"Swords of Iron" war

Special issue

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"Swords of Iron" War – Special Issue
Dado Center for Interdisciplinary Military Studies

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Preface

The **"Swords of Iron"** war was imposed on the State of Israel following a surprising and murderous attack by Hamas on the morning of October 7, 2023. It has since developed into a **prolonged and challenging multi-front regional campaign**, which is still focused on dismantling military and governance capabilities in the Gaza Strip, efforts to return our hostages, preparedness for developments in all arenas, and firming deterrence as well as Israel's regional and international standing.

Developments in the Gaza Strip as well as the entire region, introduce **understandings and dilemmas on the tactical, operational, and systemic-strategic levels, and the relationships between them**. This has propagated **extensive writing** within the military-security system itself, research institutes in Israel and abroad, and in military-civilian interagency cooperation.

The war broke out at a time when the IDF was **engaged in a conceptual discussion** and a process of formulating its **updated strategy and operational concept**, with **the Iranian threat and the multi-front challenge** at its core. This debate continues even more intensely, following the events of October 7 and the following war. There is no doubt that through the learning and debriefing processes, and certainly upon their conclusion, we will move to update the formulation of the IDF strategy, while **rethinking the basic assumptions, developing trends in the regional and global environment, and guidelines for the future**.

Over the past few years, the IDF and the security community have taken **different approaches** to the question of **what the key challenge is facing the IDF and the appropriate conceptual response**. In the past two decades, the dominant approaches have seen the **'close circle' – Hezbollah and Hamas**, as the IDF's main challenge to which it must apply either a decisive approach, a limited operations approach, or a

combination of both. Other approaches branded **Iran as the focal point** and the main military challenge for which it must prepare, whether by preventive actions or the enhancement of an offensive and proactive approach, including long-term "strategic competition." Along with the importance of this conceptual discussion, it is evident that it also expresses **ongoing discomfort regarding** the size and fittingness of the IDF for the emerging regional environment and security challenges.

Components of the IDF's strategy, as formulated in 2023 under the leadership of the Chief of the General Staff, sought to create an **integrated conceptual infrastructure**, by **binding Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, and other players into a united, multi-front and evolving adverse system** with which we will have to face in the coming years. **The strategic approach reflects the reality of the regional conflict in which we find ourselves today**, though incomplete. This includes the linkage between the regional-fundamentalist axis and the Palestinian arena; **the urgency of the threats** posed by the evolving **system's** capabilities; **the dimension of time**, which manifests, among other things, in the timing and duration of the campaign. These and other perceptual foci require **critical self-examination**, both to be **precise in defining and realizing the ways of response**, as well as to **prevent such gaps** in the future.

This exclusive issue of the Dado Journal, published during the war (July 2024), reflects a broad **discussion of theories and core questions, from a variety of perspectives**, from within and outside the military system, and stimulates a discourse, sometimes critical and incisive, on the basic assumptions, on the development of the campaign and on our ability to influence – **the operational and conceptual tiers that requires deeper examination**, and from a point of view of **processing, debriefing, and learning mechanisms** in preparation for **present and future challenges**.

I hope you find the contents useful,

BG Dr. Eyal Pecht
Head of the Dado Center
for Interdisciplinary
Military Studies

Editors' Introduction

October 7, 2023, will be remembered as the day on which many of Israel's foundational security assumptions, and those of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in particular, collapsed. A surprising and effective attack carried out by Hamas succeeded in challenging—and in many cases temporarily dismantling—the IDF's systems, drawing Israel into a complex multi-theater conflict that continues to unfold to this day.

DCJ, the journal of the Dado Center, was established in 2014 as part of our mission to advance systemic and critical thinking within the IDF. Over the years, the journal has served as a platform for ideas and concepts that were either at the core of military operations or challenged central military doctrines. It has published a wide range of articles, including those by senior commanders both active and retired, which highlight various issues in the IDF's conduct across different areas. The journal did not merely point out problems but also sought to suggest ways in which the IDF could evolve. To this end, it featured contributions from diverse voices, both within and outside the IDF, integrating theoretical and historical perspectives to shed new light on issues where it seemed we were at an impasse.

The journal aims not only to influence discourse within the IDF and expose the broader public to the conceptual discussions taking place, but also to encourage in-depth writing on conceptual issues by officers. We believe that writing can serve as a catalyst for knowledge development for these officers and be part of a process of fostering independent and critical thinking, which they can express in their roles.

The events of October 7 and the numerous challenges faced by the IDF during the war suggest, in our view, that our efforts had mixed results. Like other members of the IDF entities, we are also undergoing a process of critical self-examination, in order to understand what we

could have done better and what accounts for our partial success in advancing military thought and research, as well as in promoting critical and systemic thinking within the IDF. The list that follows is, of course, preliminary and incomplete, but it is important for us to share it with you because we view you, the readers, as partners in a journey that began a decade ago.

At *DCJ*, we are committed to learning and improvement. We share both successes and failures with the IDF. In hindsight, we have not always succeeded in challenging existing paradigms (for example, regarding the Palestinian issue and the military challenge from Gaza) and influencing the organization. The journal has encouraged and reflected the discourse on issues we identified as urgent or requiring further discussion, sometimes in a manner that managed to be critical and challenging, and sometimes in a way that mainly reflected the prevailing consensuses.

Regarding some core issues of the current war, the journal has previously provided essential insights that enabled fresh thinking. However, regarding other issues, there remains significant work for us to do. We hope that this issue represents a further step in aligning the journal with its purpose and mission—serving as a platform for professional, critical, and high-quality discourse—that will help the IDF to adapt, remain relevant, and succeed.

It goes without saying that not everything is bleak. As with past wars, the IDF did not collapse during this conflict; on the contrary, it recovered, refocused, adapted its plans and systems, launched counterattacks, and is achieving successes across various fronts. However, what about the "day after" in Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran? What can be learned from past conflicts in this regard?

The failure of October 7 resonates associatively with the Yom Kippur War, with its shortcomings and failures (see Issue No. 40 on the Yom Kippur War, available on the Dado Center website). In that conflict as well, it was the IDF's commanders who managed to recover from the surprise attack, turn the tide, and achieve a military victory on the battlefield. After that war, the IDF focused on rehabilitation and addressing deficiencies, investing more in quantitative responses rather than qualitative ones. As a result, the IDF expanded significantly, but it is questionable whether its

relevance to the threats was substantially improved. The shift towards a qualitative response, which began in the 1990s, was dramatic and came at the expense of quantity. It is evident that in both cases, the IDF did not find the optimal balance between quantity and quality. The art, which should be at the heart of the learning and the rehabilitation process of the IDF, lies in finding that balance between the need to maintain a large force structure that enables the military to operate on multiple fronts simultaneously while still preserving quality components. This includes advanced technological systems for command and control, smart munitions, and, above all, commanders with combat leadership who lead their troops from the front, with professional curiosity, critical thinking, talent, and skill. Commanders who are the true force multipliers of the IDF.

Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Itay Haiminis
Captain (Res.) Gal Perl

Part 1

The Road to "Swords of Iron" War

The transition from the Campaign Between the Wars (CBW) to the "Swords of Iron" war

Dana Preisler-Swery[1]

In this article, I will discuss the transition from the Campaign Between the Wars (CBW) to the "Swords of Iron" war. I seek to examine how a decade of operations as part of the Campaign Between the Wars affected the IDF's readiness for the current war. Moreover, this article will focus on the deterrence component of the Campaign Between the Wars, as the main element that affects potential escalation and deterioration to war. This article also identifies the need for a new conceptualization of the Campaign Between the Wars (CBW herein for the purpose of this article) as a continuum of campaigns on the spectrum between war and peace, as well as the need to re-examine the political aim of the CBW. In conclusion, the article offers a new conceptual framework for the CBW, as an ongoing strategy for routine times, which combines prevention, defense, and deterrence.

Introduction

The "Swords of Iron" war, which broke out on October 7, 2023, turned the issue of transitioning from CBW operations to full-blown war, from a critical theoretical discussion to a continuing reality. This reality allows us to draw preliminary conclusions about the failings of the CBW, the possibilities of their development in the future, as well as to gain a better understanding of the challenges imposed by the transitional

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phase. The CBW operations developed in the IDF over the past decade (2013 - 2023), and were regarded from their beginning as a mechanism to postpone the war or at least to improve IDF's preparedness to war. The main question I wish to bring forth in this article is whether the CBW operations, did in fact achieve their goal or were they part of the failures that led to the war? To answer this question, this article is divided into three: the first part provides definitions of the Campaign Between the Wars as well as an overview of the challenges of transitioning from the CBW's or other "routine" periods to full-fledged wars; The second part examines the events leading to "Swords of Iron" war, considering CBW operations in the years leading up to the war; lastly, utilizing a preliminary analysis, the third part attempts to clarify the effects of the CBW on the outbreak of the war – why significant threats to Israel's security developed precisely during the Campaign Between the Wars years, and the changes required in order to keep their relevancy and contribution to Israel's security.

Defining The Campaign Between the Wars

At the beginning of the 2000s and even more so after the Second Lebanon War (2006), Israel's conventional security strategy, which was based on the relationship between fundamental security needs (during war times) and routine security, was challenged. The cornerstone of this strategy was Israeli deterrence, which was based on Israel's ability to achieve decisive victories in the main Israeli – Arab wars, while maintaining deterrence in the periods between the wars, be it through retaliatory actions, or border defense routines, special operations, and so on. However, at the beginning of the millennium it had already become clear that it is difficult to reach decisive victories on the battlefield, while between the wars, strategic threats developed deep in the enemy's territories, which the routine security efforts could not tackle successfully. The IDF needed an organized course of action to avert the threats in the enemy depth, and in accordance with Israeli security strategy, strengthening Israeli deterrence was a crucial outcome of any attempt to prevent security threats. In the gap that had arisen between basic security and routine security, Israel needed an additional course of action that would allow it to advance its interests during routine periods,

between the wars, to foil adverse and dangerous developments with the enemy, and in this way also to strengthen its deterrence and avoid an unwanted war (Siman Tov and Sternberg, 2022). The CBW (2013) filled this need as a set of proactive initiatives bellow the threshold of war designed to serve a series of purposes. The IDF Strategy published in 2018, defined five objectives, the main of which are prevention and reduction of existing and emerging threats; the creation of better conditions for victory; preserving and strengthening Israeli deterrence; and increasing the valuableness of the State of Israel and particularly the IDF by continuous, progressive and determined force employment serving Israeli interests (IDF Strategy, 2018).

At the beginning, the CBW were designed as operations below the threshold of war given the threat of war was a central condition for its existence. That is, our enemies understanding that in the event of war with Israel, they would pay a higher price and be defeated. This logic was consistent with the regional system that took form after the Second Lebanon War (2006 - 2013) and during the civil war in Syria (2012 - 2018), at a time when all parties were not interested in another war, and our main opponents – Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran – were immersed in a dire civil war. Thus, a credible threat of war, coupled with high readiness, was supposed to maintain the effectiveness of the CBW and especially the ability to continue operating below the threshold of war (Alon, 2019).

Transition from the Campaign Between the Wars to a full-scale war

The transition from the CBW to war, as is any transition from "routine" times to war, has been researched in the past years. Such transition require perceptual shifts as well as changes in habits and work environments, thus imposing technical and conceptual challenges that must be prepared for in advance.

Examples can be found in the transition from the `War of Attrition` (1967 - 1970) to the Yom Kippur War (1973) or the transition from the Second Intifada (2001 – 2005) to the Second Lebanon War (2006). In both examples, the use of force necessitated a significant conceptual change as well as modifications to training and preparedness. Lack of this understanding led to the many failings during the wars mentioned above.

In the case of a surprise attack, it is an even more volatile event, which requires identification of the change, its implementation in the units and among the superior officers and the actual transition to a state of war, in short periods of time and usually without the appropriate preparation. This kind of transition challenges most systems, primarily the C2 system, which is forced to move from centralized command with the ability to control relatively small forces, to the intensity of mobilizing large forces (Finkel, 2008, pp. 296-297). On the other hand, when the transition is planned, such as, for example, the transition from the Reprisal Operations (1953-1956) to the Sinai War (1956), activities preceding the war can contribute to the success in the war, enable the formation of an appropriate political context in advance, and strengthen the military's preparedness for war. But in cases where Israel was surprised or dragged into war, such as in the Yom Kippur War (1973) or the Second Lebanon War (2006), the assumption was that failings during the war originated from the nature of the routine operation that preceded it. The transition itself between routine campaigns and a full-scale war is an almost momentary matter, and usually, the penny will only drop when the first missile hits. The main difficulty in identifying the changed reality stems from the dominant perceptual limits during the continuous routine campaign. "There is going to be a war tomorrow or on Sunday," were the words of Maj. Gen Benny Peled, Commander of the IAF during the Yom Kippur War. This attests to a logical realization, but not necessarily to a change in perception, much less a broad organizational understanding. The reason for this relates to the ongoing reality of the War of Attrition in the years prior, which was quite different from that of the Yom Kippur War that followed. Distortion of concepts, borrowed from the wars to the ongoing campaign and vice versa, contributes to the difficulty in understanding how to prepare for the next war and not for the one that has already passed (Finkel, 2008, pp. 270-275, 285, 293-294).

Mental and perceptual readiness for a war situation is a challenge at all levels, from the tactical field units to the General Staff and the political echelon. The lack of a shared language and perceptual understandings about the required change are a common phenomenon in these types of transitions. An example of this is the transition from the Second Intifada to the Second Lebanon War. In the year before

the war (2005-2006) there were already deep understandings in the IDI about the changes in Hezbollah, from a terror organization to one with advanced military capabilities. However, this knowledge stayed within the IDI and was not known in the field, in the General Staff and among the decision makers – as such, the necessary perceptual and physical transition along the entire chain of command was not made possible. Thus, the existing conceptual framework remained in place, and Israel continued to think that Hezbollah's actions as a terrorist organization could at worst lead to some battle days, as in the years leading up to the war, but not to war. Here too, the use of new terms, such as "Hezbollah as an army", instead of a "terrorist organization", could contribute to the understanding that the next confrontation will already be in the framework of a full-scale war between two militaries. However, at a time when Palestinian terror was the top priority and constituted the IDF's main focus, the threat from Lebanon was seen as secondary, and was influenced by the concepts existing in the system in the context of both Palestinian and Lebanese terrorism. Concepts that in retrospect were proven imprecise and incompatible with the changed reality in Lebanon – and deepened the perceptual gap (Finkel, 2022, pp. 24-26, 41-44).

The transition from the CBW to war in the current context came after a decade of CBW operations (2013-2023). The IDF has accumulated a lot of experience in operating in a continuous campaign below the threshold of war. Especially since the Second Lebanon War, which was perceived as a limited war, the IDF has only experienced limited 'deterrence operations' known as "rounds" often initiated by Israel, mainly in the Gaza arena between 2009-2023. The large scale of CBW operations affected many routine functions in the IDF, especially among the organizations engaged in CBW operations. Their ability to change work habits with the outbreak of the war was a crucial point of criticism and research even before the war erupted. Moreover, claims that "the CBW is the current war" were at the core of the tension created in the IDF, between the CBW operations and readiness for war, and contributed to both practical and conceptual confusion (Siman Tov and Sternberg, 2022).

While the CBW honed capabilities in certain parts in the IDF,

mainly in the Air Force and the IDI, who found themselves engaged in the ongoing campaigns, with high operational tension and in-depth learning of the enemy. These same organizations also suffered erosion of capabilities, a diversion of attention, and even distortions of reality that corresponded to the CBW activity. Prioritizing the urgent over the important and using intelligence sources for CBW purposes, blurred the distinctions between the CBW and the war and created distortions of perception about the enemy. Additional tensions arose between the CBW and ongoing security and border defense efforts. To preserve intelligence sources, and for fear that they would be burnt out due to the needs of ongoing routine security, conventional and highly necessary defense patterns were changed. For example, in the north arena, which was the main battlefield of the CBW, IDF'S forces along the border were forced to adopt excessive restraint and avoided preventive actions in response to Hezbollah provocations, in view of the desire to continue to maintain the CBW and the deterrence equations built between Israel and Hezbollah during the CBW's years (Kubovich, 2019; Eyal, 2024). The large scope of operations of the CBW also blurred the distinctions between routine and war and accustomed the IDF senior command and decision makers to high success rates, a sense of control over reality and strengthened the perception of Israeli intelligence superiority. During the CBW years, IDF's analysts and commanders got used to meticulous risk management, and centralized command – which are not conducive to war, the realm of chaos and uncertainty (Finkel, 2022; Siman Tov, 2022). CBW critics saw it as a "boutique" capability, limited and temporary, that draws resources and attention from the main task of preparing for war, and comes at the expense of rebuilding the IDF's ground forces. The main critic was that as long as the ground forces will not be fully reformed, the IDF's decisive victory ability is not guaranteed, and Israel will fail to achieve the main condition for the success of the CBW, that is - that in the event of a full scale war, the enemy will pay a higher price and therefore should avoid it. This critic maintained that the IDF cannot continue with the high rate of operations in the CBW, as long as it neglects highly needed reforms in its ground forces, since these two different efforts require resources, skills, concepts, and levels of functioning that are fundamentally different from one another. Moreover,

even though the former Chief of the General Staff Aviv Kohavi in his "Momentum" multi-year workplan (2019-2023), emphasized the reconstruction processes of the ground forces and the IDF's readiness for war and victory over the terrorist armies in Gaza and Lebanon – the task of restoring the ground forces was far from over, and the trend of expanding the use of the CBW continued even more strappingly (Tzur, 2016; Kohavi, 2020).

The Campaign Between the Wars honed capabilities mainly in the Air Force (photo shows an Air Force-35F fighter plane) and the IDI, which found themselves engages in ongoing friction (photo by: IDF Spokesperson)

However, It is also important to note the contribution of the CBW to the war. The CBW operations created a basis for preparedness, for operational impact and planning, as well as force design processes and multidisciplinary learning progressions, while marking red lines to maintain the processes of readiness and planning for war and for the synchronization of inter-force mechanisms. For example, during the CBW years it has become clear that Iran has become the main enemy, in all arenas and dimensions, hence the IDF has developed a multi-arena strategy, different from what it was accustomed in the past. The IDF has

also gained experience in multi-arena operations (in small scale), which includes coordinated efforts that combine kinetic (strike) and logical (cyber) combat, based on intelligence and consciousness, defense, and complementary economic and diplomatic efforts. The ability to convert these into the context of the current war, provides the IDF with significant insights and experience. The ongoing friction in the CBW, especially in the northern arena, created in the IDF a situational picture of the enemy's readiness, made it possible to gain a lot of operational experience, to make conscious decisions, and to have some control over the escalation in the northern arena, which so far has not deteriorated into an all-out war.

The key point in routine periods preceding the war should be in developing awareness that whatever is being done in that period must consider war at the end of the continuum. This provides the IDF with time to prepare for the war, to hone capabilities, to study the enemy better, and to recognize when the conditions have changed, and war has become inevitable. Past experiences show that whenever the IDF was engaged in a conflict that was not a war, it paid a heavy price in the war that followed, as war is an event that is not equivalent to the CBW, days of battle or to a limited operation. War must be the point of reference for every commander in the IDF, and it is at the end of the continuum, where concepts are examined, and their failure will lead to national consequence. The training mechanisms, the readiness of force buildup efforts, the command systems, and the operational plans - are the key to a successful transition to war, and to the resilience of the system in face of surprises and failures at the starting point.

The Campaign Between the Wars and the transition to "Swords of Iron" war

In this section, I will review the events that led to the outbreak of the "Swords of Iron" war and try to identify the connections between the activities of the CBW's and the war that broke out. To this end, I will return to the definitions of the CBW as they developed over the years in the IDF strategy publications 2015-2018 and in several internal military documents.

At first, the CBW were focused on preventing and reducing Hezbollah's

force build-up, under the auspices of the civil war in Syria. But as they expanded, additional objectives were added, such as strengthening Israeli deterrence and assets, postponing the next war, and minimizing the enemy's freedom of action. In practice, the CBW became an IDF strategy of ongoing force employment with a series of objectives, in several arenas, vis-a-vis different enemies. The development of the CBW's objectives also influenced the relationship between it and the war. However, as the CBW expanded and developed, it became clear that it could also bring the war closer due to miscalculations or unwanted escalations, and therefore the purpose of postponing the war turned from a goal into a desired result. Later, this aim was conceptualized in several ways, from "improving the conditions for entering a war" to "creating good conditions for the operation of the IDF... with an emphasis on winning the war" (The IDF's Strategy 2018). The improvement of the conditions for entering the war was based on a combination of the ability to reduce the enemy's force build-up in the years prior to the war, and the ability to influence its intentions in the cumulative deterrence dimension, and above all to influence the enemy overall considerations as to whether it is better for them to escalate the situation to war or not. At the same time, the conceptual framework of "campaigns below the threshold of war" was adopted both by the decision makers and by the military commanders. The ability, so to speak, to reject the idea of war, and even to avoid preventive actions or preliminary strikes that could escalate to war, continued to gain a foothold in the General Staff and the government, when the conception was that Israeli interests could be served through actions below the threshold of war. This strategy remained in place well after the conditions in the region evolved, namely after the end of the civil war in Syria, from which the Iranian axis emerged with military experience, advanced capabilities, and increased confidence. On the other hand, in Israel, arose a combination of external and domestic constraints, chiefly the ability of the Iranian axis partners to threaten Israel's borders and home front. In Israel, the advanced defense capabilities and a perception of intelligence superiority that would provide early warning, made the idea of war undesirable. The understanding was that the important interests, mainly the strengthening of Israeli deterrence against an all-out war, could be achieved through

the CBW. The adherence of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah to the deterrence equations, even strengthened the Israeli understanding that stability can be preserved in the northern arena, and any change in the equations will be within the framework of the understandings (or rather their violation) between Beirut and Tel Aviv. Another assumption was, as mentioned, that the breaking of the deterrence equations would be accompanied by an intelligence alert.

It is worth noting that the matter of strengthening deterrence during the CBW years was a permanent purpose of the campaign, but it may not have been sufficiently resolved. Many saw the CBW as a mere approach to preventing and reducing the enemy's capabilities. The issue of deterrence was examined considering the various adversaries, Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria, and of course Iran, but not as a central purpose. At the same time, the fact that Gaza and Lebanon were considered "immune" during the CBW years, since the IDF were deterred from operating there directly, should have been a warning sign of erosion in the Israeli deterrence. Israel preferred to contain these "immune" areas, and perceived them as temporary, undesirable situation, but one that would break out immediately as the next war commenced – as it did in fact happen. The CBW that were supposed to not only reduce enemy capabilities, but also strengthen Israel's deterrence, thus influencing the enemy's considerations whether to go to war – seem to have failed precisely at this point. The pinnacle of this failure came with the events of October 7, 2023.

The war broke out following Hamas' horrific surprise attack on the communities in the Gaza Envelope. The details regarding the motives behind it have yet to be fully revealed, however it is likely that Hamas knew that it would lead to war. Regional and Palestinian considerations, mainly the danger of normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia, the potential for uniting fronts with strong backing from Iran, and the interpretation of the tensions within Israel, seem to have led Hamas to the notion that it was the right time for war, rather than perpetuating the existing situation. On the surface, the connection between the CBW and the events of October 7th seems weak, especially considering that in Gaza there have been almost no CBW operations in recent years, and if there were any, they were limited and clandestine. The failure of the IDF's special operation

in Khan Yunis in November 2018 was an event that overshadowed the continuation of the IDF's regular operations in Gaza, at least according to what was made public knowledge (Harel, 2024). Since operation "Protective Edge" in 2014, there were several short rounds of fighting in Gaza, most of them against the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, after Israel began to distinguish between PIJ and Hamas, when the latter perceived as the sovereign of the Gaza Strip. The last of those clashes was operation "Shield and Arrow" in May 2023 which was conducted under the same logic.

Until the recent war, Gaza was, an "immunity area" like the one that was created in Lebanon, meaning an area where Israel refrained from military action, due to mutual deterrence that developed between the two sides (Sobelman 2016-2017). The "immunity area" was based on the deterrence power created by Hamas, in view of its ability to fire broad array of missiles on the Israeli home front. The fact that the IDF refrained from operating in the Gaza Strip on a regular basis, other than as part of specific rounds or operations, likely led to the loss of operational friction, gaps in intelligence gathering, erosion of defensive readiness and of red lines, as was made apparent on October 7th – to the detriment of preparedness for war (Raviv, 2021), further demonstrating that Israeli deterrence was severely eroded.

On the Israeli side, the Gaza Strip has been seen, especially in the last year, as a secondary arena, with high, but contained, chances of an escalation. Hamas was perceived as "deterred, weakened and restrained" and as the favored actor by the Israeli government to continue to rule the Gaza Strip. Hezbollah joining the campaign on October 8th by firing rockets and shelling Israeli territory, led to a breach of calm on the northern front and broke the balance of deterrence between Israel and Hezbollah that was built in the years of CBW since the Second Lebanon War (2006–2023).

In the past decade, the IDF concentrated its CBW's operations mostly in Syria, vis-à-vis Hezbollah, Syria and Iran forces, as the main objects of deterrence.

The connection between the CBW in the northern arena and the one launched by Hamas in Gaza is highly likely, due to the affiliation of Hamas and Hezbollah to the Iranian axis, albeit in a different status,

along with the Houthis in Yemen and the Shiite militias in Syria and Iraq. Even if it is not known whether there was indeed an operational coordination between the terror axis actors ahead of time or a mere strategic – ideologic influence, the fact is that Hamas has hoping that its attack on Israel, will "set fire" on the whole region, as it did.

The fighting in the northern arena [which started on October 8th] must be seen not only through the lens of arenas on the axis intersecting. Rather, it must be considered in light of Hezbollah's continued testing of Israeli deterrence over the past year: their response to the gas agreement signed between Israel and Lebanon (October 2022), the terror attack in Megiddo (March 2023), and the tent Hezbollah erected on Israeli territory in Mount Dov (April - October 2023) (Eichner, 2023; Bohbot, 2023).

These events, as well as other incidents since 2019 coupled with Iran's progress in its nuclear project, were signs of the gradual erosion of the deterrence balance between Israel and Hezbollah. On the other hand, it is also important to note that in the end the war did not start in the northern arena, even though Hezbollah boasts significant capabilities that include the Radwan Force's permanent presence along the border as well as one of the largest missile arsenals in the region. Even so, deterrence did not fully collapse and the fighting that broke out is kept within a framework of reciprocal responses, with both sides trying to avoid pushing the envelope too far. The fighting has also breached the "immunity area" in Lebanon as the IDF returned to operate in Lebanese territory, at the cost of crossing the threshold of escalation, which allowed damaging Hezbollah's capabilities and its operatives, especially those along the border – which were compromising Israel's freedom of action. The experience the IDF gained dealing with the Iranian axis also led to a better understanding that the next war will be a regional war, against all Iranian proxies (the first signs of this already appeared around operation "Guardian of the Walls" in May 2021). The experience in regional multi – arenas confrontation during the CBW and managing cross domain warfare, were fertile grounds for learning, further demonstrated in the current war.

When examining the relationship between the CBW and the "Swords of Iron" war, one must also take into account the broader context and a series of developments that have matured in the last year, primarily the

Iranian axis' sense of success along with its growing confidence in its nuclear project, as well as the damage to the Israel's regional posture, which resulted from, among other things, domestic unrest challenging all systems in the year leading up to the war. The country was routinely dealing with increasing tension in Judea and Samaria as well as violent riots along the Gaza border fence. The immunity areas created during the CBW in Gaza and Lebanon further attest to the erosion of Israeli deterrence, which should have triggered increased readiness for an all-out war (Levinson 2023). All the while, a regional strategic challenge hovered above Israel in the form of the Iranian nuclear threat.

Conclusions and potential CBW developments

The "Swords of Iron" war is a formative event and its outcomes are still too premature to judge. In the previous part of this article, I discussed the relationships between the CBW and the war that broke out, but it is also important to understand the impact of the war on the future of CBW operations, and how they should develop, so that they can contribute to strengthening, restoring and rebuilding Israeli deterrence or concluding whether they have reached their peak and end. The conclusions below are only preliminary, considering they are being written as the war in Gaza and the northern arena is in full swing, and expected to draw out even longer.

1. The first issue is why was it that the most serious security threats matured during the years of the CBW. Namely the Iranian axis, who built a tremendous ring of fire around the State of Israel, with the help of proxies and partners. To this end, it is necessary to examine not only the goal of the CBW to prevent and reduce the enemy's buildup , but mainly its purpose of strengthening and preserving Israeli deterrence. It seems that during the CBW years, and especially in recent years, Israeli deterrence has eroded in almost all arenas. The fact that the decision makers in Israel did not want war or thought that they had the time to prepare for war, allowed them to adhere to CBW concepts and to ignore the fact that the conditions that made the CBW possible – have changed. The matter of the military's readiness for war, which is the main deterrent, was abandoned or perceived as such that it would take more time to resolve, and that Israel had that time to its disposal. The

changed purpose of the CBW from postponing war to better preparing for war was not necessarily fulfilled. Meaning, this approach would have been relevant if the enemies were not interested in war or were certain that Israel would have the upper hand. However, Israeli deterrence in the Gaza arena was broken by Hamas leadership, which was not necessarily influenced by cost-benefit considerations alone, not least by the IDF's activity which hardly existed in Gaza – but rather based on extreme religious faith and their banking on Iranian support. The fighting that broke out on the Lebanese border also indicates that in places where CBW operations did not pierce "immunity areas" grave threats developed and therefore preparedness for war was impaired. In view of the centrality of the theory of deterrence in the Israeli security strategy, whose unique principle is frequent force employment, the CBW is intended to disrupt and delay enemy buildup along with thwarting immediate threats. CBW force employment, certainly demonstrated determination and capabilities, and hence, despite the complexity and difficulty of measuring the success or failure of deterrence, the element of deterrence in the CBW must not be neglected, because just as the actions of the CBW can enhance deterrence, they can also harm it and even lead to its collapse.

2. The second issue is the importance of deciphering what are the required changes to the CBW, in order for it to continue to serve Israeli interests as a strategy for force employment during routine periods. It may seem that the main failure of the CBW stems from its very conception. In practice, the CBW exists in a continuum that ranges between two extremes – war and peace – as ongoing continuous campaigns below the threshold of war. It is particularly interesting that the CBW continues even during the war, in Syria, Lebanon and in other arenas. This proves that the CBW exists in a space, which is not between the wars, and that the war is not necessarily an indication of its failure or ending. Thus, for example, the role of the CBW in preventing re-proliferation is still important, even during the war. The fact that CBW operations take place in the continuum between war and peace allows for a better grasp of how they develop. War can mark a phase from which it is possible to return to the CBW and even progress across the continuum to the opposite reality of agreements and the absence of an active military conflict. Therefore,

it is important to understand that the continuation of the CBW should lead to new "game rules", and hopefully to temporary or permanent diplomatic arrangements even though they may limit the CBW. Such limitations will be imposed as part of mutual understandings rather than outlined by unwanted "immunity areas". In the CBW as in war, the lack of a kinetic connection between military operations and a clear political aim leaves force employment to stand on its own, disconnected from national interests and diplomatic efforts. This clearly does not serve the purposes for which the CBW was intended and may even hinder them. It further obscures matters such as whether it is necessary to act, against whom and to what extent? This inevitably leads to failures in prioritizing campaigns and operations, as the main question is not whether the campaigns serves a positive political purpose, but rather what the degree of operational risk is, attempts to push operations without questioning their effectiveness, and prioritizing campaigns based on available intelligence or operational opportunities.

Though it was only added further down the road, Israel's value vis-à-vis its partners is one of the most important objectives of the CBW. This means that the actions that Israel takes should serve not only Israeli interests, but also those of its regional partners and demonstrate Israel's determination and capabilities to operate in the region. This was demonstrated over the past decade mostly in facing Iran and the ISIS campaigns that contributed to the development of relations between Israel and the Gulf states, and even to the signing of the "Abraham Accords" (2020). However, Israel's valuableness is only a preliminary step, which contributes to deterrence and may eventually be translated into future agreements.

Nevertheless, a dichotomous view of the CBW and the war is dangerous and harmful, especially to the organizational learning needed now. It ignores the fact that the CBW exists on a continuum between war and a peace, as well as the fact that it is a continuous strategy that includes direct and indirect force employment corresponding to other strategies. Understanding the sphere in which the CBW exists will make it possible to identify not only the challenges in the transition from the CBW to war, but also its contribution to peace and stability.

3. The third issue is which perceptual framework is suitable for the

changes that the CBW must undergo. As mentioned, this article points out that the CBW is an ongoing strategy on the continuum of campaigns between war and peace, which takes place during routine, contingency and war. CBW deterrence is cumulative and is meant to prevent and delay the enemy's proliferation, as well as to interrupt negative drifts. This type of deterrence is achieved by direct and indirect force employment. CBW deterrence differs from classic deterrence since the CBW reaches beyond the threat and employs force regularly. It is based on Deterrence by Denial and relies on advanced defense capabilities to impede enemy action and achievements. With that said, it is mainly a proactive strategy that operates against enemy threats before they materialize. It is important to note that the CBW is not a classic enforcement strategy since it does not aspire to bring things back to the way they were but rather shape the future. As such, the CBW manifests a strategy that combines prevention, defense, and deterrence.

This strategy that was designed about a decade ago to disrupt and delay the enemy's proliferation while acting below the threshold of war, is facing transformation both due to Israeli capabilities that have matured, and external developments, chiefly the prominence of the multi-front Iranian axis that possesses strategically coordinated offensive capabilities. Therefore, maintaining an ongoing strategy as a routine requires making a smart connection between three purposes – prevention, defense, and cumulative deterrence, as well as the ability to shift between improving war readiness and the fulfillment of political goals progressing toward a stable regional order.

In conclusion, a strategy such as the Campaign Between the Wars which has been central and important over the past decade, without a relevant theory – will become ineffective and end up in failure and grave disappointment. Without adapting the CBW to the changed reality, its ability to contribute to war readiness, and the critical need to link the military campaigns to their political goals could lead to further failings, weighing heavily on Israel's national security. The CBW theory will have to explain why it is needed and how it can continue to serve the changing circumstances and Israel's security needs. Therefore, change is imperative for its continued existence. Following the horrendous attack on the morning of October 7, 2023, and the war that broke out in its wake,

it seems that the fundamental opposition to our existence in the Middle East still exists. Aggression and invasion, despite their high military and political cost - are still acceptable alternatives among our enemies. The current war casts a shadow over any Israeli security-military discussion, and the connections between the "Swords of Iron" war and the CBW, primarily the transition from CBW to war, the centrality of the deterrence component in the CBW, and the need for the CBW to change – constitute a broad platform for learning and developing new military and security thought.

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The Failed "Deterrence Concept" Facing Asymmetric Enemies – Was there Ever Such a Concept?

BG (Res.) Dr. Moni Chorev[1]

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Hamas' strategic surprise attack on October 7th overwhelmed the Israeli public's perception and challenged faith in national security concept. Since the attack, important criticism is being voiced concerning the deterrence approach that was employed against the terror organizations in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon. Further questioning relates to Israel's addiction to strategic calm in the present and continuous oversight of developing future dangers. To the critics, the natural conclusion is that it was necessary, in the past and certainly from now on, to act forcefully to achieve decisive victory over the enemy, as the optimal solution to neutralize the growing strategic threat.

In this article I seek to offer a more balanced perspective regarding the deterrence doctrine and to argue that the Israeli concept of deterrence against asymmetric enemies was never properly defined, nor properly constructed, and certainly could not be properly implemented. The call to replace it with the professional and clear principles of military decision is fundamentally warped.

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Introduction

Hamas' attack on October 7, 2023, overwhelmed the Israeli security perception and the public's trust in it. The IDF's military superiority was crushed by its weakest enemy.

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The foundations of the national security concept of deterrence, detection, and appropriate defensive force employment – collapsed at once. The blow that Israel suffered in October deeply shook public consciousness. A rational recognition of a new strategic reality and an existential threat was soon born, requiring a long war, precious resources, and painful prices. A "war of no choice", leaning on broad public consensus and profound social solidarity. Since the beginning of the ground operation in the Gaza Strip, the IDF has been at its best. Active and reserve units operate in close multi-arms cooperation, exceptionally combining the maneuvering forces, the combat support forces, the aerial forces, and the intelligence efforts. The fighting spirit and determination are admirable, given the recognition and understanding of the goals and the tasks at hand. The decisive campaign in the Gaza Strip has in recent months triggered harsh criticism of Israel's deterrence concept, of its resounding failure and of the addiction to a semblance of security over the years, which allowed for Hamas and Hezbollah to reach monstrous proportions.

