Special Forces Units as Vehicles for Operational Learning in the IDF

“Shaked,” Rimon and Egoz as case studies for “Learning Units”

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Introduction
From time to time the IDF establishes special select units, which do not conform to conventional structures and organizational frameworks, in order to cope with new operational challenges. These units operate outside existing concepts – “breaking through cognitive boundaries” and “thinking outside the box.” The establishment of a special unit is one of the ways in which the IDF deals with an existing or evolving operational challenge for which an appropriate response not yet been found, particularly within the framework of routine security operations. These units enable systemic learning by breaking out of existing frameworks. Alongside the expected impact of these units on operational issues, their influence on the learning of the entire IDF is also desirable, even if unconscious.

Their effect can be observed at three levels: conceptual, doctrinal and ethical. The conceptual level is reflected in the development of new approaches to combat, and in shattering existing conceptual frameworks. The doctrinal level is an open level of developing tactical and techno-tactical combat techniques. The ethical layer is linked to the development of a combat and command ethos, and here too these units have influence.

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In this article we will try to examine the systemic impact of these special units, their contribution to IDF systemic learning and the idea of developing a unique organizational response. To this end, we will present an analysis of three case studies: the Shaked Reconnaissance Unit (1955), the Rimon Unit (1970) and the Egoz Unit (1995). These case studies will assist us in examining the impact of units of this type on the development of new concepts, and their contribution to the development of new operational knowledge, in light of their unique approaches. It should be noted in advance that this will require not only a thorough review of these units, but also an observation of their effect on the entire IDF.

This article does not deal with Special Forces, which are clearly defined as units of exceptional quality (“Forces with varied combat training, requiring special expertise”). The select units discussed in this article generally meet the IDF definition of elite units (“a label describing combat units [non-special forces] which are distinguished by their high operational performance and by their outstanding operational quality”). For the purpose of this article we shall deal with units in which unique capabilities were developed, enabling them to better cope with a particular operational challenge. For example, dealing with guerrilla warfare in an area with dense vegetation or desert warfare against cells of infiltrators. Accordingly, we will be evaluating units whose capabilities or operational patterns can be copied by “regular” or other units. Otherwise, the entire system would not be able to learn from them.

This article consists of three main parts. The first part will present an overview of this phenomenon in the IDF. The second part will

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2 Dictionary of IDF Terminology, p. 253. [Hebrew]
3 Ibid., p. 233 [Hebrew]
4 For a broader discussion of the various definitions of special units, see Alon Kadish and Uzi Ben-Shalom. “Special forces - a proposal for a definition.” pp. 199-202. [Hebrew]
present the case studies and discuss them, and in the third part we will examine the phenomenon and expand on the idea.

A preliminary methodological note: This article is primarily based on secondary sources (books and articles), therefore, the analysis of the units discussed in the case studies is accordingly limited. However, we believe that these sources are sufficient to permit the necessary discussion of the idea of establishing select units and their impact on systemic learning in the IDF.⁵

**The background to the phenomenon in the IDF**

As mentioned above, the establishment of select units within the IDF has occurred frequently since its establishment. This phenomenon can even be traced back to the period prior to the establishment of the IDF. For example, the “Wanderer” Companies, established and led by Yitzhak Sadeh, were employed offensively as part of Hagana formations – “outside the wire” - and developed active defense techniques based on offensive operations. Later on, the Wanderers became the conceptual basis for the “Field Companies,” which served as the basis for the expansion the Hagana concept throughout the country.⁶

The first time a select unit was established to deal with a “new” operational challenge was in the late summer of 1953, with the founding of Unit 101. This unit was established under the command of Major Ariel Sharon as a ground forces “commando” unit and was designated to address border infiltration of hostile elements who were perpetrating terrorist acts and other acts of violence within Israel. This security reality was a challenge that IDF units had difficulty in coping with at the time, especially with regard to activities beyond Israel’s borders in enemy territory. The unit existed for five months only, and was eventually merged with the

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⁵ A major source for this article is the thesis written by Col. Yoav Tillan at the National Defense College under the direction of Brig. Gen. (res.) Dr. Meir Finkel. [Hebrew]

890th Paratrooper Battalion. Much has been written about the unit and its operational impact in dealing with infiltrators through retaliation, and on its contribution to the combat spirit and ethos of the IDF. The unit’s operational methods actually set the norms and modus operandi for the IDF’s future operational military elites: primarily through determination in fulfilling missions, taking initiative, creativity and the value of camaraderie.

