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# The Israel Defense Forces in the Second Lebanon War: Why the Poor Performance?

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**ABSTRACT** Whereas in the past, Israeli successes on the battlefield compensated for deterrence and/or early warning failures, in the Second Lebanon War serious problems in Israeli military capabilities and conduct of war were exposed. The article offers explanations for the poor performance of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF): A late perception that it was war; adherence to post-heroic warfare under circumstances that rather required a different approach; the erosion of the IDF's fighting standards due to policing missions which had become its main task since the outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987; false Revolution in Military Affairs-inspired concepts; the adoption of the notion of controlling instead of capturing territory; a centralized logistic system; poor generalship; a hesitant and inexperienced political leadership, and IDF dominance in decisions on military matters.

**KEY WORDS:** Second Lebanon War, Israeli military doctrine, Revolution in military affairs

On 12 July 2006 Hizballah fired Katyusha rockets and mortars at Israeli military positions and border villages, diverting attention from another Hizballah unit that crossed the border and kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and killed three others. Israel reacted to Hizballah's provocation by launching a large-scale reprisal, which turned into a war. From the Israeli side the war started with an offensive of strategic and grand-strategic nature, mainly carried out by the Israeli Air Force (IAF). During the war's first phase the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) imposed air and sea blockades on Lebanon. The IAF attacked the Dahiya quarter of Beirut where, according to IDF reports, Hizballah

command posts were centered; hit military targets along the Beirut–Damascus highway, and elsewhere; and made an effort to destroy Hizballah’s long-range Katyusha launchers. IDF Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Dan Halutz’s recommendation to hit infrastructure targets in Lebanon notwithstanding,<sup>1</sup> Israel refrained from doing so, as Lebanon’s pro-Western government was considered one of the great achievements of the US quest for democratization in the Middle East. This meant that grand-strategic decision, namely, denying the enemy the ability to carry on the war by attacking counter-value (population and economy) targets, became irrelevant. Israel also avoided direct confrontation with Syria, despite the fact that the latter had for many years been sponsoring Hizballah’s anti-Israel activities.<sup>2</sup>

On the night of 13 July the IAF managed to destroy most of Hizballah’s long-range rocket launchers within 35 minutes, and then it almost completely destroyed the Dahiya quarter. On 14 July the Lebanese government asked for ceasefire. In Clausewitzian terms, once the IAF completed its missions during the initial stages of the war, thanks to high-quality intelligence regarding Hizballah’s strategic weapons, and before it exposed its short-handedness vis-à-vis the short-range rockets and the poor performance of the IDF’s ground forces, Israel reached the culminating point of the attack. On 16 July Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Moshe Kaplinski recommended stopping the operation lest it should deteriorate: ‘We have exhausted the [aerial] effort; we have reached the peak; from now on we can only descend’, Kaplinski told Chief of Staff Halutz.<sup>3</sup> But poor staff work at the highest level of the decision-making apparatus, combined with the poor performance of both the political and military leadership, prevented Israel from accepting a ceasefire at this stage. The retaliation operation turned into war.

On 13 July a reserve division was mobilized, but as the war progressed three additional divisions were also mobilized. On 18 July, almost a week after the outbreak of the war, when it became clear that Hizballah was launching hundreds of Katyushas a day almost uninterruptedly, turning life in northern Israel into a nightmare, and that the war could not be decided from the air or via firepower, Israel committed a few ground brigades into battle, with the mission of destroying Hizballah’s deployment along the Israeli–Lebanese border. On 22 July Israeli ground troops engaged in bloody skirmishes in

<sup>1</sup>Ofer Shelah and Yoav Limor, *Captives in Lebanon* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot 2007) [Hebrew], 45.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 274–83.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 117–18.

Maroun al-Ras, Bint Jbeil, and Ayta al-Shaab – not far from this border.

On 29 July the IDF widened its operations in order to create a security belt north of the Israeli–Lebanese border. Ground troops advanced and took hold of dominating terrain. Special Forces occasionally attacked Hizballah targets in the Bekaa valley, Tyre, and elsewhere, although they had little effect on the entire Israeli war effort. In the engagements with Hizballah operatives, the latter were fighting both bravely and efficiently, using simple but advanced anti-tank and anti-ship missiles, in addition to applying guerrilla tactics.

Towards mid-August it became evident that the IDF was indecisive on the battlefield, particularly vis-à-vis Hizballah's concealed bunker system (the so-called nature reserves), and that the organization's decentralized command and control system remained intact, despite many Israeli attempts to paralyze it. Israel also failed in preventing short-range Katyushas from being launched onto Israeli soil.

A combination of tactical mistakes and a lack of intelligence claimed many casualties among Israeli ground troops, although the loss ratios remained in Israel's favor. As the IAF could not handle the short-range launchers' threat, lacking high-quality information about their exact location,<sup>4</sup> the only way to cope with the challenge was to send in ground troops to capture the territory from where the Katyushas were being launched. Chief of Staff Halutz's instruction to Chief of Northern Command Major General Udi Adam to stop the Katyusha fire was a mission impossible as long as the entire area south of the Litani River was not captured.<sup>5</sup> In the light of these difficulties, and as the diplomatic clock started ticking, IDF troops in Lebanon nearly tripled in size. Between 12 and 13 August, that is, on the eve of the ceasefire, airborne troops landed in the area of the Litani River, and armored units began advancing northwards, heading in the same direction.<sup>6</sup> This proved to be too late, as the IDF never completed the mission before the ceasefire took effect.

Not only did the IDF fail in achieving battlefield decision against Hizballah, that is, denying the enemy's ability to carry on the fight, despite some tactical achievements, throughout the war, it played into

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<sup>4</sup>Amir Oren, 'Intelligence is not only about Early Warning', *Haaretz*, 10 Oct. 2006. Oren cites Brig. Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser, former research chief for the Military Intelligence until four months before the war: 'We also knew what we did not know about Hizballah, particularly the rockets' exact location.'

<sup>5</sup>Amira Lam, Interview with Deputy Chief of Northern Command, Maj. Gen. Eyal Ben-Reuven, *Yediot Aharonot 7 Days Supplement*, 9 March 2007.

<sup>6</sup>Maj. Gen. (res.) Giora Rom, 'The Second Lebanon Campaign: Two Strategies that Did Not Meet', *Tzevet* [IDF's Veterans' Journal] 79 (Oct.–Nov. 2006), 28–34.

Hizballah's hands. A nonstate player such as Hizballah seeks to attack its militarily and technologically stronger opponent's weak points. At the tactical level it engages in guerrilla-type warfare against small units of the enemy army, while at the grand-strategic level it uses various forms of terror against the enemy population and economy. Many years ago Liddell Hart described guerrilla operations as limited operations of a tactical nature, the aim of which was to produce an effect beyond the actual battlefield: 'A multiplicity of minor coups and threats can have a greater effect in tipping the scales than a few major hits, by producing more cumulative distraction, disturbance and demoralization among the enemy, along with a more widespread impression among the population.'<sup>7</sup> Indeed, many low-intensity conflicts (LICs) have been channeled to the two extremes of the levels-of-war pyramid.

Furthermore, strategy in general does not tolerate easily predictable plans and transparent maneuvers. Modern strategy, in particular, prefers to avoid the Sisyphean accumulation of achievements at the tactical level and their translation into operational and strategic gains, and instead, emphasizes the creation of optimal conditions for entry into combat by operating at higher levels. If the IDF really had been committed to its sophisticated tradition, its ground operations would have opened by quickly outflanking and encircling the enemy and using the element of surprise for capturing the northern parts of southern Lebanon first. An indirect approach *à la* Sun Tzu or Liddell Hart would have caused confusion among the enemy ranks and could have brought about its psychological collapse much better than the Clausewitzian direct approach, which helped Hizballah recover and stand strong.

It may be true that the IDF had planned an operation based on a 'sophisticated blend of amphibious, airborne and ground penetrations to swiftly extend deep into the front, before rolling back, so as to destroy Hizballah positions one by one from the rear, all the way back to the Israeli border'.<sup>8</sup> Given Israel's failure at incapacitating Hizballah's political and ideological leadership, and on the assumption that ground operations were inevitable in light of the war objectives, in the initial phase of the war the air campaign should have been followed by a large-scale ground operation aimed at achieving battlefield decision or at least capturing the areas from which the Katyushas were being fired.

Hizballah, on the other hand, operated in a manner compatible with the battlefield conditions. Its fighters used their defensive capabilities – advanced but easy-to-operate weapons, effective evasion and

<sup>7</sup>Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (London: Faber 1967), 377.

