

High Trajectory Weapons and Guerilla Warfare: Adjusting Fundamental Security Concepts

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In his book *National Security* Israel Tal deals at length with the key ideas and principles of Israel's security doctrine that were established in the 1950s.¹ He suggests that Israel's security doctrine can be defined in one clause: an almost total neglect of the power of endurance in favor of maximum overwhelming force. In practice, the essence of military performance in this context has over the years divided into three fundamental components:

- *Deterrence.* This is the component in Israel's strategy that was established in order to prevent Arab-initiated wars against Israel. Volumes have been written on the subject of deterrence, in a general context and within the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. An understanding of the concept of deterrence is complicated because of the difficulty in quantifying the scale and the components of deterrence.²

- *Warning.* Israel's ability to take a calculated risk against the military forces of Arab countries has created a situation in which a considerable portion of the IDF – its reserve apparatus – is not mobilized and is unprepared for battle. Early warning supplies Israel with sufficient time to prepare a suitable response to threats.

- *Decision,* the component completing the security triangle. For the purposes of this discussion, the concept of decision means

subduing the military capability of the attacking country and no more than that. David Ben-Gurion noted that for Israel there is no possibility of a final resolution to the conflict, so long as the Arabs are not interested in one.³

An additional analysis of these components can be found in an article written by Yoav Gelber⁴ that followed recent reports on an Israeli attack in Syria and appeared in the wake of the ensuing public discussion regarding Israel's deterrence. Gelber's central argument touches on the collapse of all three components. He writes that in 1973, as in 2006, all three components collapsed: Israel lost its deterrence, there was no warning, and Israel was unable to achieve decision. It is of little matter how many times Israel shouted or will continue to proclaim how it won. Israel is using the same concepts and thought patterns towards the Palestinians and Hiz-

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zbollah that it used towards the Egyptian and Syrian armies. However, Gelber continues, these are of no significance against religious fanatics who are ready to commit suicide or sacrifice their lives. These are odds that no regular army would fight against.

Let us consider the change Gelber describes and assess its significance regarding the fundamental components of Israel's security concept.

Since its establishment, the State of Israel has been called on to confront two primary threats: conventional military threats and terrorism⁵ (the non-conventional threat is beyond the scope of this article). The operation of conventional forces against the IDF has meant the operation of organized military forces. The methods of warfare include operating large organized armies via maneuver for the purpose of moving and applying force, so as to occupy or defend territory and destroy the enemy. Over the years, in response to the IDF's anti-maneuvering potential, the enemy has developed two key capabilities.

The first is the massive use of high trajectory fire. Countries such as Syria and organizations like Hizbollah in Lebanon and Palestinian organizations have built up high trajectory fire capabilities as a key part of their operational capability. The Syrian military has built up powerful, well-stocked firing capabilities in a system built to operate on Israel's northern front as well as within Israel's strategic interior. At the same time Hizbollah and other terror organizations have also built up high trajectory systems, which present Israel with a significant challenge. Actually, Syria could launch an attack that comprises firing on IDF forces or a terror attack against civilians without operating any sort of maneuvering force and without

any objective of seizing territory.

The second capability is guerilla warfare, a method of warfare characterized by two fundamental components: decentralized action carried out by small, low signature forces, with localized objectives of hitting, exhausting, and disrupting enemy operations; and concealment, intended mainly to thwart the opponent's ability to employ his conventional power. Recent experience testifies to a Syrian attempt to build supplementary fighting capabilities based on guerrilla warfare methods while preserving its conventional abilities. The use of guerilla methods requires that guerilla forces be located in familiar territory and receive assistance from the local civilian infrastructure and population. Therefore this is primarily a defensive type of warfare directed against attacking forces located in territory outside of their country. It would have serious limitations if used to attack Israel in order to occupy territory.

Given the special conditions Israel faces, mainly the size of its territory, its minimal strategic depth, and the concentration of its population and strategic infrastructure within a narrow and crowded area, it is imperative to conduct an in-depth examination of the implications of the changing nature of the threat to Israel. The reliance of Syria and agents of terror on high trajectory fire and on guerilla warfare methods necessitates a critical review of the three conceptual elements described above.

Deterrence

The 1969-70 War of Attrition and the 1973 Yom Kippur War broke out following one of the IDF's most striking victories: the Six Day War. A discussion of Israel's deterrence, therefore, would do well to begin with the elusiveness of that component given the per-

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ception of those years. Furthermore, since then, attempts by Arab countries as well as terror organizations have focused on eroding Israel's resistance rather than striking Israel with one decisive blow.