As the effective ground operation in Gaza commenced, so did the criticisms of the abandonment of the decisive victory strategy. Deterrence, which was indeed one of the three fundamental elements of Israel's national security concept since the 1950s (deterrence, early strategic warning, decision), has become an almost derogatory term in public discourse, which allegedly contributed to the tragic outcome. I offer a different argument: **the Israeli concept of deterrence against asymmetric enemies was never properly constructed, and therefore could not be properly employed.** In this article, I will address two matters pertaining to this:

1. The importance of clearly defining the objectives of deterrence without which designing and planning an effective deterrence strategy would be impossible.
2. The importance of planning the "campaign after the campaign" ahead of time as a fundamental element without which there is no direction for effectively planning the "first campaign."

The term deterrence refers to persuading the enemy to avoid unwanted action through messages and actions that make it clear that the price for their actions may be higher than the potential gain. For deterrence to be

effective, the deterrer tries to establish the price and the damage they intend to inflict on the enemy, so that they may calculate their loss against their gain due to their actions. Deterrence is aimed at preserving a preferable strategic reality between conflicting sides and preventing escalation to applying more violent force (Baidatz and Adamsky, 2014, p. 7).

IDF armored force in the Yom Kippur War (photo by: Central Intelligence Agency)

Israel's traditional security concept held that the IDF must achieve a decisive military victory in every conflict. In the first years of the state's existence, this approach guided confrontations with the enemy's armies, both because it was essential to achieve a decisive victory and because it could be reached. The necessity arose out of Israel's existential threat and the obligation to remove the risk of enemy armies invading the country. Achieving a decisive victory was possible as enemy militaries were regular armies rather than an elusive, asymmetric adversary operating as a decentralized sub-state system, embedded within civilian populations and subject to unique norms and rules. As an element of the conventional conception, the role of decision was to renew strategic deterrence and push further away the next round of violence. Deterrence was defined as the strategic endgame, and maneuver as the main means of achieving it.

In other words, achieving strategic deterrence was essentially seen as a by-product of a decisive victory on the battlefield and as a condition for its effective positioning (Kober, 1996, pp. 156-166).

Decisive victory was defined as denying enemy fighting capacity by military means, which would not allow recovery during that war. In other words, sponging from the world of "strategic surprise" ("basic surprise" and "situational surprise"), the military decision is "situational", and it takes place for a given time and in a unique strategic context only. In the IDF strategy document published in 2015, the direction for the basic endgame required in combat operations is as follows: "On the strategic level, one must strive for victory, while creating a situation in which a ceasefire or political settlement can be imposed on the enemy, from a position of strength based on their decisive defeat, or their inability and unwillingness to continue fighting. A decisive victory makes an important contribution to the creation or renewal of deterrence" (Office of the Chief of the General Staff, The IDF Strategy, 2015).

Recognizing that a military decision does not necessarily lead to victory on the strategic-political level, may lead to the choice of other approaches, designed to achieve strategic success even without the enemy suffering a decisive defeat (Harkabi, 1990, pp. 433-439). For example, research literature tackles the concept of attrition by comparing it to the military decision approach. Both approaches are intended to achieve an improvement in the strategic security situation. However, while a decisive campaign directs the operational efforts to achieve the endgame swiftly, the attrition strategy carefully employs limited, economical, and graded combat resources, with the aim of wearing down the enemy's capabilities in a slow, ongoing, and cumulative manner. A prolonged war of attrition demands endurance, physical and mental stamina, a combination of military and non-military means, increasing the dominance of the fire effort over ground maneuver, and striving to wear down the enemy's spirit, no less than defeating its military capabilities (Kober, 1996, pp. 33-34). This requires patience, a balanced distribution of combat resources over a long course of time, cost-effective calculations in different timeframes, and strategic breathing room to sustain the ongoing effort.

The prominence of deterrence

In the last decades, as the asymmetric enemy grew, so did the voices challenging the decisive victory concept in combat operations, and the use of ground maneuver as the main means to achieve it. In their view, the purpose of decision does not correspond to the developing reality. Their reasoning refers to both the strategic-political level and the operational-military level:

First, **Israeli experience indicates a limited correlation between the military achievement and the strategic-political outcome**. Defeating the enemy on the battlefield does not necessarily guarantee strategic success. Translating a decisive military victory into a sustainable, long-term political achievement has proven quite difficult. The 'state of victory' reflects a subjective strategic reality, in which the goals of the war defined by the political echelon are achieved. At the top tier – this is the test of the relevance of the fighting. The top goal of the war is not exactly the military decision, but rather achieving an improved security-political order (Ashley, 1977, p. 68). Victory is superior to decision, and it dictates purpose and meaning that steer the military effort. Military decision may help achieve victory; however, it is not necessarily a condition to secure it. It is mainly focused on the military dynamics of the conflict and the results of the battle. In contrast, victory reflects the correlation between the policy goals and the actual result (Harkabi, 1990, p. 594).

Second, **the dimension of time and the impermanence of the military result** – the achievements of the war stand the test of time and their judgment over time may be changed substantially (Harkabi, 1990, pp. 594-597). Clausewitz referred to the possible change of the results of war over time. Changes in the strategic-political reality and political conditions may create for the defeated side conditions for strategic recovery and renewal of its military power (Liddle Hart, 1989, p. 347). In Israel, the recognition of the limitations of decisive military victory and the temporality of its strategic achievements took shape at the very beginning of its journey as an independent state. The war was seen as only one link in a long chain of continuous struggles. The experience with the Arab countries reflected the limitations of military power while trying to create a new security reality. Even when a clear military victory was reached, as in the War of Independence, operation Sinai and the

Six Day War – the strategic security situation became relatively stable for limited stints. As David Ben-Gurion pointed out in the early 1950s: "After every war from which we emerge victorious – we will face the same problem again... the fear of a third, fourth and fifth round. We can never assume that we can deliver one victorious decisive blow to the enemy and that will be the last battle..." (Ben-Gurion, 1971, p. 219).

The gap between the military achievements in the campaign and the improved security situation was also illustrated in asymmetric enemy scenarios. Operation "Cast Lead", for example, which was seen as relatively successful, brought in its wake only three years of quiet. In 2012, a sporadic high-trajectory fire rained on southern Israel. This paved the way to operation "Pillar of Defense", at the end of that year. Only a year and a half passed between operation "Pillar of Defense" and operation "Protective Edge", and again the IDF met Hamas with stronger operational capabilities than in the preceding operation.

The limited length of the strategic result in fighting against asymmetric adversaries is largely related to the ability to rapidly rebuild after it ends. Enemy military capabilities rely on simple and relatively cheap systems and the process of recovery from severe damage and the erosion of assets may be quick and efficient, compared to the time required to restore a modern sophisticated army. Indeed, the experience with Hamas and Hezbollah shows quick recovery and an accelerated and effective force buildup, which are based on a learning process conducted immediately upon the end of the operations, to create improved readiness for the next round of fighting (Halevi, 2017). It can therefore be stated that possible deviations from the strategic endgame are a common phenomenon, both in a decision-led military campaign and one based on deterrence operations.

Third, **the matter of the "cost of war" versus its strategic gain** – the peace agreements with Jordan and Egypt and the ongoing civil war in Syria created an improved security reality for Israel. The asymmetric adversaries were not perceived as posing an existential threat and the combat operations in the Gaza Strip were given lessened importance, as evident in the way the political echelon defined the goals of the war: "Restoring deterrence and improving security stability for as long as possible." (Eiland, 2012, pp. 11-13).

The safer Israel felt in its neighborhood, the less the sense of collective responsibility to bear the burden of national security and the willingness to pay prices for it. The yearn for normalization, economic prosperity, peace, and well-being replaced the old norms of a battle-ready society; globalization and individualism eroded the social solidarity that had previously characterized the relationship between the military and society (Lebel, 2007, p. 70). As described by Yehoshafat Harkabi: "The type of wars that the parties fight depends on the importance of their goals. The more important the goals, the greater the effort that side will invest to achieve them... In guerrilla warfare, the 'balance of vital interests' leans in most cases in favor of the guerrilla. For North Vietnam and the Vietcong, it was more important to achieve their goal than it was important for the Americans to prevent it." (Harkabi, 1990, pp. 563-564).

One of the biggest challenges in deterring asymmetric adversaries is related to the fact that the object of deterrence is usually a poor factor with limited assets and limited in the scope of its public accountability. Posing an effective threat, which will force desired behavior on the enemy is but a limited a priori. The 2015 IDF strategy document defined the need to adapt the elements of the operation to the unique characteristics of the adversary, but the document does not specify the operational principles for planning effective deterrence operations against such an enemy (Office of the Chief of the General Staff, The IDF Strategy, 2015). This is also the case in the following document from 2018, which presents the logic of deterrence operations for "limited damage to the enemy's capabilities", the restoration of deterrence and a return to calm from a position of advantage. The military objectives for the operation are aimed at reducing the operational capacity of the enemy, restraining, and punishing it, while preventing escalation in other arenas (Office of the Chief of the General Staff, The IDF Strategy, 2018, p. 25).

These general definitions did not provide a sufficient platform for developing a comprehensive concept for deterrence operations against asymmetric adversaries, thus remaining stagnant. Despite the awareness of the limitations of the "military decision", the concept of "deterrence" remains vague and the discussion essential to its concrete operational conceptualization in each strategic context did not really develop. It is evident that the IDF doctrine left the distinction between the concepts of

"deterrence", "decision" and "victory" unclear and conceptually vague (Office of the Chief of the General Staff, The IDF Strategy, 2015, p. 15). In the absence of an essential clarification of these concepts in the unique context of asymmetric warfare, it was difficult to develop an effective deterrence concept.

What the deterrence approach missed

Two fundamental problems can be identified in the implementation of the deterrence approach: First**, the policy makers defined the goal in a narrow way** – deterring the adversary from carrying out actual offensive activities. For example, in "Cast Lead", 2008, armed with the fresh lessons from the Second Lebanon War, the Israeli government defined the objectives of the operation narrowly: "to severely damage Hamas, to reduce the fire and hostile sabotage activity from the Gaza Strip, in order to strengthen deterrence and create conditions for improving the security situation in southern Israel and preventing the conflict from spilling over to other arenas." (Harel, 2012, pp. 21-22). Three years later, the main motivation to embark on operation "Pillar of Defense" was the understanding that the deterrence achieved after operation "Cast Lead" had eroded. All the while, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad continued their force build-up, which included stockpiling long-range rockets and digging a series of offensive and defensive tunnels throughout the Gaza Strip (Golan and Perl Finkel, 2021, pp. 10-11). Israel embarked on an operation whose goals were quite slim: "To restore Israeli deterrence, inflict a severe blow to Hamas and return calm to the south." (Eiland, 2012, p. 11). The wording of the objectives of operation "Protective Edge" by the political echelon was almost identical to that preceding it in 2012: "A deterrence operation to restore peace and renew deterrence, while seriously harming Hamas, weakening it and restraining it, but preserving it as a responsible and effective sovereign address when fighting ends." (Ya'alon, 2014).

The leading strategic direction was a "quick return to a state of calm" thus enabling the enemy to continue building an intensive force to generate a true strategic threat to Israel, soon. The preference for immediate calm prevailed over the concerns of a threat in the long-term. The future bowed its head to the present, and the avoidance of an offensive

initiative – for fear of being labeled unnecessary warmongering, devoid of sufficient internal legitimacy – became a clear course of action.

What was missing in the strategic thinking and formulation of deterrence goals? Deterring the enemy from engaging in terrorist activity, is not the same goal as deterring it from modern force build-up and sophisticated weapon proliferation. The same goes for thinking about deterring the enemy from a continuous effort to educate, incite and indoctrinate hatred toward Israel. Such goals could lead to a completely different deterrence strategy. In their absence, and in the face of the other side's ongoing proliferation, a complex operational challenge emerged as well as gaps that threatened to disturb its military advantages.

IDF fighter jets operating in the Campaign Between the CBW (MABAM in Hebrew) to disrupt and hinder the enemy's buildup and expansion)

Second, the security system at the national level, i.e., the government, the security cabinet, and the National Security Council (NSC), **did not conduct a systematic and comprehensive inquiry to examine the non-military deterrence efforts – including the use of political, economic, legal and media levers – to formulate an integrated interdisciplinary strategic deterrence approach.** The over-reliance on the military effort alone caused Israel to miss the chance to reinforce the effectiveness of the national deterrence strategy and to improve its effects. This is part of a broader problem, related to the position of the political echelon

in dealing with Israel's strategic challenges. The Second Lebanon War revealed the weakness of political-tier strategic thinking. This led to legislation in 2008 which included the expansion of the NSC's authority and areas of responsibility. The new law required the NSC to formulate and coordinate recommendations regarding Israel's goals and objectives in the various arenas and to facilitate routine cabinet meetings. It was noted that its responsibility requires a broad systemic view at the general strategy level and that it was obligated to present to the government various alternatives, in addition to the proposals presented by the IDF (National Security Council, 2008).

However, in the inquiry conducted by the State Comptroller after operation "Protective Edge" in 2014, it emerged that from the day the 33rd government was established until March 2014, there were no strategic cabinet meetings to discuss the Gaza Strip. The State Comptroller's report states that "Given the capabilities and strength of the military planning elements the importance of a strong council on national security at the Prime Minister's disposal grows even more important... while giving proper weight to a system-wide view and examining general matters of security and foreign policy." The Comptroller referred to the NSC's duty to focus on the strategic tier and the context of Israel's foreign policy and international relations (State Comptroller, 2017, pp. 7-15).

Ofer Shelah, a former member of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Security Committee harshly criticizes the political echelon's function, the quality of the dialogue with the IDF and its strategic implications: "Since 2006, Israel has known more than a hundred days of fighting in the north and south, rich in state-level strategic questions. The results of the campaign were decided in the conference room, rather than on the battlefield. However, it seems that the quality of the dialogue between the uniformed officers and the political echelon is deteriorating." (Shelah, 2015, p. 250). Referring to the shortcoming in the inter-level dialogue and the direction required to address it, Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon stated: "The cabinet should deal with Policy. such discussions did not take place in this current cabinet. The NSC should hold discussions on the strategic purpose, and the IDF should be one of the proposers in this matter. In today's reality, the IDF leads the staff work in both strategic and operational aspects." (State Comptroller, 2017, p. 53).

Moreover, the endgame of combat operations is not steady, and its achievements are difficult to maintain over time. As could be learned from the fighting in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon in recent decades, the "following period" after the fighting is of utmost importance in consolidating the achievements of the campaign and in stabilizing the new strategic reality. During this period, the picture of the security reality takes shape, while employing various strategic and political efforts in addition to military action. This may last a while, requiring applicable, pre-planned preparation. The "follow-up campaign" approach does not meet the end of deterrence operations only. Even wars that ended in clear military decision did not alleviate the need to prepare for a subsequent campaign, to stabilize and control the shaping of the results. A fitting example is the "War of Attrition", which began shortly after the overwhelming victory in the Six Day War. In the discussion held by Prof. Harkabi on the definition of victory at the end of a war, he points out that the ultimate goal of a war is not military decision, but the achievement of an improved political agreement. He quotes Clausewitz's assertion: "In strategy, there is no such thing as victory." According to Clausewitz, war should be examined from two perspectives: first, in the immediate timeframe, were its defined goals achieved? Second, did the state of the country improve as a result? (Harkabi, 1990, pp. 593-594).

The definition of the endgame of the skirmish is supposed to be a strategic compass for planning the entire campaign, but it will later be exposed to shifts in stability and the effects of time. It should be designed through mutual dialogue between the political echelon and those leading the additional strategic efforts employed in the campaign. A clear definition of the endgame makes it possible to direct planning and management effectively, and to efficiently combine the military, political, civilian, economic, and media efforts. It also makes it possible to properly connect the "subsequent campaign" and the "first campaign" under a coherent logical framework. In the context of "deterrence operations" conducted in the Gaza Strip – the analysis of the connections between the "ongoing struggle" and the deterrence operations was supposed to tie the operational logic of the deterrence efforts to the strategic compass of the prolonged attrition conflict. The objectives of the "limited operation" derive their strategic significance from the logic of the ongoing fight and

allow the true value of the combat rounds to be examined, without being tempted to narrowly focus on the military result alone. The ongoing conflict provides a framework for defining the purpose and goals for each operation and creates a strong planning foundation. Is this way of thinking realized in the strategic planning processes of the operations in Gaza? Have the interrelationships between the endgame of the first operation and its subsequent campaign been analyzed?

Deterrence operations conducted by Israel in the Gaza Strip over the past decades, have clearly shown that shortly after their end, agreements and understandings reached gradually eroded. Israel reacted to the renewal of terrorist activities and the accelerated military build-up of the enemy in a restrained and surgical manner to avoid escalation. As mentioned, the "quiet for quiet" approach was defined by the strategic policy makers, but the degree of willingness of the various parties to act to preserve the results of the operation was different. It derives mainly from the verve of their interests and their perception of the degree of domestic and international legitimacy their actions will have (Luttwak, 2002, pp. 276-288). Israel did not see Hamas and Hezbollah as a strategic threat, and its willingness to respond to the violation of the understandings reached in the operations was low. On the other hand, the interest of the terrorist organizations to prepare for the continuation of the conflict and to build up their operational capacity after combat remains high. Their vigorous activity to continue an unprecedented proliferation did not meet a "prevention strategy", designed to disrupt and slow down the emerging force buildup and keep it below a calculated threshold.

The concept of planning the "subsequent campaign" as an inherent part of the planning of the "first campaign" should be based on a broad systemic analysis, at the national-strategic level. It is important to stress that this is not about the concept of the Campaign Between the Wars (CBW herein for the purpose of this article) to which the IDF strategy document dictated five main goals: to reduce existing and emerging threats; to keep the next war away and create better conditions for winning it; to preserve deterrence and strengthen it; to enhance the perceived strength of the State of Israel and the IDF in the eyes of our allies; to preserve the IDF's freedom of operation and reduce that of the enemy (The IDF Strategy, 2018, pp. 23-24). For Israel, the CBW hinders the pace and scope of

the enemy's growth, as we strive to maintain the substantial military superiority gap and prolong security stability between operations. But the key principle in planning the CBW was to avoid escalation and to keep operations below the threshold of war. The main factor in assessing the likelihood of escalation as a response to the activity of our forces is the enemy's knowledge of its deadly consequences and the high prices they will have to pay (Alon and Preisler-Swery, 2019 pp. 14-22). For the enemy, this enables action while avoiding significant retaliation, thus strengthening its public image. In the enemy's view, the extent of the damage and losses can be contained. Such a reality should be preferable over a wide-scale escalation (Milstein, 2019, pp. 66-72).

The "subsequent campaign" cannot be managed like the CBW. The strategic goal, which should guide the operational planning, **is deterring the enemy's build-up process and keeping it below a tolerable threshold.** This is a high signature campaign, and it is of no less strategic importance than the first campaign. It is designed as a proactive, enduring, and ongoing campaign to prevent escalation into a future war under harsh conditions and heavier prices to pay. In the planning process, it is necessary to place the two systemic frameworks together and plan them together as one whole. It seems that in the ongoing campaign in Gaza, the demand for a complete victory in the "first campaign" will not be able to compensate for the lack of preliminary and essential planning for the subsequent campaign, where the strategic outcome will emerge and be established.

Conclusion

The Israeli doctrine of deterrence against the terrorist armies demonstrate apertures and perceptual fixation. Despite its prominence in deterrence operations in the past decades, its strategic and operational failures were never adequately investigated. Despite the frequent occurrences of "limited operations" and "rounds", Israel has never developed a coherent, multidisciplinary deterrence strategic concept. Thus, execution always lacks an organizational logic. The planning of the operations lacks the broad analysis perspective of the pattern of the long and continuous conflict with the "resistance" organizations, during which intense rounds of fighting break out from time to time (Adamsky, 2017, p. 167).

Over a decade ago, the IAF Campaign Design Department described the limitations of the design processes and operational planning where a relevant deterrence doctrine was absent in the face of the enemies' proliferation in both Lebanon and Gaza. An attitude that a strategy for achieving "victory" is preferable to a strategy of "military decision" prevailed in the relevant think tanks (Lt. Col. S., 2011, pp. 5-13; Laish, 2010, pp. 4-11). Yet, while pointing out the shortcomings of the decisive victory approach against the asymmetric adversary, the traditional, doctrine-biased thinking patterns remain. The conventional reason manifested a binary approach, according to which if the deterrence rounds approach does not work, then the only other alternative is "decision". A typical demonstration of this is the conclusion of senior officers in the Operations Directorate (J3): "All of these (improvements in the concept of deterrence) can do nothing more than stretch the paradigm of deterrence rounds a little more. At the end of the day, considering the enemy's learning cycle, we should not invest time in improving our deterrence doctrine, but rather in finding a relevant decisive alternative". (Yadai and Ortal, 2013, p. 21).

In the face of the asymmetric adversary, the old concept of deterrence failed even earlier than October 2023. An alternate approach was never developed rendering Israel without a logical basis for employing force. The extensive experience gained in numerous deterrence operations in the Gaza Strip did not help to break through the walls of the old perception and did not lead to the formulation of a doctrine of deterrence relevant to the predominant types of conflicts in Israel. Essential questions that might have guided the development of the new concept remain unanswered:

- What are the goals of deterrence and how should they affect the operational military approach?
- How can an asymmetric adversary with limited assets, but with growing military power, be deterred?
- How should military action be combined with the other strategic efforts?
- How does one outline the interrelationships between the "first campaign" and the "subsequent campaign"?

Treating these weighty questions, both in the IDF and the political echelon, may help formulate a relevant strategic national deterrence doctrine and dig out the existing conception from its fixation. Deterrence was and should be a fundamental element of the State of Israel's security strategy. It has kept an ongoing state of war at bay and enabled Israel to invest in substantial force design and preparation between wars (Gat, 2024). Considering the development of the current war in Gaza and the long continuous offensive maneuver being carried out in it – we must examine and shape the strategy of deterrence as an essential and most importantly relevant component in the national security concept.

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Containment: A disturbing element in Israel's security behavior

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In recent decades, containment/restraint has become a central facet in Israel's security behavior due to a variety of considerations such as foreign policy, domestic issues and reluctance to rule over a hostile population as well as the development of technological responses to high-trajectory capabilities and the enemy's ability to cause considerable damage to the home front. Changes in the IDF's leadership as well as its thinking on how to conduct war also impact the choice of containment. However, containment enables the enemy time to build up force and erodes deterrence. The containment policy also normalized the use of force by Israel's enemies, thus enhancing the magnitude of violence over time.

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Introduction

Israel's national security doctrine is based on three key components: Deterrence, Early Warning, and Decisive Victory. These elements were the foundation of Israel's response to the existential threat posed by the Arab armies. Israel has dealt with invasion scenarios (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon) from the day it was founded, while coping with infiltration along its borders and attacks by various terror organizations.

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For Israel, a decisive victory would be military and not political. Israel could never defeat its enemies in the same way the US did Germany and Japan at the end of World War II after it occupied and reengineered their political structures. Israel perceives decisive victory as the destruction of enemy forces, their degradation to harm Israel for a prolonged period and renewing deterrence. The use of force was considered effective in increasing deterrence of various countries and terror organizations.

The Second Lebanon War in 2006 brought with it a fourth element – Defense, mainly against high-trajectory firepower. A fifth element emerged, "the Begin Doctrine", which was removing a strategic threat as demonstrated by destroying the nuclear facilities in Iraq and Syria in 1981 and 2007 respectively (Matanya and Bachrach, Feb. 2003). Israel's reliance on its ties with the US as well as its own technological superiority also play a growing role in the "The IDF Strategy" document published on the IDF website in 2015. Generally, Israel's attitude to matters of national security highlight initiative and the use of military force. Indeed, Israel hesitated to escalate military conflict to push as far as it could the next round of violence or to bring it to an end. Israel retaliated to attacks on its territory and civilians with strikes on the opposite side of the border. Pursuant to its security conception, in 1956, Israel even embarked on an all-out campaign known as Operation Sinai with the support of its then-ally France and later, the Six Day War in 1967. In recent years, Israel has been engaged in what is known as the Campaign Between the Wars, typified mainly by air strikes, attempts to impede Iran's entrenchment efforts in Syria and the transfer of game-changing technologies to Hezbollah (Lifshitz & Sery-Levy, 2022). In 2023, following Hamas' invasion into the Gaza Envelope and its horrific attack, Israel embarked on the "Swords of Iron" war with the aim to destroy Hamas' military capabilities.

Israel's security behavior these past few decades reflects another element that is usually never mentioned as part of the national security thinking. It is precisely when Israel had become a regional force, which could not be defeated by any of its neighbors by military force, that it preferred acting with restraint and containing aggressive provocations against it. "Containment" means restraint and the ability to absorb violence and prevent escalation. The containment element has always

been a factor in Israel's security behavior. An Israeli military response to provocation was never automatic and was usually contingent on political contexts, as once famously stated by Prime Minister Levi Eshkol: "The notepad is open, and the hand is writing." However, containment was less-commonly practiced in the past.

This article explains the main reasons Israel preferred a policy of containment over escalation and decision these past few decades. The first part of the article examines several containment incidents while the second part of the article attempts to provide logic for the choices to prefer containment over the instinctive route of escalation and decision. This phenomenon must be explained as it is widespread and there are certain indications to its negative impact on Israel's deterrence. Hamas' attack on October 7, 2023, is a recent example of a deterrence failure after prolonged containment. The "Swords of Iron" war in Gaza is perhaps the tipping point of this trend and the beginning of the return to the IDF's original security concept after the establishment of the State of Israel.

Past containment events

A good example of Israeli containment is the lack of response to the rockets fired from Iraq in the winter of 1991. Iraq had launched thirty-nine scud missiles toward Israel, causing damage to buildings and casualties. Israel refrained from attacking targets in Iraq due to pressure applied by the Americans who wanted to avoid tensions in the coalition which included forces from Arab countries. The Chief of the General Staff, LTG Dan Shomron recommended acting with restraint, in opposition to other opinions voiced within the military and the government. His position helped Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir adopt containment. Nevertheless, Shamir later admitted that the decision to "show restraint in the face of Iraq's aggressive provocations" was one of the hardest he had ever made (Shamir, 1994, p. 263).

Both Lebanon wars, the first in 1982 and the second in 2006, only broke out after many attacks against civilians, kidnappings of soldiers and firing of rockets from Lebanon toward the State of Israel. On June 6, 1982, the Israeli government decided to launch a large-scale campaign and invade Lebanon to remove the sources of the attacks (there were

also other important reasons, such as an attempt to weaken the PLO and change the political reality in Lebanon).

The Lebanese arena provides plenty of examples of Israeli containment. In 2000, for example, after Katyushas were fired at Israel, the foreign minister at the time, David Levy, threatened that "the land of Lebanon will burn in flames... Vital interests for Lebanon will go up in flames and it will take many years to restore the damage" (Globes, 2000). Ehud Barak, then Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, immediately stated after the unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000: "If a hair falls from the head of one of our soldiers, Lebanon will burn to the ground." During the October 9th cabinet meeting, Barak concluded: "... We reserve the right to respond at the appropriate time..." (Winograd Committee, 2008, p. 42).

This formula, plus threats made by various top echelon figures became Israel's frequent response to Hezbollah's provocations. After the attempted abduction that was thwarted in Ghajar, in November 2005, a consultation between Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz sheds light on the prevailing perceptions regarding dealing with Hezbollah. The recommendation of Chief of the General Staff Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz that was accepted by the political echelon was: "At this time, the recommendation is to contain the event" (Ibid., p. 60).

The IDF's responses were intentionally limited to avoid escalating the arena. According to the Winograd Committee report: "Despite the explicit threats, since the unilateral retreat in the year 2000, Israel carried out moderate, pin-pointed responses to Hezbollah attacks to contain each incident and bring an end to each event as quickly as possible. The magnitude of the responses has somewhat grown over the years, yet the principle of containment has been carefully sustained" (Ibid., p. 45). As mentioned, the containment policy was not changed even after the failed kidnapping attempt in November 2005 in Ghajar. This containment policy in the Lebanese arena continued as intense shelling toward localities in northern Israel claimed the lives of civilians and children, and as the Lebanese began their project to divert the water from the Wazzani river and thus prevent the water flow into the Hasbani (a tributary of the Jordan river). According to the Winograd report, despite IDF commanders' critique of the containment policy, there was not a

"…true attempt by senior IDF commanders to contest the government's containment policy. In addition, there is no document detailing a long-term, systematic analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the containment policy compared with other alternatives or recommending a discussion on the matter to the political echelon." (Ibid, p. 47). As containment became the preferred policy by the politicians, IDF commanders adapted to this mindset.

On July 12, 2006, dozens of Hezbollah terrorists launched a coordinated attack including heavy artillery fire on the northern Galilee. They killed three soldiers, critically injured three more and kidnapped two. It was only after these blows that Israel embarked on an operation that was later named "The Second Lebanon War". Another example of provocation containment is in July 2022, when Hezbollah launched UAVs toward the Karish gas rig as well as to northern Israel. Furthermore, despite the threats posed by Hezbollah, the Israeli government headed by Prime Minister Yair Lapid signed a maritime agreement with Lebanon on October 27, 2022, relinquishing Israel's territorial claims. In 2023, Hezbollah increased its provocations: firing anti-tank missiles at the border fence, dismantling equipment from the fence, firing missiles toward Israel, launching a powerful charge on a civilian transportation route in central Israel and conducting patrols along the border in violation of the 2006 UNSCR 1701. None of the above drew substantial retaliation.

The most known statement backing up Israeli containment was made by Ariel Sharon in response to Israel's restraint policy facing the wave of terrorist attacks waged by Palestinians which began in the autumn of 2000, known as the Second Intifada. In June 2001, Sharon stressed that "Restraint is also a show of strength" (Walla, 2001). He then addressed the criticism of his response to the Palestinian terror campaign that began in the fall of 2000, known as the Second Intifada.

From the beginning of this terror wave until early 2002, there were almost seven thousand terrorist attacks, killing two hundred and forty-four Israelis and injuring hundreds more. Israel acted with great restraint, since it saw the Palestinian Authority (PA) as a partner in peace and because of the automatic reaction of the international community, which called for restraint. It takes time to move from a reality of security cooperation with

the Palestinians to recognizing that there is a violent conflict with them. The catalyst for the end of the containment policy was a series of attacks, in which 135 Israelis were killed over the course of six weeks, and the culmination of which was the killing of another thirty Israelis in an attack at the Park Hotel in Netanya, on March 27, 2002. Following this, the IDF launched Operation "Defensive Shield", during which it invaded most of the major cities under PA control and cleared the area of terrorists. This decisive operation and the subsequent work of the IDF and the Shin Bet created a new, more tolerable security situation.

Incendiary kites and attack drones as well as incessant digging of attack tunnels from the Gaza Strip to Israel without an immediate and broad response, are an example of containment by the Israeli governments. Israel avoided launching a military campaign to overwhelm Hamas in Gaza and put an end to this situation. This is despite Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's resolute statement made on August 31, 2003: "Ashkelon will not become a frontline, neither Ashkelon nor any other place..." (Arutz 7, 2003).

It was only after extensive rocket fire and harm to civilians and daily life in Israel that the Israeli government ordered the IDF to launch several ground operations. However, the IDF did not embark on an all-out war to put an end to Hamas' malign activities or bring about the end of its rule over the Gaza Strip. Over time, Hamas increased the range of its missiles as well as the size of their warheads, and more Israelis were in harm's way. The rockets from Gaza threatened hundreds of thousands of Israelis as well as strategic facilities, but Israel contained this reality.

Only in cases where Israel could no longer contain attacks, it embarked on extensive or limited military campaigns. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert clearly expressed the public sentiment that enough is enough and that the number of incidents had indeed reached an unbearable level, when he said on July 17, 2006, in his speech in the Knesset after the start of the Second Lebanon War: "There are moments in a nation's life when it must look at the present reality and say, 'That's it'. I say to everyone – That's it. Israel will not be held hostage by gangs of terrorists, nor by any sovereign state." (Marciano, 2006). That was the case following October 7, 2023; an invasion and destruction of localities on a scale that had not been seen since the War of Independence, complemented by

atrocities, with 1200 dead and about 230 Israeli hostages, left the Israeli government no choice but to go to war with the purpose of destroying Hamas' military infrastructure.

Reasons for the adoption of the containment policy by Israeli governments and the IDF

Why did containment become a preferred alternative precisely at a time of Israel's clear military superiority over its enemies? When examining the set of local and geopolitical considerations, one can highlight several reasons to explain Israel's choice of a policy in which the element of containment is very prominent.

1. Israel, like other small countries, does not always have the freedom to act freely with all the military means at its disposal. The support of the USA is particularly important. Israel did not go to war in 1967 before concluding that the US will not oppose an Israeli move. In 1973, Israel avoided a preemptive air strike due to American opposition. The order to launch the First Lebanon War in 1982 was given after the decision-makers in Jerusalem realized that Washington was giving them a "yellow light" (as part of the campaign that the Reagan administration conducted at the time through proxies against pro-Soviet elements in many arenas). An attempt at a military move of a decisive nature was even prevented in Gaza due to American opposition. In April 2001, Sharon informed the Americans that rocket fire on Sderot was crossing all red lines and ordered the IDF to dissect the Gaza Strip into three parts with the stated goal of "clearing away the mortar threat" and pushing away rocket range. American pressure resulted in the withdrawal of Israeli forces within 24 hours, after the commander of the Gaza Division, later MG Yair Neve, announced that the IDF would stay in Gaza for months, if necessary (Zarhin and Moalem, 2011). Even in short operations, the dependence on the US is revealed. In operation "Guardian of the Walls", for example, which was carried out in May 2021 against Hamas in Gaza, the "Iron Dome" system was used extensively to intercept missiles and rockets fired by Hamas. Israel turned to the United States with an urgent request to fill in the gaps (to which the US eventually responded with broad support in Congress). In the "Swords of Iron" war, Israel's dependence on the supply of ammunition and weapon systems has

become common knowledge. This reliance was used by Washington to influence war conduct and to determine the nature of Israel's military pressure. The scope of humanitarian aid to Gaza and the supply of fuel, which mostly go to Hamas, are the result of American pressure. US leaders and generals participate in Israeli cabinet and IDF discussions – an unprecedented occurrence. Having a "political hourglass" when using force, that is, a limited time of international understanding for Israeli military activity, is nothing new. The past governments of Israel and the country's security elite thought that the containment policy, in which Israel suffers fire and casualties, is a tool for building legitimacy abroad and in Israel for military action at a later stage, extending the duration of the "political hourglass". The importance of the legitimacy dimension increases in wars that are broadcast on many media channels (Ya'alon, 2008 pp. 2-141). As in the past, there is often a correlation between the Israeli blood that is shed and the degree of destruction and distress within the country and the understanding abroad of an Israeli military response. The international attention to what is happening in the Israeli-Arab arena also greatly affects Israel's freedom of action. The conflict between the Palestinians and the Jews has, apparently, a lot of resonance. If the attention of the international media is diverted to a crisis outside the Middle East, Israel enjoys more freedom of action. In such circumstances, it can take advantage of the window of opportunity to act decisively militarily, even if only temporarily.