<sup>8</sup>Edward N. Luttwak, 'Misreading the Lebanon War', *Jerusalem Post*, 21 Aug. 2006.

hit-and-run tactics, bunkers network, and familiarity with the terrain and population – to engage small Israeli combat teams in battle under advantageous conditions. They also managed to paralyze social and economic life in northern Israel, to bring about a mass desertion of populated areas, and to cause casualties and damage property.

From a theoretical point of view, the Second Lebanon War is no novelty. Asymmetric conflicts in which the weaker side was using various force multipliers in order to balance its weakness vis-à-vis the stronger side have been the most pervasive type of conflict in the international system since World War II. Recent literature on Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW), Complex Irregular Warfare, or Hybrid War (i.e., a combination of conventional and nontraditional wars)<sup>9</sup> – describing the weaker side's new sources of power and strength – hardly offers any new insights on asymmetric conflicts but instead, reflects the fact that asymmetry could take on different forms. Changes on the battlefield and the search for new force multipliers, such as innovative or particularly destructive technologies or new evasion tactics, have always taken place and should not be viewed as fundamental transformations. The more traditional literature on LICs and the many LICs in military history, particularly during the post-World War II period (e.g., Indo-China, Vietnam, Algeria, or Afghanistan) have encompassed the basic features of this phenomenon.

The 'post-heroic' style of warfare,<sup>10</sup> which characterized the Israeli conduct of the Second Lebanon War, is not a new innovation. Post-heroic warfare has two main rules: (a) the avoidance of casualties to your own troops, and (b) the avoidance of killing enemy civilians. Its roots are demographic, social and moral, and it is characteristic of Western democracies conducting non-existential wars in which their readiness to sacrifice is relatively low. Israel has conducted its 'limited confrontations' (the IDF term for LICs) according to this pattern since the 1978 Litani operation, against enemies who have been fighting in

<sup>9</sup>Special issue on 4GW, *Contemporary Security Policy* 26/2 (Aug. 2005), 185–285; Frank G. Hoffman, 'Complex Irregular Warfare: The Next Revolution in Military Affairs', *Orbis* 50 (Summer 2006), 395–411; Jeffrey B. White, 'Some Thoughts on Irregular Warfare', <<https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/pdf/v39i5a07p.pdf>>; James N. Mattis and Frank Hoffman, 'Future Warfare: The Rise in Hybrid Wars', *Proceedings* 131 (Nov. 2005), 18–19; Frank Hoffman, 'Lessons From Lebanon: Hizballah and Hybrid Wars', *The Evening Bulletin*, 5 Sept. 2006, <[www.theeveningbulletin.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=17152236&BRD=2737&PAG=461&dept\\_id=574088&rft=6](http://www.theeveningbulletin.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=17152236&BRD=2737&PAG=461&dept_id=574088&rft=6)>.

<sup>10</sup>Edward N. Luttwak, 'Toward Post-Heroic Warfare,' *Foreign Affairs* 74/3 (May/June 1995), 109–22; Edward N. Luttwak, 'A Post-Heroic Military Policy', *Foreign Affairs* 75/4 (July/Aug. 1996), 33–44.

an 'heroic' fashion, ready to sacrifice their own fighters and determined to kill as many enemy civilians as possible.

The blurring of the boundaries between front and rear also does not deserve to be viewed as a new phenomenon. The obliteration of the boundaries between political and military considerations witnessed in the Second Lebanon War is also typical of modern warfare, especially in LICs, where there is special sensitivity stemming largely from the possibility of civilian casualties. Even the media's status as an independent player, one who is no longer reliant on the military or the government for information, often finding itself more informed about current or expected developments on the battlefield than the military (with troops sometimes learning about their unit's future mission from the media), is a post-modern phenomenon, already analyzed by Charles Moskos, and well-known from the American experience in Somalia, Haiti or Bosnia.<sup>11</sup>

From an Arab-Israeli perspective, though, there are at least three different aspects where the Second Lebanon War does reflect a certain degree of novelty: First, the war was conducted under unprecedented and favorable conditions the like of which Israel has never enjoyed – internal consensus, broad international support (including tacit support on the part of moderate Arab states), and a sense of having almost unlimited time to achieve the war objectives; Second, Hizballah's Katyusha attacks were unparalleled in terms of the number of rockets launched onto Israeli soil (some 4,000) and the duration of time under which large segments of the Israeli civilian population were under attack; and third, unlike in the past, when Israeli successes on the battlefield compensated for deterrence and/or early warning failures, the IDF's performance during this war was unsatisfactory, reflecting flawed military conceptions and poor professionalism and generalship. This unique facet of the war will be the focus of this article.

The question this article wishes to answer is, why did the IDF perform so poorly during the Second Lebanon War? Explanations for the IDF's poor performance are: a late perception that it was war; adherence to post-heroic warfare under circumstances that rather required a different approach; the erosion of the IDF's fighting standards due to policing missions which had become its main task since the outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987; false Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)-inspired concepts; the adoption of the notion of controlling instead of capturing

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<sup>11</sup>Charles C. Moskos, 'Toward a Postmodern Military: The United States as a Paradigm', in idem, John Allen Williams and David R. Segal (eds.), *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces after the Cold War* (New York: OUP 2000), 14–31.

territory; a centralized logistic system; poor generalship; a hesitant and inexperienced political leadership, and IDF dominance in decisions on military matters.

Analyzing the reasons for the Israeli failure in the Second Lebanon War may prove applicable beyond the Israeli case. It could point to the extent to which thinking and operating along RMA and post-heroic concepts can complicate, if not work against, the successful conduct of military operations in asymmetrical conflicts. Only a few years ago the US, which had invaded Iraq in an impressive RMA-inspired blitzkrieg, found itself involved in ineffective counter-insurgency warfare, where RMA principles proved to be irrelevant.

### A Late Understanding that it was War

War has two basic elements: rational/calculative, that is, war as a tool to achieve goals, and expressive/escalatory, namely, violence stemming from the inherent dynamics of military confrontation, which sweeps adversaries into spiraling escalation, almost regardless of their objectives or of any real cost/benefit calculation.<sup>12</sup> Even when one opts for violence out of a rational choice, believing it could be tamed, controlled and directed according to one's purposes, once violence starts, it gains its own momentum and dynamic.

In 2006, like in the 1982 First Lebanon War, Israel's political and military echelons approved an operation which deteriorated into war. Chief of Staff Dan Halutz testified that during the initial stages of the operation he was thinking in terms of a retaliatory attack, not war.<sup>13</sup> He therefore instructed his subordinates at the General Staff level to refrain from relating to the operation as war.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, however, he expected the commanders on the battlefield to act as if they were in war.<sup>15</sup> Minister of Transportation Shaul Mofaz – formerly chief of staff and defense minister – too, 'did not think even for a

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<sup>12</sup>For the expressive/escalatory element see Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton UP 1976), 76–7; C.R. Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* (London: Macmillan 1981), 26; Raymond Aron, *Peace and War* (New York: Doubleday 1967), 168, 967; Fred C. Ikle, *Every War Must End* (New York: Columbia UP 1971), 34; Colmar von der Goltz, *The Conduct of War* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner 1908), 5; Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan 1973), Ch. 1; Robert Osgood, *Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy* (Chicago UP 1957), 28–45.

<sup>13</sup>Chief of Staff Dan Halutz's testimony before the Winograd Commission, 50.

<sup>14</sup>Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 44.

<sup>15</sup>Halutz's testimony before the Winograd Commission, 51; Alex Fishman, 'Thanks to The Censorship', *Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, 11 May 2007.



minute' that the retaliation campaign would deteriorate to war.<sup>16</sup> Veteran Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres was the only War Cabinet member to urge the Cabinet to decide if it was war or not.<sup>17</sup>

The failure to define the confrontation as war from the start harmed the reserve forces' mobilization,<sup>18</sup> the command and control chain, the dissemination of intelligence from the strategic level, the application of pre-planned operations, and logistical support.