Deterrence should be characterized by different concepts that serve to distinguish between a symmetrical clash of military forces (force vs. force) and an asymmetrical clash in which an organized military force acts against non-military forces employing means of terror and guerilla warfare.

- *Symmetrical deterrence*, in this case, deterrence against the use of military force by an Arab country. Since the Yom Kippur

War, Israel has not been attacked by a military belonging to an Arab country, and apparently Israel has deterred Arab countries from attacking it. Syria, for example, was deterred from attacking Israel during the Second

Lebanon War and in response to what was reported to be an Israeli attack within Syria this past September. On the other hand Syria was not discouraged during the Second Lebanon War or in previous years from extending significant support to Hizbollah and other terror organizations under its auspices.

- *Asymmetric deterrence* refers here to deterring organizations and countries from taking action against Israel via terror that uses high trajectory fire and other methods. Throughout its existence Israel has clearly not succeeded in maintaining asymmetric deterrence, as terrorist elements and sponsoring countries have continued to operate against it. Prior to the Second Lebanon War Hizbollah developed a *modus operandi* whereby the organization was not deterred

from occasional actions, nor was it deterred from attempting to kidnap Israeli soldiers (succeeding in two cases). However to date the results of the Second Lebanon War show that a state of asymmetric deterrence exists vis-à-vis the organization, and Hizbollah has entirely avoided action against Israel. In contrast with the situation in the north, Israel appears unable to deter or prevent the high trajectory fire from Gaza executed by a number of organizations with differing interests.

In its two forms, deterrence can be achieved for a limited time. Success is measured by the length of time deterrence lasts. An examination of Israel's inability to realize asymmetric deterrence in the south, contrasted with success in the north (which has lasted one and a half years), points to the difference between these arenas, which comprises two main elements. The first is centralized control. Hizbollah is an organization able to control its forces well. There are other militias operating in Lebanon, but they are not significantly active in the region where Hizbollah operates. Hizbollah's domination allows it to control hostile activities from southern Lebanon. In Gaza, on the other hand, the Hamas organization operates alongside other terror organizations that, under the existing situation, are not under central Hamas control.

The second element is the extent of Israel's use of force. The scale of Israel's operation in Lebanon was highly disproportionate to the extent of the threat. The operation caused extreme damage to Hizbollah – its civilian home front, its operational ability, and its economic infrastructure. It would appear that the intensity of the force used is closely related to the ability to maintain sustained asymmetric deterrence. It is likely that using similar force in Gaza, whereby the operational and economic infrastructures of

Hamas and accompanying organizations are attacked *significantly* for an extended time, would allow a certain measure of asymmetric deterrence against these organizations.

Maintaining asymmetric deterrence is a significant challenge for Israel. The introduction of high trajectory fire as a key instrument of terror actions against Israel obliges the country to find ways of realizing this type of deterrence against terror organizations. The model of the Second Lebanon War shows that it is possible over time to maintain asymmetric deterrence against Hizbollah.

Warning

Over the years Israel has developed excellent intelligence capabilities for identifying enemy capabilities and intentions of attacking Israel. The nation's preparedness has centered on a scenario in which Israel is attacked by military forces invading its territory. To meet this type of situation a common language was constructed whereby indicators ranked enemy intentions to attack. It seems that the scenario of Syrian maneuvering forces moving into the Golan Heights is growing more remote, replaced by a scenario with asymmetric elements such as massive high trajectory fire or attrition operations using guerrilla warfare methods. This type of threat causes warning capability to be dangerously limited. The massive firing of short range rockets does not necessitate extended preparation. In fact, the Syrian army has the ability to fire within a short time frame. Presumably a surprise attack of massive high trajectory fire will include preparations for an IDF response, which in turn will signal as to Syrian intentions (in other words, referred deterrence.⁶) Also possible are offensive scenarios whereby Syrian forces employ guerrilla methods to execute localized attacks

against Israeli targets and assets along the border. What meaning does warning have under these conditions? Two principal characteristics of warning can be defined.