2. Initiating a war or an extensive military operation is not an easy decision for any government and especially in situations of domestic political tension. The gravity of the threat on the home front deepens the dilemmas. Building up legitimacy for the use of force is necessary to justify the costs of the war/operation, even if they are perceived as ending successfully. The containment period also serves the purpose of securing support at home. In addition, the possibility of failure in a proactive military operation always hovers over the minds of decision makers and is a consideration that makes containment more valuable. No leader wants to risk being associated with an unsuccessful war. Such a war creates a major political crisis and may bring down a government. Golda Meir had to resign in 1974. Popular support for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert decreased dramatically, after significant deficiencies

in managing the 2006 war in Lebanon were revealed. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's long-standing reluctance to use military force also stems from political reasons. The experience of being stuck in the "Lebanese mud" following the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was one of the reasons for the policy of containment in Lebanon after the unilateral withdrawal in May 2002 (Winograd Committee, 2008, p. 45). The Winograd Committee noted that "The government also had a clear interest in not exposing the civilian population in the north to rocket fire. The poor state of the defenses was known to the decision makers, as well as the partial readiness, to say the least, of the various civilian systems, given the possibility of escalation and fire. Furthermore, also at stake was the economic prosperity of the northern communities, which also found a symbolic but moving expression in the form of the 'fully booked B&Bs' in which Israelis were vacationing." (Winograd Committee, 2008, p. 45). The fear of casualties became a crucial factor in the political echelon's consideration whether to contain provocations or rather invade enemy space to remove the threat. Indeed, Israeli society is less susceptible to casualties than the military and political echelons think (Shoker, 2022), but the belief that the sensitivity is in fact prevalent guides their steps. The beginning of this fear was highlighted in Hanoch Levin's play "Shampoo Queen" that ran during the war of attrition and continued after the First Lebanon War. In 1983, after almost a year of stay in Lebanon and around 500 IDF soldiers killed, "Parents Against Silence" was established to pressure the government to pull the IDF out of Lebanon, end the prolonged and seemingly aimless war and prevent the loss of more lives. This group inspired yet another movement called "Four Mothers" which was founded after the 1997 Helicopter Disaster in which seventy-three soldiers were killed in a collision of two helicopters on their way into Lebanon (Madpis-Ben Dor, 2021). The trouble justifying losses in a war lacking national consensus on its goals or with unattainable goals is true in Israel as well as other places (Gelpi, Feaver & Reifler, 2009). "Four Mothers" anti-war protests helped then Prime Minister Ehud Barak legitimize the decision to pull the IDF out of the Lebanon security zone in May 2000. These two movements swept crowds all over the country raising public awareness and sensitivity to losses suffered by the IDF. Israeli policy makers and even senior IDF officers

added the public's casualty aversion into the mix of considerations and decision-making process regarding ground operations in pursuit of enemy targets (Siboni & Bazak, 2021). LTG Moshe (Bogie) Ya'alon mentions the IDF's reluctance to capture populated Palestinian areas ahead of operation "Defensive Shield" (April 2002), because of the anticipation of many casualties (Ya'alon, 2008, pp. 135-136). After the war in 2006, MG Elazar Stern complained about the IDF's hyper-sensitivity to loss of life exposing the fact that one of the battles was stopped because of a number of casualties (Shragai, 2006). Israel's controlled responses to rocket attacks from Gaza were also impacted by this consideration. Nevertheless, "Swords of Iron" has proven the political echelon and IDF high command's assessments wrong. Israel's reserve soldiers were highly responsive despite the looming risk of being killed in action. Society has shown resourcefulness and remarkable resilience. A random review of the eulogies for the fallen echoes a wave of admirable patriotic spirit, and many sectors of Israeli society are prepared to make great sacrifices to defend the homeland. The fear of casualties is reflected, among other things, in the preference for a military strategy based on precise aerial strikes. Technological developments in the field of precision and remote fire propelled the adoption of a strategy that reduced the need to employ ground forces and significantly spared casualties. Edward Luttwak coined the term "Post-heroic Warfare" and pointed out the West's transition from a typical war, where the fighter is expected to be heroic while willing to sacrifice themselves to win the battle, to a war where one of the main goals is to avoid casualties. In his opinion, heavy losses on the battlefield are no longer acceptable in Western countries (Luttwak 1995). Such assessments amplified the appeal of using air power (Cohen, 1994). A strategy based on air power was successfully implemented in the Kosovo War in 1999 by NATO, which used several types of aircraft without the need to have ground forces lay the decisive blow on the Serbian army. However, a ground alternative was indeed prepared, and the existence of that option may have contributed to Slobodan Milosevic's decision to withdraw. US military thinking has undoubtably influenced the IDF as well (Shamir, 2018).

3. Paradoxically, the peace agreements with the Arab countries – which were achieved mainly thanks to Israel's military superiority and Arab

defeats in their wars against Israel – have encumbered Israel's freedom of operation. In the past, there was a fear of Soviet intervention whereas "what will Cairo do," while Egypt was still the enemy, remained a secondary consideration. These days, more weight is given to Egypt's reaction and at times, it is notified ahead of military action. Today, Egypt is perceived as a player to be aligned with and indeed in 2024, Israel discussed with Egypt its intent to take over the Philadelphi Corridor. Jordan is sensitive to Israeli moves in Judea and Samaria and especially in Jerusalem. As the country with which Israel shares its longest border and as a buffer to the east, Jordan holds great significance. Palestinian terror attacks and provocations continued after signing the Oslo Accords and the transfer of major cities to the hands of the Palestinian Authority. The IDF based its restraint in face of those attacks on the wishes and hope of both Israeli and US foreign policy makers that the Oslo process will prove to be a success. In Ya'alon's view, these figures refused to see Yassir Arafat as an enemy who was using the peace process to achieve a historical goal – the destruction of the State of Israel (Ya'alon, 2008, pp. 11-26).

4. Another reason for avoiding decision and adopting restraint is the profound shift in the threat perception. Following the peace treaty with Egypt and later, the Arab Spring, existential threats of invasion had withered. Therefore, the IDF substantially reduced its order of battle and available personnel (both due to the perceived nature of the next war as well as financial considerations). The fear that a chain of security incidents would lead to an invasion had disappeared. The diminished threat mirrors the changing nature of Israel's enemies. In the 21st century, the entities most violent toward Israel (Hezbollah, Hamas, and other militias) were defined as terrorist organizations, whose power to undermine the territorial integrity of the country is limited. Their acquisition of weapons that allow them to rain down high-trajectory fire increased greatly, as did the ability to cause real damage to Israel, but there was no assessment that the terrorist organizations posed an existential threat. The probability that Hezbollah would invade the Galilee was not high, and events in the likes of October 7th did not seem feasible. Therefore, an immediate harsh response did not seem appropriate and containment of provocations and waiting for a convenient time to retaliate seemed a reasonable alternative. Clear military superiority

enables containment that comes at the cost, at least in the short term, of erosion in deterrence. The IDF grew comfortable with the thought that handling terror organizations that do not pose an existential threat to the state, is like "mowing the grass" (Inbar & Shamir, 2013). The essence of this concept is the containment of aggression with restraint to build up legitimacy. The military response, according to this line of thinking, is not intended to influence the enemy's intentions and achieve decision, but rather to damage their capabilities to deny them of operational competences, until Israel will again be required to respond militarily. The leadership of the military "ceased to believe in victory over non-state actors such as Hamas and Hezbollah... and prefers containment over decision" (Michael, Regev & Kimhi, 2020, p. 21). Decision is difficult when the enemy does not have a clear center of gravity, a situation that largely characterizes sub-governmental organizations. But looking at Hezbollah and Hamas as terrorist organizations is problematic because these organizations have taken over territory and are largely responsible for the civilian population. In addition, they have at their disposal trained armies equipped with more missiles than most armies around the world. The development of defensive weapon systems against high-trajectory fire such as "Iron Dome" and "Magic Wand" has alleviated to some extent Israeli concerns about the missiles from across the border. Minimizing the damage from Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza, and especially reducing casualties, gave the political echelon breathing room and reduced public pressure to act. Containment has become a reasonable alternative. One more serious threat also led Israel to containment: the massive barrages of broad-range missiles on the Israeli home front by both Hezbollah in the north and by Hamas in the south, and the dire implications of such attacks on the Israeli economy and the day-to-day lives of citizens. Despite many provocations by these organizations, the fear of an escalation in Israeli military responses, even temporarily, lies in the ability of the enemy to launch thousands of missiles on the Israeli home front. That is, the ability to launch a myriad of missiles on the civilian population in Israel and on strategic facilities (power stations, ports, airports) created a deterrence equation that Israel could hardly ignore. The riots along the Gaza fence, for example, were handled mainly with defensive measures. "The IDF aims to end these

riots with minimum casualties on the other side, so as not to stir things up or lead to funerals that will give birth to the next attackers or instigators along the fence... it seems that from one incident to the next, the IDF's deterrence is eroding... even though operational logic stands behind this containment policy" (Zeitoun, 2018).

IDF forces in Gaza during the "Swords of Iron" ground operation (photo by: IDF Spokesperson)

5. The reluctance to use a large-scale ground force, which is crucial to achieve a decisive victory, stems from the belief of a significant part of the senior officers of the IDF, that in modern warfare the ground forces are no longer significant. The dominant perception was that large wars conducted by maneuvering tanks and infantry are a thing of the past. The IDF viewed the Air Force and precise intelligence as preeminent in modern warfare (Michael, Regev & Kimchi, 2020). The IDF did indeed dilute its ground forces. Reserve armor and infantry units were disbanded due to the widespread belief that there were better alternatives (mainly technological). The assessment of the political echelon that containment is preferable is also widespread because, in recent years, the IDF ground forces were not preparing for a decisive campaign. Much skepticism has arisen regarding the IDF's competence and readiness for a ground operation, and "A ground maneuver has become the last resort for a

limited decision" (Michael, Regev & Kimchi 2020). The pursuit of the former Chief of the General Staff, LTG Aviv Kohavi, to design an "operational concept for victory" through innovative technologies also attests to the effort to deal with this concern (Kohavi, 2020). Indeed, the purpose of the "Momentum" multi-year plan published by Kohavi in 2019 was to achieve such readiness. It can be assumed that since the Chief of the General Staff and other senior commanders (Ortal, 2021, IDF) are of the opinion that the IDF is not optimally prepared to face such threats, and since according to other experts, it even suffers from a paralysis resulting from the weakness of military thinking, the IDF preferred a strategy of containment over questionable ground operations (Siboni, Bazak & Perl Finkel, April 2018, p. 8). It is no wonder that in the event that a military response was employed, Israel carried out surgical strikes from the air and reduced the use of the ground units to a minimum. It seems that the preference for containment over large-scale military operations was prevalent until October 7th. The shortage of ammunition and weapons during "Swords of Iron" proves that the IDF did not prepare itself for a major war. However, it is worth noting that the "Swords of Iron" war quickly disproved doubts about the Ground Forces' capabilities and its readiness to face the enemy. The inter-service cooperation stood out for the better. Performance inquiries will certainly reveal various deficiencies and lessons will be learned, but the fighting spirit of the IDF units is indisputable.

6. Another reason, which fits well with the those above, is the concern that placing boots on the ground will result in complicated combat scenarios, including friction with the hostile local population, and assuming responsibility for the well-being of the civilian population. The withdrawal from Lebanon and Gaza and the willingness to withdraw from areas in Judea and Samaria stem from Israel's aversion to control a foreign populace. Throughout "Swords of Iron", Israel announced that it does not plan to remain in Gaza after it achieves the goal of dismantling Hamas. Friction with the hostile local population can lead to loss of IDF soldiers, fueling domestic criticism, while civilian deaths ("non-combatants"), generate heavy international criticism. This is what happened on April 18, 1996, during operation "Grapes of Wrath", when an artillery battery fired to cover a rescue effort in the Kfar Kana

area in southern Lebanon. Four shells went astray and hit a group of refugees and the UN force in a nearby base. According to Lebanese sources, the shelling killed 102 civilians, including many children, and wounded a hundred (numbers that were later checked and found to be exaggerated). That same day, other targets were struck, resulting in the deaths of eleven more civilians. Despite condolences expressed by Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, the killing provoked international pressure to stop the operation. On April 25, the UN Security Council passed a resolution condemning Israel (on the suspicion that Israel deliberately hit the UN base), while demanding the immediate end of the operation (which at first, was largely supported as reflected at the 8G summit in St. Petersburg). Two days later the State of Israel announced the conclusion of the operation. The media and the public opinion are sensitive to the loss of civilian lives. This kind of media attention, which propels international criticism, depletes the legitimacy resources. In all the rounds in Gaza, international legitimacy was revealed as a resource that dissipates rapidly, as images begin to come out of the Gaza Strip. Containment exempts Israel from such consequences, which are a direct result of taking a resolute military initiative to eradicate Hezbollah or Hamas (Inbar & Shamir, 2013 pp. 12-13).

7. Containment in the Lebanese and Palestinian arenas is also due to strategic priorities. The existential threat is Iran's nuclear program; therefore, Israel prefers to prepare for strategic prevention efforts and does not want to shift its focus by turning its attention to military initiatives in other arenas which may end up requiring resources that should be available for the main effort – Iran. Preventing Iran from attaining nuclear weapons is Israel's top priority. Generally, Israel would prefer to avoid engaging in a multi-arena military conflict. The containment in Lebanon after the withdrawal in 2000 was exercised due to the need to focus on the Palestinian arena (Winograd Committee, 2008 p. 46). After the aerial strikes in Gaza in May 2021 as part of operation "Guardians of the Walls" during which Israeli Arabs rioted and harmed Jews, a potential new front, the domestic arena (for which the country was not prepared) was looming. This further strengthened containment efforts in Gaza. In addition, Israel wanted to maintain the separation between the Palestinian Authority in Judea and Samaria and

Hamas in the Gaza Strip, after Hamas took control of Gaza in June 2007. The dispute between Gaza and the West Bank weakened the Palestinian national movement and highlighted its extremism. That is why Israel thought that a "weak Hamas" was a necessary goal which required containment. Israel continued to supply water and electricity to Gaza and facilitate the export and import of goods. Furthermore, Israel agreed to transfer millions of dollars to Hamas from Qatar to reinforce the Islamist organization's grip on the Gaza Strip. In accordance with the "mowing the grass" concept, Israel initiated two limited ground maneuvers: Operation "Cast Lead" in December 2008 through January 2009, and operation "Protective Edge" from July 17 until August 4, 2014. The objectives of these operations were to debilitate the military capabilities of Hamas and to create deterrence to ensure temporary calm, rather than occupy the Strip or to overthrow Hamas rule. These operations and the airstrikes over the years did not prevent Hamas from becoming stronger and its force build up. Israel failed to create a "weak Hamas" or a "deterred Hamas". The events of October 7th strongly suggest that Israel did not "mow the grass" short enough.

8. It seems that the changing character of the officers in the IDF is also a factor that influenced the hesitation to come to a decision and favor containment. Unlike most armies, the IDF's roots are in militia organizations (Haganah and Palmach). The IDF started off young. The organizational culture was informal and vibrant, encouraging initiative, guile, and attack. LTG Moshe Dayan's statement about his preference of "galloping horses over lazy oxen" is well known. After the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, the IDF grew considerably following the lessons learned as well as the Arab armies' accelerated armament (Inbar, 1983). As the IDF grew, it underwent processes of bureaucratization and professionalization, like other large militaries (Safrai & Ben Ari, 2021 pp. 151-164; Ben-Shalom & Sharav, 2012 pp. 28-36). That was also the time when technology became a key element in modern warfare. As in other Western militaries, the introduction of increased legal oversight has imposed constraints on offensive initiatives. Such a military requires different leadership. The officer that this type of military produces is no longer the "warrior-hero" who is prepared to take substantial risks knowing he may die in action but rather a "manager" who operates large

units and succeeds in combining various elements of military force (Janowitz 1960, pp. 21-75). Every modern army faces the challenge of preserving the spirit of heroism and militancy. After the Second Lebanon War in 2006, IDF commanders were heavily criticized for conducting the war behind plasma screens rather than leading their forces on the battlefields. Even the IDF officers who do gain combat experience are exposed to a way of thinking that sees containment as the best practice in stark contrast to the past. The changing nature of IDF officers as well as their interactions with a cautious political echelon made containment a more appealing option.

Conclusion

Over the past three decades, Israel has more frequently exercised containment while pushing away search for decisive campaigns. Containment\restraint became a key component in Israel's national security thinking, even though it was not identified as such. The reasons containment was chosen are varied, each blocked offensive initiative and attempts to achieve decision. At times, some or all of them came together as a cluster of considerations for choosing an appropriate response. Their impact on the decision-makers varies from time to time. Foreign policy or domestic considerations, the desire to avoid rule over large hostile populations as well as new defensive technological capabilities, such as greater accuracy of firepower and precise intelligence. The enemy's abilities to hit the rear were considered, but so were the defensive capabilities against high-trajectory fire. These all served the choice of containment in recent decades over decisive victory. Changes within the IDF and in the thinking of modern warfare also affected this choice. Containment is a logical alternative that serves political and strategic interests, as explained above. Nevertheless, the horrendous onslaught on October 7, 2023, revealed that the main shortcoming of containment is its damaging effect on Israeli deterrence. Ongoing containment conveys unwillingness to engage in a military conflict in a region where political culture values the use of force. In the Middle East, the use of force is part of the legitimate set of tools at the disposal of governments. Erosion in deterrence brings the next round of violence closer.

Moreover, a prolonged containment policy gives the enemy time to

build up its force freely. The containment and subsequent build-up pose a greater risk for Israel in the future. Israel learnt that Hezbollah's missiles did not corrode. On the contrary, they caused enormous losses and severe damage in 2006. Hezbollah's impressive missiles growth in numbers and in range over the years has created a deterrence balance, discouraging Israel from taking action. Regarding Gaza, Israel has accepted the formula of "quiet for quiet", which gave Hamas time to build and enhance its military infrastructure. Israeli intelligence was surprised by the extent of the underground tunnel network and other elements of Hamas' order of battle. On October 7th, Israel paid a heavy price for limiting its use of military force against Hamas. The paradox is that containment, which appears to be successful over time, also causes complacency and the conditions that lead to failed deterrence and dire strategic surprises. Hamas' attack on October 7th is an example of that. Furthermore, the policy of restraint normalizes Israel's enemies' use of force. As this phenomenon grew prevalent, the world became used to this reality and is no longer fazed by missile barrages targeting Israeli civilians.

The continuous containment eroded Israel's legitimacy resources, contrary to its original goal, allowing substantial increase in violence against Israel over time. Hamas gradually increased the range of its rockets and their destruction power. The steady development of capabilities has made life miserable for a growing number of Israelis and was not seen as a game changing circumstance. The containment policy caused much frustration among the Israeli public, especially those who had lived within rocket range for many years. The expectation was that anyone who challenged the IDF would be struck, as in the past, thus eliminating the threat. The Israeli government used the IDF sparingly, causing an uncomfortable feeling that the lives of the soldiers were more valuable than civilians on the home front. Citizens expected the state to uphold the social contract that obligates the state to ensure their safety. In addition, the lack of attempts at decisive actions (thwarting threats and limiting further growth) affects the IDF leadership's thinking, resulting in lessened offensive-oriented cadres.

On the other hand, a pre-emptive strike and a decisive victory have considerable strategic logic. The political constraints mainly on Israeli freedom of action must be understood to find the way to deal with them

effectively. Making the choice is always a gamble, however, containment is not always a foolproof recipe, as we all learned on October 7th. The toll containment takes on deterrence is problematic. Israel cannot survive in the region if there is a significant erosion in its deterrence, therefore, it cannot afford to forfeit the pre-emptive strike, which was part of the original Israel's national security doctrine, and an alternative that must be seriously considered once again. Delaying the inevitable is not always wise, and containment may turn out to be an extremely dangerous bet, as it turned out to be on the morning of October 7, 2023. Containment over time probably has higher costs than those of taking initiative. Yet, these costs are ignored for the sake of having quiet along the borders.

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The Sense of Control in IDF Culture

The effects of the Campaign Between the Wars and conflict "rounds" in Gaza along with advancements in intelligence, fire, C2, aerial defense, and border security on the development of sense of control by senior commanders and intelligence officers prior to "Swords of Iron".

BG (Res.) Dr. Meir Finkel[1]

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This article will argue that IDF senior command developed a strong sense of control over reality. This feeling grew as a result of operational activity, mainly as part of the Campaign Between the Wars (CBW herein for the purpose of this article) and the reoccurring 'rounds of conflict' in Gaza. This activity was based on advanced technological capabilities, mainly: intelligence (and specifically – cyber capabilities), precision strike capabilities, command and control (C2), air and missile defense and border security systems. The sense of control over reality was founded on a multi-dimensional superiority in intelligence, operational and technological aspects to do with offensive strike capabilities, thwarting terror attacks and successfully preventing escalations time and time again. This sense of control was, mistakenly, extended to confidence in a superior understanding of enemy leaders' basic motivations, contemporary interests and force-employment decision-making. This sense of control may help explain some aspects the surprise assault of October 7**th**, and the difficulties in providing an immediate response.

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Introduction

A sense of control over reality is an important component of human psychology. It is founded on the belief that the actions of an individual have a significant effect on the reality in which one lives. Lack of control can often cause stress and anxiety. Compared to most of history, the individual in the modern Western world has an extremely high level of control over day-to-day life. This is made possible because of a variety of reasons, including: detailed time-management allowing planning days, weeks and months ahead of time, and technology which enables implementing these plans (advanced communications and effective transportation); violent risks being mostly rare in day-to-day life; advanced medicine, which has nearly completely eradicated sudden death from sickness and even most injuries; and much more. Uncertainty and chance have been greatly reduced in the modern world, even if they have not been eliminated.

For many reasons, war is known to be a "province of uncertainty" (Clausewitz). Originally, this referred to the tactical level of ground warfare, which is characterized by uncertainty, however, it is more than correct regarding the operational and strategic levels of warfare – especially in predicting a direct cause and effect relationship between combat and attaining the desired strategic and political aims. Militaries, including the IDF, have tried to reduce uncertainty in the battlespace through meticulous planning, improved intelligence, C2 systems to facilitate improved monitoring of forces, stand-off fire or spec-ops, optimizing coordination between different levels of command, and more. The IDF has not fought a large-scale war since 1982. Moreover, 1973 was the last time an enemy initiated war. In this article I offer a possible explanation for the development of a component of the IDF's organizational culture in recent years, which is likely to have affected intelligence and operational activity before and during October 7th – and perhaps also during the beginning of ensuing war. I argue that a sense of control over reality regarding our military activity against our enemies prevails throughout IDF HQ – not dissimilar to the modern sense of control over one's personal life. The IDF's operations in the Campaign Between the Wars contribute to this, however, the rounds of conflict in Gaza have likely also played a crucial role. While they are different,

both modes of operation rely on advanced technological capabilities, namely intelligence (specifically cyber), precision strikes, C2, aerial defense and border security systems (Figure 1).
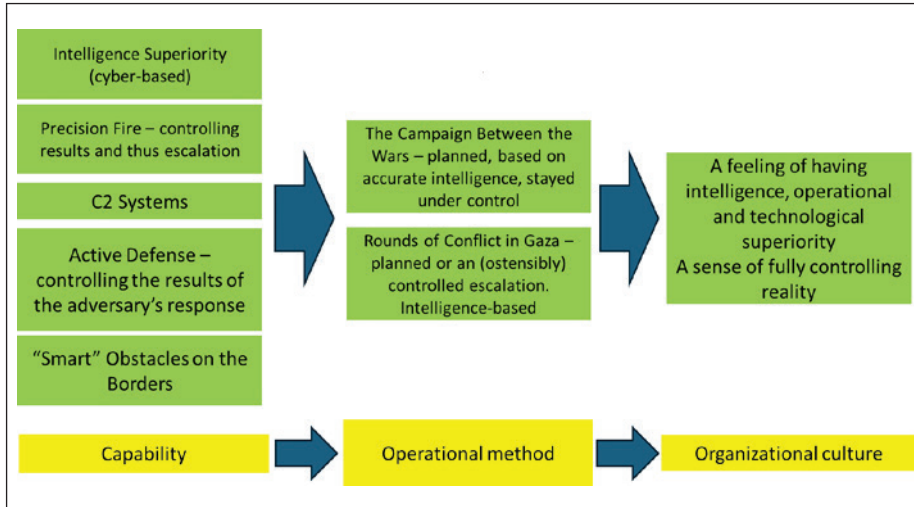
Figure 1: The components in the development of the sense of control: the two main modes of activity will be described first, and the five main capabilities afterwards.

The mutual effect on each other has fostered a sense of operational, technological, and intelligence superiority. In turn, the IDF's doctrine has developed a growing reliance on intelligence (including warning capabilities), central C2 capabilities, the belief that Israel's deterrence was sufficient to be fully in control of any attempts to escalate by the enemy, etc. All this has given rise to an exaggerated sense of control over reality throughout the IDF. This is fundamentally opposed to the understanding that the battlespace is still that same province of uncertainty at all its levels – so much so when dealing with a multi-arena scenario involving multiple actors. For ease of reading, control over the reality of operational activity will be described first, followed by the capabilities which enable it.

To preface, it is important to note three things: First – I am not claiming that it was a mistake to develop or do any of the following, rather that the wide-scale success over a decade-and-a-half has fostered a growing sense of control over reality. Second – it must be emphasized that this article does not deal with the much-discussed, age-old argument

of centralized command of forces vis-à-vis the decentralized approach to command known as mission-oriented command. This article discusses the sense of control over reality and seeks to understand it from all angles. Third – this paper does not discuss the effect of the CBW on the General Staff, IDI (J2) or the IAF splitting focus between the CBW and preparing for future wars. Neither does it examine the development of centralized control patterns that may have hindered the IDF in swapping to a more decentralized approach during the war (Shelah and Valensi, 2023, pp. 43-45). It will, however, analyze the effects of the success of the CBW on the IDF's sense of control over reality.

Control over operational activity
The political echelon

The IDF's sense of control over reality is, in some manners, a part of the political approach which treats Israel as a "status quo" actor (Inbar, 2012). According to this, Israel wishes to preserve the current situation on all fronts, except maybe distant arenas such as Iran and the Gulf States. This political situation was mostly a result of past failed attempts to shape the strategic reality: the 1982 war in Lebanon, and the attempt to put into power a regime helpful to Israel; years of control of the Gaza Strip before the withdrawal from it in 2005; as well as the Palestinian Authority's difficulties in preventing terror emanating from its territory, among others. Israel is not interested in war, unless it is forced upon it. At the same time however, Israel avoids taking any steps toward an agreement with the Palestinians. This is the reason that, even though most of the IDF's operations in Gaza and Judea and Samaria are initiated (both at the operational and tactical level) by the IDF, they remain a part of a conservative strategy, whose main aim is reinstating calm for as long as possible.

Most of the IDF's activity in the CBW was in Syria, and the risk of escalation was low. Actions against Hezbollah in Lebanon, such as operation "Northern Shield", were undertaken while mitigating the risk of friction and escalation, as well as employing special forces. These forces are another development in the IDF, which has enabled controlled minimal-risk activity. The walls, fences, and sensor systems on the borders have also helped mitigate threats and uncertainty. This strategic limit,

whatever form it took in the different arenas, allowed the military echelon to execute controlled operations, and assume that all operational activity was highly controlled. The truth of the matter is, almost all the operations described below were executed as "special operations", meaning that success was ensured by reducing factors causing uncertainty.

The Campaign Between the Wars

As mentioned above, the discussion of the effects of the CBW in this paper is neither about diverting focus away from preparations for war, nor about the difficulties in adapting control schemes for war. Our discussion is about the sense of control over reality, which has been created as a result of years of activity in the CBW. At the core of every action is a surgical operation based on accurate intelligence. As said by the Head of the Operations Directorate (J3) MG (Res.) Nitzan Alon and Dana Preisler: "Intelligence superiority and capabilities – Israel has intelligence superiority in the different arenas and fronts. This is a critical condition for the CBW to be effective at all levels of activity: from the national-level intelligence on our enemies and adversaries required the political echelon's strategic decisions; to concrete intelligence at the operational and tactical level. Intelligence that sometimes includes information about the other side's overarching concepts and campaign ideas – which, if exposed, plans can be made to thwart them" (Alon and Preisler-Swery, 2019, pg. 20). Or "For example, in preventing force design: Israel conducts kinetic operations based on accurate intelligence, showing the adversary how vulnerable it is" (Ibid., pg. 20). Rave Galili wrote: "The operational response for the threat of the 'terror armies' and Iran, which has taken shape during the CBW, has made it possible to act with operational and intelligence superiority simultaneously on multiple fronts – while managing risks and preventing escalation" (Galili, 2021, pg. 169).

The CBW is conducted by employing precise stand-off fire, mostly from the air, with the occasional use of land-based and naval systems. This helps mitigate uncertainty in force employment. The utilization of fire is mostly directed by the HQs in the IAF and Israeli Navy, where centralized C&C is the norm. When stand-off fire was not appropriate for the desired operation, like when dealing with Hezbollah's tunnels in operation "Northern Shield", special forces (mostly the 89th Commando

Brigade and the Yahalom Special Operations Engineering Unit) were employed in surgical ground operations. The CBW is directed by a select few in the IDF's General Staff, Commands and Services, who are in direct control of the tactical activity – mainly aerial strikes as well as land-based strikes. Shelah and Valensi mentioned that "[…] Israel has become accustomed to standards of complete intelligence control, the ability to operate surgically, reliance on stand-off weaponry, and an emphasis on zero casualties to IDF forces […]" (Shelah and Valensi, 2023, pg. 43).
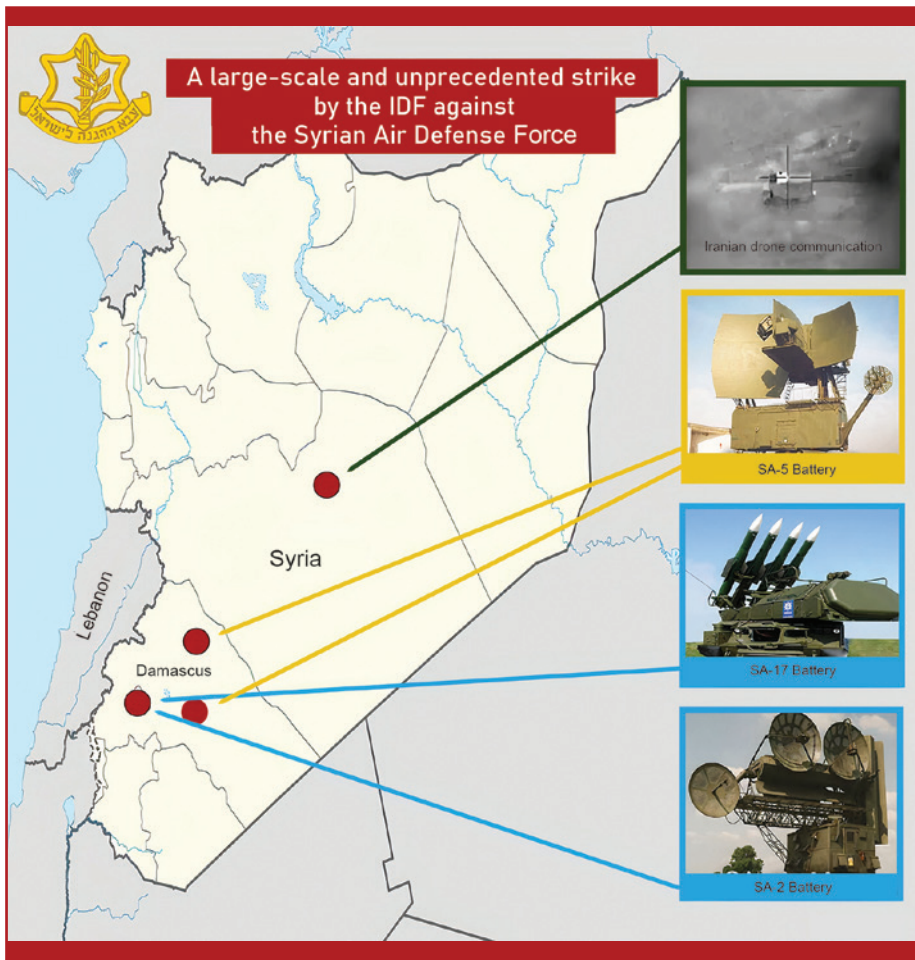
Figure 2: Operation "House of Cards", May 10, 2018. During the operation 70 different targets were struck in Syrian territory. This is the largest operation in Syrian territory since 1974. (Image source: IDF Spokesperson)

A significant portion of the strikes were in Syria, and the Syrians reacted by attempting to intercept planes or other means, but not with offensive action. The feeling that the IDF is in control was proved right again and again as Israel operated vis-à-vis Hezbollah, whose leader, Hassan Nasrallah, defined the "equations" according to which the organization operated. By doing so, he made it easy for the IDF to predict Hezbollah's response – which was mostly Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM) fire toward IDF soldiers near the border. The IDF attempted, not always successfully, to control the effectiveness of Hezbollah's response through strict, centralized command and minimizing the vulnerability of forces on the front. Two examples of such cases when Hezbollah responded to IDF actions in the CBW are: the elimination of Jihad Mughniyah on January 15, 2015, and Hezbollah's response of ATGM fire toward a force in the Har Dov area; a strike in Syria on July 20, 2020, during which a Hezbollah operative was killed, and Hezbollah's response that September with ATGM fire toward an IDF ambulance moving through an area exposed to the adversary. The mistakes were always made by the ground forces, disrupting the IDF's ability to fully control incidents..

I stress again that this article analyzes the effects of the success of the CBW on the IDF's sense of control over reality. It does not discuss its effect on splitting focus between the CBW and preparation for future wars. Neither does it examine the development of centralized control patterns that may hinder switching to a more decentralized approach during war.

The rounds of conflict in Gaza

The five rounds of conflict in Gaza preceding "Swords of Iron" have one thing in common – Israel had the strategic and operational initiative, and it began its activity with an aerial operation based on precise intelligence. This is how the operations in Gaza began: operation "Cast Lead" started on December 27, 2008, with a surprise aerial strike; the opening strike of operation "Pillar of Defense" was the elimination of Ahmed Jabari, the commander of Hamas' military wing on 14 November 2012. "Pillar of Defense" was also the first time the Iron Dome system was employed. Since then, it has become a central component of the IDF's activity. The Iron Dome system gives Israel's political leadership and the IDF relatively wide margins in decision-making regarding offensive actions,

as well as high control over the damage the adversary's response can inflict to Israel. Operation "Protective Edge" in July-August 2014 did not begin with a surprise strike but was rather a Hamas response to a wide-scale Israeli operation in Judea and Samaria as part of operation "Brother's Keeper", during which approximately four hundred terrorists were apprehended. Israeli control over the escalating combat during operation "Protective Edge" became weaker, and the operation ended up taking longer than originally planned. Operation "Black Belt" broke out following a planned IDF strike on the Palestinian Islamic Jihaad (PIJ) on November 12, 2018. Finally, operation "Guardian of the Walls" began following escalating tensions, however, the strike on Hamas' tunnel network on May 11, 2022, was based on accurate intelligence and its timing was an Israeli decision.

What all these operations have in common is the high level of control Israel had over the situation, whether this was achieved by seizing the initiative with a surprise attack or by controlling the escalation utilizing fire. IDF activity in all these operations relied on accurate intelligence, aerial superiority, and centralized control by the General Staff. When the forces on the ground were deployed, they were utilized carefully and in as limited a capacity as possible, to minimize uncertainty. I believe this repeating pattern strengthened the sense of control over reality in the IDF. Moreover, it should be noted that the IDF's operations in Judea and Samaria are conducted based on accurate intelligence and dedicated forces (special units of the IDF and Israel Border Police) – which likely also influenced this growing feeling of control. In fact, the sense of control started from them, far before it developed regarding Gaza and Lebanon.

All the operations detailed above share several characteristics: Israeli-initiated actions which were conducted with a high level of control over reality, and a sense that the escalation is under control (based on strict risk-management). This feeling likely helped foster a hidden assumption amongst commanding officers that even if war broke out, it would not be a surprise, but rather a result of a dynamic of unplanned escalation. A war in which the adversary had the initiative was treated as an outdated, irrelevant scenario (even without questioning whether Israel's intelligence capabilities coul d provide warning). One reason for

this was the deep-seated belief that the adversary is also convinced that it cannot catch us by surprise. After all, the enemy had seen what we had done in the CBW and the rounds of conflict in Gaza and understood that it stood no chance against Israel's superior intelligence, technological, and operational capabilities.

High-quality intelligence on the enemy's activities gathered by the IDF and other intelligence organizations was conveyed straight to the divisional and brigade levels, allowing them to concentrate on to foil attempted terror attacks on the borders. Over time, the forces on the ground became more reliant on information coming from above, and less on their own reconnaissance capabilities. Even so, there were a multitude of cracks and faults in this picture of the situation and alert capabilities. One illustrative incident occurred one month before the war, when a terrorist infiltrated Israel from Lebanon, planted a bomb near the Megiddo junction and was eliminated only when trying to return to Lebanese soil.

Intelligence personnel became more and more involved in the IDF's targeted killing or pinpoint weapons destruction operations (thwarting operations), and perhaps they too found it hard to imagine that the adversary could successfully overcome our superiority – which had proven itself time and again. It appears that the proven superior intelligence capabilities utilized in strikes and thwarting operations fueled a mistaken sense of superiority. This self-assurance was also exemplified in the confidence that we knew the enemy leaders' basic motivations, contemporary interests and force-employment decision-making. When enemy leaders conducted themselves in a manner not in line with the analysis of intelligence – for instance, Sinwar's irregular actions at the beginning of operation Guardian of the Walls, and after the operation's end – it was taken to be a momentary "act of madness", and not properly analyzed.