### Adherence to 'Post-Heroic' Warfare

According to an operational plan ('Country's Shield'), which was prepared by former Chief of Northern Command Major General Benny Gantz and Major General Eyal Ben-Reuven a few years before the outbreak of the war, the operation was supposed to start with the taking control of Southern Lebanon from the Litani River southwards (the 'hammer') and from the Lebanon-Israel border northwards (the 'anvil'). This initial stage was to be followed by a two-week stage of controlling the territory via fire and small units. A six-week stay period seemed to be sufficient for neutralizing the Katyusha threat by hunting as many launchers as possible. Once completed, the IDF troops were to disengage and return to Israel. Bearing in mind the Israeli society's loss aversion, 'Country Shield's' planners aimed at crippling Hizballah with minimum casualties on the Israeli side. Although the plan was never carried out,<sup>19</sup> it reflected the IDF's post-heroic inclination.

In a Cabinet meeting on 27 July Minister of Transportation (formerly chief-of-staff and defense minister) Shaul Mofaz warned against a ground operation, claiming that the Israeli public was sensitive to the death toll the operation had already claimed – 32 troops.<sup>20</sup> During discussions in the following days Home Security Minister Avi Dichter opposed a major ground invasion, claiming that 'You can do this in a very short time, but you are going to kill many more innocent civilians and cause many more casualties among the troops. We have no intention of doing either.'<sup>21</sup> In a Cabinet meeting on 31 July, Mofaz reiterated his objection to a large-scale ground operation: 'We have had

<sup>16</sup>Minister of Transportation Shaul Mofaz's testimony before the Winograd Commission, <[www.vaadatwino.org.il/pdf/מליד%20שאו%20מפז.pdf](http://www.vaadatwino.org.il/pdf/מליד%20שאו%20מפז.pdf)>, 43 >.

<sup>17</sup>Ariella Ringel-Hoffman, 'This is not How a War Should be Conducted', *Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, 23 March 2007.

<sup>18</sup>Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 45.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 132–4.

<sup>20</sup>Ringel-Hoffman, 'This is not How a War Should be Conducted'.

<sup>21</sup>Scott Wilson, 'Israeli War Plan Had No Exit Strategy', <[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/20/AR2006102001688\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/20/AR2006102001688_pf.html)>.

great achievements [...], which it would be unwise to risk by exposing 40,000 troops to the Lebanese reality.<sup>22</sup> Towards the end of the war the feeling among the Cabinet members was that there was no choice but to go for a ground operation. But on 9 August it still discussed alternative plans for such operation. Minister of Housing Meir Shitrit explained why he opposed an advance to the Litani River, stressing the casualty consideration.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the war IAF fighter-bombers flew at high altitude in order to avoid casualties among pilots. 'The mission was to avoid being killed and avoid hitting our own troops', explained one of the pilots. Combat helicopters were not allowed to penetrate deep into Lebanon for the same reason. Helicopters were used, though, for rescue and logistics purposes.<sup>24</sup>

According to IDF's Chief of the Manpower Branch Major General Elazar Stern, part of the explanation for the IDF's failure in the war was over-sensitivity to casualties. 'Every casualty was reported to the Chief of Staff, and there was a case in which an entire battle was stopped because of one casualty.'<sup>25</sup> 'If an entire state stops [fighting] because eight soldiers fell in battle, it is difficult to take a decision to push forward, knowing that it will claim the lives of more troops. If a commander on the battlefield gets all kinds of remarks from above, like "don't do this or don't do that" because of the risk entailed, it has an impact on him', Elazar said on another occasion.<sup>26</sup> An investigation committee headed by Major General (res.) Yoram Yair found that during the war commanders' sense of responsibility for the lives of their troops overshadowed their commitment to fulfill their missions. While an effort was made to spare the lives of soldiers, civilians risked their lives in the rear.<sup>27</sup>

Chief of Staff Halutz admitted that a 'no casualties' approach penetrated Israeli military mind as a result of the IDF's preoccupation with terror challenges.<sup>28</sup> After the war he said that canceling missions when no visual intelligence was available, in order to save the lives of troops was unacceptable, and that the IDF should investigate how it came to acquire this habit.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ringel-Hoffman, 'This is not How a War Should be Conducted'.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 244.

<sup>25</sup>Israeli Radio, Channel 7, 2 Nov. 2006, <[www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/155971](http://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/155971)>.

<sup>26</sup>Yossi Yehoshua, 'Declining Values', *Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, 13 July 2007.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Amir Buchbut, 'Halutz's Swords' Speech', NRG Online [Hebrew], <<http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/506/032.html>>.

<sup>29</sup>Yehoshua, 'Declining Values'.

Edward Luttwak, the father of the term post-heroic warfare, has never concealed his hostility to this form of conducting war. As far as the Second Lebanon War is concerned, Luttwak thought the Israeli aversion to casualties was unjustified either in itself or as compared to similar combat situations that other armies had found themselves in. 'When an IDF company attacked the mountain town of Bint Jbeil, losing eight men in one night, that number was perceived in Israel – and broadcast around the world – as a disastrous loss.'<sup>30</sup> Under what conditions would the Israelis have been ready to sacrifice more soldiers? According to Luttwak, had Hizballah been successful in killing many Israeli civilians, this would have made a large-scale offensive by more than 45,000 soldiers a compelling necessity, politically justifying the hundreds of casualties that it would certainly have cost. But instead of hundreds of dead civilians, the Israelis were losing one or two a day, and even after three weeks, the grand total was less than in some one-man suicide bombings. That made it politically unacceptable to launch the planned offensive that would kill young soldiers and family men, while still not eradicating Hizballah, because it is a political movement in arms, and not just an army or a bunch of gunmen.<sup>31</sup>

The war revealed the post-heroic policy's limitations. Beyond the fact that Israel's enemies – both Palestinians and Hizballah – have been fighting in an 'heroic' fashion, ready to sacrifice their own fighters and determined to kill as many enemy civilians as possible, in the Second Lebanon War Israel found itself caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, it was committed to post-heroic warfare. On the other hand, in order to achieve the ambitious political and military war objectives it was necessary to sacrifice both troops and civilians, that is, to violate the principles of post-heroic warfare. Achieving battlefield decision would have enabled Israel to attain its war objectives. These included the pushing of Hizballah from the Israeli-Lebanese border; significantly crippling the organization's capabilities and status to the point of stopping terror activities from Lebanon; strengthening Israeli deterrence vis-à-vis Hizballah and other regional actors; bringing about a settlement which would be kept by an effective international mechanism; and the creation of conditions for the return of the kidnapped troops.

To these quite ambitious objectives additional ones were added by the civilian echelon, which proved unattainable. They included the stopping of Katyusha fire on Israel, the breaking of Hizballah, and significantly weakening its capabilities and status in Lebanon.<sup>32</sup> The

<sup>30</sup>Edward Luttwak, 'Misreading the Lebanon War', *Jerusalem Post*, 20 Aug. 2006.

<sup>31</sup>Luttwak, 'Misreading the Lebanon War'.

<sup>32</sup>Yehuda Ben Meir, 'Israeli Government Policy and the War's Objectives', *Strategic Assessment* 9/2 (Aug. 2006), <[www.tau.ac.il/jcss/sa/v9n2p2BenMeir.html](http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/sa/v9n2p2BenMeir.html)>;

objective set by Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni – reestablishing Israeli deterrence – which was partially achieved, as one can learn from Hizballah’s Secretary General Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah’s confession that he would not have ordered the kidnapping of the Israeli soldiers had he known that Israeli reaction would be that strong,<sup>33</sup> might have been better served had the IDF achieved battlefield decision.

Sticking to the rules of post-heroic warfare might have limited Israel’s freedom of action. This indeed occurred when the pursuit of Israeli goals caused many Israeli casualties and much collateral damage in Lebanon. After 28 Lebanese civilians were killed in the wake of an IAF strike on a building in the village of Qana, Israel declared a 48-hour suspension of air strikes over Southern Lebanon in order to allow an investigation and time for civilians to leave the area.<sup>34</sup>

In fact, though, despite the intensity of the Israel–Hizballah war and the fact that it lasted much longer than the 1982 War, far fewer civilians were killed as a result of IDF operations – ‘only’ 1,187 in 2006 as compared to almost 18,000 in 1982<sup>35</sup> – to a great extent thanks to improved precision of Israeli munitions. By using highly accurate global

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Ringel-Hoffman, ‘This is not How a War Should be Conducted’; Deputy Prime Minister Peres, 13 July 2006, <[www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/449/059.html](http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/449/059.html)>; <[www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3275310,00.html](http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3275310,00.html)>; Defense Minister Peretz, 13 July 2006, <<http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3275310,00.html>>. The IDF recommended avoiding an attack on Syria. At a later stage, it defined another objective – preventing the reconstruction of Iranian capabilities in Lebanon. Rom, ‘The Second Lebanon Campaign’, 28.