- *Remote warning* refers to the intelligence capability to warn as to the operation of forces beyond the country's borders, for example intelligence warnings on events in Syria or intelligence alerts on events in Gaza. Both these cases necessitate intelligence that operates without having a permanent presence in the area. Remote warning enables a satisfactory response to the operation of organized military forces against Israel, alerting as to their maneuvers as well as their capacity for fire. This type of warning is facilitated by the high signature of the military formations involved. However, it is difficult to supply effective warnings of events beyond the country's borders that are connected with high trajectory fire such as short range rockets; this also applies to the operation of low signature forces employing guerilla methods that are run by terror organizations (in the Gaza Strip or in Lebanon, for example) or perhaps Syria.

- *Presence-based warning.* IDF fighting in Judea and Samaria has been characterized over the years by an ability to generate effective intelligence warnings based on an ongoing IDF presence in the region. Proof of this is that the IDF and the General Security Services were successful in reducing terror to more tolerable proportions. Attempts to realize this capability in Gaza and in Lebanon show just how difficult it is to generate effective intelligence from afar.

Accordingly, the warning component of Israel's security concept must be adjusted and refined. The need for warning on the maneuvering of large forces belonging to Arab countries is still valid. At the same time, the

need has grown for warning as to the operation of guerilla-contoured forces and massive high trajectory fire, whether activated by a country or – and all the more so – by a terror organization. Reliance on referred deterrence may well prove inadequate.

Decision

The term decision describes a situation where in a swift action, the opponent's ability is eradicated, and it succumbs first to a state of helplessness and thereafter surrenders.⁷ The IDF is required to achieve quick decision in order to impact significantly on an enemy country's organized military capability;

at the same time it must hit and minimize as much as possible the operational capabilities and damage caused by organizations, including terror organizations.⁸ If in previous scenarios the IDF prepared for attacks

contoured along the lines of the Yom Kippur War, in which maneuvering forces move into the country's territory, now new scenarios dominate. These include enemy attacks consisting of massive, high intensity high trajectory fire along the length and breadth of the front, and reaching into the country's strategic depth. There is also the possibility of fire directed at civilian targets and infrastructure, with Syria firing in combination with or separately from Hizbollah. In accordance with IDF fundamental concepts, the first stage of a response would include a defensive fighting stage, after which the military must achieve decision via attack. It is fitting, then, to examine the implications of defensive fighting and attack in these scenarios.

The enemy's concentrated attack effort

and transition from maneuvering to firepower obliges an in-depth clarification of IDF defensive fighting. If in the past opponents opened fire in order to create conditions for a subsequent maneuvering assault, in the new situation fire is the primary component of attack. Stopping the fire becomes the basic component of any IDF operational response. The experience of the Second Lebanon War showed that stopping long range fire effectively is achievable; in contrast, it is difficult to stop short range fire. The overall response to the threat is an integrated defensive and offensive response that may be based on four components, two defensive and two offensive:

- *Intercepting rockets and missiles in flight.*

Israel is aiming to develop and produce defensive systems enabling the interception of in-flight rockets. At this stage it is difficult to see how such systems would supply a comprehensive answer to the problem, not to mention that the expected cost of operating such systems would be high and the extent of firing likely to be great indeed. That an interception system could effectively handle the threat seems unlikely under these conditions. The effectiveness of the system is likely to be higher for the Gaza region, where the scope of fire is unlike what is expected in the north.

- *Passive defense and defense of the civilian front.* This defensive component comprises two parts: the creation of a shielding and survivability capability founded on apt prioritization of the country's vital systems, and the ability to supply protection to citizens against missile and rocket attacks. This protection must be constructed in order to enable a reasonable degree of ongoing Israeli civilian and economic activity. At the same time it is imperative to fashion a complete operational concept for defending the civil-

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ian front, which must include the integration of all relevant components including: the IDF, the National Emergency Authority (for defending the home front), local government systems, and even extra-governmental agencies such as NGOs and other organizations. Only a synergetic integration of all these elements along with instruction of the population for the “day of reckoning” can enable the creation of an effective response to high trajectory fire on the civilian front.

- *Counter fire.* During the Second Lebanon War the IDF demonstrated capabilities of hitting medium range and long range launching systems, but was hard pressed to attack short range rockets with any measure of success. Apparently effective counter fire ability will also be absent in the foreseeable future. The creation of an effective attack cycle of locating-firing-destroying constitutes one of the most meaningful challenges for the IDF. Nonetheless, the use of (statistically precise) counter fire will continue to be a component of an overall response to the rocket threat.