The sense of control as a result of developments in force design

The fields of advancement in force design will now be detailed. They are clear and well-known and will be described briefly.

Advancements in cyber-based intelligence gathering and information processing – the foundation of Israel's intelligence superiority

Development of cyber capabilities in the IDF began during the last decade of the previous century, in the IDI (J2). During the 2010's, the IDF's cyber capabilities underwent a massive improvement, making Israel the cyber superpower it is today. The IDF treated cyber as an important field, as can be seen in the "The IDF Strategy" document from 2015, and the idea to create a cyber directorate (a new service/command) that will combine intelligence-gathering, offensive, and defensive capabilities under one roof. Alongside the constant growth in the use of computers and computer networks all throughout the world, cyber has become a crucial component of intelligence – and its importance is yet growing. It should be noted that cyber-attacks tend to be of a covert nature, since they operate in a grey area allowing denying involvement – often it is not possible to tell who is responsible for a cyber-attack, or whether one even occurred at all. In this way, the adversary does not have to react, and control over a possible escalation is greater.

Information processing developed in response to the growing amounts of information that cyber intelligence-gathering has provided. In 2022, referring to the digital transformation, the deputy commander of Unit 8200 said: "[…] several different kinds of information fused together. Three years ago, a change was made in the IDI, new connections between systems and databases were made, creating a smart algorithm that can look at all the sensors from the various sources. This makes it possible to produce more accurate, higher quality intelligence, helping to thwart quite a few terror attacks" (Harel, 2022). In 2022, the CO of the IDI (J2), MG Tamir Heyman said that "Digital [capabilities] have become the very core of the IDI's activity" (Hatoni, 2022). The rise in quality and amount of intelligence has also helped foster the impression that the adversary would find it difficult to hide information from the IDF.

During the same period, the IDI also became an "operator", not only supplying information to other parts of the IDF or the security establishment, but also directly conducting operations. It may be that this too inflated the sense of control over reality in the IDI.

Precision strike capabilities

The IDF has been capable of conducting precision strikes utilizing Hermes 450 UAS since the 1990's. The ability to precisely strike targets using heavy munitions started being heavily developed following the 2006 Second Lebanon War, during which this capability was limited. The IDF's capabilities include continued upgrading of the variety of munitions and their accuracy (based on intelligence on the targets); high availability – small intervals between receiving intelligence and full readiness for execution; and the ability to mitigate collateral damage, which is important both for receiving international support for Israel's actions, as well as reducing the adversary's need to react to operations during the CBW. The IDF has shown extremely impressive capabilities in this field over the years, and during "Swords of Iron". These capabilities also make it possible to control results at a high reliability.

Command and control capabilities

Advancements in this field have allowed commanders and staff officers at the divisional and regional command-level HQs, as well as in the IAF and Israeli Navy HQs, and even senior officers in the J2 and J3 to directly monitor operations in the CBW – and get involved in real-time. This makes it possible, for instance, to abort a strike if it becomes clear that the collateral damage will be greater than planned; to provide more precise alerts for air defense components operating to shoot down high-trajectory fires (mainly rockets), thus allowing day-to-day life to continue; and to direct forces on the ground and monitor their conduct.

Air defense

The first operational use of Iron Dome was during operation "Pillar of Defense", in 2012. Starting from then, employing the Iron Dome system has allowed the IDF to limit its offensive activity in relation to the damage done to the Israeli home front. When the IDF is the first to act, like in the CBW or the rounds of conflict in Gaza, that initiative is usually on the strategic or operational level. This allows the IDF to deploy air defense forces, escalate, and contain the enemy's response. Of course, this component has also increased the IDF's sense of control over escalation dynamics.

On the ground – walls, smart borders, and spec-ops

The fifth component are the responses developed to face threats on Israel's borders. These are based on security obstacles both beneath and above the surface, as well as sensor networks and sensor fusion capabilities. In turn, the threat of infiltration over land has been reduced, and the IDF's confidence in thwarting infiltration has risen. The sixth component is the growth of the special operations units. Their employment mitigates risks, as senior commanders tend to trust them more than the regular units. This is why units that have been recently formed or expanded, such as the 89th Commando Brigade and the Yahalom Special Operations Engineering Unit, were the ones to expose and neutralize tunnels during operation "Northern Shield" in the winter of 2018.

The development of the sense of superiority, centralized C&C and growing assumption that the adversary's actions are derived from deterrence

As a result of capabilities developed by the IDF to be superior to its enemies and considering them having been proven over a decade and a half of operations in Gaza and during the CBW, a feeling of almost total military superiority developed in the IDF – except for the lack of belief in the ground maneuver. This was expressed in writing several times, and had a direct effect on the IDF's conduct:

Superiority (especially intelligence superiority)

The "IDF's Strategy" document from 2015 dealt with intelligence, naval, aerial, ground and spectrum (EW) superiority. The document pointed out the need for "military superiority in all domains of combat" (IDF's Strategy, 2015; 2018 as well). The second part of the Dado Center Journal volume titled "Military Superiority and the Momentum Multi-year Plan", published in October 2020, focused on superiority, and contained five papers on the issue in different domains: aerial, naval, EW, cyber and intelligence. Apparently, aerial and intelligence superiority, displayed again and again during the CBW and the rounds of conflict in Gaza, brought about the conception that superiority was possible in all domains of combat. It must be noted that while the need for aerial superiority has been known for many years as a crucial requirement for effective

operations both in the air and on the ground, the IDI only started dealing with intelligence superiority some time before the Second Lebanon War. The terminology of superiority only came into use later in the fields of cyber and spectrum.

Defining Intelligence Superiority

Intelligence superiority is the collection of capabilities that enables the IDF and state leadership to achieve their campaign objectives in all states of routine, emergency, and war. This is accomplished through high-quality, timely intelligence (both in the short and long term and in speed), with relevant capacity and flexibility, while staying ahead of and exposing the enemy.

Intelligence Cycle

Dissemination · Research · Processing · Extraction · Collection

Intelligence for Strategy | Exposing the enemy | Targets | Air and Maritime Superiority | Intelligence for Force Military Buildup

PEACETIME, EMERGENCY, WAR

Figure 3: Definition of intelligence superiority from 2020

BG Dror Shalom, Head of the IDI's Research and Analysis Division between 2016-2020, wrote in 2022 that "Overall, Israel is a strong regional power that enjoys clear operational superiority over its enemies due to its strength in intelligence, airpower, and active defense. This was manifested clearly in 2021 in Operation Guardian of the Walls (attacks on Hamas's underground and active defense), in the CBW (reducing the Iranian entrenchment in Syria), and in routine security measures in the West Bank" (Shalom, 2022). In the same paper, Shalom wrote that this superiority is being challenged for several reasons, however this quote is an excellent summary of the conception in the IDF at the time it was written.

It seems that the growing amount and successful utilization of quality intelligence – especially as part of the CBW, but also in Judea and Samaria and other arenas – fostered amongst intelligence officers a deep-seated belief in their ability to provide answers to any questions asked as part of offensive and thwarting operations. In a world of

thwarting operations and spec-ops, the need to interpret reality as part of intelligence work was reduced. It is possible that many intelligence officers began to treat intelligence as simply information, and not a combination of information and interpretation.

Diminished friction on the borders leading to the rise of the centralized C2 approach at the expense of field commander's independence

This command-and-control (C2) approach was needed to direct tactical activity such as strikes on weaponry in Syria during the CBW, which could bring about an escalation vis-à-vis Hezbollah or Iran; or neutralizing senior Hamas or PIJ operatives, which could draw rocket fire on Israeli population centers. Such operations require coordination of not only the strike itself, but also the deployment and readiness of air defense components and soldiers on the borders to "reduce targets" in the event of attempted ATGM fired by the adversary (even so, the adversary succeeded – as in the two incidents mentioned above). Another factor is the need to keep Russia or the US in the loop while the operation is being conducted. Such eliminations require approval from the Chief of the General Staff and the political echelon, usually in real-time or a short while ahead, for multiple reasons. Intelligence superiority lays at the heart of the approach that deterrence will subsist no matter what, allowing the General Staff to control operations in a centralized manner by utilizing various means, allocating them to the regional command when alerts come in. All this became entrenched as the dominant approach amongst IDF senior command.

The IDF's withdrawal from Lebanon and Gaza minimized ground forces contact with the adversary's forces in these arenas. Walls and fences were built, further reducing the contact between commanders on the ground at the tactical level and the enemy. It is likely that this situation reduced the amount and importance of information gathered at those levels, subsequently raising the importance of the information gathered at the General Staff level, based on the intelligence superiority detailed above.

Headquarters of the 7th Division of the Syrian Army

Before

After
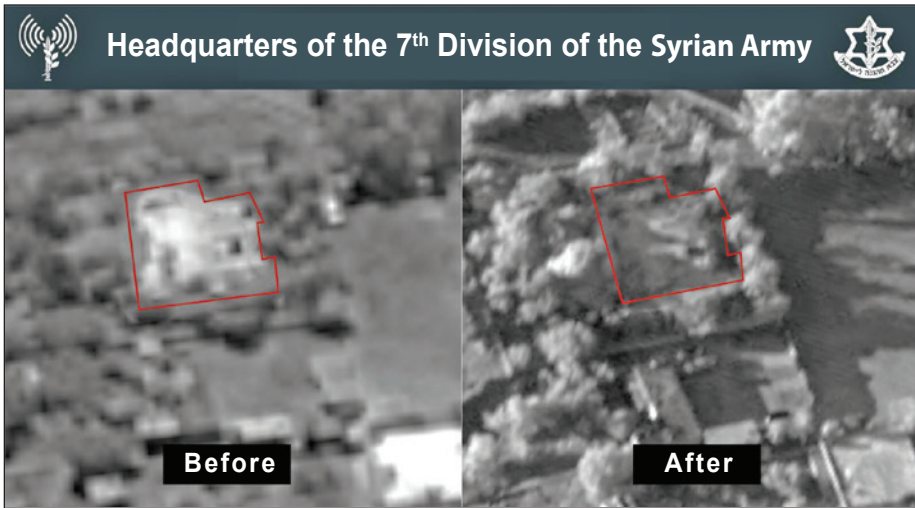
Surgical strike capabilities enabled close control of results and collateral damage, and as such also the adversary's response and any potential escalation (Photo by: IDF Spokesperson)

Deterrence

Israeli deterrence has been discussed exhaustively. In the decade and a half since the Second Lebanon War, deterrence has dominated Israel's interpretation of the enemy's patterns of activity, or inactivity, as a response to the IDF's actions. This is a key term in military-security discourse. However, it has been interpreted through the "superiority lens", and given exaggerated importance, contrary to reality – Israel's adversaries' actions were shaped by other factors except for how deterred they were. These factors included internal politics, regional dynamics, unfinished force build-up processes, and more. As I understand it, the overestimation of the value of deterring Hezbollah already began after the Second Lebanon War (Finkel, 2016) and was eventually extended to Hamas, Syria and the Iranian presence there. It may be that Nasrallah's commitment to deterrence equations and his declarations of "mutual deterrence" led us to copy our operational logic vis-à-vis Hezbollah to Hamas as well. Of course, it must also be questioned if we perhaps did not deter Hezbollah as well as we thought.

Conceptual effects of the sense of control

One sentence from the "IDF's Strategy" document of 2018 exemplifies the sense of control which I claim developed in Israel. It deals with the "Prevention and Influence" approach (both terms rooted in the ability to control reality), as a complementary component to decisive victory: "According to this approach, force employment includes routine security operations, as well as continued offensive and defensive actions as part of the CBW and limited operations [in Gaza] meant to restore calm from an advantageous position. This approach would also call for retaliatory operations, consisting of overt, focused, offensive actions meant to damage the adversary's assets, capabilities or interests while remaining beneath the threshold of war, as well as sending messages of a desire to restore calm while preparing for escalation" (The IDF Strategy, 2018).

Other ideas and concepts developed in the IDF over the past decade, some of which are shared with the political echelon, are also evidence of this sense of control over reality. These include: "Shortening the duration of the war" – a conception which has seeped into the General Staff; "isolating arenas" as a central concept of the response to a scenario of a multi-arena threat (Bengo et al., 2023); the use of the term "days of combat" when referring to actions vis-à-vis Hezbollah (Dvori, 2021) – which also implies control over reality; treating the Chief of the General Staff as the "Operational Commander", while several operational arenas are active (IDF Strategy, 2015, 2018); and creating "strategic clarity" which presupposes complete understanding of the other side (Shabtai, 2023).

It should be noted that the cracks in this superiority and alert-based approach grew wider the more the IDF dealt with the challenge of a multi-arena war, the threat of a nuclear Iran, and other issues (see Shalom, 2022). Discussions within the IDF showed that there was an understanding of the challenges in providing a simultaneous response in multiple arenas. Yadai and Ortal argued that the appropriate response was to strengthen the Ground Forces to reduce the load on the General Staff, the IAF and the IDI, freeing them up to concentrate on Iran (Yadai and Ortal, 2023). Bengo et al., called this emerging reality "the end of the Golden Age of Security". After a decade and a half of "superiority" and "proven deterrence", it was hard for this conclusion to sink in before the war broke out, especially when looking at Hamas.

Conclusion and recommendations for the future and learning lessons from "Swords of Iron"

The Second Lebanon War in 2006 came as a massive surprise for the IDF, since the political echelon made a sudden shift from a policy of containment to going to war. The feeling in the IDF was that war with Hezbollah was an Israeli decision, and that the war could be stopped, for instance, after the strike on the Dahya neighborhood in Beirut. IDF high command thought that the IDF could control the security reality vis-à-vis Israel's adversaries. This sentiment only grew over a decade and a half of operations in Gaza and as part of the CBW (as well as in Judea and Samaria). These operations relied on continuously developing advanced intelligence capabilities (which grew to be more and more cyber-based), on surgical aerial strikes which mitigated uncertainty; on utilization of dedicated forces when there was no choice; and on-air defense vis-à-vis Hamas which allowed for greater leeway in decision-making and a high level of control over the damage done to the home front. A large-scale maneuver was thought to be not only a tool without a clear purpose, only to be used in dire circumstances when Israel decided to utilize it to bring a controlled escalation to a close, but also difficult to control, especially as the IDF's commanders had almost no experience with it in the past few decades. The Ground Forces were considered error-prone, since they were vulnerable to ATGM fire despite clear instructions to avoid being exposed to the adversary who was targeting the IDF in its attempted responses to strikes as part of the CBW.

I am not arguing against the methods which were developed and employed with relative success over the years, or against the excellent capabilities which the IDF relies on right now. Neither am I arguing that the personnel themselves became "arrogant", but rather that a sense of control became more and more entrenched – understandably so, considering successful operational-intelligence activity. My point is that it may be that because of how outstanding these operations were, their success and developments that grew out of them brought about a change in the organizational culture of the IDF's senior HQs. This culture put too much emphasis on the sense of control, reduced the chances of being surprised thanks to intelligence superiority, and promoted personnel who showed high skills in centralized C&C regarding operations based

on accurate intelligence, stand-off fire, and special forces. Commanders who were excellent "technicians", as MG Gershon Hacohen called them (Hacohen, 2010). In the same breath, we can also mention intelligence officers who excelled at coordinating intelligence sources, preparing intelligence for utilization (mostly for fire operations), and creating an accurate tactical-level intelligence picture for thwarting terror attacks. They were mostly measured according to these capabilities, and less on their ability to put together a unique interpretation of reality that challenged commanders or assessments by others.

Theoretical basis for learning lessons from the war

If this truly is the case, it may be that this paper will help understand some things about the period before "Swords of Iron", as well as of the war itself:

1. **Before the war** – Before October 7th, how much did senior commanders in the Southern Command rely on alerts that came from above (intelligence superiority), and how much did they rely on information from below, from the field? Most of all, how did these commanders interpret these two sources, and was there an attempt to have them engage in a "debate"? We should think back to the days before the Yom Kippur War, the Head of the IDI's Deputy for Research (today's Head of the Research and Analysis Division) censured the Northern Command's Head Intelligence Officer that he "put the Command on alert" considering information gathered in the Command regarding Syrian preparations in the Golan.

2. **The morning of October 7th** – How did commanders and intelligence officers conduct themselves when their high sense of control over reality was shattered? Did the routine centralized operational processes hinder the ability to provide a quicker response when the situational reports were vaguer? Were these processes the reason that these commanders temporarily lost the ability to operate under basic surprise conditions?

3. **At the beginning of the ground operation** – A quick transition between centralized control employed for routine security and the decentralized control scheme required to conduct a wide-scale maneuver was rapidly completed. The rapid transition, after years of

centralized control, raises the question of whether high command had at all succeeded in finding the right balance between direct command over routine security, and the need to distribute it to multiple forces under a mission-oriented command approach. For example, did senior command successfully create a multi-leveled (General Staff-Command-Division-Brigade) understanding of the situation, the aims and the operational objectives of the ground maneuver – especially when the fighting itself created tension between taking over territory and eliminating adversaries on the surface, and providing a response to the subterranean threat (identification, investigation, and destruction)?

Recommendations – beyond a basis for learning

It is difficult to advise how to deal with an issue that has become part of the cultural fabric of the IDF since the Second Lebanon War. In general, one of the lessons to be learned from the current war will be finding a new balance between relying on the capabilities detailed above and command concepts that will be less dependent on optimal control over the situation, which will be able to deal with uncertainty. This has several organizational and processual aspects to do with the division of responsibilities between different levels in the command chain. Who has the authority to decide what is the most likely threat scenario – the one according to which the operational response to the adversary in a given Area of Responsibility (AoR) will be formulated? Who has the authority to employ which assets, what kind of clearance or approval is needed, and from whom? What must be coordinated by senior HQs, and in what cases can mistakes born of rapid, uncoordinated action be tolerated, and so on.

In my book about the Ground Forces' HQs, I argued that "Defensive missions being the focus of the regional divisions, especially the 91st and 143rd (Gaza), instead of the offensive combat that was their focus up to the first decade of the 21st century (take for instance, the 91st Division before the Second Lebanon War, and the 143rd before "Cast Lead") […] created a situation where the force that had the expertise and the most intimate tactical knowledge of the arena was no longer in charge of knowledge development for offensive operations in this arena" (Finkel, 2023, p. 46). I suggest reconsidering the pros and cons of this division, which is relatively new, regarding which level is designated

as the IDF's expert for enemies on Israel's borders. A recommendation concerning force design, is to strengthen the independence of the forces on the ground regarding fire and intelligence, so they do not need to rely on the General Staff's capabilities – which are sometimes insufficient in amount, and thus tip the scales toward centralized command (Yadai and Ortal, 2023). When promoting and developing commanders and intelligence officers, the prominence of excellency in coordination of intelligence and fire capabilities should be reduced. Instead, critical thinking and the ability to express opinions that may be contrary to that of senior commanders should be emphasized.

My final recommendation is "humility", which in this case is the opposite of outwardly presenting superiority. In the past few years, the IDF has publicly displayed its successes and capabilities, not only through statements by senior commanders, but also by showcasing many units, both staff and field, as well as weaponry and methods. It would behoove us to reduce this habit.

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Part 2

On War

Creating Prevention through Operational Versatility: A Response to the Threat of Iran's Religious Terror Armies

Col. (Res.) Dr. Ofer Guterman, Dr. Haim Assa, Col. (Res.) Ran Eisenberg and Col. (Res.) D. B. D.[1]

The war of October 7th exposed the irrelevance of Israel's national security doctrine in facing Iran's network of religious terror armies. In this article, we will propose a response to this threat – prevention. Unlike the Campaign Between the Wars (CBW), the approach we offer is not committed to remaining under the threshold of war, but rather to removing strategic threats or reducing them to an acceptable level. Prevention will be achieved by utilizing operational versatility – a sophisticated campaign method meant to prevent adversaries from coordinating and reduce restrictions on Israel's freedom of operation. In nearby arenas, this approach will take the form of a "mowing the grass" strategy (and preventive war, if need be). In more geographically remote arenas, intelligence, air and spec-ops will be utilized, inevitably as part of regional and international partnerships. This approach requires changes in Israeli decision-making patterns both at the political and military levels, as well as alterations to force design.

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The paradigmatic crisis of Israel's security conception

Hamas' assault on October 7th and the ensuing multi-arena war is proof of a total failure of Israel's security conception: Israel failed to create deterrence vis-à-vis Hamas and the Iranian proxies who joined the fighting (despite Hezbollah limiting its operations in the north). Intelligence failed to provide early warning of Hamas' intentions and capabilities (the decision to execute a surprise attack, Hamas' battle plan, and the scale of the tunnel network in the Gaza Strip). On October 7th itself, the IDF failed to protect civilians in the western Negev, and its defense throughout the war in the north and south is only made possible by unprecedented (both in scale and duration) evacuation of the population from areas near the border. The IDF has not been able to reach a rapid, decisive military victory neither in the main fighting arena in Gaza, nor the secondary arena in Lebanon. Finally, the militias attacking Israel from more distant arenas have mostly been combated by the USA or a coalition under its leadership – while Israel lacks an appropriate offensive response.

This is not a second-degree problem – meaning improper implementation of a valid strategy – but rather a first-degree problem. Israel's security concept is amid a paradigmatic crisis. Accordingly, recent literature concerning the crisis has discussed updating the security concept (Shabtai, 2024), generally advocating for building the military's capability to fight long wars (Finkel, 2024; Ortal, 2024), as well as active political efforts to reach an arrangement to bring the Israeli-Arab conflict to a close (Bar-Joseph, 2024). These approaches are not wrong; however, they do not provide a good-enough solution for the type of military threat posed to Israel by Iran – which is the main factor that made Israel's current security concept obsolete.

Over the years, Iran's military force has developed into a grave strategic threat to the State of Israel. This was motivated by a mixture of a sense of being under an existential threat, hegemonial ambitions to become a regional superpower, a combination of nationalistic and religious sentiments, and a dogmatic commitment to conflict against the USA and Israel. Iran's military power is based on several factors: the first is strategic military capabilities that can effectively reach Israel – the fruit of the local industries' efforts. Another is the nuclear program,

meant to slowly advance toward weapons-grade nuclear technology or rapid breakthrough capabilities that can be used as a means of power projection and deterrence. Finally, Iran's network of proxy militias spread throughout the Middle East (Zimmet, 2024). Dealing with the whole spectrum of Iranian threats is beyond the scope of the current discussion and requires a broad approach combining updating extant components (e.g., updating the current deterrence concept vis-à-vis a nuclear-threshold state) and developing new ones. In this article, we will focus on the strategic response to one of the three components of the threat to Israel – Iran's proxy militias.

We propose to understand and define the military threat posed by the Iranian militias as a network of religious terror armies. Politically, they combine an unrelenting Jihadist vision with low sensitivity to the restrictions on employing military force that a state would have. At the operational level, they hold massive, advanced military capabilities thanks to the support of the regional power that is Iran, while employing these capabilities to engage by terror and guerilla warfare. Thus, their weaknesses and susceptibility to the IDF's maneuver and fire capabilities is lessened. (Brun and Valensi, 2010; Hacohen, 2016). The militia networks' conduct as a multi-arena threat in both distant and close-by arenas, requires Israel to examine its power balance vis-à-vis the network as a whole, as well as its ability to operate on multiple fronts at the same time – while facing the challenge of operating effectively and consistently over long distances. A rational analysis considering the combination of this trend and advancements in military technology would conclude that there is a need to acknowledge the erosion of the IDF's qualitative and quantitative edge.

Analyzing our traditional security conception while considering the Iranian axis' religious terror armies exposes the gaps in its relevance:

1. **Deterrence** – deterrence has lost relevance, even if not totally. Because these entities adhere to a dogmatic ideology of destroying Israel, and because the limitations of a state are irrelevant to them (or limit them very partially), it is difficult to make them feel threatened – politically, economically, or otherwise. This is the case when deterring them from undertaking a specific offensive operation, but also the deeper idea of the "Iron Wall" that Israeli deterrence is

founded on (Henkin, 2016) – it is a mistake to assume that defeat on the battlefield will make these adversaries give up and abandon their desire to destroy the State of Israel.

2. **Detection –** there is a fundamental challenge in understanding the rationale of these militias, whose political-religious world view is so different from ours. The militias' operational concept is based on several capabilities: from ground force perspective – their units are much smaller than those of a regular military, and the "need to know" circle is much smaller; from fire power perspective – the decentralized operational method and the readiness of the launching units make it possible to rapidly conduct opening blows, leaving very little time for early warning. Moreover, no matter who the enemy is, modern history has proven time and again that it is impossible to completely prevent strategic military surprises (Kam, 1990). On the other hand, originally the importance of early warning in Israel's national security doctrine was to enable a rapid, large-scale mobilization of reserves to counter an imminent attack of large Arab armies – a threat no longer crucial as it was in the past. The threats posed by the current enemy – aerial strikes and raids conducted by no more than thousands of terrorists – can be blocked by employing enhanced regular air and land defense units, which can be constantly maintained at acceptable expense to the Israeli economy.

3. **Decisive victory –** for Israel, decisive victory means rapidly attaining a crushing military victory (Eisenkot and Siboni, 2019), which can include holding territory and eroding the adversary's capabilities (Tal, 1998). However, the pro-Iranian militias do not have clear political or operational centers of gravity. This makes attaining a decisive military victory especially problematic, as proven during the Second Lebanon War, the war of October 7th, and during all the operations in the Gaza Strip since Hamas seized power. Furthermore, there is also an innate difficulty in defeating militias acting against Israel from distant arenas, both because of operational limitations, as well as political restrictions.

4. **Defense** – seeing as the enemy has built systemic raiding capabilities alongside its mass fire – both displayed during October 7th – the IDF and Israel cannot continue to be satisfied with building separate

defensive components. There is a need for a holistic, systematic approach to multi-domain defense. Evidently, Israel's land defense concepts must be revised to provide a solution to the threat of a multi-domain infiltration and create a strong defense for both civilian communities and military positions near the border (Ortal, 2024). In addition, it is clear that the current air defense capabilities and doctrine are not suited to the unprecedented threat of the Iranian axis – both in scale and precision (Brun, 2023).
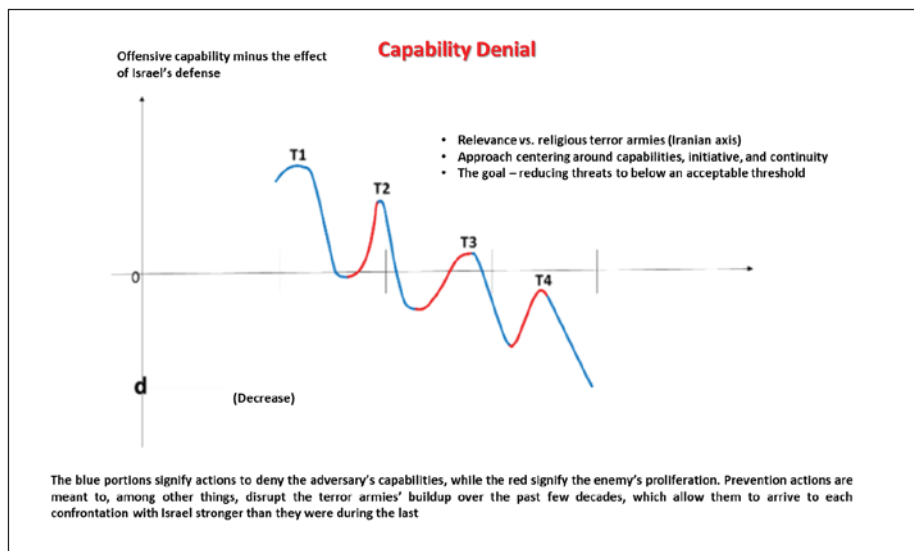
Analyzing the reasons, the current national security conception is irrelevant, as well as the nature of the threat that has become increasingly clear during the terrible war in Gaza, we propose updating the security conception by adding new components and in turn reinterpreting some of the traditional elements. As aforementioned, the concept presented here is focused on the specific threat of Iran's network of religious terror armies. In part, it will also have to do with the Iranian threat but is not meant to help deal with other state-level threats.

Prevention as a "pillar" of the security concept, and implementing it through operational versatility

As we understand it, to deal with Iran's network of religious terror armies we must place the principle of prevention at the core of security thought. According to this principle, Israel must seize the initiative and continuously act to erode the enemy's capabilities – so long as it estimates they could develop into a strategic threat on the Israeli state and citizenry. For the purposes of this article, a strategic threat is defined as an enemy capability whose current or potential damage capacity, after deducting Israel's defensive capabilities, make it an unacceptable threat. For Israel, the strategic threat rises out of the aggregate capabilities of the terror army network spread throughout the various arenas surrounding Israel. Accordingly, prevention must reduce the threat until it is underneath an acceptable threshold. Matanya and Bachrach (2023), proposed implementing prevention in cases when the price of denying capabilities is smaller than the emerging or existing threat, as well as how likely it is to come into being. Amidror (2023) added that decision-making regarding prevention must consider achievement assessment – meaning, how possible it is to degrade capabilities and remove the

threat in a manner that justifies the price of the operation. According to this model of decision-making, it is possible and necessary to use this approach to combat the threat of the Iranian religious terror armies.

Similarly to Israel's traditional security concept, the rationale behind denying capabilities is offensive at the operational level, and defensive at the strategic level. However, contrary to the traditional pillar of decisive victory, even in its expanded version of "cumulative victories" that brings about "cumulative deterrence" (Ben-Israel, 2013; Dekel and Einav, 2017; Amidror, 2020) – prevention is not a singular decisive victory in a military engagement once every few years, but rather continuous activity to erode the adversary's capabilities over several years. Thus, prevention is supposed to reduce dependence on disaster-prone elements such as early warning and deterrence and counteract the problematic nature of winning wars against terror armies quickly. It is also meant to break and reverse the current pattern, wherein these armies are stronger at the onset of each round of conflict with Israel.

Capability Denial

Offensive capability minus the effect of Israel's defense

- Relevance vs. religious terror armies (Iranian axis)
- Approach centering around capabilities, initiative, and continuity
- The goal – reducing threats to below an acceptable threshold

(Decrease)

The blue portions signify actions to deny the adversary's capabilities, while the red signify the enemy's proliferation. Prevention actions are meant to, among other things, disrupt the terror armies' buildup over the past few decades, which allow them to arrive to each confrontation with Israel stronger than they were during the last

Prevention requires utilizing red lines. Whenever the enemy's capabilities cross these lines, this will prompt operations to erode them and bring them back down to an acceptable level. The red lines cannot be set only according to rises in the adversary's capabilities, but rather considering the balance between the offensive and defensive capabilities

of both sides, in each fighting domain and regarding each kind of threat. When the moment of truth arrives, any military and political leadership would find it difficult to make decisions about an offensive action because of the expected prices as well as the chances for failure. In addition, there will be a practical dilemma regarding when the last chance would be to make the decision – not too early, but not too late either (Amidror, 2023). This is a possible weakness in implementing prevention, however, we are taking it as a matter of fact the reality of historic decision-making crossroads will force leadership to make difficult choices when looking at the big picture.

In practice, over the years Israel has taken actions and implemented strategies that have utilized prevention. Prominent examples in the distant past include the Sinai war (Tal, 1998, pp. 132-135), and the "Begin Doctrine" – meant to prevent Israel's enemies in the Middle East from becoming nuclear powers, was implemented in Iraq, Syria, and in a different manner (because of the different capabilities) in Iran (Matania and Bachrach, 2023). Over the last two decades, Israel has employed prevention in Judea and Samaria following the Second Intifada; in Syria as part of the effort to prevent Iranian entrenchment (Inbar and Shamir, 2013; Shamir, 2017); in Lebanon during operation "Northern Shield" (2018-2019) intended to destroy Hezbollah's cross-border tunnels; and in Gaza following October 7th. Even so, the implementation of this approach in recent decades has been reactive, and often rose from a sense of lack of choice (in both Gaza and Judea and Samaria); or was preplanned but only utilized in a comfortable arena (in Syria, where the Assad regime is apprehensive of engaging with Israel, and the Iranian axis' forces are limited by their need to avoid creating a rift with the Assad regime; and in Lebanon where the operation to destroy the tunnels was conducted inside Israeli territory). What we propose is that prevention should be utilized while seizing the initiative in every arena where unacceptable threats are present or are emerging – even if the price is significant.

Officially, prevention has ostensibly been integrated into the IDF's strategy in recent years as the "Prevention and Influence" approach, according to which "military force will be employed in a variety of manners to shape enemies' decision-making factors, alongside the
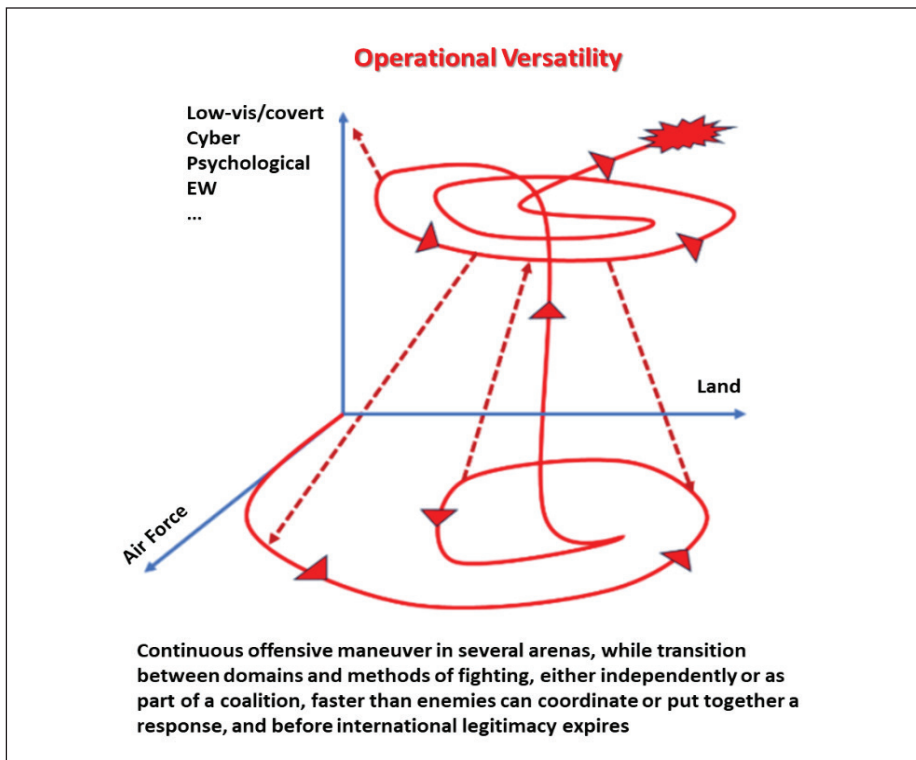
factors affecting relevant areas, or to prevent the adversary from acting, and denying its capabilities. As part of this, cooperative frameworks and enabling efforts – such as the cyber, cognitive and other efforts – must be strengthened" (The IDF's Strategy, 2018, pp. 18-19). The IDF's strategy treats prevention as part of the Campaign Between the Wars (CBW herein for the purpose of this article), which is conducted in a "planned, offensive manner, **under the threshold of war**" (Ibid., p. 19, emphasis ours). The prevention approach we offer is different from the Campaign Between the Wars. The goal of CBW to remain under the threshold of war necessarily limits the methods that can be utilized, their intensity and frequency, as well as the kinds of targets that can be marked out. As such, the CBW aims to delay, reduce, or postpone threats, but does not prevent them, while eating away deterrence, bringing about unstable periods of calm, and hindering readiness for war (Laish, 2019; Ortal, 2021; Siman Tov and Sternberg, 2022; Shelah and Valensi, 2023). Risk management methodology in the CBW gives preference to avoiding escalation over degrading enemy capabilities. In contrast, the prevention approach we are proposing has much more ambitious goals, employs a broader range of means and methods, as well as bolder risk-management patterns. This approach is first and foremost committed to reducing threats to below a designated red line, even should this risk an overt military confrontation.

We join Matania and Bachrach's (2023) proposal to integrate prevention as an additional, fifth, "pillar" of Israel's national security conception, which we see as crucial considering the current strategic reality. We ask to contribute to developing this element, both practically and theoretically, by discussing possible ways to implement it. In this capacity, we suggest utilizing operational versatility as a general method to implement prevention. This is a stratagem-based approach hinging on constant movement and utilizing various combat methods in different domains, geographic arenas, and levels of concealment (overt/covert).