<sup>33</sup>CNN, ‘Nasrallah: Soldiers’ abduction a mistake’, 27 Aug. 2006, <[www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/08/27/mideast.nasrallah/](http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/08/27/mideast.nasrallah/)>.

<sup>34</sup>Following the incident, Defense Minister Amir Peretz said in the Knesset that ‘there is no Israeli commander who will issue an order to hurt uninvolved civilians.’ <[www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3284024,00.html](http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3284024,00.html)>. Israel’s ambassador to the UN Gillerman declared, ‘We never, ever target civilians. We are actually very cautious and very careful about not hurting any civilians.’ <<http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/08/04/gillerman/>>. And Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said after the Qana incident: ‘The State of Israel sanctifies the most fundamental moral values, which are carved in our ancient Jewish tradition – and in our blood which was spilled – and we do not need any nation or any country to teach us these principles. We do not pursue innocent civilians, we do not fight against the Lebanese people and we do not seek to topple their government. We are fighting against reckless terrorists, and we will not stop fighting them until we remove them from our border. I deeply regret the civilians – adults and children – who were killed in Qfar Qana. We did not seek to harm them, [and] we did not want their death. They were not our enemies and they were not the target of our aircraft.’ ‘Olmert’s Address to a Meeting of Heads of Local Authorities’, 31 July 2006, <[www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/Olmert073106.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/Olmert073106.html)>.

<sup>35</sup><[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006\\_Israel-Lebanon\\_conflict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Israel-Lebanon_conflict)>; <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1982\\_Lebanon\\_War#Casualties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1982_Lebanon_War#Casualties)>.

positioning system-guided smart bombs (JDAM) against Hizballah's Fajr rockets (Operation 'Specific Gravity') during the first two days of the war the IAF was able to reduce collateral damage to minimum. Only 53 Lebanese citizens were killed during the operation, 10 percent of the number predicted by IAF operations research experts beforehand.<sup>36</sup>

### The Impact of Fighting Two Intifadas

Many of the IDF's weaknesses that were exposed during the war derived from the fact that since late 1987, when the first Intifada broke out in the West Bank and Gaza, policing in the territories has become its main mission. Fighting a weak opponent for such a long period of time has significantly weakened the IDF's operational capabilities. In General Staff discussions during Yaalon's tenure as Chief of Staff, at least two General Staff members, Major Generals Yishai Bar and Yiftach Ron-Tal, warned that as a result of the preoccupation with missions in the territories the IDF had lost its maneuverability and capability to fight in mountainous terrain.<sup>37</sup>

In a meeting of senior IDF commanders in early January 2007, Chief of Staff Dan Halutz admitted that as a result of years of police-type operations in the territories IDF commanders have become accustomed to thinking that nothing was more important than sparing the lives of the troops, even if that came at the expense of accomplishing their missions.<sup>38</sup> Major General (res.) Yoram Yair, who came across this phenomenon while investigating the 91st Division's functioning during the Second Lebanon War, explained:

We have not had war for 24 years now. Commanders from the division level downwards had no war experience. [...] They had lot of operational or tactical experience in Gaza, Lebanon and Judea and Samaria, and were basing their action on that experience. [...] They took it with them to the [Second Lebanon] war, although they should have acted in a totally different manner. [...] We used to say that in the territories a casualty rate of 1:0 was better than 3:1; in other words, that we had better kill only one terrorist instead of three, as long as none was killed on our side. [...] In current security situations this may

<sup>36</sup>Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 78–9.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>38</sup>Nahum Barnea, 'Interrogated Ltd', *Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, 5 Jan. 2007.

be acceptable, as there is always a chance to re-confront the terrorists at a later stage, but in war there is no such thing as tomorrow [...]. The luxury of current security does not exist, and one should try to achieve battlefield decision as quickly as possible.<sup>39</sup>

A similar opinion was expressed by former Chief of Northern Command Major General (res.) Amiran Levin.<sup>40</sup> This should not have come as a surprise. In 1998, more than a decade after the outbreak of the first Intifada, Israeli military historian Martin van Creveld warned that 'ten years of trying to deal with the Intifada has sapped the IDF's strength by causing troops and commanders to adapt to the enemy. The troops now look at mostly empty-handed Palestinian men, women, and children as if they were in fact a serious military threat.'<sup>41</sup> As if predicting the IDF's poor performance during the Second Lebanon War, van Creveld added: 'Among the commanders, the great majority can barely remember when they trained for and engaged in anything more dangerous than police-type operation; in the entire IDF there is now hardly any officer left who has commanded so much as a brigade in real war.'<sup>42</sup>

The eight years that elapsed since then made the impact of this type of fighting even worse. If until May 2000 the IDF also gained operational experience from fighting the Hizballah in Southern Lebanon, since its withdrawal to the international border, fighting terrorists and suicide bombers had become the IDF's sole source of combat experience. Israeli troops became used to confronting a numerically inferior and poorly trained and equipped opponent, enjoying excellent tactical and operational intelligence provided by Military Intelligence and the General Security Service (GSS), massive logistical and technical support, and a familiarity with the combat environment in which they have been fighting for many years. During the Second Intifada 85 percent of Israeli targeted-killing attempts ended up with the targets killed; the rest were injured or saved. These high rates of success were achieved thanks to high-quality intelligence, based on a combination of signals intelligence, human intelligence, and a variety of vision devices, such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which led the Israelis to their targets, and joint inter-service (ground forces-military intelligence-IAF-police-GSS) activity allowed the IDF to

<sup>39</sup>Yehoshua, 'Declining Values'.

<sup>40</sup>Amos Harel, 'A Flawed Operational Conception', *Haaretz*, 10 Dec. 2006.

<sup>41</sup>Martin van Creveld, *The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israeli Defense Forces* (New York: Public Affairs 1998), 362–3.

<sup>42</sup>Van Creveld, *The Sword and the Olive*, 363.

overcome the problem of targeting an elusive enemy,<sup>43</sup> after overcoming bureaucratic and organizational affiliations and loyalties.

None of these advantages were available during the war in the summer of 2006. Hizballah's fighters were highly motivated, and well trained and equipped; the tactical intelligence that was provided to the ground troops by Military Intelligence was of low quality, if at all, compared to the high-quality one provided by the GSS in the territories and in South Lebanon prior to the 2000 withdrawal; commanders lacked experience in operating large formations in general and armored formations in particular; logistical support was rather ineffective; and some of the fighting took place in an unfamiliar terrain. Having failed to train its troops for this type of war, the IDF was influenced by the irrelevant experience that had been gained in the territories. For example, in the territories the IDF used to protect soldiers from small-arms fire by sheltering them in the houses of the local population. Based on this experience, in Lebanon soldiers were ordered to take shelter in a similar manner, ignoring the fact that Hizballah was using sophisticated anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs). Consequently, in the village of Debel, where 110 reserve soldiers stayed in one house, 9 soldiers were killed and 31 were wounded when Hizballah destroyed the house using ATGMs.<sup>44</sup>

After having applied post-heroic warfare in the territories with great success, the IDF failed to understand that such warfare did not suit a war of higher intensity. In the territories the IDF was much stronger, and the conditions were much more suitable for the use of technology that could save the troops' lives. 'When you are so strong, [...] and given the existence of other [i.e., technological] means one could employ in order to do the job, it does not make sense to risk the lives of troops. In a current security situation this may well be the right policy, but in a state of war, it becomes inappropriate', explained Major General (res.) Yoram Yair.<sup>45</sup>

### **False Assumptions and Beliefs**

Under the impression of the strengthening of firepower on the battlefield at the expense of maneuver as a result of technological developments, and strongly inspired by the American RMA way of

<sup>43</sup>Interview with IAF Chief General Shkedy, *Jane's Defence Weekly* 42/1 (5 Jan. 2005), 34.

<sup>44</sup>Shosh Mula and Assefa Peled, 'Testimonies from the Heart', *Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, 17 Nov. 2006; Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 335–6.

<sup>45</sup>Yehoshua, 'Declining Values'.

thinking, Israeli military doctrine and planning have tended to adopt false assumptions and beliefs.