Additional units were soon established and in the mid-1950s, reconnaissance units were established in the territorial commands. In 1955 the Shaked (Almond) reconnaissance unit was established within the Southern Command to face a specific challenge - we will discuss the challenge and the unit below. In 1956 the Egoz (Walnut) reconnaissance unit was established in the Northern Command and a decade later the Haruv (Carob) reconnaissance unit in the Central Command.

In 1966 the “Duchifat” (Hoopoe bird) reconnaissance unit was established as part of the Paratroopers Brigade, to provide a mechanized response by airborne forces to enemy armored units, using armored cars that were newly acquired from France.

After the Six Day War, in the early 1970s the Rimon (Pomegranate) reconnaissance unit was established to address terrorist activities in the Gaza Strip - discussed in detail later in this article.

After the Yom Kippur War, most of these units were dismantled and the territorial commands’ reconnaissance units were merged with regular units, but a new generation of units developed in their footsteps. In 1974 the Counterterrorism Unit (LOTAR) and the K-9 unit “Oketz” (Sting) were set up.

In the 1980s anti-terrorism units, designed to operate in Judea and Samaria (West Bank) and the Gaza Strip were established. Like the Rimon reconnaissance unit of the 1970s, the new units Duvdevan (Cherry) (1986, Judea and Samaria) and Shimshon (Samson) (1986, Judea and Samaria) and Shimshon (Samson) (1986,

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7 For example, see Uri Milstein. The History of the Paratroopers - the War of Independence to the Second Lebanon War (Vol 1); Ze’ev Elron. “The IDF Paratroopers - Early Years: 1956-1948,” pp. 43-42. [Hebrew]
Gaza) were based on the capabilities of undercover forces in disguise - “Histaarvut” (lit. to be Arabized) - and frontal confrontation with the enemy.

In 1995 the Egoz unit was re-established in the Northern Command, as a battalion within the Golani Brigade. The new Egoz was to specialize in unique operational activities in southern Lebanon against Hezbollah and other hostile elements operating in the Israeli security zone – this is the third and final unit to be discussed below in detail. In the 1990s Bomb Squad units and the “Yael” reconnaissance unit were merged into one unit – “Yahalom (Diamond) Special Operations Engineering Unit.”

Since the beginning of the 21st century the rate of establishment of select units has decreased significantly. During the first decade of the new millennium, a small unit dealing with weapon caches and tunnels, named “Samur” (Weasel) was developed, later to be absorbed as another company within Yahalom. In 2010, a company-sized unit in the Givati Brigade was formally established as Rimon, designated to operate during routine operational periods against the challenge of infiltrations and terrorist activities along the borders with Egypt and Jordan, within the Edom Division of the Southern Command.

As we can see, in every era the IDF has faced new challenges for which it was required to provide new operational responses. In some cases the IDF was required to produce a new capability by establishing a specialized and unique select unit for that purpose. In some cases, existing units and frameworks were forced to expand their purpose and objectives to include, as part of their capabilities, a response to a current challenge, in addition to or instead of existing capabilities.

The case studies
The selected case studies are: Shaked 1955-1982; Rimon 1970-1972; and Egoz 1995-2006. These select units were able to successfully deal with “new” operational challenges and to some extent influenced the learning processes of the entire IDF. The
purpose of this section is to describe these units and to discuss their impact as well as assessing their contribution to the IDF on two key parameters - development of new operational knowledge and of new combat concepts and attitudes. Before detailing each case study, it is important to note that the description of the Shaked reconnaissance unit is relatively long because of the length of the period in question and the wealth of literature about the unit. Relatively few sources were found concerning the other units, but there were enough to enable the discussion that we intended. Despite the imbalance this caused among the case studies, it should be noted that we chose to expand the description of the first case, Shaked, so as not to give up the depth it offers for our discussion.

