptual and technological ideas that
seemed to us to be relevant to the debate. In other words, the ideas that had the potential for desirable change. We held at least ten discussions around the potential ideas which had been identified – concepts oriented towards Special Forces, towards rapid penetration to the enemy’s rear, towards new technologies, etc. Some concepts were further clarified in the “laboratory” channel - war games which examined several concepts, held within the framework of the division commanders advanced studies, and within the framework of Heads of the Doctrine Departments in the Ground Forces, and using additional experimental and thought platforms.

**Definition of the Problem- Background**

The maneuver is a system based on concentrating force toward geographical points (Clear shape of a moving arrow)

The enemy is a decentralized ballistic system with no geographic centers of gravity (No movement or form).

In the effort to deploy to fight against High-Trajectory fire we are dragged into complex, decentralized, slow and very expensive warfare.

While trying to concentrate force we miss the decentralized system and strike at "doubtful" center of gravity.

Figure 5 - Defining the problem as a basis for the deliberations of the working groups. January 2015
The scope of the debate turned out to be enormous, but time was growing short. In the spring, the General Staff, under the leadership of the new Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot, was due to convene a workshop to determine the IDF’s future warfare concept and the force design program that would support it. How does one bring together such a process?

We chose to establish three working groups, each of which would attempt to process the different conceptual directions that we had produced up to that point. The groups would confront the conceptual directions with the definition of the problem, as formulated at the time, in an attempt to reach their own conceptual synthesis. The groups worked during the month of February, concurrently to the central learning channel of “Land Ahead.”

It must be admitted that the three groups returned with three very different working papers. Their essence, leading ideas and the depth and level of readiness of each paper was completely different. In spite, or perhaps because of this, the comparative discussion of the different papers allowed us to clearly formulate the dominant conceptual tension facing us: The tension between a decentralized operation spread over large areas and high intensity activity focused on centers of gravity. More importantly – working in teams allowed us, thanks to a critical analysis of the papers, to understand that we were not deadlocked. While in the past we had regarded this dilemma as a dead end, now, after “A ground tour in the land of potential,” we realized that the answer might also lie within this tension.

“Eureka”

“Land Ahead” proposed, in my opinion, a good and innovative answer to the research question, "How can we decisively defeat the enemy's combat systems, prevent it from realizing its warfare concept and force it to realize that the form of warfare it had adopted in recent decades was no longer effective?". Of course, this is not the place to present readers with the essence of this answer.
Suffice it to say that the ground warfare concept that we are developing today highlights more than ever, and in a different way than in the past, the potential of network-centric warfare as a major platform for a dramatic improvement in the effectiveness of ground forces. This potential is in relation to the threat presented by the enemy and to the effectiveness of the ground forces in terms of the size of the force and the time required to achieve the objectives.

Other highlights of the concept are related to the establishment and employment of Special Forces, the establishment of a commando brigade within the IDF, the further jointness of deep maneuver capabilities, the many improvements to the strength of tactical ground formations, and impressive changes in the logistical support concept.

We also clearly prioritized all of these – through differential force design. “Land Ahead” could not ignore the resources challenge, so the concept defines clear priorities, including a focus on the regular army divisions first. These divisions will constitute the cutting edge of experimentation and learning in the ground forces, in preparation for further dissemination of this knowledge to the general order of battle, as well as serving as the “powerful arrows” of force employment, with the aspiration that quick and determined maneuver by these powerful arrows would reduce the need to expand the combat by employing additional forces. It is also clear that we are not talking about magic or a promise of no risks involved - we did not remove uncertainty from the battlefield. Moreover, the ground forces are not expected to bear the burden of combat alone.

The goal that we formulated at the end of 2014: “Framing a realistic vision of an effective and efficient ground maneuver - a maneuver that embodies the potential, in combination with the other strengths of the IDF, for a decisive defeat,” reminded us of the

14 These changes are the result of the impressive work of the Technology and Logistics Directorate in conjunction with the ground forces.
virtue of modesty. Decisive defeat will be the outcome of building a complete and synchronized IDF system – a precise and tighter connection of ground, air and intelligence forces. This link, beginning with force design, and culminating in a tighter and smoother combined arms tapestry of military strength, may be able to produce a more effective military system in the face of the challenges presented by the enemy. We noticed the potential for the IDF inherent in comprehensive combined arms networking. However, we observed that within the IDF as a whole, the ground forces were the main component requiring investigation and change.