Varied force employment will create redundancy, because it will enable striking the enemy even when certain capabilities become unavailable and may help "pair weapon to target" thus aiming at the adversary's weaknesses to achieve a multi-systemic strike. Constant variability between different methods of operation will also help

implement the principles of surprise, continuity, and offensiveness in order to occupy the enemy with security and defense, increase uncertainty, and reduce the risk of forces of habit and eroding the effectiveness of certain weapons. Furthermore, changing from one type of operation to another should aid in reducing political pressure and mitigating damage to Israel's legitimacy – each method utilized by Israel being temporary would reduce the international community's tendency to feel that it needs to impose restrictions and limit Israels activity, especially with higher use of weapons under the threshold of an intensive, overt, military engagement.

Operational Versatility

Continuous offensive maneuver in several arenas, while transition between domains and methods of fighting, either independently or as part of a coalition, faster than enemies can coordinate or put together a response, and before international legitimacy expires

The war that Israel impressed on Hamas on October 7th may, so long as it develops as such, be an example of operational versatility. After the intense maneuver stage had peaked for multiple reasons to do with the limitations of the military force, Israel is gradually transitioning to a different mode of force employment in the Gaza Strip – "mowing the grass", which consists of raids and thwarting operations (Gat, 2024). At

the same time, Israel is increasing its activities against Hamas operatives and infrastructure in Judea and Samaria, as well as acting to eliminate the organization's operators beyond the limits of these areas. In addition, it would be appropriate for Israel to conduct increasingly heavy efforts in economic, political, and legal warfare against Hamas, to delegitimize the organization and its infrastructure worldwide. All the while, Israel is also eliminating Hamas operatives, and conducting cyber and influence operations (at least as reported by foreign media) outside of the Gaza Strip. Together, all of these make a good foundation for a coherent, long-term campaign utilizing rapid transitions between different combat methods and fighting domains as needed to prevent a situation where outside restrictions force Israel to a stop. This also enables preserving continuity of offensive operations in different domains employing different methods – thus giving the initiative back to Israel.

Utilizing operational versatility, denying capabilities from Iran's religious terror armies may also give cumulative benefits in the form of disrupting their ability to act in synchrony as part of a coordinated, multi-dimensional campaign. In this way, Israel will reduce the dangerous potential in arenas coinciding.

Capability denial in close and distant arenas

Another reason capability denial is relevant, is how suited this approach is to Israel's operational capabilities and the structure of its defense and intelligence forces. Indeed, the war of October 7th created (or exposed) a dangerous security reality for Israel – in some ways, even situating Israel in a position of military inferiority, at least regarding everything to do with independently dealing with the complete spectrum of threats posed to it. However, at a fundamental level, the IDF has significant maneuver and fire capabilities in nearby arenas, and the Israeli defense apparatus has significant operational intelligence, air, and spec-ops capabilities in more distant arenas. As we understand it, various strategies should be derived based on these capabilities, along with force design processes that could restore Israel's ability to realign the balance of military power, and remove the strategic threats posed by the Iranian axis.

In the first circle ("the ring states") – enemy capabilities should be degraded utilizing a "mowing the grass" strategy. This continuous

operation of Israel's security forces led by the IDF should be aimed at damaging enemy capabilities. Its aim is not (at least overtly) attaining political goals, but rather preventing the adversary from developing capabilities that would pose a severe threat to the State of Israel and its citizens. However, this strategy might not suffice in cases when the threat has already emerged. In such cases, the appropriate approach is striving for decisive victory utilizing an intensive campaign from a rationale of counterattack or preemption war. The war, intense and condensed, will lead to a sharp, rapid decline in the enemy's capabilities, and will create the freedom of operation required to begin mowing the grass (Golan and Perl Finkel, 2021; Siboni and Bazak, 2021).

Different applications of this approach can be seen in several nearby arenas. In Judea and Samaria – the outbreak of the Second Intifada and the severe wave of terror raised the threat to a threshold that made operation "Defensive Shield" necessary as a counterattack. In the years following operation "Defensive Shield", and in practice up to today, "mowing the grass" was necessary to reduce terror in Judea and Samaria down to acceptable levels. This activity included mostly operations to eliminate or apprehend terrorists, but also efforts to close NGOs utilized by terror organizations, financial efforts, preventing smuggling into Judea and Samaria, and more. October 7th led to a continued Israeli counterattack in Gaza, which is slowly reducing in intensity and turning into a "mowing the grass" operations, which will likely continue for many years as well. In Syria, Israel recognized early on Iran's entrenchment as a potentially unacceptable threat, while exploiting its freedom of operation in this arena to continuously employ a "mowing the grass" strategy against whatever Iranian axis target it detects in the area. At the same time, Israel also operates against the Syrian regime according to the traditional security approach, from a rationale of deterrence. In Lebanon, Hezbollah has capabilities at a scale and quality that pose an unacceptable threat. Following the lessons of October 7th and considering the ideology of the religious terror armies as we understand it (such an organization will never abandon its struggle against Israel), the prevention approach we offer calls for a preemptive war against Hezbollah (even if not necessarily immediately). This war should aim to deal a severe blow

to Hezbollah's capabilities, followed by continued efforts to further damage and degrade them.

It can be concluded that prevention sheds new light on the pillar of decisive victory, which can now not only be implemented in one stand-alone war, but as the climax of a series of actions against the enemy. Moreover, decisive victory becomes one element, not always necessary, of the whole concept. At the same time, prevention also increases the probability of intensive conflict, as a possible escalation of actions meant to deny capabilities.

The IDF's land capabilities are less relevant to threats posed in more distant arenas – the terror armies in Iraq and Yemen. The intelligence community, special forces and the IAF should take primacy in combating these threats. A continuous Israeli campaign against them must include a variety of coordinated covert and clandestine operations, including in cyberspace, as well as information warfare and influence operations. However, this must happen alongside "kinetic" operations such as eliminations and damaging means and infrastructure.

Nonetheless, distance limits Israel's political and military freedom of operation, which necessitates adding another element to independent operational versatility – alliances. While the Iranian axis poses a coalition threat, Israel routinely combats it mostly on its own, only occasionally utilizing partial cooperations with like-minded states in the region and in the international community – which hold far more potential. The Abraham Accords cracked Israel's isolation from the rest of the Middle East. This enables building a new defensive wall made up of a coalition of states with a mutual interest in combating the Iranian enemy, and strategic partnership with the USA (Haiminis, 2023). The regional alliance, with Western-American backing, will grant Israel many advantages in aspects of deterrence, prevention, and defense. In dealing with distant threats, the need for alliances and coalitions is a must, not simply nice to have. Israel should be a central and active actor in these alliances, and even must have them to create sufficient defense when considering all the defensive components required. The complex diplomatic challenge that has emerged following October 7th makes it necessary for Israel to examine the ways to utilize regional alliances and coalitions, as well as what restrictions and obligations these partnerships lay upon it.

Implementing Israeli means to deny capabilities from axis forces, combined with a coalition approach using regional and international alliances, will enable Israel to deepen the blows dealt to the Iranian axis – from harming one member at a time to damaging the axis as a whole. The anti-coalition campaign vis-à-vis the Iranian axis and its terror armies, while also striking Iran itself – cannot only consist of physical harm meant to erode capabilities but must also include an intelligence analysis of each of the adversaries' weaknesses sensitivities and pain points, the relationships between them and the coalition as a whole. This "pain map" (Chorev, 2015, pp. 39-41) will help guide the campaign in creating wedges between the members of the Iranian coalition and weakening the ties between them. For example, disrupting lines of communication for funds, know-how and weaponry; creating indirect pressure on coalition members by making their allies pay the price for their actions; deepening potential tensions, such as religious schisms (Shia/Sunni), etc. In this case too, implementing this approach requires Israel to act in conjunction and cooperation with its allies in the region – both as a physical bridge for operating in distant arenas, as well as a cultural bridge to understanding the "other" and analyzing the opposite side's rationale so that "soft" means can be effectively employed.

In practice, there are several fields in which multilateral cooperation has already begun. This cooperation has proven itself during the current war – for instance, the regional air defense alliance under American auspices, which allows Israel and other states to share sensor information and aerial interception systems. Another prominent example is the international coalition led by the USA to combat the Houthi threat. The air defense alliance and the naval coalition have aided with intercepting aerial threats and securing maritime freedom of movement. The potential of other defense alliances can be similarly considered – expanding the air defense cooperation beyond sensors to interception, expanding the naval coalition to also deal with Iranian threats in Hormuz and the Arabian Gulf, creating an intelligence alliance, as well as joint operational planning against Iran and its proxies as part of prevention (from influence campaigns to financial efforts as well as clandestine and kinetic operations).

Ramifications on preparedness and force design

Our proposal in this article also includes a call to augment the security concept with a new element – prevention and capability denial – as another pillar of Israel's security. This new idea should be applied utilizing operational versatility, which itself should be implemented through two strategies: firstly, by IDF operations in the first circle ("the ring states"), and secondly in more distant arenas. In light of the changes derived from this approach, it is important to elucidate the changes required in both the IDF's force design as well as the defense and security establishment as a whole:

- **Endurance for a long, intensive war**: Traditionally, Israel's security doctrine calls for wars to be kept as short as possible – an idea that has permeated Israel's strategic thought in recent years (Shelah, 2015, pp. 97-100; The IDF' Strategy, 2018; Kohavi, 2020). Even so, history shows that the length of Israel's wars and large-scale operations is only increasing. The war following October 7th only illustrates this more prominently than in the past. This demonstrates the need to develop the military's endurance for long wars, including in OB, platforms, and systems, as well as armaments and interceptors (Finkel, 2024). The prevention approach makes this need even more imperative, both because of the possible need to engage in a preventive war (concretely – with Hezbollah), and because actions meant to deny capabilities may lead to escalation and full-on military engagements (Ibid; Ortal, 2024). Additionally, improving the IDF's endurance for long wars will aid in implementing prevention, as it will reduce concerns of escalation and in turn have a positive effect on risk-management (Ortal 2021).

- **Coordinated force employment command and control**: Implementing operational versatility, especially in more distant arenas, requires high integration of force employment between all organizations and actors in Israel's security establishment. This integration has already began forming and improved greatly during the Campaign Between the Wars, but the need for continuity in force employment, as well as rapid transition between different modes of operation – each led by a different organization – as well as bolder risk management, all require a much higher level of coordination and synchronization.

- **A strategy of coalitions and alliances**: For Israel to operate continuously and effectively in distant arenas, it must rely on the USA and close cooperation with allies in the region. These are necessary both for Israel's diplomatic and military freedom of operation, as well as for reinforcing Israel's actions as part of a broader campaign – involving other actors employing force. Such a strategy has its prices and restrictions, which include considering the political, economic, and military interests of coalition members in addition to Israel's.

- **Developing "renewable" offensive and defensive armaments without range limits**: In addition to the need for endurance and mass acquisition of armaments, R&D and acquisition efforts must focus on "renewable" capabilities such as energy weapons, as well as offensive capabilities that are not limited by distance (e.g., in cyberspace).

- **Strengthening production and supply lines**: The need to carefully utilize armaments during the current war is a direct result of being unprepared for a long war, alongside the effects of the "naval blockade" maintained by the Houthis in Bab al-Mandeb. This highlights the need to improve the independent production capabilities of the local security industry. The response to the threat must include on-shoring and near-shoring strategies, i.e., expanding local industries, diversifying suppliers (and choosing more local ones), as well as improving regional and international cooperation with friendly states.

Conclusion

The network of religious terror armies Iran has built over the past decades – whether by "adopting" existing organizations or creating them – has become a strategic threat for Israel. This threat is eroding Israel's qualitative and quantitative military edge and affects Israel's difficulties in attaining its military and political goals using the current national security doctrine. The severity of the threat has become tragically clear following the October 7th war. So long as current trends continue, the threat will only grow over the next few years as a result of Iran's commitment to improving the scale and quality of arms held by these armies. As such, we think it a must to integrate strategic prevention as part of the solution – an approach which advocates seizing the initiative, and acting thoroughly and consistently to deny the enemy from holding

capabilities which make it an unacceptable threat. This approach is different from the CBW, as it is committed to removing the threat, and not necessarily remaining under the threshold of war.

- Capabilities should be denied utilizing operational versatility – a stratagem-based approach centered around constantly transitioning between different methods, domains, and arenas of fighting in order to prevent the enemy network from synchronizing and coordinating against Israel, as well as reduce international limitations on Israel's freedom of operation. In nearby arenas, this is embodied in a strategy of "mowing the grass", and if needed, by a preventive war. In more distant arenas, this approach will be led by the IAF, spec-ops, and intelligence community, and will include both Israeli and coalition-based actions.

- Prevention and operational versatility are connected to existing components of the national security doctrine. When dealing with terror armies (contrary to state-level threats, including Iran), they should remove or at least reduce dependence on deterrence and early warning, which prove time and again to be problematic. In relation to prevention, early warning will focus on identifying capabilities which could develop into strategic threats. The need to implement prevention will be derived from the balance between Israel's defense capabilities and the threats. How successful prevention operations are will be calculated according to the remaining threat in relation to Israel's ability to defend against it. Prevention also has a complex relationship with the principle of decisive victory – successful implementation of prevention will help avoid needing to engage in a decisive confrontation, however, prevention may also require preemptive wars.

- The approach detailed in this article also poses a difficult challenge to political and military leadership. Prevention requires making decisions about offensive actions when red lines are crossed while considering the price of such actions and the factors affecting their success. This type of decision-making is proactive and different from risk-averse decision-making. Moreover, this approach relies on national resilience and the political leadership's willingness to build it in order to gather the public support required for a conflict that could

be seen as a war of choice.

- Force-design must also be adjusted: endurance for long wars must be build, including by strengthening independent production and supply lines; integrated force-employment C2 between the various actors employing force in Israel's security establishment (the Campaign Between the Wars has already laid the foundations for this); and a coalition-based strategy, which requires deep cooperation with both Western and Arab states, while understanding the need to take their interests into account.

- The prevention approach and its implementation must be further developed in relation to Israel's national security doctrine, and specifically against Iran's religious terror armies. It is especially important to do so considering the severity of the threats posed to Israel, as well as the risks and challenges in taking such an approach. However, it is also important to further develop these concepts because of the must in integrating it into Israel's response to threats, as well as the relative paucity of literature on the subject.

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A Light at the End of the Tunnel: Toward a Civil Affairs Campaign

Maj. (Res.) Yotam Hacohen[1]

Dismantling Hamas' rule in the Gaza Strip is one of the main goals set by Israel in the war. However, months into the war, Israel is still struggling to stabilize a reality in which Hamas' future recovery as a factor with civilian control is prevented. Defeating Hamas as a popular movement requires a prolonged lead of a civil campaign – an integrated operation of military and civilian efforts to achieve the war's objectives. This requires taking control of the central dimensions of life out of the rule of Hamas' militants—by actively taking the distribution of aid out of their hands, and by encouraging economic activity and managing the reconstruction and spatial design, in a way that will prevent Hamas from recovering. Only in this way will it be possible to chart a different future for Israel-Gaza relations based on the achievements of the current conflict.

Prolog

Gaza's Via Maris road, days after the dramatic looting of trucks carrying humanitarian aid during which dozens of Gazans were killed. The road is white with spilled flour, and sacks are strewn all along the way – likely to have fallen from the trucks as they sped away, fleeing the mob. Dozens of civilians wanting to head south are waiting at the checkpoint. They say that the *Shabab* (young men) have taken all the food and are selling it at prices so high they cannot afford them. They

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want to go south because they heard that they could find humanitarian aid. Communication between the military and the civilians is through speakers, from a distance. It is hard to understand who is speaking on the Israeli side. At some point, dozens of young men come running up, waving their arms to indicate they want to gather the flour sacks that fell into the checkpoint. As they pick up the sacks and start moving back north, two of the men start fighting over one bag of flour. One of them pulls out a knife. At that moment, hundreds of pairs of eyes are looking at them. A quick decision by a junior officer helps defuse the situation, pushing them both back without using weapons or the two civilians hurting each other. The soldiers look shocked by this incident, and it feels like nobody from the IDF wants to be in this situation. The commanders at the checkpoint, among them senior commanders who happened to be there, do not see this event as having anything to do with the goals of the war.

Introduction

Over almost a year, the IDF has been at war, with one of its main goals being dismantling Hamas' military and sovereign capabilities in the Gaza Strip. The complex ground maneuver in an urban environment has attained significant successes – bisecting the Strip, eliminating senior terrorists, and dealing severe damage to Hamas' rocketry, military units and civil-sovereign capabilities.

From its inception, the IDF has been fighting in civilian environments. The fight for Jewish sovereignty over Israel is firstly one between the Jewish and Arab populations, more than between states and organizations. Even so, discourse around fighting in a civilian environment is considered a discourse of the past few decades with the pivotal point being the First Lebanon War when civil aspects were brought to the fore. Since then, they have become increasingly important considering the challenges of routine security and the clashes between Israel and the Palestinians. Even though warfare in a civilian environment has been exhaustively discussed both in Israel and worldwide it seems that the current war in Gaza has revealed the gaps in the IDF's strategy and capabilities. To attain the goals of the war, relevant solutions in this field must be implemented.

Residents of the city of Gaza queued for security checks to proceed south along the coastal route (Photo by: Yotam Hacohen)

.In recent decades, the extensive involvement of Western militaries in civilian contexts has driven the development of diverse frameworks and concepts aimed at achieving the correct integration of the civil and military civil-military efforts. For the purposes of this article, which is specifically focused on the Gaza conflict, I have opted to employ the term "civil campaign". Although somewhat broad, this concept has been in use internally and effectively encapsulates the specific set of civil-military operations that Israel would need to conduct in Gaza to secure its long-term objectives. As such, it is used as a strategic concept and not just an operational one. The civil campaign is the integrated employment of various capabilities (military and civilian) to create a long-term desired change in civilian life in a manner supporting national interests. The need to discuss civilian affairs and not just combat in a civilian environment (which most current discourse focuses on), is tied to the very nature of the challenge Israel faces in Gaza. Israel does not intend only to damage Hamas' military capabilities which are hidden within a civilian environment, but also to prevent Hamas from returning and once again entrenching itself. Hamas, as an Islamic

movement originating with the Muslim Brotherhood praxis, sees Islam as all-encompassing – a solution to all of life's problems. As such, its main powerbase is the population, chiefly the Gazans, but also the Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria, as well as throughout the world – albeit in a different manner. To undermine Hamas' power, the relationship between the terror organization and the civilian population must be understood, and calculated actions taken to dissipate Hamas' influence and control. Unlike the previous rounds of conflict in Gaza, Israel is not only interested in destroying Hamas' military capabilities, but also gutting out its political power.

Hamas' multifarious, dynamic nature, and its symbiotic relationship with the civilian population, makes it necessary to also act against it in the civilian dimension. Despite its main state-level governing components being dismantled, it appears that the terror organization has quickly adapted itself to the changing reality and is adopting new methods as new conditions emerge. The discussion in this article will focus on defeating Hamas in the war by bringing it to a point from which it will find it difficult to recover and rebuild its political power – which was the foundation that enabled Hamas to create the military threat it posed before October 7th. To reach this point, based on the assumption that Hamas' center of gravity is its ties with the civilian population, various tools, and other means to affect civilian affairs must be developed. All together these capabilities can be considered a civil campaign.

A fundamental question is how Israel despite its vast experience in fighting within civilian environments, end up in a war with all its civil-affairs capabilities so severely limited. I will argue that employing these means in a large-scale, targeted manner, is critical to creating the turning-point needed to decisively defeat Hamas as a holistic governing system.

Despite the urgency of civil affairs in Gaza, this issue is not limited just to the Gaza Strip. Israel's rivals, chief among them Iran, have been acting for decades to turn fertile civilian platforms throughout the Middle East into strategic assets that can be utilized in the conflict with Israel. As a non-Arab and non-Islamic actor and given the basic hostility towards Israel in the region, Israeli position is limited and

complex in these matters. The choice of a strategy that is inherently a stand-off is reasonable under these circumstances, but its costs are too high. Success of the civil campaign in Gaza could pave the way for strategic learning that will enable dramatic strategic maneuvers also far from Israel's borders.

The Problem: Hamas as an antifragile system

As defined by Nassim Taleb, the antifragile concept describes systems that get stronger when undergoing changes and being exposed to stress. Antifragile organizations or structures can experience fluctuations which strengthen them, enabling them to develop new capabilities, and even improve their ability to deal with extremes.

Almost a year into the most difficult war in Hamas' history, it is difficult to not describe Hamas as a system which displays significant antifragility. Hamas is continuing to manage civilian and military reality in Gaza, even with most of its military capabilities dismantled, the severe blows dealt to most of its symbols of power and governance institutions, the collapse of local authorities in most of the Gaza Strip – and the massive destruction. Whenever the IDF withdraws from an area Hamas quickly acts to restore its governance there. The very fact that Hamas has survived until now strengthens its positioning and legitimacy in Palestinian society. As such, we should first examine the components which make Hamas an antifragile system.

Hamas has six main identity components, or central functions. The ability to shift between them is a core part of its survivability. The first three elements make up its name: Harakat (Movement) al-Muqawama (Resistance) al-Islamiya (Islamic) – Islamic Resistance Movement. The three other components are its Palestinian identity, sovereignty aspects, and its membership in the Iranian axis – which is the newest and least-ingrained part of them all. This way of breaking down Hamas' identity is not new, however, the ongoing war sheds new light on the tensions and effects the components have on each other, as well as the way that Hamas manages them.

- Movement – the "movement" component is Hamas' deep ties to the population. Hamas was born in Gaza's refugee camps as an ideological, religious movement that took care of civilians – and chief among

them those in the camps.[2] Hamas' identity as a movement did not disappear after it became the sovereign power in Gaza.[3] This element is preserved in Hamas' Da'wah efforts, through systematic preaching and efforts to attract followers, as well as social welfare to help with the populations needs.

- Resistance – armed resistance, through terror,[4] is at the core of Hamas' identity. This component can be seen mostly in the terror organization's military wing. Resistance ("muqawama") was defined by Hamas in the organization's charter (Hamas, 2017, statement 25) as a strategic choice to preserve unchangeable foundational principles and restoring rights of the Palestinian people.

- Islam – Hamas was first founded as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, incorporating much of the movements religious and ideological doctrine. In this way, despite the Palestinian focus of the terror organization, Hamas sees its actions as part of a broader effort to reach pan-Islamic salvation. Hamas defined the struggle to free Palestine as a Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic duty – in this order (Ibid.). The Islamist component is also exemplified in Hamas – deep ties to other pro-Islamic actors in the region, such as Qatar, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (e.g., during Morsi – s time in power), and the Islamist regime in Türkiye.

- Sovereignty – Hamas – vision is a reality in which Israel no longer exists as a sovereign entity, and in its place the rule of Islam and its laws reigns over the area from the river to the sea. Since the disengagement from Gaza, and especially since Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, Hamas – identity as a sovereign power has become very central, along with the obligations that come with it – as a stage toward applying sovereignty to all of Israel. Other elements that can be seen as part of this are internal aspects such as civil governance and international

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[2]   In his book, "The Second Urban Revolution" (p. 337), Juval Portugali claimed that the refugee camps were in fact a result of the rapid urbanization of a mostly rural Palestinian populace. As such, the formation of ideological movements in the area must also be examined through an urbanization lens.

[3]   For comparison refer to the process by which the Workers Party of the Land of Israel (Mapai) which ceased functioning as a movement and became a political party after the founding of the State of Israel.

[4]   In Hamas' eyes its resistance is not terrorist activity, but rather instilling fear in the enemy's heart, a religious commandment in the Quran (8:60).

facets of Hamas – continued efforts to consolidate its legitimacy as the sovereign in the Gaza Strip – vis-à-vis Israel, states in the region, and the international community.

- Palestinian identity – its Palestinian identity is a seemingly obvious part of Hamas' identity. However, it must be mentioned to highlight the tension between it and the pan-Islamic aspects of its character. Its Palestinian identity makes Hamas a local organization, contrary to Global Jihad actors who have risen to prominence in recent years, even those who had sovereign ambitions.[5]
- Axis – in recent years, Iran's support of Hamas and the presence of Hamas leadership abroad in Lebanon, has deepened the ties between Hamas and other axis elements despite Hamas' Sunni beliefs.

The organization's various identities have always been at odds with each other, while some have always been strengthened at the expense of others. During the first years of Mujama al-Islamiya, the organization which would become Hamas, the movement and Islamist aspects of the organization were stronger than the resistance elements. Between the First Intifada and the disengagement, the latter took center stage. Hamas' sovereignty project after 2007 seemed to be its central focus, so central that we in Israel thought that the resistance aspects had been significantly reduced or diverted to other arenas, with Hamas' sovereign identity more prominent in Gaza and the resistance elements more active in Judea and Samaria.

These tensions have often been described as one of Hamas' weaknesses, and that, using a clever strategy, Israel could try to exacerbate them, even leading Hamas to abandon some aspects of its identity. During the current war, however, we can see that Hamas can shift between its different identities in a manner that makes it difficult to defeat the terror organization as a system. At the heart of Israel's challenge in decisively defeating Hamas is the organization's ability to give up on some of its functions, at least temporarily. For instance, when Hamas' governance center in Gaza City was dismantled early in the war, Hamas slipped out to the south of the Gaza Strip while minimizing its identity as a sovereign power, temporarily, and strengthening resistance and movement elements.

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[5] Hamas' charter (August 1988) defines patriotism ("watania") as an inscrutable part of religious belief ("aqidah").

The transition between different identities is made possible by the set of expectations that Hamas has established among the residents of Gaza, or in practice, the lack thereof: the asymmetry between Hamas and Israel is so significant that the Gazan public does not expect Hamas to be able to prevent the Gaza Strip from being taken over, or Hamas to be able to keep its government fully functional during the war.

To understand how surprising this functionality is for those who see sovereignty from a Western post-Westphalian[6] perspective, imagine a reality where the Allies conquer Nazi Germany during the war, Hitler disappears, the German army is destroyed but Nazi Germany does not surrender. Germany's rapid collapse is a result of the German conception of a state at the time, and in turn Hamas' transformation abilities are rooted in local political imagination. This surprising reality must be explained using a few important characteristics of Hamas and the Islamic Resistance as a whole:

1. Hamas' decentralized structure – Hamas was born on the run. Over the years, the organization grew, becoming a decentralized system with every local branch being able to operate independently of other components. The local *Shura* council in every neighborhood does not depend on the municipal or Strip-level Hamas authorities to function. When the higher levels of the pyramid collapse – the lower ones continue to function. The ability to operate even in extreme conditions restores Hamas – governing legitimacy, which is suffering under the current crisis. Moreover, Hamas – decentralized system allows spatial separation between the management and executive branches so that senior leadership can be located outside of the area of fighting (for instance, in Gaza – when there is fighting in Judea and Samaria; or in Qatar, Türkiye, and Lebanon while there is active combat in Gaza).

2. Evasion as a religious obligation – Evading Israel, whether it is Hamas' senior leaders hiding from assassination, or the effort to preserve civilian and military apparatuses even at the price of not employing them, is considered a religious obligation. This

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6   The peace of Westphalia at the close of the 30-year war is considered by many to be the origin of modern sovereignty and the connection between the national identity of a population, territory, and government.

approach allows Hamas to disappear for extended periods of time, without suffering public ire for it. Simply surviving is seen as an achievement.[7]

3. Jihad as a personal duty – Hamas has fully adopted the approach to Jihad as personal duty.[8] This allows Hamas' military system to dissolve without combat ending. The fact that Jihad, the armed struggle to free Palestine, is a personal duty is anchored in Hamas' charter (article 15): "The day that enemies usurp part of Muslim land, Jihad becomes the individual duty of every Muslim."

4. Partial and tiered sovereignty – Examining 16 years of Hamas control reveals Hamas' idea of its responsibility as a sovereign. Hamas operates in an area with multiple actors holding partial sovereign powers and providing certain services to the population (remaining PA elements in Gaza, NGOs – especially UNRWA, foreign states and even Israeli services). Hamas strives to maintain its power over them but does not dismantle them so long as their activity serves its interests. The terror organization will endeavor to convert them to its cause; however, it does not need to integrate them into its system. For now. Hamas' responsibility to the public it controls and its relationship with the other actors do not make up comprehensive responsibility or rights/duties but is instead dependent on available functions and the conditions at a specific point in time. This approach emphasizes

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[7] There is an active theological debate within Islamic theology regarding withdrawing or fleeing from the battlefield, which is a sin, and evasion as a strategy meant to enable catching the enemy unprepared. The main source for this is the Al-Anfal ("The Bounties") Surah of the Quran, which is about Jihad. In verses 15-16 it is written that it is forbidden for Muslim warriors to flee during war. However, it is allowed (8:16) if the withdrawal is tactical, and conducted as a stratagem, and forces can turn back around to return to the fight. The tactical retreat is a scheme ("khidae") meant to reestablish conditions that allow conducting another assault. It is often called "alkar walfar" – "retreat to return and fight". This practice is described in the prophet's biography and in Muslim thought as a worthy action. Popular commentary for the Al-Anfal Surah can be found here: https://quran.com/en/al-anfal/16/tafsirs

[8] This approach is attributed to Abdullah Azam, a Palestinian Sheikh who lived in Afghanistan and one of the minds behind Al-Qaeda's thought. Azam is considered a spiritual guide of Hamas as a Muslim Brotherhood organization, even above his status as a teacher for world Jihad elements, including Bin-Laden (Maliach, 2010).

output and resources invested, not results (we did what we could). This frees the organization from responsibility and allows it to manage its relationships with other factors according to its needs.[9]

Together, these components make up the full picture: Hamas freely moves along its continuum of identities and functions. When one element is dealt a blow, or when adhering to it endangers the survival of the whole – it retreats from it temporarily, without feeling like it suffered a loss, thus allowing it to operate under new conditions.

If one projects this picture on the situation in the field – Israel attacked Hamas' sovereign governing and military components, as if it were a Western state. Under the Israeli assault, Hamas shed most of its signs of governance, reorganizing its fighting units into local guerilla cells. Despite this, it maintains control over two main centers of gravity – distribution of humanitarian aid and leading representation in negotiations. It seems that Israel has, temporarily, achieved its goals in the Gaza Strip (dismantling Hamas as a governing system and military force as it was before the war), however, Hamas has preserved its integral capabilities, and is waiting for the moment Israel ceases operating continuously. As soon as it arrives, Hamas will return and rebuild its sovereign system and military structure. The widespread destruction may even be a chance for Hamas to strengthen its grip by manipulating restoration efforts. To prevent this reconstitution, Hamas' movement characteristic must be challenged – meaning, the mechanisms that tie Hamas' ideology and organizational elements to the population in Gaza must be disrupted. The only way to head in this direction is utilizing the civil campaign.

Contrary to Israel's approach, which sees dismantling the enemy's military capabilities a worthy goal, even if it is not the only goal of the war – Hamas' concept of victory is long-term and recognizes that immediate challenges are an unavoidable step on the road to victory. Victory for Hamas is based on its interpretation of Islam, the Quran and

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[9]   The principle of balance lies at Hamas' foundation as a n organization adhering to Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi's al-Wasatiyah form of Islam. At its core is balancing between costs and benefits. Al-Wasatiyah is Hamas' pragmatism in the framework of the Sharia, the divine way.

traditions vocalized by the prophet Muhammad. Defeating this structure requires creating a plan for intermediate- and long-term change that will turn this situation on its head.

Civil affairs in Israeli military thought

The main challenge in describing the civil aspects of Israel's security conception is defining the limits of the discussion. Where should it begin – with The Shomer (the first Jewish defense organization, founded at 1909) or with the creation of the IDF? Should an attempt be made to outline the evolving concepts as a whole or should one focus on pivotal moments? The sketch detailed here is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to describe a few crucial points by examining the four main periods of military thought and customs regarding this matter.

From communities to nation: From independence to the Six Day War

The first decades after Israel declared its independence are distinguished by the attempt to shift the conflict between the Jewish and Arab populations into a conflict between states. The civil dimension of military activity was embodied in three principal areas:

1. Military administration over Israeli Arabs – the presence of a population considered hostile within Israel's territory led to the establishment of martial law over the Arab population in Israel. This situation persisted until December 1966, during which the military managed civilian life in Arab villages in the Galilee, the Negev, and the Triangle.

2. The Reprisal Operations – Palestinian populations outside of Israeli territory began conducting terror activity aimed at Israeli citizens, partially encouraged by other states. Israel responded mostly by conducting reprisal operations in civilian centers, later aimed at the states of Egypt and Jordan to pressure them to prevent terror activity emanating from their territory.

3. The internal civil aspects of the IDF's operations – in Ben-Gurion's and others' eyes, the IDF had a significant role in nation-building, beyond its security functions.

The final component, the internal aspect, may seem to be beyond

the limits of the discussion, which as a rule is conducted in the civil dimension in hostile states and communities. We see the expansion or reduction of the IDF's role in internal Israeli civil affairs a significant part of the wider paradigmatic framework, and as such it is appropriate to examine how this changed over time. Either way, even though during these years civil affairs were a large part in the IDF's activity, these remained sidelined in comparison to the existential threats posed to Israel by the states around it.

Striving to solving civil issues: From the Six Day War and until the withdrawal to the Security Zone in Lebanon

The heyday of civil affairs in Israeli military thought, which in many ways is still the pivotal period in today's conceptions, began after the Six Day War in 1967 and lasted until the IDF withdrew to the Security Zone in southern Lebanon in 1985. During these years, Israel reorganized the military administration in Judea and Samaria and in the Gaza Strip, relying on local authorities in the Palestinian cities. The "open bridges" policy vis-à-vis Jordan began to be implemented to improve the economy in the area. At the same time, the challenge posed by Palestinian terror groups grew, and Israel had to invest more resources in combating terror, both in Gaza, and Judea and Samaria, as well as on the border with Jordan, and later, in Lebanon. In the Gaza Strip, Israel operated against terror from within the refugee camps and even initiated a plan for the reconstruction of the refugee camps to build up their infrastructure (a project originally led by the CO of the Southern Command, MG Ariel Sharon). Israel also built new roads in the camps, began building the settlements in Judea and Samaria, Gaza, and the Sinai, and initiated various other civilian and engineering projects aimed at reshaping the spatial layout and design of these areas.

In the north, considering the civil war in Lebanon, Israel fostered warm relations with the Christian population in the south as part of what was called the "Good Fence". This situation paved the way for Israel's largest intervention – the First Lebanon War, whose unstated goal was changing the Lebanese regime, defeating the PLO elements in the country, and reducing Syrian influence over Lebanon. The objectives in Lebanon

are a point of contention even today. During the war, Israel instituted martial law over towns and areas it took over, preparing the ground for a new civil-governmental reality in Lebanon. The assassination of Bachir Gemayel, the Sabra and Shatila incident, and pressure both from within Israel and from the international community, caused Israel to withdraw south several times, until it reached the lines of the Security Zone which it held with the South Lebanon Army – without achieving all its strategic objectives.

The first years in Lebanon ("the Lebanese mud") were seen as an ambitious experiment that went far beyond the limits of Israeli power. Israel's partial responsibility for the massacre in Sabra and Shatila, as well as its reliance on the Christian partners who were seen as acting against Israeli interests – led to a deep-seated tendency to avoid being involved in civil affairs in Lebanon. At the same time, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, which had just been founded, identified the torn-apart Lebanon as fertile grounds for its initial attempts to export the Iranian revolution. The Shi'ite population in Lebanon, which had been sidelined and oppressed for many years, began a protracted process of change.

These processes, along with the dramatic force-design which began after the Yom Kippur War, created a massive economic crisis in Israel. This crisis led to the Economic Stabilization Plan of 1985, which completely changed the power balance within Israel's government. The IDF also began to reduce back to maintainable dimensions, and from then on Israel's private and public sectors began to strive to become more efficient, professional, and managed. The IDF did not abandon its foundation as a "people's military" but starting from 1985, the professional elements of the military grew, even at the expense of "popular" components, becoming what was often described as "small and smart". Various processes can be included in this trend, including the dissolution of the National Guard (Hagah), the establishment of the Homefront Command, investments in intelligence and stand-off capabilities and weakening of the reserve army. We see this point – the withdrawal to the Security Zone along with fundamental changes in Israel's government – a key point in the transformation of Israel's security approach to civil affairs.