### *The Cult of Technology*

RMA advocates argue that the combination of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; advanced command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence; and precision-strike weapons can promise rapid, decisive victory, very low casualties and collateral damage, and strategic results.<sup>46</sup> Airpower proponents believe that it can save 'enemy lives through the use of precision to minimize noncombatant fatalities, and friendly lives by the substitution of technology for manpower and the creation of battlefield conditions in which land elements [...] can do their job without significant resistance'.<sup>47</sup>

In their LIC thinking armed forces of highly technological countries often demonstrate the naive belief that their technological edge would enable them to cope effectively with irregular challenges at relatively low cost. They tend to put their faith in airborne weapon systems, pointing out their qualitative and operational advantage, particularly their superior firepower, higher maneuverability and greater flexibility in comparison with ground counter-insurgency forces. Airborne weapon systems are also believed to reduce the number of casualties inflicted on counter-insurgency forces, thereby gaining legitimacy for conducting LICs, which is particularly important to open Western societies.

Only a decade ago Israeli senior commanders held a balanced approach, which reflected prudence regarding the impact of technology. On the one hand, they looked for the best weapons systems to be acquired in order to ensure the technological edge over the Arabs; while on the other hand, they understood the danger of over-reliance on technology at the expense of the human factor.<sup>48</sup> In recent years Israeli military thought has been following in the footsteps of the technology-oriented RMA, being inspired by such concepts as 'information dominance', 'dominant maneuver', precision strikes, 'focused logistics', etc. The former director of the Research and Development (R&D)

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<sup>46</sup>Elizabeth A. Stanley-Mitchell, 'The Digital Battlefield: What Army Transformation Efforts Say about its Professional Jurisdiction', in Don M. Snider and Gayle Watkins (eds.), *The Future of the Army Profession* (New York: McGraw Hill 2003), 155–78.

<sup>47</sup>Benjamin S. Lambeth, *The Transformation of American Air Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 2000), 303.

<sup>48</sup>Reuven Gal, *A Portrait of the Israeli Soldier* (Westport, CT: Greenwood 1986), 175; Eliot A. Cohen, Michael J. Eisenstadt and Andrew J. Bacevich, *Knives, Tanks and Missiles: Israel's Security Revolution* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy 1998), 63–65.



directorate at the Ministry of Defense, Major General Isaac Ben-Israel, advocated a technology-focused military doctrine, force design and military buildup for Israel, identifying military quality with high-technology capabilities.<sup>49</sup> 'Here in Israel we have realized that our relative advantage in frustrating terrorist attempts is carried out mainly through technology. Our success rate is very high', Ben-Israel explained.<sup>50</sup>

Similar views have been expressed by other Israeli military experts. For example, Shmuel Gordon, an Israeli military analyst, presented technological sophistication as a state-of-the art substitute for Liddell Hart's indirect approach, which unlike the traditional one is based on firepower rather than maneuver.<sup>51</sup> The IDF's new operational doctrine that was issued in April 2006, three months before the outbreak of the Second Lebanon War, was heavily technology-oriented. Stressing the ascendancy of firepower over maneuver, it focused on achieving battlefield success via a combination of accurate, stand-off fire and limited operations on the ground; the need to affect the enemy's consciousness; the central role played by airpower; and the diminishing role of large-scale and deep ground maneuvers.<sup>52</sup>

The operational order issued by the General Staff on 13 July 2006, which still referred to the confrontation as a campaign (codenamed 'Just Reward'), described the upcoming operation as a stand-off, fire-based protracted offensive,<sup>53</sup> reflecting the IDF's technology-based approach. According to Defense Minister Amir Peretz, Chief of Staff Dan Halutz, an IAF officer by origin, believed in obtaining decision via massive firepower, and never changed his mind until the end of the war.<sup>54</sup> Halutz did not deny it, admitting that not preparing for a ground operation had been a mistake, affected by his failure to foresee that the operation would last 33 days.<sup>55</sup>

Experts have already pointed out that the cult of technology has had a weakening effect on traditional military capabilities such as close

<sup>49</sup>Isaac Ben-Israel, 'The Military Buildup's Theory of Relativity', *Maarachot* 352–353 (Aug. 1997), 33; Isaac Ben-Israel, 'Security, Technology, and Future Battlefield', in Haggai Golan (ed.), *Israel's Security Web* (Tel Aviv: Maarachot 2001) [Hebrew], 279, <[http://www.samliquidation.com/chabad\\_9d.html](http://www.samliquidation.com/chabad_9d.html)>.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>Shmuel Gordon, *The Bow of Paris* (Tel Aviv: Poalim 1997) [Hebrew], particularly 320–2.

<sup>52</sup>Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 198; The Winograd Commission's Interim Report, <<http://www.vaadatwino.org.il/pdf/מאורחות20טופי20לאינטרנט.pdf>>, 48>.

<sup>53</sup>Alex Fishman, 'The Five-Day War', *Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, 17 April 2007.

<sup>54</sup>Fishman, 'Thanks to The Censorship'.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

combat or combat intelligence.<sup>56</sup> The war seems to have proved that it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to destroy a sophisticated guerrilla force by a new type of RMA warfare. Paradoxically, in LICs a massive traditional army is necessary in order to capture the terrain from which guerrilla warfare is conducted. This is also the lesson learned from Iraq.

Following the Second Lebanon War both Chief of Staff Dan Halutz and ex-Deputy Chief of Staff Matan Vilnai pointed to one of the reasons for the difficulties the IDF had faced on the battlefield – the tendency of senior commanders to run the battle not by leading their troops on the battlefield, but from their headquarters, which were located in the rear (the 162nd Division in Rosh Pinna, the 91st Division in Biranit, and the ‘Column of Fire’ Division in Metula), over-relying on technology.<sup>57</sup>

Conducting the war over plasma screens may have been compatible with the assumption that on a battlefield where enemy forces are destroyed by stand-off precision fire, optimal command and control is achieved from control centers. At the same time, however, ‘it may have changed the focus of our command’, Halutz admitted.<sup>58</sup> Vilnai’s diagnosis was that what the IDF had lacked in that war was a simple command system. ‘You can run McDonald’s using plasma screens, not a battle’, he said.<sup>59</sup> Major General (res.) Yossi Peled criticized the new state of mind that had permeated the IDF: ‘Something very bad has happened to the IDF in recent years. We have lost the balance between the arms, giving credit to the IAF’s ability to solve any problem. A golden calf was created and named technology; many believed it could win the war.’<sup>60</sup> Major General (res.) Amiran Levin, too, pointed to the over-reliance on precision technology as one of the major reasons for the IDF’s malfunctioning in the war, second only to the impact of the long occupation of the territories.<sup>61</sup>

Based on the Israeli experience in Lebanon, the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report’s recommendation is to avoid setting goals for network-centric warfare,

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<sup>56</sup>See, for example, Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton UP 2004); Stephen Biddle, ‘Military Power: A Reply’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28/33 (June 2005), 453–69.

<sup>57</sup>Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 385.

<sup>58</sup><<http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/pages/ShArtSR.jhtml?itemNo=755196&objNo=59745&returnParam=Y>>.

<sup>59</sup>Amira Lam, ‘We Betrayed our Constituency’, *Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, 1 Sept. 2006.

<sup>60</sup>Ari Shavit, Interview with Maj. Gen. (res.) Yossi Peled, *Haaretz Weekend Supplement*, 20 Oct. 2006.

<sup>61</sup>Harel, ‘A Flawed Operational Conception’.

intelligence, targeting, and battle damage assessments that are impossible, or simply too costly and uncertain to deploy. 'No country does better in making use of military technology than the US, but nor is any country also so incredibly wasteful, unable to bring many projects to cost-effective deployment, and so prone to assume that technology can solve every problem', the report asserts.<sup>62</sup>

The assumption that due to the IDF's 'Ground Forces Digitalization' program (ZAYAD, in Hebrew),<sup>63</sup> ground forces would have access to much more precise intelligence, proved problematic, whether due to gaps in intelligence (which will always exist), outdated intelligence, or failure to distribute intelligence to troops on the battlefield in general or in real time. Forces often operated blindly, were occasionally surprised by enemy munitions (e.g., advanced Kornet and Fagot anti-tank missiles and the C-802 anti-ship missile), and fell victim to Hizballah's tactics. To the credit of Israeli ground forces it must be said that their transformation into a digital Army has yet to be completed, but doubts regarding the expected effectiveness of this development already exist.