- *Maneuvering assault actions in launch areas.* Operating maneuvering forces in launch areas in order to directly engage agents that operate and support launches would spur a significant decrease in enemy fire. Such a maneuvering action would have to operate in an area well protected by regular forces as well as forces employing guerilla methods and controlling large anti-tank systems. The IDF must identify the optimal maneuvering blend that would enable it to also move about in such protected areas. Despite its new emphasis on high trajectory fire, the Syrian army still has appreciable maneuvering capabilities; the IDF’s maneuvering actions would have to hit these significantly while conquering territory and taking action

against targets in a way that reduces motivation to continue firing rockets.

Achieving decision obliges a balance between all the components; at the same time, the lessons of the war in Iraq must be kept in mind. The Iraqi military was subdued within a short time, but the American military has since found itself confronting terror directed against Iraqi civilians as well as a significant level of guerilla warfare directed against American forces. Such being the case, the need to achieve decision obliges a finalization of the military moves while developing a comprehensive operational concept. In order to put the last touches on decision, the IDF must supply a response to guerilla threats originating within and outside of territory the IDF has conquered, until a resolution to the conflict is implemented.

Conclusion

The range of threats against Israel has injected new components into the equation, and the blend of the overall threat has changed. In the past, the IDF had to contend with scenarios of maneuvering forces attacking Israel in order to conquer territory. Now that Israel’s enemies have understood Israel’s power to deal with such scenarios, they have introduced rocket fire plus guerilla warfare into the equation as the core component of their attack and defense concept. The three fundamental elements of deterrence-warning-decision must be adjusted in order to understand to what extent these elements are adequately updated to face the current threat.

Over the years Israel has succeeded in effecting symmetrical deterrence, but has found asymmetric deterrence difficult. The lessons of the Second Lebanon War enable a reexamination of Israel’s ability to deliver a suitable deterrent response that also meets

The integration of defensive systems, counter fire, and maneuver will help supply the required decision in an area governed by guerilla warfare.

asymmetric threats. The defense establishment's difficulty in generating remote warnings for asymmetric threats, combined with the introduction of such threats in hostile countries such as Syria, necessitates a reexamination of the IDF's process of force buildup and its preparedness for dealing with scenarios of unanticipated massive high trajectory fire within an effective period of time.

Finally, Israel's concept of decision must be reviewed. It appears that over time, the IDF will have to perform in an interior defended with guerilla warfare by combining between defensive systems, counter fire, and maneuver. These elements will partly supply the required decision. The IDF will also have to supply a response to continued guerilla warfare and terror following its occupation of territory. IDF force buildup processes necessitate inter-branch collaboration focused on supporting the entire IDF lineup, starting from the lone combat soldier and the small maneuvering unit all the way to the IDF's chief command apparatus.

Notes

- 1 Israel Tal, *National Security: The Israeli Experience* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000).
- 2 An illustration of the elusiveness of this concept can be seen in the outbreak of the War of Attrition followed by the Yom Kippur War; they erupted after what was perceived as a period of Israel's heightened deterrence following the Six Day War.
- 3 David Ben-Gurion, *Uniqueness and Destiny: On Israel's Security*; speech to commanders on July 5, 1955. Ma'arachot, 1971.
- 4 Yoav Gelber, "Reflections on Israel's Security Philosophy," Ynet, September 21, 2007, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3451620,00.html>.
- 5 This essay considers the key attribute of terrorism to be the intention to harm civilians not directly involved in fighting. Therefore acts of terror can be carried out by terrorist organizations with no political identity or by countries that activate terror. As an example, the opening of fire by an enemy country against civilian targets is an act of terror. On the other hand if an organization such as Hizbollah takes action against IDF forces, it would not be considered terror.
- 6 Referred deterrence is defined as deterrence created by signs of preparations for a counter response, rather than for an actual attack. For example, massive high trajectory fire by Syria may occur without sufficient warning, but Syrian preparations for the anticipated Israeli response require actions that will be identified by intelligence alert capabilities.
- 7 Yehoshafat Harkabi, *War and Strategy*, ch. 8, "Decision and Attrition."
- 8 An extensive discussion of the concept of decision and all its operational implications is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it here to state that in any military conflict with a country, decision is achieved by significantly affecting and thwarting that country's military capability as far as effective operations against Israel are concerned. On the other hand, in the context of terror, decision is achieved when a reasonable and enduring security situation is attained.

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