Turning civil affairs into a political issue: The Security Zone, the Intifada, and the Oslo Accords

Israel's period holding the Security Zone and the challenges faced by Israel during the First Intifada riots (which began in the refugee camps in Gaza) created a decade and a half during which Israel attempted to shape civil affairs in a supposedly more calculated manner – at least in comparison to the past. The main tool used to shape reality was diplomatic negotiations as part of the Peace process. Israel reorganized its relationship with the Palestinians behind post-1967 lines as part of the Oslo accords, which transferred almost all civil responsibility to Palestinian hands, creating several lines which still affect the arena today: The IDF and the military administration withdrew from city centers, with the bypass roads becoming central transportation axes; ties between Israel and the Palestinians were weakened (mostly because of lockdowns following Palestinians waves of terror). At the same time, attempts to create shared mechanisms to keep civil order as part of joint patrols quickly proved ineffectual – perhaps a glimpse of the future.

Israel also attempted to work toward a peace treaty with Syria, which would undoubtedly affect the Lebanese arena. This sentiment was extraordinarily strong, and there was talk of "going out to eat hummus in Damascus". In the background, ties with the South Lebanon Army were tightening, and it initially seemed that the threat of terror organizations in southern Lebanon was contained. Over the years the challenge posed by Shi'ite organizations – first Amal and then Hezbollah, supported by Iran and Syria – became graver, until it finally became unbearable for Israel's population.

A villa in the Jungle: the withdrawal from Lebanon, the disengagement from Gaza, and managing both arenas from a stand-off position

The lack of success in organizing the political situation in the northern arena, and the collapse of the Camp David talks during the summer of 2000, led to a rapid process during which Israel attempted to erect a fence between it and the area. The withdrawal of the IDF from Lebanon led, in turn, to the collapse of the South Lebanon Army. The onset of the Second Intifada turned Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip into

a fighting arena. The Jewish civilian communities became military outposts, with access to them facilitated only by convoys, and waves of terror washed Israel's cities. In response, Israel began to change its position concerning the arena. For the first time, Israel tried to avoid being involved in civilian affairs, while striving to defeat terror by military means. Operation "Defensive Shield" is the culmination of this approach – Israel successfully dismantled hostile forces in PA territory, including those who acted from within the PA itself, without taking any civilian responsibility. In Gaza, Israel began fully disengaging, a process which has not been fully completed. In practice, Israel shut the gates to Lebanon and to Gaza, erected the obstacle in Judea and Samaria, and tried to put the whole civilian challenge behind it.

The trends which began in 1985, chief among them the disengagement from attempting to affect civilian affairs, the rise in the IDF's professionalism and growing avoidance of affairs that are not strictly military – shaped the main project of the last decades: the establishment of smart obstacles between Israel and the civilian populations in the various arenas. The only effort Israel continued to invest resources in to shape reality was the concept of "economic peace". Every now and then, a round of conflict was conducted, which Israel treated as restoring order and deterrence, but did not wish to stick its toes into the mud to profoundly change reality. At the same time Israel developed certain capabilities to influence reality, mostly remotely, utilizing digital mechanisms to shape discourse, but not day-to-day civilian life on the other side. It was under these conditions that Israel's next civil challenge grew.

Israel's growing isolating policy of avoiding shaping civil affairs is the opposite of the trend characterizing its rivals'. Around 2007, Israel unilaterally closed the Security Fence in the Jerusalem area to prevent terror from emanating out of Judea and Samaria. The main civilian effect of this move was pushing Palestinian Israeli citizens in Judea and Samaria back into the city, fearing they would lose their status. Israel, not expecting this, had difficulty discussing this problem. The strain created on local infrastructure, and the lack of Israeli sovereignty in the area create opportunities for the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement and Hamas to reestablish themselves in Eastern Jerusalem.

The Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war that followed it initiated

an internal discourse in Israel around the question of intervening in the changing strategic environment. Despite governance dissolving in Hauran (Southern Syria), right next to Israel, and even with the clear threat of Iran and Hezbollah taking over, Israel chose to not be proactive and conduct strategic processes to shape reality. Field initiative led to small-scale maneuvers as part of operation "Good Neighbor", including the establishment of a field-hospital and transfer of humanitarian aid to civilians in the Syrian Golan. These were not taken in a scale that had the potential to shape reality. Israel chose to refrain from intervening, partly because of past traumas, and did not defend civilians in the Golan when Syria, with Iranian and Russian support, restored its hold over southern Syria. Contrary to Israel – Iran, Syria, and Russia, as well as Türkiye from another angle, recognized in the chaos an opportunity to expand their influence in Syria, while Israel prioritized its ability to continue and act from its preferred stand-off position rather than laying the foundations for long term influence through the support of civil affairs.

Despite Israel withdrawing and dismantling most of its civic capabilities, the trend in the rest of the world is reversed. To deal with the gap between the scale of the goals of "Swords of Iron" war and the extant capabilities, we should look to how militaries throughout the world deal with the civil challenge, before concluding what a civil campaign in Gaza means right now.

Civil affairs in global military thought

The challenge of fighting in a populated environment has been at the heart of military discourse since the 1990s, when the Soviet bloc collapsed, and local fighting arenas took center stage. In the introduction to their influential booklet "Shock and Awe", the authors note that the US Army's first armor division, which was meant to block soviet armor from flooding the plains of Europe, was instead deployed on a peacekeeping mission in Bosnia. They question whether this is the appropriate force for such a mission and call it an OOTW – Operation Other Than War – not truly exposing the idea behind the operation (Ulman and Wade, 1996). The search for appropriate terminology for this type of operation has been going on for many years, and it seems to have not yet been concluded.

Looking back on the roots of military-civil affairs in the West during the modern age would surely lead us to World War II as a watershed in Western thought in this field. On the one hand, the effects the terrors of the war helped shape the foundation for the modern Western concepts of human rights as well as the international laws of war which are based on them. On the other hand, the Allies led a campaign intended to root out ideas and beliefs that had proven murderous – both in Europe and in Asia. The Allies' focus on creating a new order in Europe, especially through Morgenthau's Plan for the denazification of Germany, and Marshal's Plan for restoring Europe – are to this day considered foundational for the change Western Europe underwent after the war. Similarly, the MacArthur Plan led by the General when he was de-facto ruler of Japan after the war, was also intended to create a new civil order in Japan. When the Americans put together their preparations for changing the civil order in Iraq in 2003, Germany and Japan were treated as central steppingstones in shaping their approach (Dobbins, 2003).

In 1998, NATO implemented a new approach to coordinate civil and military actors in the battlespace in Kosovo – known as CIMIC (Civil-military Cooperation) – which was updated and adjusted over time. This approach was often contrasted to the CA (Civil Affairs) approach, which integrates those into a mainly military campaign. It is important to note that the term CA, like the term OOTW, refers to multiple actions without really discussing what they mean.

At the basis of the CIMIC approach is a holistic action to join two central components – supporting civilian population, either directly or via local/international organizations, and supporting military operations, while coordinating and liaising between the two. For this approach to be implemented, Western militaries built notification, coordination, and cooperation mechanisms to connect military forces with local ones utilizing dedicated officers and units (Biton and Elrom, 2021). At the core of this approach is the understanding that CMOs could improve the effectiveness of military operations in attaining the strategic goal of the war – or harm it if it is not given sufficient attention.

Employing CMIC like NATO did in Bosnia is meant to support civilian projects utilizing military forces to assist with future restoration efforts and ease the transfer of power to local leadership when the military

operation to stabilize the area is done (Bergner, 1998). CIMIC refers to a holistic system where civilian and military components are meant to be jointly operated in relying on the "host" state's infrastructure, while CA is mostly intended to separate the local, non-combatant population from enemy forces embedded within it.

In the 2000s, facing the challenge of fighting Islamic terror, the USA turned its efforts to Nation Building, first in Somalia (already in the 1990s), but more so in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those wars were conducted in failed states that had had problems beforehand because of a weak central regime – tribalism, unmodernized economies and the rise of radical Islamic forces. The major civilian effort was during the second stage of the war – after the rapid military takeover of the area – focused on rebuilding state infrastructure in cooperation with international NGOs and local forces. The civil effort was long, expensive, and consisted mainly of economic investments, training personnel and creating a modern administration. However, it failed to deal with the fundamental challenges hindering these states' development. Following his time in Bosnia, the British General Rupert Smith argued in those years that the wars of his time were no longer industrial wars (like the World Wars or even the Cold War), but rather "war amongst the people." This new phenomenon of war characteristics is discerned from those of the industrial-age wars: They tend to be long, weapons and fighting forces are employed completely differently, and they are almost always asymmetric, with one side being a non-state actor. The idea of "war amongst the people" became a common term to describe contemporary wars in the West.

Despite the vast differences in military culture and the nature of combat, the idea of establishing a holistic civil-military operation is prevalent in Russia's operations as part of its hybrid combat doctrine developed in those years. Many actions taken in the Russian periphery can be seen as part of this, including efforts to create a subversive opposition in the Ukrainian periphery (Donbas/Donetsk) along with subversion efforts in the country's heartlands. In our region, we can turn our eyes to Russia's Reconciliation Centers in Syria, which are chiefly meant to serve the war effort. These centers were created during the intensive stage of fighting to gather intelligence and create levers over

the local population by controlling humanitarian activity. The civil aspects of these centers' activity include acting to promote cease-fires and surrenders, providing safe passage from active combat areas to safe zones, and distributing humanitarian aid in combat zones. This activity is frequently published to help enhance Russia's legitimacy both in the local and international dimensions (L. A., 2020).

The focus of this article is significantly more specific and limited in scope compared to the extensive discussions on this topic in military literature and thought over the past several decades. Surprisingly, however, the civilian dimensions of modern warfare are increasingly losing focus in Israel. Israel sees the challenges of fighting in a civilian environment as an issue that is chiefly moral, legal and PR-related, and as such not part of core efforts, and not a matter of strategic goals. Without a clear political directive regarding the population in Judea and Samaria, considering the directive to avoid escalation in Gaza, and based on the rapid decisive-victory approach that the IDF envisioned in the event of a war in Lebanon – Israel, until October 2023, did not need to develop a comprehensive approach to the civilian aspects of the war. COL Biton and LTC Elrom say this clearly in their article from 2021:

"While militaries that implement CIMIC (in whichever form) usually have a clear political goal that includes a regime change or some sort of change in political reality – the IDF is fighting in a different environment, without a military goal that is supposed to bring about a political change or a change in regime… In fact, since 2000, all of Israel's military operations in the Palestinian arena, as well as the Second Lebanon War, were not meant to collapse leadership or change the political situation. These usually only had military goals – removing threats (rockets, tunnels, terror, etc.) and creating military deterrence."

The focus on removing tactical military threats, along with the civil dimension disappearing, has brought Israel to the current situation, where it finds itself on the brink of one of the most fateful wars in its history – without a relevant strategy to deal with civil affairs, and without the structure and capabilities necessary to act. In fact, to attain its goal in the war, Israel must quickly develop capabilities that it has mostly never employed – and those it has were last used in the 1980s.

Toward a civil affairs campaign

The reality described by Biton and Elrom has completely transformed in October 2023. The goals of Israel's war, for the first time since 1982, are related to the foundations of civilian reality in the Gaza Strip: Hamas will not stay in power. However, Israel's tools were built in an age where Israel wanted to avoid involving itself in civil affairs as much as possible, even at the price of leaving its rivals in power. The IDF built itself for a rapid, technological war, striving for as little friction as possible with the population. The established Government Units in the regional commands practically became support units for civil affairs, whose whole purpose was evacuating civilians from combat zones to avoid incidents that could harm legitimacy, as part of a short war. No one even thought that instituting a military administration was a possibility.

Israel's existing civil affair capabilities in the Gaza Strip are meant to operate from a stand-off position – the District Coordination-Liaison Offices (DCLO) purpose is what it says on the tin: not manage civilian life in Gaza but coordinate between local and international actors. This has international functions (fulfilling Israel's legal obligations and preventing a crisis of legitimacy), however, it is not seen as an action with a direct military, or strategic security goal. But, when Hamas ceases to function as a government, and loses its legitimacy, the liaison and coordination approach collapses (one must coordinate with someone). The legitimacy crisis that emerged between January and March of 2024, was not caused only by a lack of food in Gaza, but also because the damage dealt to Hamas made it impossible to distribute food in the northern Gaza Strip. Since Israel privatized its ability to prevent humanitarian crises by giving that responsibility to international NGOs, Israel was at their mercy – or in other words, at the mercy of Hamas' control over the distribution of aid. Hamas discovered it had a massive asset, which enabled it to delegitimize Israel: because it cannot distribute aid, it creates massive disorder that jeopardizes nutrition security in the northern Gaza Strip, which reduces Israel's legitimacy to operate in the rest of the Strip – and puts pressure on it to stop the fighting.

To fulfil the goals of the war for the long-term, Israel must develop capabilities that will pull the rug from under Hamas, and not only temporarily dismantle its government. The rug will be pulled the

moment that Israel starts to engage directly with the population, manage aid distribution, and assumes responsibility for the day after – not as a political move, but as a response to the reality emerging on the ground.

The mechanisms and personnel in the DCLOs, as well as the knowledge accumulated in Judea and Samaria, constitute a very experienced unit – which is expected to be able to succeed, given the right strategic conditions, in building these capabilities. However, like CIMIC in the West, and Russia's hybrid warfare in the East – here too, a civil-military whole is needed. It does not currently exist. The structural separation created in Israel does not allow it to exist: COGAT's place as a hybrid civil-military agency is helpful during routine times, however, it makes holistic command difficult during war. The military commander is required to put together a civil goal and utilize both civil and military means to attain his aims, but today, the civil dimension is almost non-existent and certainly is not treated as a core function in the military.

Over the past few months, the various units engaging the population have developed operational tools that can take responsibility over civil affairs out of Hamas' hands. These tools do not ignore the limitations of Israel's military power and capabilities. Israel is still not interested in having its soldiers in high friction with the Palestinian population, for obvious reasons. It is still not interested in taking comprehensive responsibility over civilians who led and took part in the most murderous assault on Israeli citizens in the state's history – just a few months ago. As such, to conduct a successful civil campaign, Israel must fully leverage several core developments:

1. **The regional agreements** – Despite the widespread destruction in Gaza, regional cooperation has not been destabilized, and has even become tighter in several aspects during the war. Israel's partners see the Muslim Brotherhood variant of Islam as an internal threat and are also interested in Hamas being dismantled. The actions that Israel cannot conduct directly regarding the population can certainly be led by Egypt, the UAE, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. To capitalize on this trend, Israel needs to deepen cooperation and publicly provide an agreed-upon horizon, or at the very least an intermediate road-plan which partners can work with.

2. **Expanding the range of civil administration actions** – Even though civil administration cannot exist without physical presence, and there cannot be presence without friction, friction can be significantly reduced in a variety of ways, without detriment to the quality of the relationship with the civilian population. Israel should develop digital tools, build infrastructure, and employ contractors that are not Israeli (for security missions, aid distribution, and providing direct services) for a variety of needs as well as improve its capability to cooperate with international NGOs in a way that does not serve Hamas' interests.

3. **The great potential of the post-war reconstruction** – One of the reasons Hamas is not concerned about its status in the Gaza Strip is related to its intimate knowledge of the power of reconstruction after wars are over. Hamas, like Hezbollah, proliferated significantly during the reconstruction efforts they led after 2006 and 2014. The reconstruction and rehabilitation process involves rebuilding both the physical and the mental dimensions. Whomever leads the restoration – controls history. The restoration funds will probably start flowing into Gaza when fighting subsides, and Israel must ensure that restoration serves Israeli interests and not Hamas'. To utilize reconstruction efforts to help in attaining the goals of the war, a dedicated strategy and toolbox must be developed along with regional and international partners to prevent Hamas from taking over the temporary housing, restoring neighborhoods, the commercial districts, and public institutions.

4. The power of spatial design – the changes in the physical space of the Gaza Strip are already affecting social dynamics – the new Netzarim Corridor has drawn a line in the Gazan sand that it is difficult to imagine will disappear. The destruction and engineering work as a result of the ground maneuver in the Kisufim area, and near Rafah and Philadelphi route (the border with Egypt) are reshaping the south of the Strip. The area of separation near the border with Israel will change agricultural patterns and the distribution of the population throughout the Gaza Strip as a whole. The scale of the destruction makes it necessary to rebuild – Some of the 1948 refugee camps that served as the most formidable strongholds of Hamas have undergone significant transformations, no longer existing in their original form. All this will shape Gaza and the social dynamics in the Strip for many years to come.

5. Understanding civilian dynamics – the population in Gaza is at a breaking point. Such a situation is fertile ground for both positive and negative dynamics. Without effective civil intervention, Hamas will probably utilize the crisis to exacerbate hatred to Israel and situate itself as the savior – in contrast to Israel, who supposedly created the crisis. Will Gaza devolve into a ravaged region, mirroring the devastation seen in Somalia or will growth dynamics emerge? Will Salafi elements grow, or will elements with more moderate interpretations of Islam emerge? Because Israel has barely engaged with the population directly, we do not really understand these dynamics and potentials. The discussion surrounding an alternative local government, which will not be radical or hostile to Israel, is still a theoretical one. Turning it into a constructive strategic discussion requires quick cycles of trial and error to examine the situation to sense the emerging patterns. More such processes must be initiated and placed at the very core of military and security efforts.

Israel's difficulties in discussing civil aspects of the war relates, among other things, to the dichotomy between military and political efforts – which nowadays surrounds what is called the "day after". Many of the IDF's senior command are of the opinion that civil affairs are not the military's responsibility and instead are part of the political aspects of the war. It seems that the government is having difficulties in directing the military to conduct "civil" actions, despite relatively clear declarations. On the Palestinian side, as of today, there is no non-Hamas element which can be spoken with regarding the future of Gaza. For now, the PA does not have enough power on the ground to take a leading part in the complex situation. As such, if Israel wants to change civil reality, the only possible operator is the military.

The gap detailed above is also related to the IDF's "knowledge of the enemy." To provide a civilian alternative as part of a military operation, a deep understanding of the adversary is required: its cultural, educational, and social aspects, and not only the military-tactical facet.

The commonly used term of "the day after" muddies the water here, blunting Israel's strategic thought. Continuous military activity is required to prevent Hamas's civil infrastructure from recovering – and it has largely evaded harm during the war. This effort will have to

continue for many years, even if less intensely, to prevent Hamas from recovering, and it must be conducted in tandem with civil efforts. At the same time, to deal with legitimacy challenges, Israel must provide aid to the population, and even initiate reconstruction efforts in some parts of the Strip while fighting continues in others. Employing civil-affair capabilities while fighting is ongoing is the only way to destabilize Hamas' centers of gravity and counter its strategy of evasion in a way that will make it easier to dismantle Hamas' military capabilities while offering an alternative to the population.

From a historic standpoint, these elements can all be found in lessons learned from the four periods detailed above. Agreements like those of the 1990s are crucial – Israel cannot do this alone. However, Israel cannot offload this challenge to someone else – this is a challenge that Israel must face as a nation in the coming years, exactly like the first years of independence. The IDF's growing professionalism, especially in counterterrorism is also crucial – we must have a professional military to strike terror while avoiding collateral damage that will make it impossible to provide an alternative to Hamas. And we must go back to some of the pretensions of the 1970s and try to deal with the roots of civil issues, while acknowledging our limits which have also changed over the years. If the refugee camps and the refugee mentality lie at the core of the challenge posed by Hamas, we cannot let UNRWA preserve this mentality forever. As General Sharon and Prime Minister Eshkol understood more than five decades ago, it seems we must change the very foundations of reality.

What can be done?

Governance must be taken out of Hamas' hands as early as possible to prevent the terror organization from recovering using aid and restoration efforts. As such, it is appropriate to highlight three fields where Israel can, and needs, to being developing the civil campaign now:

1. **Diverting humanitarian aid** – Hamas must be denied use and control over aid by setting up distribution points at the outskirts of the urban areas and transferring aid to non-hostile actors. Israel can also begin rebuilding commercial activity in areas that Hamas presence has been eliminated.

2. **Areas clear of Hamas** – the ability to provide food, shelter, and basic medical services to the population outside of urban spaces is already extant. This activity has been spoken of in the media as humanitarian "islands" or "bubbles", and it is possible to act in this way right now.

3. **Spatial design** – Israel's military activity is already shaping the physical space in the Gaza Strip. The routes created during the ground maneuver are remarkably like those drawn by General Ariel Sharon in the 1970s, which were meant to prevent Gaza from becoming a completely urbanized area that cannot be controlled. To prevent the Gaza Strip from once again becoming uncontrollable, the horizontal and vertical routes must be modernized, fast, and accessible. In the same way, the ruins must be rebuilt as modern cities and not refugee camps. Even now, Israel can act in a variety of ways to anchor Gaza toward a future of a functioning government and a flourishing economy – and not the recovery of Islamist elements.

These tools cannot stand on their own. However, a civil campaign can be employed at this time, and doing so will enable rapid learning to make up for the deficiencies detailed above. Only a combination of military and civil efforts will prevent Hamas from recovering and allow shaping the Gaza Strip's future and relationship with Israel after the war.

Epilog: Accidentally turning the light on

Early in April 2023, the US Army's JLOTS was first activated on the Gazan coast. The dock and loading area were situated only a few dozen meters from the temporary checkpoint (the same location in the story about flour sacks at the beginning of this article). At the same time, long-term Israeli presence in Netzarim was established in the form of forward posts and a built-up checkpoint. For security and work purposes, the area is lit up 24/7. When civilians in the Central Refugee Camps found out that the area was permanently lit up with electric lights, this sparked an intense discussion over social media – even more than the military operations that were conducted in the area at the time. The contrast between the Gazans, who had not had stable electricity for many months, and the brightly lit Israeli-controlled complex in the heart of Gaza – was a sign of how deeply reality had changed. The light, seen from a distance, was the first sign – even if likely unintentional – that

control over civil affairs had left Hamas' hands, and would not return to its grasp. The war began almost a year ago, and it seems that military efforts alone cannot dismantle Hamas' governance in Gaza. If we delight in life and desire change – in every neighborhood, and along every road, we must keep turning on the light.

Works to erect the unloading complex of the American mobile dock (photo by: Engineering and Construction Directorate, Ministry of Defense)

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"Swords of Irons" – Military Aspects of Israel's National Security Concept

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In this article I argue that past attempts to adapt the components of the national security concept – Deterrence, Early Warning) and Decision (Decisive Victory) – to Israel's changing security needs failed because of significant incompatibility with the nature of our conflicts, which among other things are long and susceptible to surprise. After discussing these attempts, the following components are put forth: (1) Endurance for long-lasting conflict at the national and military level. (2) Flexibility – rapid recovery from surprises when fighting breaks out, while moving forward. (3) Displaying a qualitative edge when dealing with novel threats developed by the enemy, as well as challenging adversaries by developing capabilities for which they are unprepared. (4) Deterrence through proven perseverance, recovery, and a qualitative edge vis-à-vis new challenges, as opposed to classic deterrence which is based on punishment/retribution or prevention.

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Introduction

This article deals with a vaguely defined subject. The State of Israel's unwritten national security concept is supposed to be centered around attaining national goals. These were never detailed in any official document. The best description I know of can be found in Dan Schueftan's book of the same title. Amongst the twelve national goals

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Schueftan details are security and deterrence in a hostile regional environment, as well as strategic understanding of the balance of power in the Middle East (Schueftan, 2021, pp. 38-54). In his book, "Israeli National Security", David "Chuck" Freilich, discusses several facets of this matter, including the military-security aspect (Freilich, 2019, pp. 185-346). The program at the Israel National Defense College goes over several other elements, including the social and economic sides of national security. This article will focus on the military aspect. It must be said that military excellence, such as that demonstrated in Gaza during "Swords of Iron", on its own would be lacking as a basic national security component. It is the government's responsibility to fully utilize and exhaust the most of it on the political level.

Much has been written over the past few decades about the relevance (or lack thereof) of the key elements/pillars of the "classic" security concept attributed to Ben-Gurion: Deterrence, Early warning, and Decision (decisive victory). These components are explicitly mentioned in Israel Tal's "National Security" (Tal, 1996), and are directly tied to a fourth component, which was added in 2006: Defense, of the military and civilian home front. The response to the relevance of each of these elements being put into question changed along with the threats Israel faced. This response can be divided into several approaches. The first is introducing a new component to the security concept: home front defense – added after a new threat developed, and a response to face it (Meridor Committee, 2006). The second approach contends that the three initial conceptual pillars were developed in an age of conflict between symmetrical militaries, and are therefore no longer fully fit for the diverse kinds of conflicts in which the IDF is engaged – such as the Intifadas, the Campaign Between the Wars, etc. As such, a new component is required – a routine security concept, which also includes significantly expanding these original principles (Laish, 2010). The third option is claiming that these initial elements remain valid, however, they must be adjusted to longer, diverse types of conflicts. This approach is exemplified in the ideas put forth in response to the Second Intifada – "continuous decision" and attrition (Samo-Nir, 2003), in response to operations between wars – "cumulative deterrence" (Almog, 1997), specific deterrence, and early warning not only of war, but also strategic

changes and terror attacks (The IDF Strategy documents – the operational conception from 2002-2018).

This third approach is an example of a broader process known as "stretching terms" – until they lose their original meaning (some would say, out of ignorance). One such case can be seen in how the focused mission of early warning of the outbreak of war was given less emphasis over the years and became "early warning and intelligence" – practically the lion's share of intelligence work. A fourth way to respond to the clash between terminology and reality is based on the idea that decision is irrelevant for the national security at the strategic and operational levels of war, and is only to be used at the tactical level (and in specific cases the operational level as well) (The IDF Strategy, 2015). Freilich argued that the idea of decision is losing primacy because of practical difficulties as well as the effect of international scrutiny on maneuvering forces and taking over territory – which also imposes restrictions on fully utilizing military power and other capabilities. The wars in Ukraine and Gaza illustrate that despite these two challenges, holding territory is a fundamental concept in war.

The fifth type of response is rooted in thinking that the original components are relevant or require expansion. In turn, this approach is translated into improving the ability to implement the basic conceptual pillars, for instance by refining intelligence-based warning capabilities, upgrading decisive (fires and maneuver) capabilities, strengthening defensive elements on the home front and so on (much has been written about this, too much to list here). Recently, a strategy of prevention has also been advocated for concerning the Iranian nuclear threat, as well as other aspects of strategic competition.

The problem with deterrence, warning, decisive victory, and defense can be distilled into two key aspects: structure and essence. Structurally, these conceptual elements are not adapted to the spectrum of military conflict that Israel is facing, especially limited and ongoing conflict on the one hand (especially not deterrence, warning, and decisive victory – which are particularly unsuited to the conflict with the Palestinians is Judea and Samaria), and for distant threats like Iran on the other (especially not warning and decisive victory). Beyond this, however, is that the essence of these concepts has yet to have been proven during

war. The number of incidents which broke out with no early warning – both war and crucial strategic changes in the adversary's conduct – is much too large for warning to be a solid basis for national security. Deterrence is hard to assess, and as such it is unreliable as a foundational conceptual pillar. These elements in particular came under scrutiny after the failure of warning capabilities during the surprise attack on October 7th, and the failure in assessing how deterred Hamas was from conflict.

In this article, I will argue that the way to amend the national security conception is not any of the five options discussed above. Rather, it is adding three different components to the military tier of the national security concept – meaning, the IDF's strategy – as well as defining a fourth element. First – Endurance at the national and military level for long-lasting conflict. Second – Flexibility, meaning rapid recovery from surprises when fighting breaks out, while moving forward. Third – Demonstrating a qualitative edge in dealing with novel threats developed by the enemy, as well as challenging adversaries by developing capabilities for which they are unprepared. Fourth – Deterrence through proven perseverance, recovery, and a qualitative edge vis-à-vis new challenges, as opposed to classic deterrence which is based on punishment/retribution or prevention. This proposal has three key advantages: (1) These elements are suited to all manners of conflict, from individual terror attacks to dealing with Iran's proxy network, as well as the nuclear threat, and in some ways even with cyber. Another benefit is that they do not require changing existing terminology and concepts which were developed for full-scale war. (2) They are less reliant on interpreting the adversary's intentions (i.e., predicting surprise attacks), like deterrence and warning, and instead depend much more on the IDF's actions. (3) They have practical effects on force design and its employment. These effects are broader than those of warning and decisive victory, not to mention deterrence. I would argue that while deterrence is crucial on the national security level, it would be prudent to not rely on it at military tier of thought – and when it is utilized, it would be wise to focus on aspects other than punishment and prevention, as will be explained below.

It is imperative to adapt each security-military concept to the

unique circumstances of a state and its military. The Deterrence-Warning-Decision triangle was a tailored response to the challenge faced by a small state to maintain a large standing army to combat peer competitors. The components proposed here are seemingly generic enough to suit any military, however, I would argue the contrary: (a) All of Israel's conflicts since 1982 have been continuous by definition, whether combating violent riots, terror or guerilla warfare conducted by the "resistance" organizations – Fatah and Hezbollah in Lebanon, Palestinian terror in Judea and Samaria, and Hamas in Gaza. (b) The "intensity" number of conflicts which the IDF has been a part of in such a brief period of time (76 years) is the highest in the world. This ratio raises the likelihood of surprises, even if only statistically. Moreover, regional dynamics change rapidly, and when taking into consideration the multiple possible coalitions that can be formed against Israel, the chances of Israel being surprised are even further raised. As such, we must treat being surprised as the norm, and provide a response that is not only to do with improving our intelligence warning. (c) The rising speed of the "conceptual" arms race between us and our adversaries, which is a result of the high number of conflicts (see point b. above), the availability of military technology to non-state actors, constant friction on the borders and as part of the Campaign Between the Wars. Because of this, our enemies undergo rapid changes, developing new fighting capabilities at an accelerated rate, which in turn requires us to develop responses at an equally rapid pace. Israel is out-of-the-ordinary in this too, in comparison to other states throughout the world who deal with security threats.

I will explain these new components in detail while referencing the terminology discussed above. Finally, I will address the issue of deterrence, which – despite the many difficulties in assessing its effects – is important in many ways from a military perspective. Just like the crucial aspect of American support.

The Proposal
Endurance at the national and military level for long-lasting conflict

This element is relevant to all the conflicts in which the IDF is involved, including those mistakenly thought to be short-term. Among these are the reprisal operations of the 1950s, and the War of Attrition (both on the Suez Canal and in the Jordan Valley). The latter is also called "the Thousand Day War" and was in practice a part of a supposedly short war – the Six Day War. The Yom Kippur War was also purportedly short, if ignoring the IDF's continued presence on the western side of the Suez Canal and in the enclave in the Golan (sometimes called the "Little War of Attrition" – it lasted until May of 1974). Most of the IDF's personnel were deployed at the time, including the reserves. The rocket barrages prior to the "Peace for Galilee" war in 1982, when the IDF held Lebanese territory up to the Awali river until the withdrawal to Security Zone lines in June of 1985 is another example of a "short" war which was in actuality a drawn-out engagement. Both Intifadas can be seen this way as well. Finally, "Swords of Iron" both in the south and in the north, has been ongoing for four months as of the writing of this article. Differing from warning and decisive victory, which are intended to focus on immediate incidents, during these conflicts both sides can claim victory (since their aims are different). Both sides are vulnerable to attrition, and the side that perseveres is the ultimate victor. This is precisely how Israel has operated since its inception, at varying levels of success. This is the solution to the "Arabic patience" which we, as a nation, also exhibit – as exemplified in the slogan: "Am hanetzach lo mefahed mederech arukah" – the Eternal (Jewish) People are not afraid of long journeys.

The military aspects of this conceptual element in both force design and employment are many. Regarding public motivation, they are preserving mandatory conscription, the value of combat service and the reserves as components of a "nation in arms" as well as preserving the IDF's status as a highly trusted organization in the public eye. From a military capability perspective, we are looking at: the scale of the reserve forces (of all kinds); "depth" of weaponry, ammunition and spare parts – whether achieved by stocking stores or by developing the ability to

produce supplies during fighting; defense on the civilian home front meant to preserve day-to-day life during the fighting; and the ability to train new soldiers and allocate them to various units during the fighting. And there is more.

I will say that since the Second Lebanon War, particularly over the fifty-one-day long operation "Protective Edge" in 2014, the IDF has treated shortening the duration of the fighting as a sort of principle of force employment. I would argue that this must be taken off the conceptual docket. The IDF's desire for short wars is understandable, and all the reasons are good. Nevertheless, this principle is problematic. One issue is that the type of conflicts the IDF is engaged in vis-à-vis the Palestinian "resistance" organizations in Judea and Samaria and in Gaza, as well as Hezbollah in Lebanon, is not a short one. The second problem is that tailoring force design to short wars has repeatedly proven itself to be a mistake. Starting from the Second Lebanon War and lasting to present day, conflicts last longer than planned in the force design process, creating increasingly severe restrictions as combat persists.

Flexibility – rapid recovery from surprises in parallel to ongoing combat

History provides us plenty examples of conflicts breaking out taking the state or military by surprise: the Yom Kippur War, the First Intifada, the Second Lebanon War (when the IDF was surprised by decisions made by the Israeli government), and "Swords of Iron." The IDF was also surprised by the capabilities the enemy had developed. Before the conflict, we did not understand how they would affect the operational level – and sometimes the strategic level as well: by the wide front fording of the Suez canal, as well as robust SAM and ATGM employment during the Yom Kippur War; by violent riots during the First Intifada; by the "nature reserves" (Hezbollah military compounds built in forested areas) and certain weaponry during the Second Lebanon war; and by a simultaneous wide-scale assault at multiple points, and certain types of weaponry during "Swords of Iron". Other incidents include the tunnels just before operation "Protective Edge," the suicide bombings during the Second Intifada, and the "lone wolf" terror in 2015. The IDF was also surprised by the Syrian nuclear program – and there are other examples.

In the past, I argued that any attempts to manage issues regarding warning of all kinds and "intelligence for force design" by improving intelligence capabilities or contact-points between intelligence and the "consumer" (military or political) are inherently limited. There are many reasons for this – psychological, organizational, and more. I have further claimed that since surprise is a basic element of any enemy's actions, the appropriate response to it is rapid recovery based on flexibility and adaptability (Finkel, 2011). Then again, there are as many surprises and mistaken assessments as there are ways for the IDF to recover from them. Whether through changing plans or combat methods, adapting technology or the organization itself, or even simply through tactical lessons learned during combat. "Swords of Iron" has once again shown Israel's ability to do this, from several angles: rapid employment of reserves in the north on October 7th; planning from scratch the IDF's offensive in Gaza; technical changes defending armor vehicles; lessons learned during the fighting and more (Finkel, 2024). This element should have several important implications for the IDF, starting from the selection of commanders and training them to deal with surprises through exercises that emphasize uncertainty at all levels – from the Chief of the General Staff to the greenest soldier. On the weapons and force structure side of things, balancing the fundamental components of maneuver and stand-off fire, and providing commanders with a variety of means. With them at their disposal, commanders would be able to improvise solutions to novel problems (for instance, the need for assault helicopters – which was at a low before the war). There should be a redundancy of weapons meant to deal with an operational challenge designated as a central one. Redundancy in the form of three kinds of technologies for fording that were in the IDF's arsenal before the Yom Kippur War; the "15 backups" made for striking SAMs before operation "Artzav (Mole Cricket) 19" in First Lebanon War (1982); the multitude of anti-armor means developed or acquired after the Yom Kippur War, including the Merkava tanks, the TOW missiles, assault helicopters, the Spike missiles, Hermes UAS, and more. There are many more aspects to recovering from surprise, like strategic depth and defensive reserves, mission-oriented command, and distributing authority to employ certain capabilities.

Displaying a qualitative edge when facing new threats – defeating the enemy's combat method and developing new capabilities to surprise it

The conceptual origins of decisive victory are rooted in defeating armies on the battlefield itself. In Israel, this concept was later developed during the Second Intifada (through attrition) and then into a fruitless discussion of defeating Hamas and Hezbollah's idea of "resistance." It has even been claimed that decision can only be achieved at the tactical or operational levels, and that it is wrong to think of it as a strategic goal. It is certainly possible to attain decisive victory on the battlefield in the conflicts the IDF is fighting in. However, the ability to do so is very much dependent on the first component – that is, national resilience and the military capability to conduct long wars. Decision is too narrow of a concept, and it is unsuited for the conflicts we are engaged in both in close (such as Judea and Samaria) and distant (such as Iran) arenas.