The **Shaked** reconnaissance unit (1955) was established to deal with a serious threat facing the State of Israel at that time - hostile incursions and infiltrations into its southern territory. During this period, southern Israel was considered the most problematic area from a security perspective. In parallel to the existential threat posed by the Arab states - particularly Egypt and Jordan – other routine security threats arose that violated Israel's sovereignty over its territory. For example: incursions by Egyptian spotter troops, shooting attacks, violent robberies, thefts, smuggling and more. These all weighed heavily on Israel's security, on the freedom of movement of Israeli citizens and on the IDF's control of the area south of Kiryat Gat.8

Three main periods can be identified during the existence of the Shaked unit: The first, from its establishment in 1955 until the Six Day War; the second, from the end of the Six Day War to the Yom Kippur War; the third, from the Yom Kippur War until its amalgamation with the Givati Brigade in 1982, following the First Lebanon War. In each period the unit confronted enemies whose

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8 Uri Milstein and Dov Doron. *Shaked Reconnaissance Unit - prevention and routine security in the IDF’s history*, p. 27; Mike Elder, *Unit 424 - the Story of Shaked*, pp. 24-21. [Hebrew]
operational characteristics were different, by employing different operational methods. At its beginning Shaked mainly dealt with incursions from the Gaza Strip and along the Egyptian border in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula. Later its activities expanded, in parallel with a growth in the size of the unit, to the rest of the western Negev, south to Eilat and east - along the border with Jordan in the Arava. In a short time, Shaked had become a major component in the struggle to overcome incursions along the southern borders of Israel.

The success of Shaked was already evident in its first years. These accomplishments were achieved despite its limited order of battle and without it having any special weaponry. That is why the Shaked reconnaissance methods were considered to be so effective. During this period the unit made a clear contribution by developing unique concepts and tactics for “tracking,” “pursuit via footprints,” “encirclement” and “interdiction” on dirt tracking roads, all of which were systematically organized as a professional methodology for dealing with and containing infiltrations by hostile elements into Israeli territory. These methods were adopted and adapted for other fronts by other IDF units, including the Egoz and Haruv reconnaissance units of the Northern and Central commands, and have become common techniques in conducting routine security operations along all the borders of the State.

In Shaked a doctrine was written [...] commanders [at the command echelon] did not claim to be experts and know-it-alls regarding the choice of tactical method of response, and they therefore avoided meddling. Amos Yarkoni [the unit’s first commander] led a start-up, it was a “laboratory” and it continued until the War of Attrition.”

Towards the mid-1960s, changes occurred in the weaponry and organization of the unit. In addition to electronic means, including

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9 Uri Milstein and Dov Doron. ‘Shaked’ Reconnaissance Unit. pp. 56-63. [Hebrew]
10 Interview with Amatzia (Patzi) Chen. July 7, 2015. [Hebrew]
the first use of the “Keshet” (Rainbow) radar and other motion detectors, Shaked began using advanced night-vision equipment with SLS which was installed on platoon weapons and machine guns. In those years Shaked grew to the dimensions of a small battalion, and its companies specialized in the various sectors of the Southern Command. The main mode of operation of the reconnaissance unit was based on a strict operational and systematic routine which was characterized by vehicular patrols and the pursuit of infiltrators to achieve operational control over the border in its Area of Responsibility within Southern Command. Occasionally it carried out activities of a more offensive character, such as raids and patrols across enemy lines. But mostly it focused on carrying out patrols, ambushes and the pursuit of enemy squads that had penetrated the border in their sector.¹¹ During this period Shaked was a model for the establishment of reconnaissance units in other Territorial Command, and it was a source of new knowledge development. The other Territorial Command reconnaissance units and additional army units adopted the techniques and the drills developed by Shaked for routine border protection. The unit’s lessons and experiences were documented into a ‘doctrine,’ whose principles, to some extent, still apply to this day.