Of particular concern was Hizballah's success in playing on the technological playground against Israeli electronic warfare. The organization was eavesdropping on Israeli communications networks and mobile telephones, including Israeli soldiers' conversations from inside Lebanon. According to the CSIS report, American electronic warfare (EW) experts came to Israel to find out how Hizballah's Iranian systems neutralized Israeli EW. They were interested in four areas: (1) The Israeli EW systems' failure to block Hizballah's command and communications and the links between the Lebanese command and the Syria-based Iranian headquarters; (2) How Iranian technicians helped Hizballah eavesdrop on Israel's communications networks and mobile telephones; and (3) How Iranian EW installed in Lebanese Army coastal radar stations blocked the Barak anti-missile system aboard Israeli warships, allowing Hizballah to hit the Israeli corvette *Hanith*.<sup>64</sup> Hizballah also had advanced night-vision systems, such as thermal imaging night-vision equipment, which made IDF troops movement transparent.<sup>65</sup>

In the wake of the difficulties the IDF faced in the 2006 Israel–Hizballah war, and the painful casualties Israel had paid during that

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<sup>62</sup>Anthony H. Cordesman, *Preliminary 'Lessons' of the Israeli–Hizballah War* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 11 Sept. 2006), 15, <[http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/060911\\_isr\\_hez\\_lessons.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/060911_isr_hez_lessons.pdf)>.

<sup>63</sup><http://www.defense-update.com/products/z/zayad.html>.

<sup>64</sup>Cordesman, *Preliminary 'Lessons'*, 38. See also Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 288.

<sup>65</sup>Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 333.

war, Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres was still looking for technological solutions, though 'upgraded' and of new types. He advocated the development of nanotechnology means in order to cope with the elusive nature of the terrorist threat, pointing to the combination of effectiveness and lower cost it constituted:

There is no point to a warplane or helicopter worth millions of dollars looking for a single terrorist or a small group of terrorists, at a high risk; nor is there any point for a tank to search among rocky hideouts or in reinforced refuges for a handful of camouflaged terrorists armed with night-vision equipment and anti-tank missiles. [...] it is necessary to use a completely new kind of technology, such as nanotechnology – a new dimension, and not merely enhancement of existing technologies. A terrorist may be deterred if he knows that he could encounter new means that make it possible to detect him, even among a large crowd; that his hidden weapons could be found by invisible means. The defense system should use tools that are operated from a distance, robots and intelligence of a kind not yet known.<sup>66</sup>

### *The Reliance on Airpower*

For many years Israeli military doctrine considered the Army to be the backbone of any large-scale military operation, both in conventional/symmetrical war against regular armies of state players as well as in asymmetrical war against nonstate players with irregular or semi-regular forces. Airpower was considered a major factor in creating the necessary conditions for battlefield success, and the structure of the IDF's force maintained a balance among its components that would guarantee the ability to achieve a variety of objectives and carry out a variety of missions.<sup>67</sup>

The ascendancy of firepower on the battlefield, strong post-heroic tendencies, and many years of airpower advocates preaching in favor of investing the bulk of available defense resources in airpower, which has been presented as the wisest thing to do in accordance with the principle of relative advantage,<sup>68</sup> have accounted for the

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<sup>66</sup>Shimon Peres, 'Upgrading War, Privatizing Peace', *Haaretz*, 31 Aug. 2006 <<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/756832.html>>.

<sup>67</sup>On the importance of inter-arm and inter-corps balance and its impact on flexible operation, see for example, Richard E. Simpkin, *Race to the Swift: Thoughts on Twenty-First Warfare* (London: Brassey's 1985).

<sup>68</sup>Ben-Israel, 'The Military Buildup's Theory of Relativity'.

spreading of the flawed belief that airpower could decide the outcome of the war by itself. Although Chief of the Army, Major General Benny Gantz, denied that anyone in Israeli military leadership has really ever held the view that airpower alone can decide,<sup>69</sup> the belief was not merely in the back of their minds. In a discussion at the National Defense College in January 2001 then IAF Chief Dan Halutz argued that:

Many air operations were generally implemented without a land force, based on a worldview of Western society's sensitivity to losses. A land force is not sent into action as long as there is an effective alternative. Small forces, in commando format, have been utilized. The IAF is a partner in or decides wars. This obliges us to part with a number of anachronistic assumptions. First of all, that victory equals territory. Victory means achieving the strategic goal and not necessarily territory. I maintain that we also have to part with the concept of a land battle. We have to talk about the integrated battle and about the appropriate force activating it. Victory is a matter of consciousness. Airpower affects the adversary's consciousness significantly.<sup>70</sup>

In 2002, still as IAF Chief, Dan Halutz referred to the IAF's capabilities: 'Airpower alone can decide, and let alone be the senior partner to such decision.'<sup>71</sup> In his testimony before the Winograd Commission Halutz reiterated his belief that given the ascendancy of firepower on the battlefield, the Air Force, thanks to its outstanding fire capabilities, could play a dominant role on the modern battlefield.<sup>72</sup> He was so confident that airpower could do the job alone, or almost alone, that he did not provide the government with any real alternative plan until the latest stage of the war.

Halutz either ignored or was not aware of the fact that battlefield decision at the strategic level has never been achieved from the air, only at the tactical level. Kosovo, which was so often referred to, was a grand-strategic decision, achieved by denying the Serbian *society* the ability to carry on the war – not that of the Serbian Army, which

<sup>69</sup>Barbara Opall-Rome, Interview with Maj. Gen. Benjamin Gantz, Commander of Israel Defense Forces Army Headquarters, *Defense News*, 28 Aug. 2006, 38.

<sup>70</sup>Zeev Schiff, 'The Foresight Saga', <[www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/749268.html](http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/749268.html)>.

<sup>71</sup>Amnon Lord, 'The Air Went Out', *Makor Rishon*, 2 Nov. 2006. <[www.makorrishon.co.il/show.asp?id=14091](http://www.makorrishon.co.il/show.asp?id=14091)>.

<sup>72</sup>Halutz's testimony before the Winograd Commission, <<http://www.vaadatwino.org.il/pdf/תמליל%20דיון%20הוועדה.pdf>, 16>.

remained almost unharmed. Lebanon differed from Kosovo: the Americans would not let Israel target the democratically elected and relatively independent from Syrian influence, Lebanese government and the Israeli civilian rear, unlike that of the countries attacking Kosovo, was under attack throughout the war, with the IAF unable to stop it. As a result of the priority given to airpower, army budgets were cut, one of the results being Israeli tanks lacking active protection systems, smoke obscuration equipment, etc.<sup>73</sup>

On the second night of the war, after the IAF's success against Hizballah's long-range launchers, Halutz, faithful to his belief in decision from the air, informed Prime Minister Ehud Olmert: 'All long-range rockets have been destroyed. [...] We have won the war.'<sup>74</sup> Less than a week after the war started Halutz told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 'We are achieving our goals by employing airpower and artillery without launching a ground operation into Lebanon.'<sup>75</sup> To cite Minister of Infrastructure Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, 'the Prime Minister was misled by the Chief of Staff to believe that the problem could be handled from the air. Otherwise, how can one explain the Prime Minister's declaration that we won the war, and that a new Middle East was being created?'<sup>76</sup> This was not the first time that a very authoritative, professionally respected but also overly self-confident IAF Chief promised goods he was unable to deliver. According to Yuval Neeman, before the 1973 October War IAF Chief Major General Benny Peled reassured the political echelon that should the Egyptians try to cross the Suez Canal they would fail, and that the IAF would solve any problem that might arise.<sup>77</sup>

As the Second Lebanon War progressed, it became evident there was a great disproportion between the unprecedented number of combat sorties carried out by the IAF – 11,897, more than the number of sorties during the 1973 October War (11,223), and during the 1982 First Lebanon War (6,052)<sup>78</sup> – and their impact on the achievements during the war and its outcomes, particularly on Hizballah's capability to carry on the fight and to keep launching hundreds of Katyusha rockets onto Israeli territory daily, despite improved hunting tactics

<sup>73</sup> <<http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/1,7340,L-3297389,00.html>>.

<sup>74</sup> YNET, 27 Aug. 2006, <[www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3296031,00.html](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3296031,00.html)>.

<sup>75</sup> 17 July 2006, <[www.isracast.com/index.aspx?y=2006&m=7](http://www.isracast.com/index.aspx?y=2006&m=7)>.

<sup>76</sup> Minister of Infrastructure Binyamin Ben-Eliezer's testimony before the Winograd Commission, <<http://www.vaadatwino.org.il/pdf/תמלי%20בן%20עוזרן.pdf>>, 15–16.

<sup>77</sup> Ronen Bergman, Interview with Professor Yuval Neeman – formerly Chief of the IDF's Military Intelligence, Israel Atomic Energy Commission, and Israeli Space Agency, *Yediot Aharonot 7 Days Supplement*, 18 March 2005.