An example of rapid recovery during combat, with limited success: the pumps used to flood Hamas' tunnels (Source: IDF Spokesperson)

I would posit that in both types of conflicts as well as in wars, the goal is not dismantling the adversary's fighting ability as a system, thus denying its ability to operate during war. Rather, it should be neutralizing the effectiveness of the new fighting capability that the enemy developed – not only destroying military force. Experience shows that Arab states always rebuilt and elevated their forces after wars, reaching greater capabilities than they had before. This is also the case with Hamas and Hezbollah. The Arab states who have recognized the state of Israel as a legitimate entity and entered into peace treaties with it, only did so after they dealt with an Israeli response to any military method or capability which they could muster: During the Yom Kippur War, Israel defeated the combination of strategic surprise, Egyptian anti-tank capabilities in Suez, and Syrian armor in the Golan. Finally, the SAM threat was neutralized by the IAF's response during the First Lebanon War (1982).

Hamas, for example, went from focusing on rockets – which lost effectiveness when the Iron Dome systems became operational – to cross-border tunnels, whose effectiveness was also reduced when the IDF responded by building the subterranean obstacle. Finally, Hamas utilized a ground assault during the current war. Our response to the enemy, which pushed us to transform and change at each point, was not direct damage to its military forces in a military operation, but rather displaying a qualitative edge vis-à-vis the adversary's new capability. This is "defeating the enemy's combat method." This does not entail giving up on decisive victory on the battlefield. That kind of victory is important at the tactical and operational level, and it is a part of defeating the enemy's methods. One example of this from "Swords of Iron" is the IDF's effort to dismantle Hamas' brigades and battalions in the northern part of the Gaza Strip and Khan Yunis. In doing so, we show the enemy the ineffectiveness of a defensive method based on two main components: hiding within a civilian population and relying on a tunnel system both to defend rocketry and command and control capabilities, as well as for guerilla warfare against the IDF – should it enter Gaza on the ground. The combined multi-service capability displayed by the IDF in taking over Gaza – a scenario Israel did not prepare for – may be more important from a long-term perspective

and when considering all of Israel's enemies. This ability has greater significance, and a longer "shelf-life" than something like eliminating Hamas leadership in Gaza.

Expanding the idea of defeating the adversary's force to defeating its combat method has broad ramifications on military activity. First, intelligence efforts must focus mostly on the enemy's capabilities and learning processes, and less on its intentions (despite the limits on intelligence for force-design mentioned above). Second, developing rapid learning capabilities. Finally, focusing the IDF's force design capabilities on providing responses to the abilities the enemy treats as the key to its success. One example of this is the needed effective response to Hezbollah's mass fire capabilities, anti-tank capabilities, and so on. To implement this, the concept of Israel's "qualitative edge fields" (Ben Israel, 1997) first put forth in the 1990s, should be further developed. Bengo et al. (2023), wrote that "Israel's Golden Age of Security" is over. I agree with them and am proposing that the concept of "superiority" in almost every field (air, naval, intelligence, and cyber) must be focused on more specific areas – and choosing them will not be easy. These fields must be centered around the main challenge posed by the adversary and its weak points or focused on creating a significant challenge for the enemy – in a field where it will struggle to provide a response. It is possible, as claimed by Yoram Hamo (2016), that developing such a capability which the adversary sees as a significant challenge it cannot overcome, will bring it to abandon a principal component of its force design, even before that enemy faces the IDF's response in the field.

Until now, I have discussed several new ideas while considering the basic elements of deterrence, warning, and decisive victory. The relatively newer element – home front defense, is tied at the national level to the state's ability to successfully overcome lengthy conflicts. At the military level, it relates to the military's ability to continue fighting, recover from surprises and provide a response to the challenges posed by the enemy. I would suggest removing its status as a vital element of itself, and instead weaving it into the new elements detailed above. It seems that there is some truth to criticism heard over the last decade about the rise in the centrality of active defense systems in military and

security thought, claiming that "you don't win with defense". Opposition to the development and acquisition of the Iron Dome system in the IDF, before it was finally decided to implement it, was rooted in concern that the offensive response would become passive – and in turn deterrence would be lost. The Iron Dome system supposedly allayed reservations by reducing damage to the home front, enabling political freedom of operation, and preventing a ground operation which would undoubtedly involve casualties. In hindsight, it may be that the emphasis put on this component of national security was correct from a routine security or limited operations perspective, but less so when dealing with a wide-scale war. In such cases, there is a need to focus on defending national infrastructure and preserving operational continuity of offensive components (such as airbases and IAF HQs), and less on the civilian home front.

Deterrence – through proven resilience, recovery from surprises and displaying a qualitative edge vis-à-vis the new challenges

Deterring the enemy from war is a concept taken from the nuclear power balance dynamic of the Cold War. It is hard to rely on it, just like it is hard to rely on warning. While deterrence is real, it is nothing more than our assessment of the enemy's decision-making, whose considerations are often far more complex than just how deterred it became the last time we fought. The challenge in assessing state-actors' level of deterrence was substantial enough (for example, during the War of Attrition directly after the Six Day War and the "Little War of Attrition" in the Golan during the spring of 1974), and it is even more so when dealing with terror organizations and popular uprisings – both have very different decision-making processes than that of a state. Over a certain period, the IDF broadened the concept of deterrence, and even used it in a biased manner when calling the operations in Gaza "Deterrence Operations." The idea behind these operations was deterring the adversary during conflict to prevent escalation – as opposed to "normal" deterrence, which is a result of the enemy's perception of its own failure in a previous war.

I would argue that while deterrence may be a component of the national security concept, it would be better to avoid using it in the military sphere – which is meant to focus on building and employing force.

Deterrence at the national security level is formed from a combination of the perception of Israel's military capabilities, its willingness to employ them, Israel's strategic depth, how supportive its ally the USA is, Israel's economic capabilities, etc. States and organizations are deterred by various combinations of these factors. Iran's considerations are different than Hamas'. In "Swords of Iron," it seems that the principal factor of Iran's decision-making is the US threat, while Hamas' main considerations are Israel's success in fulfilling objectives on the ground and whether the world sees Israel continuing to fight as legitimate.

Discussing deterrence at the military level is not a fruitful endeavor, and it may even be harmful. Force design is not meant to be directly geared toward deterrence, but rather for effective action against threats – whether by denying effectiveness (like air defense systems) or by destroying threats with fire or with a ground operation. If such actions succeed, they will improve deterrence.

Iron Dome battery during operation "Guardian of the Walls" – and example of the qualitative military edge (Source: IDF Spokesperson)

I believe that the concept developed to describe how societies deal with cyber threats with social resilience – Deterrence by Resilience (Van Doorn and Brinkel, 2021), could suit Israel in broader contexts, especially in deterrence by recovery. The first three elements I put forth – endurance, recovering from surprise, and displaying a qualitative edge vis-à-vis the enemy's new central fighting method when combined, create the fourth element which is deterrence. In other words, the adversary will be deterred by Israel's ability to fight long wars, to recover from surprises and develop a qualitative edge when the enemy undergoes significant changes – repeatedly. One exception from this would be force design processes aimed at deterring Iran. In this case, we must consider the original usage of nuclear deterrence – through denying effectiveness and punishment/retribution.

Conclusion

While "Swords of Iron" ensues, the discussion around the failure in warning, the problem of deterrence, the viability of decisive victory, and the challenges of home front defense has already begun – even if it is not systematic. In the discussion above, I pointed out that past attempts to adhere to these conceptual elements or adjust them – whether small or significant – have failed, or they were not in consensus. I proposed a different path to a solution, which includes taking the four core concepts proposed here as a foundation for an updated strategy for the IDF or for updating the military aspects of the national security conception. These are: (1) Endurance at the national and military level for long-lasting conflict. (2) Flexibility – rapid recovery from surprises during fighting. (3) Displaying a qualitative edge when dealing with novel threats developed by the enemy, as well as challenging adversaries by developing capabilities for which they are unprepared. (4) Deterrence through proven perseverance, recovery from surprise, and a qualitative edge when facing a changing adversary (the first three components).

These four components can help solve some of the problems with the old ones. They are suited to the whole spectrum of conflicts Israel faces, from stabbings to nuclear strikes and even the cyber arena. They also do not require us to stretch older elements developed in the context of intensive between armies' wars. The new elements are less reliant on

interpreting the enemy's intentions (especially surprise), as opposed to deterrence by punishment and prevention, as well as warning. Instead, they depend far more on the IDF's actions and have practical effects on force design and employment.

The fault in my proposal is the supposed difficulty in assessment. The failure or success of deterrence, warning or decision can be, at least on the surface, assessed in a binary manner – deterrence fails when the enemy starts a war. There is a failure in early warning if it is not given on time. A decisive victory is easy to see on the battlefield. Supposedly. I believe that despite the apparent relative ease in assessing them, the cons in continuing to use the older terms are much greater than this one supposed advantage (supposed, because the adversary's considerations are far broader than just how deterred it is, and because decisive victory against foes such as our enemies is, as mentioned, hard to achieve and difficult to define during combat). On the other hand, despite the difficulties, we can measure the IDF's ability to recover from surprises, its ability to create a qualitative edge against new operational challenges the enemy develops between the wars, as well as national and military resilience.

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Part 3

In the Aftermath of the War - Preliminary Insights

Force Design Following "Swords of Iron" – Avoiding Treading on the Same Rakes

Ofer Shelah[1]

Critical decisions regarding force design will be made this year following the events of October 7th and the ongoing war, which has yet to end and could expand at any given moment. This article provides a brief review of past mistakes and cultural drifts that have in certain instances led to exorbitant, and at times, unwarranted post-war decisions, especially events that started in failure such as the Yom Kippur War. Given the distinct conditions of "Swords of Iron" and the need to learn from mistakes and avoid drifts proves all the more crucial, particularly when the multi-front challenge the IDF must prepare for against the Iranian "resistance axis" is unlike anything we have ever encountered.

Introduction

In view of IDF force design or force buildup, "Swords of Iron" is an exception. If we set aside the War of Independence which started in the early days of the state and essentially shaped the IDF in its inception, the current campaign is unique both in intensity and length. Israel's "major" wars were high intensity and brief; the rounds of conflict or attrition engaged only a small portion of the military and required, at most, pin-pointed changes, the establishment of mission-specific specialty units (fighting terror or guerilla), and limited call for duty within the reserve corps.

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"Swords of Iron" is different. Not only in scale but also in the various shifts in character and the war's operational requirements. So far, it has included an intense phase the IDF has not experienced since 1982 – full mobilization of the reserve force, large-scale ground maneuver, the use of aerial force to an extent greater than any of Israel's military conflicts since 1973, extensive damage on the home front, months of defensive engagements along the 1967 border as well as Judea and Samaria – all in just four months. Soon after that, the ground operations in Gaza diminished and most of the reserves were sent back home, yet intense friction there and other fronts remained to an extent the IDF is not familiar with as part of its routine security activity. The end is nowhere near in sight and a greater war against Hezbollah and other entities seems imminent. A good portion of the combat reserves have been redrafted ahead of another spell sometime in the coming months. Such conditions require substantial force buildup while still fighting. The situation is even more complicated as October 7th rendered Israel into great shock. The duty to restore the sense of security that would allow 120 thousand displaced Israelis, eighty thousand of them residents of the north, to return to their homes required making a move soon. When this reality conflicts with the constant difficulty of making decisions that will prepare the IDF for real challenges looming in the near and far future, there is real danger that British General Rupert Smith's bleak assertion that "Militaries around the world don't prepare for the last war, they usually prepare for the wrong war" will come true (Smith, 2013, p. 10).

Budget – Give us more, we'll decide what for later

A problematic projection of uncontrolled force buildup which is largely based on an automatic reaction of "give us more" is well known. Security expenses soar, yet do not necessarily provide the right response to the challenges at hand, as the natural tendency is to react based on past catastrophes with a demand for more resources and expensive technological solutions. Various committees have already pointed out this failure in the past, albeit it seems to have returned yet again and in large numbers.

A good example of increased spending on security is the decade

following the Yom Kippur War reaching a third of the GDP, further contributing to the local economy's "lost decade" and the severe financial crisis of the early 1980s. It should be noted that the country's defense expenditure was high even prior to the Yom Kippur War, with 25% of the GDP in 1972, and a defense budget multiplying itself by three between the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War (Greenberg, 2004, p. 414). These facts did not prevent intelligence failings and under-preparedness on the eve prior to the war.

Another less discussed example occurred after the Second Lebanon War. The Brodet Committee, established after the war to formulate multi-year defense budget guidelines, set a plan that reflected a substantial growth of NIS 46 billion over a decade, along with a demand that the IDF economize by NIS 30 billion stretched over the same period. According to the Bank of Israel's research paper, this budget outline did indeed endure until 2013 (Bank of Israel, 2011). Economizing, however, was implemented only partially. Despite this, according to then Chief of the General Staff LTG Gadi Eizenkot upon taking office, the IDF in 2015 was in a state that required deep transformation to fulfill its duties.

This automatic demand for resources was not limited to the budget but included other assets as well. After the Second Lebanon War, the shortened minimal enlistment period that was to take effect, as recommended by the Ben Basat Committee and approved by the Minister of Defense, Shaul Mofaz, was cancelled. Similarly, the mandatory period for men's service in the IDF was recently extended to 36 months without exception, even of those whom the IDF might render redundant (pursuant to the agreement between the IDF and the Ministry of Treasury achieved prior to the war as part of the "Maalot" multi-year plan).

The encumbrance on the overall state budget as a result of the increase in the defense budget, and its impact on civilian expenditures intended to propagate growth and the well-being of the citizens, is clear and severe. So is the effect on the growth of the extension of mandatory service. Growth, it should be mentioned, is the basis on which all government spending is funded, including defense expenditures. In this article I will focus on the implications of an uncontrolled process and the absence

of a real concept of military power. I argue that such a process not only harms the economy – something that can be justified by the fact that the needs of the hour are "guns, not socks" – but also does not render the army more prepared for the real challenges. It harms security, not only the economy.

Take what is available, not what you need

Mordechai Gur, the IDF's tenth Chief of the General Staff who orchestrated the massive force buildup after the Yom Kippur War, later expressed regret for the way the buildup was carried out. In a private conversation, he told BG Dov Tamari that "He was hoping for a qualitative change but later decided on a substantial quantitative change." (Tamari, 2012, p. 412). In another statement he said that "The true introspection we had to do... relates to our just demands since 1974, to strengthen the IDF while investing massive budgets and fulfilling various commitments to the USA […] now that the Egyptians have finally tabled the option of war and chose peace" (Gur, 1998, pp. 343-344). Gur's words relate to two constant force design failings following traumatic events:

"Namer" CEV in Swords of Iron War (Photo by: IDF Spokesperson)

The first is typical of the "more of the same" syndrome, in which the military tries to make up for its failings not from a clearheaded view based on a cohesive operating concept of the needs of the present and the near future – but by adding "buckles on the belt" in hopes to avoid yesterday's failures. The second is ignoring the change created by the war itself, or the new situation that has become clearer as a result, indicating directions for the future that are not necessarily in line with the perceptions of the present. And the third is equipping and implementing what is possible and not what is necessary. One example is the massive procurement of M-113 (known in the IDF by the nickname "Zelda") APCs from the USA after the Yom Kippur War. These APCs replaced the old half-tracks that were employed by the infantry units in the major wars, and were purchased as combat transport vehicles both for existing and for new units as the IDF almost doubled its number of armored divisions. Over 8,000 APCs were purchased constituting more than twice the number of half-tracks and the (few) APCs the IDF used in the Yom Kippur War.

Supposedly, there was a certain economic logic in this, as they were cheap US military surplus items. But in truth, this "gifted horse" proved quite knotty: The cheap APCs required expensive maintenance systems, the cost of which in shekels was and still is significant to this day. The impact on the operational culture was even more detrimental. The relatively thin armor of the APCs provided protection against fragments of artillery shells, but not against the anti-tank missiles, which the Arab forces utilized so effectively in the Yom Kippur War, and not even against much simpler means like the RPG-7 rockets. This was also clear within the IDF, and quite soon, infantry units at the time would say that "the APC is a bus, not a combat vehicle". However, the convenience of traveling in an APC compared to marching on foot was inviting, and in the IDF a doctrine of combat began to develop around the new device – unfounded in every aspect, as its inadequacy for the battlefield was already known when it was acquired, let alone as the years passed. The lesson of the Yom Kippur War – in which the cry "more infantry" was raised, when the armored formations encountered dug-in infantry forces equipped with anti-tank missiles, suffering heavy losses – became, not in an orderly manner, but as a derivative of the procurement and

equipping, an actual transformation from infantry to armored infantry, which can seemingly move at the pace of the tank. But the truth is that the infantry was not armored; the various anti-tank devices that gradually developed created a real threat to any relatively large and conspicuous vehicle. At the same time, despite all the warnings, the IDF went ahead and nurtured its APC addiction. This incompatibility with the relevant battlefield became even more apparent after the peace agreement with Egypt at the end of the 1970s. The APC had limited mobility in the sands of the Sinai desert, where the tanks also moved relatively quickly; in the basaltic Golan Heights and in the mountainous terrain in Lebanon, the maneuverability of tanks and APCs was almost completely restricted, which made them much more vulnerable. But the IDF was already stuck, in terms of both concept and resource, with the APCs.

In the First Lebanon War, only nine years after Yom Kippur, most of the units that entered Lebanon preferred to move in APCs. Different from all of them was the decision of the paratrooper brigade CO, COL Yoram Yair (Yaya), to move north on foot after landing from the sea in the Awali area, and the brigade march from there to Beirut, while fighting, at a much higher efficiency than most other IDF units (Yair, 1990, pp. 52-53). But it was an exception that proved the rule. Even in the following years, the APC did not disappear – for the simple reason that it is impossible to disappear more than 8,000 tools, which were already used for almost everything in the IDF.

For more than a decade the IDF has been trying to get rid of the APCs. Some of them were even sold as scrap steel, and their number is still estimated in the thousands. Even with the acquisition of the armored "Namer" APCs, whose ability to survive was proven in the "Swords of Iron" war (although it must be reiterated that this is dealing with the relatively limited capabilities of Hamas), the IDF still did not wean itself from the thought, and perhaps also from the compulsion, that it is possible to use "Zeldas" on the battlefield. This had grave consequences, such as an incident in which seven Golani fighters were killed during operation "Protective Edge" in 2014, more than forty years after the IDF began equipping them with APCs.

One can find similar examples in many units in the air, at sea and on land: a relative abundance of resources, procurement opportunities and

the lack of systemic and doctrine-based thinking about what we really need – lead to heavy expenses, for the development and equipping of systems that are not necessarily suited to the tasks of the IDF, especially in a future vision that is not necessarily far-reaching. Then, theories begin to develop seeking to invent a relevant use for the system, which was already purchased and integrated at a prohibitive cost and now forces military thinking, instead of being derived from it.

Forces from the Paratroopers Brigade and tanks from The School of Armored Corps disembark from the landing craft at Awali Beach, June 7, 1982 (photo by: GPO, Government Press Office)

Recovering – easily forgetting, barely learning

In the IDF, a military that is in action every day, there seems to be a reoccurring phenomenon that makes it even more difficult to properly learn and implement lessons as a basis for future force design: even the most difficult failures are almost always accompanied by an immediate semblance of recovery, of turning defeat into victory and a renewed validation of success and military supremacy. These are complemented with broad public support, while ignoring (inevitable on a psychological level but harmful for learning lessons) the failures and blaming them on the government or a particular general, rather than admitting to a

systemic flop in our beloved IDF.

Such was the case on Yom Kippur, when the IDF and the Israeli citizenry were quick to draw positive conclusions from the operational shift in both arenas. To this day one may hear the claim that Israel achieved an unequivocal military victory in the war, which is a sentiment that made it difficult to draw real doctrinal conclusions after the war.

This was the case in a substantially smaller military event, operation "Protective Edge". The IDF was completely unprepared for what was assigned to it: a ground operation to locate and cut off Hamas attack tunnels. It embarked on this operation without sufficient intelligence, combat doctrine, readiness of the dedicated units and without appropriate weapons, some of which were hastily purchased in the civilian market during the operation. Yet, IDF senior command and the public were proud of the bravery of the troops and the resourcefulness of the field commanders and did not at all bother with the question of why the military did not prepare for the task it was facing.

The commander of the Ground Forces at the time, MG Guy Tzur, candidly described the cultural hitches that led to this situation and summed it up with the words "It was merely a minor flaw; when operation 'Protective Edge' was over and the long and detailed investigation processes that followed were concluded, the spirit of self-criticism that The term "Heavy Army" was coined during the First Lebanon War, when the IDF's mass grew substantially since 1973 at the expense of deception tactics. Eight divisions, including 1400 tanks, moved into Lebanon in straight lines, when only one move (the paratroopers landing in Awali) manifested a concept of operating deep in enemy territory and a surprise flanking. With the exception of the coastal route, all the courses were mountainous, columns of tanks could not deploy effectively, and local resistance from commandos armed with anti-tank missiles was enough to stop or damage them (for example, the 162nd division in Ein Zhalta or the eastern route in Sultan Ya'akov). In the end, the IDF only partially filled the order to reach the Beirut-Damascus Road. In the coastal route, it took about six days to execute – far beyond the 48-hour deadline.

propelled the 'Land on the Horizon' process until that summer – had died down". The fact that the IDF fought well in Gaza, and what we all engaged in that summer, somewhat dimmed the discomfort that formed

the basis for "Land on the Horizon" reform plan (Tzur, 2016, p. 98).

This can also be expected when inquiries into "Swords of Iron" are completed. In fact, only days after October 7th, voices were heard in the army that spoke of a miraculous recovery, voices that grew as the ground maneuver in the Gaza Strip deepened and amassed operational successes. Under these conditions, it is doubtful whether incisive investigations will change much either, since they never did after "Protective Edge" or after the more extensive wars, revealing the lack of a systematic concept of applying lessons. MG (Ret.) Doron Almog, who examined the failures in producing relevant lessons and their application between the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War, claimed that the IDF has a poor understanding of the concept of "lesson."

"The lesson is a conclusion from an event that happened in the past," wrote Almog, "And therefore in relation to the future, the lesson is only a hypothesis. The process of producing lessons tends to focus on the event that was and ended, and how and by what means better results could have been achieved in relation to that event... and thus we find ourselves with a list of 555 topics, defined as the lessons learned from the Six Day War, all of which are technical and contain no thought concerning future scenarios" (Almog, 1997 p. 5).

The fact that Almog and Tzur referred to events that occurred almost 50 years apart testifies to the drift derived from a deeply rooted culture, which must be dealt with so as not to repeat past mistakes.

Enhancement Goals – looking to the past to find responses for the future

The words of IDF Chief of the General Staff Gur about the military ignoring the fact that Egypt had chosen peace relate to another crucial failing: The war itself reveals or creates a fundamental change, both for the enemy and in the geostrategic environment within which Israel operates. At the time, it was the Egyptian decision (which one can certainly argue was made before the war, and which could have prevented the campaign if President Sadat was convinced that Israel was willing to reach an agreement). Nowadays, it is about a profound understanding of the meaning of the term "multi-front", which the IDF has been using for quite some time.

However, by the way it has approached both force buildup and force employment, it is doubtful whether there is true understanding of what that fully means. A notable example from the past is force buildup efforts after the First Lebanon War, which ignored one of the far-reaching lessons drawn by Syrian President Assad from Israel's absolute aerial superiority demonstrated in the war, and the way he turned to completely different directions. For two decades, the IDF continued its massive force buildup, both in terms of equipment and training, in preparation for a scenario that was becoming less and less likely – a major armored attack by Syria like in the beginning of the Yom Kippur War. The concept of "active defense" during the days of IDF Chiefs of the General Staff Dan Shomron and Ehud Barak, inspired by doctrines developed in the US Army during the 1980s (partly as a result of the lessons of the Yom Kippur War) and the fascination with the innovations introduced by the "Revolution in Military Affairs" (RMA) – were lacking one major element: as Syria turned to increasing its fire capabilities on the home front, and the territory of the Syrian Golan Heights became more densely populated, the basic scenario of such an attack became far less likely. The IDF has a high capacity for adaptability, and some of the systems developed (attack drones, precision strike capabilities from the ground) were later applied successfully for other purposes. Nevertheless, no real calculation was made regarding the numbers and costs of the equipment or concerning the relevance of training for scenarios such as breaching the Syrian barrier, on which the field units continued to train diligently even though the odds of that happening were close to zero. When the gap between reality and the IDF force buildup became too wide, new threats emerged ("the eastern front") which the army generals later admitted were invalid long before the military stopped building up the forces for which they were designed.

The Appropriate Organizational Structure – unanswered fundamental questions

In the absence of foundational documents and resolutions of the political echelon, and in view of the inherent weakness of the Ministry of Defense vis-à-vis the IDF, which is demonstrated in part in the fact that it is the military that provides the Minister of Defense with the

information and analysis on critical aspects, such as planning and finances (the head of the budget division in the Ministry of Defense is the Financial Advisor to the Chief of the General Staff – a uniformed Brigadier General). The IDF makes fundamental organizational changes concerning force buildup based on decisions made by Chiefs of the General Staff as they each see fit. Siboni and Perl Finkel analyzed the transition from the centrality of the General Staff in force buildup before the Yom Kippur War to the process of decentralization after the war (Siboni & Perl Finkel, 2017, pp. 144-145). The establishment of the Field Units HQ, which later became the Israeli Gound Forces, was supposed to settle the question regarding ground force buildup. Yet, this matter has not been fully resolved to this day, rendering the right balance between stakeholders i.e., Services, Commands, and the General Staff, unclear. The doctrinal discussion, which includes exercises and experiments, as in US TRADOC, is not regulated, and is largely influenced by the worldview and decisions of the incumbent Chiefs of the General Staff at the time. The IDF makes sharp changes in all aspects of force buildup every few years. The ability to adapt and adjust capabilities to new challenges has repeatedly made up for this shortcoming yet fails to provide an adequate response.

Egoz warriors in Khan Yunis (Photo: IDF Spokesperson)

The Challenge – rethinking the multi-front arena

Until October 2023, a "multi-front campaign" was nothing more than a blank statement, which meant that a situation might unfold in which we would have "more of the same", mainly fire from many sources and at different ranges. The events of October 7th, and especially the meaning of what fortunately did not happen – a coordinated attack by Hezbollah and other Iranian Axis elements along with the attack by Hamas – illustrated that "multi-front" is a completely different type of challenge, which requires a changed concept of force buildup and force employment, on a routine basis (the Campaign Between the Wars) as well as in an all-out war scenario. The significance of this challenge has yet to fully penetrate the awareness of the decision makers and certainly not the general public, nor can it be expected to while fighting continues. We must give deeper thought to the real response to this challenge. Should the mistakes of the past listed here be repeated, as current decisions already indicate will happen, i.e., demands for "more of the same, only in larger numbers", this time around we will be facing much heavier damage far beyond burdening the state budget. The multi-arena challenge, in its profound meaning, is the most significant threat to Israel's security in years. An appropriate response must fully consider fundamental questions (such as Israel's ability to defend itself on its own), before making any major decision that will truss the country's resources to a response that will not provide a real solution.

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"The IDF's unique advantage, the commanders are the secret to its strength": Lessons Learned from 1982 to 2023[1]

Capt. (Res.) Gal Perl[2]

Until recently, the IDF forces were maneuvering in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, we need to prepare for a war in the north, if it comes. The book "With Me from Lebanon" was published over three decades ago, but it's main lessons – the importance of the ground, independence of forces, mission command (and command from the front) and Subterfuge – can be utilized in war in the Gaza Strip to succeed in the war in Lebanon.

Introduction

Israel's strategic circumstances since October 7, 2023 have brought closer the possibility that the limited conflict in the north will evolve into a full-blown war. While fighting continues in the Gaza Strip, a long, complex, confrontation with Hezbollah is being conducted on the northern front. In a way, it is reminiscent of the Security Zone days, with both sides organized and deployed, acting within a seemingly agreed-upon set of rules, with most of the fighting being Standoff fire and not maneuver-based. The IDF has succeeded in attaining significant successes, including striking hundreds of Hezbollah's operatives (as well as Palestinian terrorists), infrastructure, weaponry, and more. However, this is not enough, and the IDF must ask itself (and thoroughly examine) what are the takeaways that can be applied in a potential ground operation in Lebanon. The list

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extends beyond the scope of this article, nonetheless, separating the wheat from the chaff while examining the lessons learned from the war in the south, the IDF should look back and learn from our previous operational experience in Lebanon – and the many books written about it.

Firstly, the war in Gaza has ended a three-decade debate within the IDF (as part of a wider discussion being held by all western armies) regarding the relevance and the need for a ground maneuver. Time and again, the question of the necessity of maneuvering forces on the ground in an age when the IDF has in its arsenal such powerful and precise Fire-Intelligence integration capabilities that have been proven effective in a series of operations – both in the Gaza Strip and other arenas.

About six months before 'Swords of Iron', the Chief of the General Staff, LTG Herzi Halevi, said that the maneuver has, first and foremost, psychological value. "An adversary who knows that it may feel the boots of its enemy on the ground. This is very important for deterrence. There is a certain level of achievements in war, that cannot be attained without maneuver."[3] The ground operation, he asserted, requires two more fundamental elements: The first, the importance of taking both responsibility and initiative; and the second, what he described as one of the significant lessons he had learned from the Russia-Ukraine war – the importance of fighting spirit.[4]

The need to dismantle Hamas as a military and governing force in the Gaza Strip has put an end to the discussion, at least in Israel, considering the goals of the war which necessitated a wide-ranging ground operation. Only ground forces in the enemy's territory, can chase it down, disrupt its operations, make it feel hunted,[5] and minimize fire launched toward the home front.

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[3]   Halevi, H. (23 May 2023). Chief of the General Staff's talk in a conference in Herzliyya, Reichmann University.

[4]   Ibid.

[5]   Mattis, J. and West, B. (2022). *Call Sign: Chaos,* (Hebrew version), Ministry of Defence and Modan, p. 122; at the time, the IDF learned quite a bit from the US' experience with urban warfare in Iraq. During the Second Intifada, the CO of the 890th Paratroopers Battalion, LTC Amir Baram, adopted a saying inspired from the commanders of the USMC (probably Mattis), as the battalion's slogan: "Patience, dedication, and the occasional bullet between the eyes".

The maneuvering forces, both the regular and the reserves, under the command of MG Yaron Finkelman, the Commander of the IDF's Southern Command, have shown impressive fighting capacity operating in the north and center of the Gaza Strip. They struck thousands of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Hamas operatives, destroyed military infrastructure (including tunnels, command posts, weapons depots and fortified positions), seized weaponry, and apprehended terrorists.[6] Considering the sense of urgency, the reserves for the ground forces have shown themselves to be a force multiplier, despite years of neglect. Operational experience, maturity and judgement, professional know-how and high motivation enabled them to quickly make up the differences between them and the regular forces, and in many cases even to lead war efforts.

This conclusion is not born only of research, but also based on what I saw and felt during battle, as the reserve Marine-Paratroopers battalion in which I serve (the 697th Battalion) was called up under the "Fire Arrows" (551st) Brigade. Three weeks later, the battalion was already fighting under the command of LTC (Res.) Tzach Ekshtein, in Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahya, al-Atara, and Sheikh Radwan in Gaza.[7] Judging by my conversations with commanders and soldiers from other units who took part in the fighting, including the 55th Brigade, the 16th, and more, they too shared that experience.

The fact that the ground maneuver has been proven to be the correct operational response for the southern front, does not mean that it is necessarily the right response in the north.[8] However, we must prepare.

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[6] IDF. (November 7, 2023). Statement of the Commanding Officer of the Southern Command: "We are fighting [...] in the heart of Gaza City. In the heart of terror […] we will not stop […] Until we are victorious." IDF site.

[7] The battalion killed, with fire and Armor support and in direct confrontation, approximately 150 Hamas terrorists, destroyed infrastructure and weaponry and met all objectives in a no less than astonishing manner. A reserve battalion at its best. This came at a cost. And that cost was high. During the fighting, four of the battalion's soldiers fell, and approximately sixty were injured.

[8] Ortal, E. (February 2024). "The War of October 7 – and the One to Follow", Begin-Sadat center for Strategic Studies, pp. 6-23.

What's more – as supposedly said by former Chief of the General Staff, LTG Rafael Eitan (Raful), the problem with the enemy is that they don't attend the final briefing. [9]

Learning and preparing for the next war

Hezbollah has long ago ceased to be similar to the guerilla organization the IDF fought during the years it stayed in Lebanon, or the commando divisions that the IDF faced in 2006. Since the Second Lebanon War, Hezbollah has grown in scale, acquired advanced weaponry and an arsenal of ballistic rockets and missiles (some of them PGMs), as well as AT launchers, set up tunnel networks, and more. Moreover, its personnel have gained operational experience fighting in the civil war in Syria. In an article on the subject, BG (Res.) Dr. Meir Finkel proposed "to treat Hezbollah like a regular army, like the Syrian commando during the 1982 Lebanon War".[10] As such, it is important to learn how the IDF fought these terror and guerilla forces (PLO terrorists) as well as the Syrian commando during the war in 1982.

Even though the shelf of books written on the First Lebanon War is not that heavily laden, there are a few relevant volumes. Without denigrating books written by researchers and journalists, and it is enough to mention Israel's Lebanon War, by Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari,[11] it is clear that books written by commanders are of special import, as their conclusions and insights are affirmed by those who were there themselves and led soldiers on the battlefield.

Like in most militaries, active IDF officers do not often publish books about incidents from the recent past. Prominent examples include The Heights of Courage, by BG (Res.) Avigdor Kahalani about the armor battalion under his command during the Yom Kippur War,[12] and Undeclared

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[9] General Eitan supposedly originally said "Kapak shtaim" (ק"פכ 2) a term referring to the second, final briefing before an operation, during which final coordination between all participating units is made, and the commanders strengthen their understanding of the CO's plan as well as what the neighbouring units are planning. See: *Command and Control During Ground Operations* (August 2015, Hebrew ver.). Ground Forces, p. 137.

[10] Finkel, M. (May 2023). "Coordination of expectations: what is victory in the next Lebanon war and what is its price", Dado Center Journal 39, P. 128.

[11] Schiff, Z. and Ya'ari, E. (1985) Israel's Lebanon War. Touchstone.

[12] Kahalni, A. The Heights of Courage. (1992, Prager [Hebrew ver. 1975, Schocken]).

War, by BG (Res.) Moshe Tamir (Chiko) about his time in Lebanon while serving in the Golani infantry Brigade – a book which contained important observations and criticism of the IDF's stay in Lebanon, the fighting against Hezbollah and the strategy employed by the IDF.[13] It's no small matter when a senior officer still in active duty publishes a book in which they include criticism of the military, and this shines a positive light on the IDF as an organization which allows critical discussions aimed at learning from its failures just as much as its successes.

One of the finer books amongst these, that brought forth insights that may be applicable to a looming war in Lebanon, is the book written by MG (Res.) Yoram Yair (Ya-Ya), With Me from Lebanon (Maarachot, 1990, Hebrew edition). In it, he describes the fighting by the Paratroopers brigade under his command during the war, from the landing at the source of the Awali River in June 1982 and to arriving in Beirut. In a way the author gave himself an easy time, as he only described the brigade's battles during the first week of the war, even though it can be said that the war continued for at least two more years, if not more, until the IDF's withdrawal in May 2000. Yair chose to focus on describing a week of fighting – from the landing and up to Beirut, while the IDF stayed in Lebanon for 18 more years.

Yair's book is about an efficient, surprising maneuver.[14] It also talks about shrewd field commanders who took initiative, and dedicated forces who showed great fighting spirit. Readers would learn about the dilemmas, the mistakes, the successes, how the brigade conducted integrated lethal, Joint Warfare fighting, as well as the challenges and difficulties. Although the book describes the actions of a force sent deep into enemy territory, its lessons are also appropriate for a scenario of a force sent to the front.

In the preface to the book, then Minister of Defense, Yitzhak Rabin, wrote that the Lebanon War had once again illustrated "The IDF's unique advantage, […] that the commanders are the secret to its strength […] [The war] once again proved the necessity of the infantry corps. In the age of planes, missiles, and computers, there is still no alternative for a soldier creating facts with their body, legs, and mind. It is clear from

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13   Tamir, M. (2005). Undeclared War, (Hebrew version), Maarachot.