¹¹ Uri Milstein and Dov Doron. *Shaked Reconnaissance Unit*, p. 113. [Hebrew]
Amos Yarkoni, Unit Commander, in the jeep commander seat behind the machine gun.
Sinai, the Six Day War, June 1967

At the end of the Six Day War Shaked experienced the first significant shift in its mission after a force from the unit was assigned to confront the Egyptian army in the Suez Canal area. The unit's operational scope had increased in accordance with the change of borders and accordingly it had to change its capabilities and its operational patterns to include mechanized patrols and company-size raids behind enemy lines. The unit's prestige was at its peak during this period, due to the variety and broad scope of its operations.\(^\text{12}\) As part of the IDF's handling of terrorist activity in the south of the country, the “Shfifon” (rattle snake) unit was established within Shaked under the command of Amatzia “Patzi” Chen. The activities and tasks of this unique framework were varied and many:
They included patrols of various kinds, including airborne on helicopters, which were conducted as needed on both sides of the border with Jordan in pursuit of terrorists, suspects and infiltrators.

\(^{12}\) Yaakov Erez and Ilan Kfir (eds). *The IDF and its Units – Reconnaissance Units and Minorities*, pp. 24-22. [Hebrew]
Such missions were called “Search and Destroy” and later, the name “Barriers” stuck to missions conducted with CH-53 helicopters.\textsuperscript{13}

Activities on this front peaked during Ariel Sharon’s tenure as GOC Southern Command (1969 - 1973) when he ordered Shaked forces to carry out operations east of the border with Jordan, with the intention of striking at terrorists within Jordanian territory.\textsuperscript{14}

The second significant shift experienced by Shaked took place in the early 1970s, when a force from the unit was stationed in the Gaza Strip to cope with increased terrorism and a Palestinian popular uprising. Although the new deployment did not signify a definite change in purpose or objective, it required considerable operational adjustments. In this sector Shaked faced totally different combat characteristics. Its troops, experts in open area warfare, where cover is thin and the population sparse, were now forced to fight in conditions that were completely the opposite of what the unit had previously dealt with - agricultural land, dense urban areas, the presence of a large and frequently uninvolved, population. Shaked had indeed gained considerable experience in fighting terrorists, but the change in combat conditions and the modus operandi of the terrorists within cities and refugee camps, required different and new skills.

Terror operatives in these areas had an extensive infrastructure of secret bunkers, weapons caches and sophisticated hideouts in the hearts of refugee camps and the orchards around them, in which they could hide weapons and personnel.

Shaked was able to cope with this new challenge thanks to its flexibility, stemming, inter alia, from an organizational culture characterized by a determination to carry out its mission, by initiative and by creativity. All these had largely defined the high

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  \item \textsuperscript{13} Uri Milstein and Dov Doron. \textit{'Shaked' Reconnaissance unit}, pp. 180-182. [Hebrew]
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid. p. 200
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quality and uniqueness of Shaked and they radiated out to the entire IDF. Initially Shaked personnel had difficulty in coping with terrorist organizations operating from within a densely populated area. Soon, its commanders realized that large patrols and systematic searches under curfew were not effective. The gunmen fled at the sight of troops and friction with the civilian population only increased. After a while, the unit was able to implement the recommendations of the GOC who had consistency argued that “to defeat the terrorists we have to force ever changing conditions open them, thus confounding them.”  

After much confusion, Shaked implemented a new and successful operational pattern called “Catch Me” (or as defined by Amatzia Chen, “Onslaught”). In this method, a company-size force, mounted on vehicles, would enter a refugee camp, encircling a district or a section of it. Infantry squads would then advance through the alleyways from all sides, converging on the center of the defined sector. While advancing, the forces would wait for the militants to emerge as they attempted to escape into the center of the encircled area where they would be caught. Afterwards searches would be conducted of the homes in the area. This method proved itself many times over. 

During this period many changes occurred within Shaked. The numerous security changes taking place at that time fundamentally affected the functioning of Shaked in all sectors and fronts. The combat challenges in the Sinai, the south of the country and the Gaza Strip were completely different from each other. During this period Shaked grew in size: More than five regular companies were established as well as a reserve framework. The unit was reinforced with new weapons and capabilities, such as helicopters, armored vehicles, recoilless guns etc. Shaked developed new skills in urban warfare, establishing bridgeheads and sabotage.