<sup>78</sup> Isaac Ben-Israel, 'The Missile War', an unpublished paper.

applied by the IAF. After four days of war the IAF completed the attack of all the targets on its target list. Thousands of short-range Katyushas were left unharmed as the IDF's intelligence did not know their exact location.<sup>79</sup>

Counterfire by conventional artillery was marginally effective, too. 170,000 artillery shells were fired during the war – more than twice the number fired during the 1973 October War, which was waged against two regular armies, and 10 times the number fired against the Palestinian Liberation Organization during the 1978 Litani operation.<sup>80</sup>

This, too, should not have come as a surprise. In February 2004 Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Moshe Yaalon briefed the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on the rocket threat from Lebanon, stressing that diminishing the rocket fire without operating on the ground might take weeks. Head of the Committee, Member of the Knesset Tzachi Hanegbi, informed Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz of Yaalon's briefing.<sup>81</sup> In a discussion convened by Sharon, Chief of Military Intelligence Aharon Ze'evi-Farkash warned the political echelon from being misled into believing that a complete solution existed for the problem of the rockets. In a publication of the Institute for Air and Space Strategic Studies former IAF chief and former Deputy Chief of Staff Major General David Ivry wrote that airpower could not be victorious by itself in the war against terrorism.<sup>82</sup>

An exercise ('Arm in Arm'), which took place one month before the outbreak of the war, started with a scenario very similar to the 12 July events. During the exercise, IAF Chief Major General Eliezer Shkedy warned that nobody should expect the IAF to stop the Katyusha fire. 'Expect a success of no more than one to three percent in hitting the Katyushas', he said.<sup>83</sup>

Infrastructure Minister (formerly Defense Minister) Binyamin Ben-Eliezer and Mossad Chief Meir Dagan seemed to be the only ones to understand from the start that large-scale ground operations were inevitable if the war objectives were to be achieved.<sup>84</sup> Chief of Staff Halutz's consistent objection to a large-scale ground operations was supported by most of the Cabinet members, including Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Defense Minister Amir Peretz, and Minister of

<sup>79</sup>Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 80–1.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>81</sup>*Yediot Aharonot*, 22 Jan. 2007.

<sup>82</sup>Schiff, 'The Foresight Saga'.

<sup>83</sup>Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 138.

<sup>84</sup>*Haaretz*, 24 Jan. 2007; Ringel-Hoffman, 'This is not How a War Should be Conducted'; Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 60.

Transportation (formerly Defense Minister and Chief of Staff) Shaul Mofaz. Based on his belief that a ground operation would only reduce the Katyusha fire, not entirely stop it, Mofaz was ready to embark on such an operation only if the firepower option should prove to be ineffective.<sup>85</sup> Chief of Northern Command Major General Udi Adam and his deputy Major General Eyal Ben-Reuven, who had prepared a large-scale ground operation prior to the war ('Mey Marom'), advocated implementing it. At later stages of the war they were joined by two senior commanders of air force background – Military Intelligence Chief Major General Amos Yadlin and Brigadier General Ido Nehushtan. On 26 July, in an evaluation of the situation held at the Chief of Staff's office, Yadlin and Nehushtan said that given the IAF's failure in coping with the Katyusha threat, a ground operation became unavoidable.<sup>86</sup> On 28 July Yadlin said that it was necessary that the war ended with Israeli victory in general and over the Katyushas in particular. He spoke about the urgent need to operate on the ground, arguing that the IDF which had defeated the Arab states within six days could finish the job quickly by sending in two divisions.<sup>87</sup>

Unlike the Chief of Military Intelligence, who changed his mind in light of the difficulty of handling the Katyusha threat, on 27 July Defense Minister Amir Peretz still believed that a large-scale ground operation would only prolong the war. On 31 July Shaul Mofaz thought that the IDF's achievements by then were significant, and Israel should therefore neither risk these achievements nor the lives of IDF soldiers by sending in 40,000 troops. Mofaz preferred aerial operations, instead.<sup>88</sup> After a month of fighting some airpower experts still believed that the combination of high-quality intelligence, airpower and Special Forces was the ultimate counter-terror formula that could also work against rocket launchers.<sup>89</sup>

Only a week into August Defense Minister Peretz and Chief of Staff Halutz suddenly changed their minds. In a Cabinet meeting on 8 August, a week before the war ended, they explained why only a large-scale ground operation could be effective in handling the short-range Katyusha rockets and enable Israel get to the negotiating table from a better position, notwithstanding the casualties incurred in such an operation.<sup>90</sup> Ten days earlier, Halutz was still clinging to his

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<sup>85</sup>Mofaz's testimony before the Winograd Commission, 44–5.

<sup>86</sup>*Haaretz*, 23 Jan. 2007; Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 205.

<sup>87</sup>*Haaretz*, 23 Jan., 2007; Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 212–13.

<sup>88</sup>Ringel-Hoffman, 'This is not How a War Should be Conducted'.

<sup>89</sup>See for example, Shmuel Gordon, 'Winning from the Air is Still Possible', <[www.ynet.co.il/articles/1,7340,L-3288914,00.html](http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/1,7340,L-3288914,00.html)>.

<sup>90</sup>Ringel-Hoffman, 'This is not How a War Should be Conducted'.



skepticism regarding the effectiveness of a ground operation, and told the Cabinet that it would not solve the problem.<sup>91</sup>

### *Small, High-Quality Forces*

Israel has traditionally relied on strong and large ground forces for achieving battlefield success. Increased reliance on airpower, however, was soon accompanied by the cultivation of special units as another expression of a new, 'small but smart' military, within the framework of the transformation the IDF was supposed to undergo, that was along similar lines to the US armed forces' transformation. Instead of capturing territory – the traditional role of ground forces – the special units were expected to operate as small, independent units, in cooperation with the IAF. As a central component of a network-centric joint, but 'defused' warfare,<sup>92</sup> they were supposed to shorten the sensor-to-shooter loop to near-real time, and create various kinds of 'effects'.

The notion of diffused warfare, according to Yedidya Yaari and Haim Assa, is based on the assumption made by many RMA thinkers, that a fundamental shift is taking place from campaigns consisting of horizontal collisions between rival forces, breaking through the opponent's layers of defense and conducted along distinct lines with distinct starting and end points – to diffused confrontation that takes place, simultaneously, on the entire battlespace, distributing the force's mass to a multitude of separate pressure points, rather than concentrating it on assumed centers of gravity.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>91</sup>Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's testimony before the Winograd Commission, <[www.vaadatwino.org.il/pdf/תמליל%20אולמרט.pdf](http://www.vaadatwino.org.il/pdf/תמליל%20אולמרט.pdf)>, 58.

<sup>92</sup>Chris C. Demchak, 'Complexity and Theory of Networked Militaries', in Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff (eds.), *The Sources of Military Change: Culture, Politics, Technology* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 2002), 221–62; Lt. Col. Edmund C. Blash, US Army Reserve, 'Signal Forum: Network-Centric Warfare Pro & Con', <[www.iwar.org.uk/rma/resources/ncw/ncw-forum.htm](http://www.iwar.org.uk/rma/resources/ncw/ncw-forum.htm)>; Lt. Gen. William S. Wallace, 'Network-Enabled Battle Command', <[www.rusi.org/downloads/pub\\_rds/Wallace.pdf](http://www.rusi.org/downloads/pub_rds/Wallace.pdf)>.

<sup>93</sup>The force is based on 'molecules', each comprised of land, air or maritime elements, which participate as sensors in creating the 'world picture'. The moment a legitimate target is detected, the molecule best positioned for taking the shot, acts as the shooter, thus closing the sensor-shooter circle. A controller sees the world views of all the molecules, creating the common integrated picture of the entire relevant battle space. If vertical contact with an enemy target is disrupted, the line-of-sight will continue to be sustained by the horizontal elements of the molecule. The main sensor changes but the picture remains relevant. The same applies to the allocation of firepower for the firing phase. Taking into account the internal backing provided by the other components of the molecule – air, ground, and sea – a system of forces is created that hardly has any

The cumulative effect of the special units during the Second Lebanon War and their contribution to the war effort was very limited. Raids by Israeli commandos in the Baalbek area near the Lebanon–Syria border on 1–2 August, and assaults by special forces units on rocket launchers and command posts were marginally effective, too. Attacks on launchers by airpower were moderately effective inasmuch as they degraded the accuracy of the rocket launchers and pushed them out of the optimal launching zones against Haifa. Thus, downtown Haifa was not hit during the later phase of the conflict, except during the last day (13 August) when Hizballah staged an extra effort for this purpose.<sup>94</sup>

### *‘Controlling’ Instead of Capturing Territory*

With the increased emphasis on firepower, as opposed to maneuver, new concepts began to permeate Israeli military thought, among them that of ‘control’ – a theoretical concept that until recently was reserved

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significant mass, compared to traditional linear force build-ups, but is capable of creating much larger systemic effect, while in principle, not risking a greater degree of exposure. In theory, the molecule structures can expand to the size of the traditional units of action, such as platoons or regiments. However, their uniqueness lies in their independence. Every molecule contains an independent multi-dimensional sensor and shooter component, capable at all times of tying into the other molecular systems operating in its proximity.