**Design and Implementation**

We could stop our story here. We sought a new horizon for the ground forces out of an undefined, but burning sense of embarrassment and perhaps even of crisis. The road was difficult and complex, but we have apparently found, at least in our opinion, new ideas that embody genuine promise. But the road to realization is long and equally complex, probably even more so, than the road to the design of the initial idea. Not everyone in the ground forces, certainly not outsiders, could really understand the conceptual process we underwent during those long months. Furthermore, the central idea of “Land Ahead” - harnessing advanced networked capabilities (unlike our current command and control concept) for a synergy of ground warfare - lack a natural “lobby” in the ground forces. The Armored Corps, the Infantry, the Engineering Corps, the Field Intelligence Corps and the Artillery Corps - these are all organized combat professions that are able to analyze their needs and promote them. “Network-centric Warfare,” however, in addition to not being an organization or a branch of the Ground Forces, is also perceived, wrongly, as a threat to the Digital Ground Forces (Tzayad) concept, an important and relevant concept that we had promoted in the ground forces until recently through a taskforce and dedicated branches at Ground Forces Headquarters.
So in the spring of 2015 we began parallel design processes: A more detailed formulation of the “Land Ahead” concept on the one hand; and planning for the multi-year program and the procurement and realization of our concept of network-centric warfare at the weapons systems level, on the other; accompanied by a third discussion on how the ground forces should reorganize in light of the new concept. All these were done concurrently with the Gideon multi-year program, as well as the tremendous uncertainty created by unconnected organizational issues that arose at the time, such as the question of the possible union of the Ground Forces and the Technology and Logistics Directorate, questions concerning a dramatic reduction in manpower, and other issues.

Summary
The military, strategic, technological and social circumstances of recent decades have led the IDF into a process that has pushed offensive ground maneuver off center stage within military and strategic concepts. For many years it seemed that the alternative solutions that we have developed, mainly accurate intelligence and standoff fire, while not bringing impressive military victories, provided a reasonable strategic response to the challenges. We are increasingly realizing that in future conflicts and wars we will not be satisfied with either the standoff fire concept nor with limited ground maneuvers.

In force design a situation was created, in which the IDF strengthened its intelligence and offensive capabilities, building one of the world’s most advanced systems of these type. But while strengthening the intelligence and offensive legs, the ground leg was left lagging behind.

“Land Ahead,” above all, seeks to connect the ground forces in a manner that will be deep, practical and durable in combat conditions, to the IDF’s capabilities which have evolved greatly in the intelligence, aerial strike, and ICT domains. Furthermore, “Land Ahead” was designed to generate ground forces whose contribution to intelligence and the lethality of the IDF will be no
less than the intelligence and aerial support for the ground forces. “Land Ahead” is designed to produce genuine combined arms maneuver in which the intelligence, aerial and ICT dimensions, together with the presence of ground forces inside enemy territory, and with appropriate logistical support, create synergies, making it very difficult for the enemy to adapt to the speed of our operations. This idea of genuine combined arms maneuver – a ground-intelligence-air complex - alongside other specialized ingredients contained in “Land Ahead,” will greatly improve the ability of the IDF to execute deep maneuver, as dictated by IDF strategy. Alongside this idea we also formulated an implementation strategy, including a differential force design program with an emphasis on strengthening the tactical forces at the IDF’s operational cutting edge.

Not everything is resolved. The road ahead is still long and the challenges are significant in implementing “Land Ahead” within a challenging budget framework and complicated organizational difficulties, as well as in relation to challenges that we have identified but which have not yet been addressed. We realize that the defense sphere requires careful review and the formulation of a new paradigm; we also understand that in the era of combined arms operations and cross-service force design we will have to examine the structure of the Ground Forces Headquarters which is still organized along the lines of a traditional Corps. Important organizational reforms will require attention and the investment of significant energy on our part, such as the amalgamation of the Ground Forces and the Technological and Logistics Directorate.

With all these, “Land Ahead,” is signaling, at least as we understand it, a real potential for a renewal of the IDF. This renewal will restore the Ground Forces to their rightful place in the fabric of the IDF’s concept, but more importantly - will provide new vitality and enhanced effectiveness to the IDF’s total strength in relation to the strategic challenges presented by our enemies.
Bibliography