15 Ibid. p. 225.
16 David Maimon. *Terrorism Defeated - the suppression of terrorism in the Gaza Strip 1971 to 1972*, p.117. [Hebrew]
At the end of the Yom Kippur War, a long process began, which took almost a decade, of the “institutionalization and enlistment” of Shaked as a “regular” battalion. During this period, it effectively ceased to exist as a select unit.

The Rimon select unit (1970) was established and developed in light of the increase in terror attacks emanating from the Gaza Strip and hostile elements proliferating in the area. After the Six Day War the terror organizations targeting Israel regrouped into three main frameworks: Fatah, the PFLP and the Liberation Forces. These organizations encouraged the Palestinian population to act against Israel within Israeli territory and beyond its borders. Large arsenals in the Gaza Strip were used for diverse operations such as grenade, bomb and gunfire attacks. Many soldiers became casualties, and in effect the Gaza Strip became another front for the Southern Command, alongside the Egyptian and Jordanian fronts in the south. The feeling at the time was that when one acted against the enemy, it distanced itself, escaped and avoided contact.\(^{17}\)

In its early days the unit was a small coastal reconnaissance unit, under the Gaza Strip Territorial Brigade. Over time and with the development of undercover methods of disguise (“Histaaravut”) the unit expanded its activities and created an effective cooperation with the General Security Service (today the Israel Security Agency). Rimon’s first commanding officer was Captain Meir Dagan, who was appointed by the GOC Southern Command, Maj. Gen. Ariel Sharon. Rimon was a relatively small unit, numbering a few dozen soldiers, whose numbers would change from time to time according to the scope of its activities and changing needs. Its members were selected from various units on the basis of personal acquaintance. Most of the unit’s operations involved small team work.

The manner in which the Rimon was established as a select unit was in itself a change, developing primarily at the initiative of GOC

\(^{17}\) Ibid., pp. 29-33, 44-47
Southern Command. Tactical solutions evolved over time in the field, but changes in adopting this type of response were fully supported in all respects by GOC Southern Command. Sharon demanded quick results and supervised the unit’s activities by personally approving many of its operational plans. Meetings of the unit’s commanders with the GOC were conducted on a weekly basis, sometimes several times a week, to authorize operational plans, or in the field with the troops. The results were not long in coming. During the second half of 1971 there was an increase in the number of terrorists injured or caught, and a significant decline in the number of incidents and casualties among our forces - military and civilian.\(^{18}\)

Rimon was based on a modus operandi using subterfuge, including the creative application of deception and manipulation by means of undercover activities. The unit specialized in coming into very close contact with terror activists in order to capture or kill them.\(^{19}\)

The unit's operations were secret, to this day some have not been publicized, yet it had a considerable impact on the reduction of terrorism. Unlike the other units, Rimon used less conventional weapons that were often outside the standard arsenal of the IDF. As part of its broad contribution and effect the unit was a prototype for the establishment of new undercover units, such as Duvdevan and Shimshon, which were established in 1986, in light of the then current challenges that arose again in the Gaza Strip and in Judea and Samaria.

**Egoz** (1995) was established to deal with the buildup of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. Unlike Shaked and Rimon, Egoz was established in a relatively orderly fashion. Its purpose and mission were defined by military order and the unit was established at battalion size. Egoz was established within the Golani Brigade, for fear that “establishing a unit independent of a supportive and supervisory framework would not succeed.” Similar units that were

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., pp. 156-160

\(^{19}\) Personal interview with Meir Dagan, 7 July 2015.
established in the army without such support suffered from long periods of growing pains.\textsuperscript{20} During its first five years (1995 – 2000, until the IDF’s withdrawal from Lebanon) the unit operated within the Israeli security zone in South Lebanon. Its first commander was Erez Zukerman. Within a short time the unit accomplished impressive operational achievements using “unique operational methods.”\textsuperscript{21} The unit succeeded in coming into close contact with the enemy on many occasions, and in striking the enemy’s forces more frequently than “regular” IDF units operating at that time in the security zone. Its activities had many effects, including on “decision-makers,” as its second commander, Moshe Tamir put it:

The unit’s demonstrated ability to penetrate the Hezbollah formation and to confront the terrorists in their home field bolstered the confidence of decision makers […] Following the operation [“Wild Landscape”] the unit carried out a string of successful operations against [enemy]

\textsuperscript{20} Moshe (Chico) Tamir. War with no Medal, p.141. [Hebrew]
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p.144.
outposts in this area [Sujud] which undermined their control in the field and disrupted their ability to strike at the defensive lineup and the outposts in the sector.\textsuperscript{22}

Zukerman, followed by Tamir, led the unit in many operations, leading to numerous engagements with the enemy. The unit’s combat techniques including bush and boulder warfare, pursuit techniques, sabotage raids, area containment operations, long-term camouflage, etc., were innovative and evolved over time. The specific and unique operational lessons learnt by Egoz were applied by other combat units deployed in the area. However, it seems that these capabilities had not sufficiently ripened by the time of the IDF’s withdrawal from the security zone in 2000, into an operational response which could signal a revolution in dealing with Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

The withdrawal from Lebanon and the events of the Second Palestinian Intifada led to a different challenge for the IDF in general and for the Egoz unit in particular. As a result, Egoz teams adapted themselves to warfare in the West Bank and then in Gaza, in rural and urban configurations. With the unit's successes in this new environment, its purpose was also updated by the General Staff.

Egoz, like most other IDF units, was influenced by a focus on fighting the Palestinian uprising and terrorism, far from the Lebanese border. Like many other units, it paid a heavy price in readapting to the combat environment when it was suddenly required to do so during the Second Lebanon War in 2006.\textsuperscript{23}

The flexibility of Egoz, like the rest of the units surveyed earlier, stems from an operational culture associated with many elite units, which relies heavily on the quality of its commanders and troops and their high level of determination, combined with specialization in a particular arena while facing an enemy of a defined profile.

\textsuperscript{22} Moshe (Chico) Tamir. War with no Badge, page 172. [Hebrew]
\textsuperscript{23} Amir Rappaport. Fire on our Forces – how we defeated ourselves in the Second Lebanon War, pp. 156-155. [Hebrew]
Case studies Discussion
Shifting threats and challenges create a dynamic of change in the balance of forces which lead to the development of new concepts to help deal with new challenges. Learning and adapting to the changes on the battlefield, the implementation of lessons learned and the creation of flexible and rapid operational responses are essential elements for success in a dynamic of this type.
In most cases the decision to establish a select unit of the sort discussed in this article is a response to a problem created by the enemy. However, the establishment of these units is designed to break existing conceptual frameworks and to develop new ideas - concepts, methods, and values - using a focused force to address the challenge.

The ethos of these units reflects a success story in addressing the challenges they were designated to handle (some more, some less). This is despite the fact that in most cases it appears that their establishment process was implemented ad hoc and lacked basic elements such as a definition of purpose, concept, etc. The case studies described here demonstrate that the establishment of a unit of this type primarily requires an operational problem without a solution, and commanders who feel that “something else” is required to deal with it.

These units typically developed organizational cultures that deviated from conventional military orders and procedures. This culture assisted in breaking boundaries, and helped develop combat methods and values that diverged from existing concepts: The establishment of “select” units constitutes an antithesis to military conservatism. These units develop operational, organizational and moral cultures that often do not comply with military orders and regulations. This organizational culture is reflected in the breaking of boundaries, values and combat norms [...]. the secret power of a select unit is in avoiding routine, in vibrant creativity and a rapid connection between thought and action [...]. the experiences of Haruv, Shaked and Egoz demonstrate
unequivocally the need to establish combat units that would meet the army’s combat needs in limited confrontations and in routine security.24

The select units discussed in this article were established and employed for routine security needs. Essentially, they were created to address specific challenges related to routine security, mainly by engaging professional focus on operational problems, on changing accepted patterns and on a mix of offensive and innovative (or unconventional) ideas. Dealing with routine security means enduring daily friction at a relatively high frequency. This friction is critical for learning and allows the creation of new knowledge by repeated experiences.