14   Shelah, O. (2015). Dare to Win, (Hebrew version), Yedioth Books, p. 173.

the lines written in this book, how sophisticated military though and walking down the old, but good, road of employing stratagems to surprise the enemy, spares sweat and blood, and enables military successes. In places where tanks had not yet gone and planes could not penetrate, only the infantryman could get the job done, and with success" (p. 7). In many ways, this could be said about the ongoing fighting in the Gaza Strip during 'Swords of Iron', and this is what it will be like during the possible war in Lebanon.

Surprising the enemy – appearing in a spot that will send it off-balance

When the government decided to commence operation 'Peace for Galilee', the 98th (then 96th) Division was tasked with an amphibious landing at the mouth of the Awali in Lebanon. The main force of the division was a Paratroopers brigade under the command of Yair, enhanced with engineering, artillery and armor. The operation deep in Lebanese territory was surprising, and enabled the IDF to quickly maneuver north, toward Beirut.

On June 6, 1982, the men boarded the Israeli navy's tank landers and sailed toward Lebanon. The brigade executed an amphibious landing at the mouth of the Awali. "Unlike some of the stories, these aren't safe shores; we are drawing near the greatest of dangers – war" (p. 22).

After the landing, Yair was unsure how to move northward. "Going straight toward the enemy's main force would not properly make use of the advantages of a brigade like mine; this is not fighting characteristic of paratroopers. Paratroopers' strength is in flanking and appearing – sometimes by air, sometimes by sea – in the most surprising spots, where the enemy cannot prepare to meet them. This time too, we cannot give up on the principle of flanking, and we need to find a way to surprise the enemy on land, difficult as it may be – to appear in a spot that will send the enemy off balance and bring about its collapse" (p. 52).

The "Tighozet" route, through the Chouf mountains, was the most challenging line of advance along the coast. "Seeing as both the enemy's mode of operation and its location are a riddle, I can only check that I read the map properly, and understand the environment; so that the route I chose to move the forces along really does allow every component –

paratroopers, armor, artillery, engineering – to make the best use of its advantages and at the same time, to mask its weaknesses" (p. 53).

Yair and his paratroopers waged a long, tasking campaign (70 km). Even though on the surface, choosing the mountainous route was supposed to slow the brigade down, in practice Yair's choice paid off and the paratroopers were the first force to arrive in Beirut. A significant portion of the fighting was led by the reconnaissance battalion under the command of LTC Doron Almog (Avrotzky), which consisted of "the three brigade-level companies – recon, engineering, and AT, with all their APCs – the battalion commander with eight tanks, and part of the brigade's medical company" (p. 92).[15] The brigade's reconnaissance company lead the advance, under the command of Israel Ziv, with the Battalion CO Almog alongside.

Yair described the recon battalion's advance "The men are overloaded, and the climb is very difficult. The bulletproof plates under the vests are warm, making them sweat and lose fluids" (p. 73). There is a clear lesson here for the next war. Soldiers, especially those in the vanguard, will have to be light and agile to operate in the mountainous Lebanese terrain. If not, the force will not be able to fight efficiently, as it will buckle under the heavy weight on its back.[16]

Six kilometers east of Damour, the vanguard met the enemy. "In a few seconds, the lack of water was forgotten, and the unit is in the midst of a charge. Israel is charging along with part of the force along the ridge above, and Doron is running with some of the others on the road. In a

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[15] On a personal note, this was the first book of war memoirs that I read (as a boy). My father, Arye Perl, an officer with the paratroopers who fought in the brigade and was the deputy CO of the medical company, refused to tell me about any of his experiences. After the battle of Damour, the company was split up: one Detachment, under my father's command, was put under the brigade's reconnaissance battalion, which was commanded by Almog, while the second remained with the rest of the brigade. Eventually Dad told me about the landing from the sea; about the fear he felt when they were hit by mortar fire; about a wonderful meal they made in Qabr Chamoun, after the fight; about how he rushed in a jeep with another doctor to save an injured Lebanese baby (they "took over" a hospital by singlehandedly and found the right infusion). About how he kicked out two doctors when he found out they had looted Lebanese property. About the improvised force he was attached to, that took over the President's palace in Beirut (and the people threw rice at them), and about the World Cup finals that he saw in a flat in town. The rest I had to read in Yair's book.

[16] Shelah, O. (January 7, 2011). A heavyweight question. Maariv (Hebrew).

matter of minutes, the charge is over: ten terrorists killed, ten terrorists captured" (p. 73). The water has run out, but Ziv insists on giving water to the prisoners too.

This is just a small incident, but there is much in the little there is. First, the importance of Command from the front. Years later, MG (Res.) Almog wrote: "Leading up front allows each commander to get, in the shortest time possible, the best information about the enemy's state, the condition of our forces, about the terrain, the troops' morale and how tired they are, and about what we call in a sit-rep 'additional factors'. The commander's presence at the front in critical points, like moments of crisis in the battle, allow them to be an example to their men – which could bring about a shift in momentum, breathing new energies in soldiers and commanders alike".[17] This observation was proved in previous operations in Gaza,[18] as well as in the ongoing war, and will not be any different in Lebanon.

For instance, at midnight between October 28 and 29, 2023, the men of the 551**st** brigade crossed the security fence near Kibbutz Erez and into the Gaza Strip, moving on foot for three kilometers toward Beit Hanoun. The 697th battalion was at the head of the advance,[19] with an armor company that had been put under it in the vanguard. The company CO was in the lead.[20] At first light, the battalion struck the outskirts of the urban area. The recon company, under the command of MAJ Moshe Leiter, led a rapid advance from one building to the next on the left flank, encountered terrorists and struck them. On the right flank, company B encountered terrorists in a building. A team from the company and from the battalion XO's command group fired toward the terrorists, while a tank fired two shots at the building. The battalion set up camp on the outskirts of the area. During the first battle, the battalion CO and the

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[17] Almog, D. (June 2012). Commander's place in battle. Maarachot 443, p. 29 (Hebrew).

[18] Druck, D. (2022). "The combined and joint battle 2006-2014", in: The development of the combined battle in the IDF. (Editor: M. Finkel). Maarachot and Moden, p. 297 (Hebrew).

[19] On the first night only half the battalion went in, because of a justified concern that there would not be any buildings fit to hold all the men. The second half reattached the next night.

[20] The company was part of the 8108th Battalion under the 679th Reserve Armor Brigade.

brigade CO, COL Ido Kass, were nearby and in complete control, while the two company commanders were in the lead.

Secondly, even under the stresses combat brings, the logistical difficulties, the fear, and the rage toward the enemy, the commanders did not give up on the IDF's values – purity of arms and combat morals. My battalion CO often says that moral behavior means being willing to pay the price, in this case lack of water, of adhering to the values of the IDF. This approach is also apparent in the words of the Chief of the General Staff and the CO of the Southern Command while addressing the since the beginning of the war, about the need to fight without forsaking the IDF's ethics.[21]

Colonel Yoram Yair heading the brigade command post in the Damour area (photo: IDF Archive)

Back in 1982, In a different battle in the same area, a battalion of terrorists set up an ambush, however, the brigade's vanguard spotted it ahead of time and utilized subterfuge.[22] The AT company and an armor force moved along a route heading to the village, while the battalion CO

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[21] Barnea, N. (February 16, 2024). Bibi no-no. Yedioth Ahronoth (Hebrew).
[22] Almog (June 2012), p. 28.

and the engineering unit advanced on the ridge up above the ambush. Approximately 50 terrorists trapped between the forces were killed, and about 20 captured.

The brigade's last battle before Beirut was against a Syrian commando battalion in Shemlan. The CO of the Northern Command, MG Amir Drori, and the Chief of the General Staff, LTG Rafael Eitan (Raful), pushed Yair to take over the village as quickly as possible so he could join the Christian Phalanges' forces. "The reason for the pressure from 'above' was clear to me. It is equally clear, however, that I couldn't put too much pressure on the officers under my command. I need to take into account my orders and put in any changes possible into the plan to ensure the mission is complete as quickly as possible. But I need to act like a pressure valve and keep the commanders under me safe" (p. 152).

In the battle, he wrote, "Both sides, the Israeli paratroopers on the one hand and the Syrian commandos on the other, are now akin to a pair of boxers in a ring, just before the gong is heard, signaling the end of a long, equal match between them. Both have given their all, so they can win" (p. 154). It was clear to Yair that "the victor would be the one who could manage to muster the last of their strength, despite the pain and exhaustion, to lay one more fist, a strong, accurate strike, that would bring their opponent to the matt and decide the battle" (p. 154).

As such, when the AT company's advance was halted, he decided the right spot for him to make the best impact on the battle was in front. "In order to spur the exhausted soldiers into this last decisive effort, to squeeze the last inch of energy that they still had left, the XO and I run up to the head of the column (p. 154). The charge, with the brigade commander and his deputy at the front, decided the battle and the brigade's advance toward Beirut was secured.

The unit's fighting spirit and cohesion harnessed by commanders leading from the front were the reason that damaged, exhausted forces could stand up to the task and keep moving forward. In this regard, Yair wrote: "The professionalism, the order, and the discipline of the unit high as they are, are not enough to move the men to fulfil any task during battle, when facing death. A commander who is not be able to gather their unit and will not be able to cultivate solidarity between soldiers and commanders during war, will not have at their disposal the

training, order, and discipline that were instilled during training" (p. 83).

This is how it has always been. In the final battle before Beirut, in the battles the IDF has fought since then, in 'Swords of Iron', in the Gaza Strip. Fighting spirit is also the reason that the 697th, one day after suffering casualties and injuries in Beit Hanoun, on November 10, 2023, rose like the phoenix, went on an offensive, killed Hamas operatives and continued fulfilling its tasks. There is no alternative to fighting spirit, and just like Noah's Ark, it is built before the flood – in training and exercises, war simulations at every level (company, battalion and up), whether in Joint Warfare exercises (for example, division-level exercises or the 2022 exercise in Cyprus), cultivating and teaching commanders to act with initiative and aggressiveness. It is built during service in active units, team-building events for commanders, and in-depth looks at doctrine, history and more.

Lessons learned

The 98th Division's maneuver deep in Lebanon is one of the only cases in the history of Israel's wars of a successful joint action on the front and within the depths of enemy territory. However, as the IDF History Department researcher Saul Bronfeld has said, "the successful landing helped bring about the quick collapse of the terrorists organized resistance south of the Awali, however, it was not enough to create a strategic flanking action of Beirut. IDF brigade only surrounded Beirut after the ceasefire and arrived at the city only after the hard fighting in the valley."[23]

The book **With Me from Lebanon** may be short and succinct, however, there is much good advice and excellent insights for commanders, from the fire-team to the brigade level. Reading it, especially after fighting in Gaza, I have found several important lessons relevant to Lebanon as well:

Land, land, and again, land. Before the enemy, before any other factor that affects the ability of military units to act – is analyzing the terrain. The ability to glean potential shapers from the terrain, including key locations, kill zones, controlling and controlled areas and more,

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[23] Bronfeld, S. (2022). Landing in the Awali estuary - "What more can you ask of us homeland". Yesodot 3, p. 66 (Hebrew).

is the foundation of any operational plan. In Lebanon, as Yair showed when he led his brigade on a surprise flanking maneuver, terrain is a limiting factor as well as an enabling one. The terrain in the mostly flat Gaza Strip, with the IDF moving relatively short distances, posed less of a challenge for maneuvering forces. Lebanon is a whole other ball game.

"Together we stand alone". This slogan, adopted at the time by an IDF's Paratroopers battalion commander for his unit,[24] needs to be one of a series of lessons that should be taken into account by the units that will maneuver in Lebanon, as well as those still in active combat in Gaza. The battalion is an autonomous, independent unit that is not reliant on the "mother brigade" and can act on its own. The size of the area and Hezbollah's deployment requires to act while preserving mutual aid between forces, making sure to operate within the principle of fully utilizing every force, while employing fire and support components as possible. However, the battalion must be able to solve its problems on its own, as Hezbollah is able to challenge the IDF in a way that its forces, even an entire brigade may fail to provide much needed aid.

Mission-oriented command is a way of life. During the war in Gaza, the IDF rolled back to a mission-oriented command approach, abandoning the Micromanagement method typical of its years of routine security activity. According to this approach, the commander in the field has the liberty to "choose unexpected plans-of-action in order to complete the assigned mission",[25] as if they wait for instructions, they will never be able to capitalize on unforeseen opportunities.[26] To put this approach into practice, an organizational culture that facilitates the understanding the commander's intent must be created, considering the tension between that and focusing on a particular task; mutual trust based on capabilities as well as good communication built on a shared understanding of combat doctrine, tolerance for mistakes made without malicious intent, a built-in tendency for action and showing initiative, a strong link between authority and responsibility.[27]

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[24] Finkelman, Y. (November 19, 2008). Debriefing Operation "Double Challenge" Paratrooper Patrol Battalion 5135. 35th Brigade (Hebrew).

[25] Shamir, E. (2014). The Pursuit of Mission Command, (Hebrew version), Maarachot and Modan, p. 19

[26] Ibid, p. 51

[27] Ibid, p. 41

A tank in service of the 551st Brigade during the fighting in the Gaza Strip in the 'Swords of Iron' War (Photo: IDF Spokesperson)

Moreover, the quality of a military unit is measured by the authorities and freedom of operation given, as well as the expectations set of the junior command. While war can and has made the IDF choose the mission-orientated command approach even when these characteristics are not extant. The scope and intensity of the fighting, the need to make timely decisions, and senior command's inability to be always involved with each force and places – all a natural part of war – has forced the IDF's senior command to trust its field commanders and give them freedom of operation.[28] They, in turn, have proven themselves worthy of that trust. In Lebanon, the anticipated magnitude of fighting, the enemy's known characteristics, the challenging terrain and other factors, make the commanders' understanding of two levels up and one level below imperative.

Subterfuge is a core skill. Each adversary system has an obvious center of gravity (a controlling area, a C2 center, central structure, a component which if struck destabilizes the adversary's organization, striking it off-balance). At its core, subterfuge is analyzing the adversary,

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[28] Tamir (2005), p. 275

identifying this center of gravity, and understanding how to strike it in a rapid, unexpected manner. This was how Yair's brigade operated in the First Lebanon War; this is how the IDF acted during "Swords of Iron". As said by BG (Res.) Tamir, the enemy's system in the Gaza Strip has been dismantled as a result of the integration of the intense fire effort ("The refractive element") – which damage the tunnels just moments before the forces on the ground maneuvered into enemy territory, and denied Hamas operatives the cover of the subterranean space – and the ground maneuver which chased down and killed Hamas operatives who were forced to remain above ground.[29]

Improvisation is founded on doctrine. It is important to act according to doctrine dealing with Command and Control (C2/C&C) and the Brigade Combat Team (BCT), and of course according to the good old blue handbook (which changes color with every edition).[30] Improvisation, when done right, is based on doctrine (and everything is written). It can be said that improvisation is simply adapting doctrine to the given circumstances (the adversary, the terrain, our force, and of course, the 'H'). When it isn't done this way – the results are often grave.

Conclusion

Until recently, the soldiers of the 98th Division, under the command of BG Dan Goldfuss, have been fighting in Khan Yunis. On October 7th, they fought to stop the Nukhba operatives attacking Israeli communities and IDF bases nearby the Gaza Strip. After then, between December 2023 and April 2024, the division stormed Khan Yunis, struck Hamas terrorists and destroyed weaponry and infrastructure, engaging in integrated warfare both below and above ground.[31]

At the same time, we must prepare for the next war, should it come. This preparation requires us to ask difficult questions, including how competent would forces be, namely the reserves, if the IDF had the time to train them? Has the IDF been training properly in the years prior to the war, in a manner that simulates the war well enough, whatever

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[29] Interview with BG (Res.) Moshe (Chiko) Tamir, Kfar Daniel, February 19, 2024

[30] A pocket handbook consisting of a set of instructions, tips and notes about C&C and fighting doctrine given to the junior command in the IDF..

[31] Goldfuss, D. (March 13, 2024). Statement of the commander of the 98th Paratroopers Division. Khan Yunis.

form it takes? Have we prepared our forces well enough? The IDF has already begun combatting tunnels in Khan Yunis – a decision that required willingness to take risks (the subterranean domain neutralizes many of the IDF's Joint Warfare advantages), boldness, and professional skill therefore avoided as much as possible.

Another question relates to the duration of the fighting, the patterns of combat and the way the IDF operates. In the past, there have been conversations in the IDF about reducing the duration of war (or at least, removing the home front from the area of combat). Six months into the war we can confidently say that neither this nor that has happened. This issue requires thinking about the rest of the war from a standpoint of managing equipment stores and order of battle (both regular and reserves), as well as how the IDF is going to be set up in the field (martial law, establishing a security zone, and more open questions), as Hamas has changed how it is deployed in the Gaza Strip, transitioning into waging a guerilla war – the IDF too, has reduced its forces and moved to conducting small-scale offensive operations.

The war has changed shape since it first started, and has shifted into its second stage, like what happened in Judea & Samaria after operation "Defensive Shield". It has become "the IDF's mop-up war against the recovery of Hamas in areas that have been taken over and abandoned, to which the terror organization has returned, once again holding them in its grasp."[32] The IDF has continued to act to combat this recovery. An example is operation "Local Surgery" (March 18 – April 1, 2024), during which the 162nd Division raided Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza.[33]

At the battalion level, with every objective we were tasked with attacking, we sat down and analyzed it so we could act not only with the appropriate force and at the right time, but also in a manner that would deny the enemy any opportunity to set up a campaign to resist us. We must assume the Hezbollah will be able to set up one, so there are not shortcuts in this case either. CCVWH (Center of gravity, Critical assets, Vulnerabilities, What will decide, How to decide), has been and

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[32] Ziv, I. (March 22, 2024). The action at Shifa was the opening shot of the 'Second Iron Sword War'. N12 (Hebrew).

[33] Levy, S. (April 1, 2024). Suicide terrorists and documentation from October 7: New details on the operation in Shifa. Mako (Hebrew).

will remain the leading approach, because at the end of the day, there is a mission to fulfill. The terrain, independent forces, familiarity with combat literature, mission-oriented command (and leading from the front), and subterfuge are the essence of the main lessons we should learn from Yair's book - and from the war in Gaza – to succeed in the war in Lebanon.

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Part 4

Literature Review

"Doctor of Operations" - Book Review
Life in a War by Dov Tamari
(Yedioth Books, 2024)

Gal Perl[34]

Introduction[35]

> "We Israelis, who have lived through three generations of war, greatly value - as a nation, as a military, as a unit in the military, and as individuals - the experience we have accumulated. But this experience is paradoxical. It has immense importance on one hand, yet on the other, it is often a millstone, as it pulls us to the past, while the next war will always be different from its predecessor" (p. 275).

This understanding, articulated by BG (Ret.) Dr. Dov Tamari (Dovik) in his autobiography, *Life in a (Never Ending) War*, is at the center of his new book. The book's title is derived from his approach, according to which war is the key factor shaping life here in Israel to the extent of being society's organizing principle. Some would argue, as does American director Oliver Stone, that "War is the organizing principle of any society" (Stone, 1991). The fact that the book was released during the "Swords of Iron" war seems to have given this statement added soundness.

In full disclosure, Tamari taught me in my master's degree and greatly influenced me. He is a national security expert who wrote his PhD dissertation on the IDF's reserve system. In the late 1990s, he established

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and headed the Institute for the Research of Operational Doctrine (MALTAM), which later became the Dado Center for Interdisciplinary Military Studies. If there is something missing in this book, it is substantial references to his role, in developing systemic thinking in the IDF and training senior officers in this field (Shelah, 2015, p. 82).

But before becoming a renowned academic expert, Tamari was one of the IDF's most experienced and decorated field commanders. Chief of the General Staff Yitzhak Rabin even called him "Doctor of Operations" when he commanded the General Staff Reconnaissance Unit (Sayeret Matkal). In the book, he sought to describe his firsthand experiences, mainly to explain his own takeaways that could be applied to build a new knowledge base for future challenges. The book he wrote, just like when I studied under his guidance at the university, was an eye-opening and well-written lesson on command, tactics, and strategy, as well as on military thought and matters of national security.

The absurdity, he wrote, is "that militaries are supposed to respond to what has not yet happened, but their learning is based on the past, upon which they design forces, capabilities, and thinking. In too many cases, this has proven to be unsuccessful. The military's role is to wrestle with the paradox, confront it, and produce knowledge, understanding, organization, and patterns of action for what has not yet occurred" (p. 393).

Indeed, in the IDF, one of the most operationally engaged armies in the world, commanders tend to rely mainly on the operational experience they have accumulated during their service. This was the case, for example, during the period of stay in Lebanon (Tamir, 2005, p. 44). Yet this experience, albeit important and valuable, is only one component in the plethora of capabilities required of senior officers. It is worth mentioning here the common saying in the U.S. Marine Corps, according to which training is preparation for known threats while education (meaning officer training courses, academic studies, and study of military history and theories in the fields of security and strategy) is preparation for the unknown. These are all necessary for commanders to be able to handle complex and abstract strategic concerns, as opposed to the tangible and tactical matters they have dealt with thus far. The challenges they will face will be new, and only the

combination of their experience with all of these will allow them to formulate an appropriate response (Amidror, 2002, p. 39). After all, no war is like its predecessor. Although the nature of war never changes, everything is always new. Different enemy, different weapons, different battlefield. New knowledge is required. Building the ark before the flood is always preferable. Although some of the knowledge will have to be learned during the war itself, a significant part of the preparations and knowledge can be obtained beforehand. On this, American General Dwight Eisenhower already said, "Plans are worthless, but planning is everything" (Eisenhower, 1957).

Every military needs "subversive entities" to advance its capabilities

Tamari, who grew up in Kibbutz Ein Harod, enlisted in the IDF in 1954. The kibbutz movement wanted him and his peers to join the Nahal brigade. They refused and volunteered for the 890th Paratroopers Battalion. LTC Ariel Sharon (Arik), led the battalion in a long series of successful retribution operations in which Tamari participated.

Every military, he wrote, "needs 'subversive entities' to advance its capabilities. Wise general staff institutionalize subversion and translate it into methods of operation applied by additional units" (p. 73). Unit 101, which Sharon established and merged with the paratroopers, was such a formation, and the paratroopers were such in all matters of shaping the IDF's combat norms in the years following the War of Independence. The General Staff Reconnaissance Unit (Sayeret Matkal), in which Tamari later served and commanded, was such in all matters of shaping the modes of operation of the IDF's special forces in addition to Sayeret Golani and Egoz which pulled the entire military forward, during the IDF's stay in the security zone in Lebanon (Tamir, 2005, p. 42).

The Chief of the General Staff at the time, LTG Moshe Dayan, sought to make the raid a central component in the IDF's concept of operation, because this tactic allows force employment flexibility in size and mobility, and its purpose is to surprise and shatter the enemy's confidence, create a sense of pursuit and vulnerability, and then return to the point of origin (Shelah, 2015, p. 121). A sequence of raids can create a severe sense of inferiority among enemy forces and serve as

a springboard to open war, should Israel choose to do so. Sharon's paratroopers were the instrument he used to institutionalize combat and command norms and to implement the offensive mode of operation he conceived (Shamir, 2023, p. 163).

The first operation in which Tamari participated was Operation "Black Arrow," a raid on Egyptian army bases in the Gaza Strip in February 1955, as Gaza was already then, an operational focal point challenging the IDF. He was then a trainee in the paratroopers' squad commanders' course in a company commanded by Captain Saadia Elkayam (Sofafo). After storming the camp, he wrote, "We stormed the nearby building with heavy fire. On the way, we threw grenades into the scout tents where Egyptian soldiers were sleeping and killed them before they left their tents" (p. 28). Fear, he admitted, "is not the warrior's best friend, but it's always there" (p. 30). Sofafo was killed in that operation, and a new commander was appointed to the company, LT Meir Har-Zion, a prominent commander who greatly influenced Tamari.

In retrospect, he noted that the concept of "Follow me," still prevalent in the IDF today and very evident on the battlefields in the Gaza Strip in the current war, was shaped then in the paratroopers. However, he later learned "that it is essential to distinguish between Follow me' as a normative concept and ethos and the practical tactical question of the location of the company commander, battalion commander, and other force commanders in battle" (p. 33). According to him, "The commander's position is not set in procedures and drills. A commander must constantly consider, even during the battle, the right balance between leading the force, avoiding exposure to the first bullet, and the ability to see clear and up close what is happening on the battlefield. The need to move people requires presence, as opposed to commanding large formations where command is not direct but through subordinate commanders and commanders subordinate to them" (p. 33).

Tamari did not mention this, but as commanders climb the ranks, the operation they oversee becomes strategic and does not remain at the tactical level. This requires, alongside personal example, combat leadership, and forward command, which are all cornerstones of command, also an understanding of how force employment affects and connects tactics and the tiers above it.

In operation "Samaria," a raid on the Jordanian police in Qalqilya in October 1956, Tamari was already an officer and served as a platoon commander in the paratroopers' reconnaissance unit that had just been established. The reconnaissance force ambushed a Jordanian military convoy called to reinforce police forces attacked by the paratroopers. "When they were, unfortunately for them, between the explosive charges and the ignition cans, we activated them and fired anti-tank munitions. The two vehicles overturned on the slope. After suffering a hit by a bazooka, the leading armored vehicle, managed to continue driving westward and disappeared. We stormed and killed about 25 soldiers before they could fire a single shot." (p. 54). Later, the reconnaissance unit commander was wounded and Tamari, who took command of the force, evacuated his men while demonstrating coolness, resourcefulness, and courage later awarding him the Medal of Courage. As commander of Sayeret Matkal, he was awarded two additional Chief of Staff Citations.

Limitations of military power

Analyzing the Sinai War (1956), Tamari wrote that during the movement of the Paratroopers Brigade to the Mitla Pass, to join the battalion of Rafael Eitan (Raful). Within an hour, his force captured a two-company Egyptian compound near the village of Thamad without suffering any losses. He later wrote that the battle was "almost undocumented or researched because it was successful, matter of fact, and simple, without wonderous heroic acts. The IDF memory prefers battles characterized by complications, failures, and therefore also acts of heroism" (p. 86).

According to Tamari, the man in command of the IDF at the time was, in his view, the best Chief of the General Staff in IDF history, Dayan, who was as familiar with the IDF's weaknesses as he was with its strengths. The plan he designed was built considering limited military power. Former Chief of the General Staff LTG Gabi Ashkenazi once said that "Our duty is to ensure that the missions we task upon those who take off into the air and cross the border, are attainable. Not risk-free, but achievable. That the military power in its broad sense, not of the pilot in the cockpit and not of the soldier in the tank or at the entrance to a house in Beirut or Gaza, but in the broad sense, are realistic goals. Understanding what can be achieved and what cannot be achieved with

military force is a painful realization. Employing military force is a means, and not an end" (Ashkenazi, 2012). This he explained is how the plans for operation "Cast Lead" were shaped and this is how, in his view, force should be employed. It seems that Tamari thinks similarly.

But Tamari included in the book a comment by Defense Minister Pinhas Lavon, who told General Staff officers in the end of 1953 that they should "understand a very simple assumption that great generals in the world realize today: there can be a wonderful, successful military operation, that may turn into a political disaster, making it eventually a military failure" (p. 68). And when does this happen? When tactical actions are disconnected from the political goals. The bridge between the two is strategy. In its absence, or in case the chosen strategy is unattainable, it is not at all certain that a collection of tactical and operational actions on the battlefield, successful, daring, and efficient as they may be, will contribute to victory in the campaign and achieving political goals. Alternatively, there can be a campaign in which the tactical tier failed more than once, did not meet its missions, and the operations (even successful ones) it conducted had a loose connection with the overall strategy, yet the cumulative achievement of the military force employment was a strategic success. This was the case, for example, in the Second Lebanon War.

"I won't be surprised if and when we are surprised"

From the paratroopers, Tamari moved, as mentioned, to Sayeret Matkal. Under his command, the unit crystalized into a leading special forces unit. From there he moved to the Armored Corps and served as commander of the 401st Brigade. In September 1973, in a skeleton exercise of the 143rd Armored Reserve Division, headed by his former commander from the paratroopers, MG (Res.) Ariel Sharon, Tamari spoke with the new CO of the Southern Command, MG Shmuel Gonen (Gorodish).

Should the IDF need to strike the west bank of the Suez Canal, Tamari said, the Southern Command will need an additional armored division. The CO agreed and expressed his intention to demand two additional divisions – five in total. But it can be assumed that the next war, Tamari replied, will be conducted on two fronts, where one division in the Golan Heights against the Syrians will not be enough,

and in general, the General Staff will not be able to remain without a General Staff reserve division. Gonen thought for a moment and summed up with a sentence that is the embodiment of the hubris that brought upon that war: "But in the end of the day, they're just Arabs" (p. 274). This is, Tamari determined, "the essence of 'the failure' in few words" (p. 274).

In the Yom Kippur War, Tamari served as the deputy of the 162nd Division commander, MG Avraham Adan (Bren). In the containment battle on October 14, Tamari led part of the division's forces, including the 274th Armored Brigade (Ezov, 2023, p. 283). "At seven in the morning the Egyptian attack began, and forces were immediately engaged. The Egyptians attacked with two tank brigades accompanied by infantry. Heavy fire came from two directions. The reports from the Tiran tanks brigade commander sounded shaken from time to time. As recalled, this was the brigade's first battle. A report came claiming more than 20 of our tanks were hit. This was a false report, but it's hard to know what's false and what's accurate in such moments, and it takes time to clarify" (p. 298). It was a tough battle,

Commander of the Southern Front, former Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Chaim Bar-Lev, and Deputy Commander of Division 162, Brigadier General Dov Tamari, during the Yom Kippur War (Photo: IDF Archive)

and the division's forces managed to hold the line despite the casualties it suffered. "I added a divisional battle as a notch on my belt, but it was a very stressful day. I think that was the day that my hair started to go white" (p. 299), Tamari wrote. The division commander, Adan, later determined that in this battle "Dovik's command was exemplary: calm, thoughtful, in control of the situation and demonstrating knowledge and experience accumulated over six days of fighting" (Adan, 1979, p. 173).

Tamari also extensively referred to the battle conducted by the 890th Paratroopers Battalion, commanded LTC Yitzhak Mordechai, in the Chinese Farm and noted that the division did not have enough intelligence about the enemy's deployment in the compound while having to expand the bottleneck leading to the bridgehead. "This was the reality into which Battalion 890 entered on the night of October 16, and barely came out of there on the afternoon of the next day, suffering heavy losses. It was an encounter battle against entrenched Egyptian forces with high fire capacity. My opinion both then and now is that in spite of it all, the battalion fulfilled its mission: to allow the dragging of heavy pontoons to the crossing point, even though the Egyptian forces remained in the field" (p. 302).

Often, he wrote, the question arises "What was the right thing to have done? Risk the crossing, which was the only possible response to the Egyptian success and the only chance to bring the war to a reasonable conclusion? Delay it? Avoid it?" (p. 303). This, he explained, raises again the "eternal question that senior commanders encounter and will meet in every war: if a decisive point has been identified, on which the success of the battle or the entire campaign depends, and a unit - battalion, brigade, division - suffers heavy casualties, should achieving the mission be dropped"? (p. 303) According to him, he remains convinced that there was no choice in that battle. "In war, the number of casualties does not always determine whether an action is justified and worthy" (p. 303).

Tamari retired from the IDF as a brigadier general, after commanding a division as well as the Command and Staff College. Despite the Chief of the General Staff's wish to promote him to major general, the then Defense Minister, Ariel Sharon, decided against it presumably as part of the clashes between the generals after the 1973 war. Yet Tamari was not bitter about it, and while voicing objective criticism, he praised Sharon in the book as a field commander saying that he "led the division well during the war" (p. 306). Sharon's division crossed the canal and enabled the campaign's tipping point on the southern front. The encirclement of the Third Army, which was made possible thanks to that achievement, was carried out by the division in which Tamari fought.

Brittle yet Antifragile Military

In a special chapter at the end of the book, dedicated to the war that broke out on October 7, 2023, Tamari included two statements with which he often opened courses he taught at the university. First, he wrote, "The IDF is a brittle military" (p. 389), because it has relied, since its establishment, on a small regular force, insufficient in size to deal with threats, and on a large reserve force. Second, he noted, "I won't be surprised if and when we are surprised" (p. 389). It can be determined that these two statements became truths with the outbreak of the war, although the IDF recovered impressively.

IDF forces, both regular and reserves under the command of Southern Command CO MG Yaron Finkelman, carried out an offensive ground operation in the Gaza Strip and recorded many tactical achievements, fighting above and below ground (IDF website editorial, 2023). The maneuvering divisions, assisted by precise fire and maneuver-adjacent fire, hit thousands of Hamas and PIJ operatives, destroyed weapons, military infrastructure (including tunnels, command facilities, ammunition depots, and fighting positions) and apprehended terrorist operatives. The fighting in the heart of densely built and populated areas required IDF commanders, at all levels and certainly brigade and division commanders, to employ all those values that Tamari referred to, as well as a deep understanding of the connection between tactical action and strategic significance.

This demonstrates the concept of antifragility described by philosopher Nassim Nicholas Taleb, according to which "Antifragility is beyond resilience or robustness. The resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better" (Taleb, 2014, p. 25). Still, it's important to remember that this recovery happened against a specific enemy, and it's better to keep it in the appropriate perspective and not talk about it as if it were a recovery like in 1973, against the Syrian and Egyptian armies. Additionally, and still, for the statement made by Minister Lavon not to become relevant again, it is necessary to ensure that there is a close connection between these moves and the overall strategy, and that considering the grave threat to the home front and the increasing burden on the economy, these will be rapid and decisive in nature.

Tamari, who deeply researched the reserve system, determined that over the years there was a "continuous erosion of the reserves" (p. 408). This hindered the military's readiness for scenarios like those of October 7th. On the other hand, he claimed, the war "is a golden age for reserve soldiers. From turnout that exceeded expectations, through fighting in poor starting conditions, to the suffering and damage caused to the reserve soldier, their family, and their livelihood. All this during unprecedented political and social unrest, which polarized many reserve soldiers against the government" (p. 408).

As someone who fought in the war as a reserve officer, I can only add that although he was right in every clause, it would have been better to also say something about the high level of fighting demonstrated by many reserve units despite the deficiencies and gaps in force readiness. This stemmed from the fact that the reserves brought with them maturity, common sense, operational experience, and a different command style from that of regular commanders, which included smart adherence to the mission, so that it would be performed to the utmost rather than hardheadedly. These advantages coupled with high-level competence maintained over the years in some of the reserve brigades, often allowed to operate "at the tip of the blue arrow," that is, spearheading maneuvering forces.

Tamari also warned, in the wake of the war, against over-reliance on technology. For the acquisition of advanced technological systems "does not negate proven foundations of defense and combat" (p. 410). Indeed, he noted, advanced technologies are the IDF's most critical asset, but "technology products have no independent status. They are an essential part of a multi-component defense and combat system" (p. 410).

Following this, Tamari included in the book a story from the beginning of Chief of the General Staff LTG Motta Gur's tenure, after the Yom Kippur War. Chief of the General Staff Gur deliberated on the direction needed "to cement the IDF's power - a significant change in the quality of the military or rapid quantitative growth. His decision was quantitative growth. He did not explain why he decided so. I assume he failed to truly define in his own mind the meaning of qualitative growth meant" (p. 323). It is therefore essential to find the balance point between the need to establish a large order of battle that will allow the military to

operate on several fronts simultaneously without compromising quality elements such as advanced technology, precise weaponry, and especially excellent commanders, curious and hungry for knowledge, with combat leadership who confidently call, "Follow me!".

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October 7, 2023, will forever be remembered as the day many of Israel's fundamental security assumptions collapsed, particularly those of the IDF. A surprising and effective attack by Hamas managed to challenge – and in many cases temporarily disrupt—IDF systems, drawing Israel into a complex, multi-front conflict that is still ongoing.

At *Dado Center Journal*, we are committed to learning and improving. We share in the successes and failures of the IDF. In retrospect, we have not always succeeded in challenging the existing mindset (for instance, regarding the Palestinian issue and the military threat from Gaza) and influencing the organization. The journal has encouraged and reflected the discussions that took place on issues we identified as urgent or requiring further debate, sometimes managing to be critical and challenging, and other times mainly reflecting the prevailing conventions.

Regarding some of the core issues of the current war, the journal has previously established a vital knowledge base that enables fresh thinking, while in other areas, we still have a significant path to tread.

We hope this issue is another step in adapting the journal to its purpose and mission – serving as a platform for professional, relevant, critical, and instructive discourse that will help the IDF evolve, stay relevant, and achieve victory.