It is clear that when, as part of routine security operations, the association between a unit’s designation and the challenge it actually faces is severed, the unit’s effect on operational learning declines. For example, after the IDF withdrew from the security zone in Lebanon, the ability of Egoz to develop operational knowledge in this theater, and to influence the system as a whole, significantly diminished.

In many ways, Shaked was the classic model for a select unit whose achievements had a broad effect on the entire system. The unit’s operations affected general operational patterns while augmenting the offensive approach, alongside the development of operational methods and combat techniques, such as “tracking,” “encircling” and “interdiction,” which were later applied by other units. Shaked was also to some extent a laboratory where new weapons were tested - examining their efficacy and developing techniques to be employed by the entire army. Shaked was also the inspiration for the establishment of reconnaissance units in other commands. For example: “At the end of 1966 the Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin decided to set up a reconnaissance unit in the Central Command, which would implement the lessons of the Southern Shaked

reconnaissance unit in the command’s sector, operating along the border with Jordan.”

Thus Haruv was established. Haruv which, as noted, was designated to apply the lessons of its “older sister,” Shaked, needed to develop a special doctrine to deal with infiltrators from Jordan on their way up the Judea and Samaria mountain ridge. The unit was equipped with special equipment for its missions, such as the “Dagan” active night vision device and similarly, it too served as a laboratory for evaluating new weapons.

Alongside the importance of these units - from creating greater flexibility in a large organization to their contribution to the IDF’s prestige - it is worth noting some inherent tensions and drawbacks. The size of the resources invested concurrently in a large number of units of this type, each one for a specific operational response, from the late 1960s to the end of the Yom Kippur War, gave rise to criticism and to the claim that there was no justification for the demanding existence of each of these units. From a broader perspective the resources in the possession of the select units, came at the expense of regular army units.

Conclusions

The most obvious and major conclusion is that where the units coped effectively with the operational challenge for which they were established, new and original operational knowledge was developed.

The most successful units, in this context, were those that excelled at learning processes in light of their many different operational experiences, and in implementing these lessons for their future activities. This excellence was reflected in their ability to serve as

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25 Yaakov Erez and Ilan Kfir (eds). *The IDF and its Units – Reconnaissance Units and Minorities*, p. 75. [Hebrew]
26 Alon Kadish and Uzi Ben-Shalom “Special forces - a proposal for a definition,” p. 200. [Hebrew]
27 Boaz Zalmanowitz, 'The establishment of special forces for low intensity warfare', pp. 35-32. [Hebrew]
“operational laboratories” in their field - particularly by learning through friction, i.e. operational experience. The products of this learning were used by the units to maintain their relative advantage in realizing their purpose, but their value increased immeasurably when they were adopted and implemented in other frameworks, across the organization, until their consolidation into a genuine doctrine.

The second conclusion is that through the establishment of select units, the military establishment, in most cases, succeeded in providing relatively rapid operational responses to operational challenges that were unsolvable until that time, given that the army had concluded that existing military units would not be able to overcome them. For the most part, these units enabled operational flexibility within a large and conservative organization.

Their responses were designed primarily to address a common range of challenges associated with routine security. These speedy solutions stemmed primarily from the fact that the idea to establish each of these units was formulated, initiated or supported by a senior commander, sometimes by the Chief of Staff himself, as he harnessed the rest of the system to promote the initiative. For example, the establishment of Egoz took only six months.

One last conclusion is the importance of the select units for the ethos of the organization. The scope of this contribution is hard to assess, but its influence is strongly felt, sometimes even within the public, outside of the organization. The narrative about the success of select units is known to have the potential to strengthen the army's image and the prestige of the units within it, in addition to a direct contribution to the spirit and the high morale of the troops of each unit as well as their self-esteem. In addition, the motivation of these units to stand out for their excellence creates natural competition between them, while encouraging continuous improvement.

Summary and Future Vision
Today’s conflicts are more complex and complicated than ever. “Collateral damage,” “public awareness” and “civilians” - these are just some of the terms describing the “rules” of current violent conflict. Even the enemy’s characteristics have changed almost beyond recognition since the days of Shaked reconnaissance unit. Despite the great strength of the IDF, it appears that the balance of power vis-a-vis our rivals is not directly proportional to this strength. As can be seen in this article, these select units were tools for operational conduct outside the existing frameworks and for better dealing with complex challenges. Also, units of this type have a broad impact on the entire system.

Currently the scope for establishing select units within the ground forces is diminishing. The new Rimon unit (2010) is the last select unit to be established, after a long period in which no such units were established. One presumption about this declining trend is that it is a result of a decrease in the intensity of combat during routine security operations relative to the period when the IDF was deployed within the Gaza Strip and Lebanon. During the periods of combat in the security zone in Southern Lebanon or in the Gaza Strip, the IDF also set up these units to “feel” and identify gaps in the operational response. According to this argument, the IDF does not currently recognize a need for the establishment of new select units. At the same time, it is possible to see the planned consolidation of the Egoz, Rimon, Duvdevan and Maglan units into one commando brigade, as a change in the approach behind the establishment of these units.

Currently, routine security activities along the Israeli-Lebanese border are less intense than those that prevailed during the IDF’s presence in the security zone. Similarly, the missions along the border with the Gaza Strip cannot match the challenges facing the IDF in protecting the Gaza Strip settlements prior to the disengagement. But it seems that the argument that lower

28 Personal interview with Moshe (Chico) Tamir
29 Amos Harel. “Israeli Army Establishes 'Commando Brigade' of Special Units.”
intensity and different operational challenges are driving this change in attitude, is overly lenient and only provides a partial explanation for this decline. Therefore, we must try to take a closer look at this trend and ask: where are the select units now, and what is their future? Or ask the fundamental question: Where can we actualize the notion of thinking outside the box and finding new creative solutions?

It is possible that the challenges currently facing the IDF, combined with Israel's strategic culture, are behind the fact that expressions of innovation are taking place in other channels. The boom in advanced weapons development (unmanned platforms, precision missiles, etc.) and the emergence of various intelligence units are just some of the expressions of change in the way that the system now handles its challenges.

Today we can see that in order to address new challenges, tremendous technological efforts are being made and when they succeed, select units are established to deal with each challenge using new weapons systems, such as the “Iron Dome” units. This is a tangible response, which has the potential to foment change at the strategic level. However, it is difficult to find in these units a potential for learning and for change across the entire system. We may find the main theme that underlies the establishment of the select units as examined in this article, (i.e., the creation of “another” organizational form within an existing framework) in other content worlds. For example, in the force design field, the establishment of special “authorities” is the organization's way of dealing with a new or unresolved challenge. For instance: the “Homa” authority (development of active defensive systems) or the “Hourglass” authority (construction of the barrier on the Israel-Egyptian border). The idea behind the establishment of an authority is the establishment of a single entity (a sort of “elite unit”) engaged in a focused manner on a certain challenge, while persuading other entities to also deal with it, usually achieving results in a relatively shorter than expected time.
Another example is the American way of dealing with roadside bombs in Iraq by establishing the JIEDDO organization (Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization). JIEDDO is “the leading and comprehensive organization [...] which is responsible for consolidating the actions of the services and all the other agencies in the context of IEDs into one clear and organized narrative.”

Systems of this type are tools for an organization to develop new knowledge and systematically focus on a problem. It is important to note that it is often difficult for an organization to later discard this structure, which is essentially a temporary tool for dealing with a specific challenge.

Today, the system's significant challenge is to break existing intellectual boundaries and to develop new approaches and methods of combat, which are more appropriate to the challenges it faces. The units surveyed in the article, are an example of a system responding in a groundbreaking way. Today we need to rethink where and how to correctly use this approach and where we could possibly establish bodies that would diverge from conventional frameworks, in order to generate broader influence - Cyber reconnaissance units? New units to evaluate weapons systems? Special underground warfare units?

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30 [https://www.jieddo.mil/about.htm](https://www.jieddo.mil/about.htm)
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