Maneuver is diffused into a series of simultaneous movements on the ground, in the air, and at sea. The movements are not committed to a unified pattern, yet their logic of conduct relies on the one objective of closing the sensor-to-shooter circle. The focus is on the specific targets themselves rather than on capturing the territory wherein they exist. The main risk involved in the deployment of light molecular forces throughout the enemy’s battlespace is resolved by the ability to see and integrate in real-time the enemy reactions in every area of deployment, and to respond rapidly. Yaari and Assa admit that the command and control dimension of diffused warfare, as well as the resulting command structure, is one of the most complex challenges of diffused warfare. Even if technical issues are overcome, other difficult questions will still have to be solved, such as real-time hierarchy between multi-service elements in the network, issues pertaining to location of the controller, command structure of the molecule, etc.

Furthermore, their theory is based on the optimistic assumptions that war could be waged in a sterile fashion, that intelligence would be near to complete, that the enemy will not be able to match the molecules’ sophistication and thwart and disrupt their mode of operation using various force multipliers, including technology, and that controlling a territory via molecules could really substitute its conquest, as guerrilla/terrorist actions typically conducted in occupied territories would be effectively thwarted by the molecules. Haim Assa and Yedidya Yaari, *Diffused Warfare* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot 2005) [Hebrew].

<sup>94</sup>Uzi Rubin, ‘Hizballah’s Rocket Campaign Against Northern Israel: Preliminary Report’, *Jerusalem Issue Brief* 6/10 (31 Aug. 2006).

for air and sea contexts where conquering territory is irrelevant. 'Control', however, is insufficient for purposes of destroying infrastructure or preventing the launching of Katyusha rockets. According to the aforementioned operational plan 'Country's Shield', which was prepared a few years before the outbreak of the war, IDF troops were supposed to refrain from capturing territory in Southern Lebanon. Instead, they were to 'take control' over the area and to destroy Katyusha rockets via precision fire and raids by small units. There is no point in entering Bint Jbeil or any other town or village or running after each Katyusha, the planners argued.<sup>95</sup>

The strategic importance of the town of Bint Jbeil in the central region of Southern Lebanon notwithstanding, Brigadier General Shuky Shachrur, the Northern Command's chief of staff, said the Israeli troops never intended to conquer the town. Rather, he said, their goal was to 'control the town from outside' and raid specific targets based on intelligence.<sup>96</sup> 'We have complete control of the town of Bint Jbeil', 91st Division commander Brigadier General Gal Hirsch told a Cable News Network correspondent.<sup>97</sup> '[We can] direct precise fire at every point that is needed (within Bint Jbeil) and to bring the forces to a situation of minimum risk', an Israeli Colonel explained the notion of controlling the area stretching between the village of Maroun al-Ras and the town of Bint Jbeil.<sup>98</sup>

Bint Jbeil was strongly associated with Hizballah's military presence and status in Southern Lebanon. Not only was it a Hizballah stronghold, it is also one of the most important towns in the region. As the town was the site of a famous speech by Sheikh Nasrallah, in which he described Israel as weak as a spider web, it had also a symbolic meaning. As such, it constituted a center of gravity, the capturing of which would have been essential for physically harming Hizballah's infrastructure in it and demoralizing its fighters and would have provided a boost for the Israeli war effort. 'Capturing Bint Jbeil has no tactical significance but it does have a symbolic meaning', Chief of Staff Halutz explained on 26 June why it was necessary to attack the town. When the IDF eventually entered the town on 26 July, however, it did so in a transparent and expected movement, with its troops easily being ambushed and surrounded, and eventually the fighting claimed the lives of some 17 soldiers. The IDF's retreat from Bint Jbeil, a few days later, with the same belief that

<sup>95</sup>Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 132.

<sup>96</sup><<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/27/AR2006072700714.html>>.

<sup>97</sup><<http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/060726/lo1.03.html>>.

<sup>98</sup>'IDF in Control of Bint Jbeil', <[www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3281031,00.html](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3281031,00.html)>.

controlling the area was sufficient, was correctly interpreted by Hizballah as a great victory for the organization.

### *Reorganization of the Logistical System*

During the mid-1960s the IDF underwent a major logistical reform, which was supposed to support its maneuver-based blitzkrieg-oriented operations. In the new decentralized system the division or the brigade was directly in charge of 'pushing' supplies to its own forces along the lines of operation. The motivation to do so was higher, the lines of communications were shorter, and personal acquaintances between the supplies' providers and the fighting forces made the mission simpler. The system was put to test during the 1967 Six-Day War. The fact that spearhead tank battalions could advance continuously since they were sustained by the supply units that followed in their wake proved the efficiency of this 'linear integration' system.<sup>99</sup>

With the increased emphasis on firepower as opposed to maneuver since the 1980s, the IDF once again decided to reorganize logistically. The current system, based on modularly structured area logistic units, is meant to allow for the allocation of logistic resources to the combat units in accordance with operational planning and developments on the battlefield in real time, while their modular structure is supposed to provide availability, flexibility, and efficiency.<sup>100</sup>

In the Second Lebanon War, in addition to missing equipment and supplies from depots, as well as old or inadequate equipment, there were also noticeable shortages of food, water and ammunition for units operating in Lebanon,<sup>101</sup> with one major reason probably being the centralized nature of the new system. It may have improved control over logistical resources, and 'saved' personnel and stocks,<sup>102</sup> but it crippled the combat units' logistical autonomy and went against strategic logic, which is different from non-military logic. 'We have found ourselves operating without a logistical tail', complained an IDF field commander.<sup>103</sup> It is unclear whether the new logistic system would

<sup>99</sup>Edward Luttwak and Dan Horowitz, *The Israeli Army* (London: Allen Lane 1975), 292–5.

<sup>100</sup><<http://www1.idf.il/atal/site/templates/controller.asp?lang=HE&fid=47269&did=49143&bFromList=true>>.

<sup>101</sup>Zeev Schiff, 'Lessons of War/Logistical Failure Led to Crisis of Faith', *Haaretz*, 28 Aug. 2006. <[www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/754994.html](http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/754994.html)>.

<sup>102</sup>Amnon Barzilai, '[Chief of the IDF's Technology and Logistics Branch Maj. Gen. Udi] Adam's Technological Revolution', *Haaretz*, 2 April 2004.

<sup>103</sup>Alon Ben-David, 'Israel Introspective after Lebanon Offensive', *Jane's Defense Weekly*, 22 Aug. 2006, 19.

have met operational requirements had the war involved large-scale ground maneuvers. Israel also suffered from shortages in smart munitions, having to rely on airlifts from the US during the war.<sup>104</sup>

On the other side, Hizballah's logistic system managed to provide munitions for the organization's fighters, enabling it to sustain its war effort. As the CSIS report explains, 'The lack of a formal and hierarchical supply system meant that dispersed weapons and supplies – the equivalent of “feed forward logistics” – accumulated over six years [by Hizballah] ensured their ability to keep operating in spite of IDF attacks on supply facilities and resupply.'<sup>105</sup>

### *Reserve Units*

Only two decades ago some three-quarters of Israeli ground forces were comprised of reserve units. The emphasis on airpower and on small high-quality forces, the assumption that the era of traditional ground war is over and that 'control' can replace capturing territory, the reliance on the new logistical system to meet operational requirements, the IDF's emphasis on policing missions in the territories, and budgetary constraints – have in recent years resulted in the creation of two armies within the IDF. There is the regular army, which is more professional, better equipped, and better – although not always sufficiently – trained; and the reserve units, which are less professional, not as well-trained and inadequately equipped. The IDF's best infantry units hardly trained, and brigades and regiments hardly exercised. Armor and artillery units did not train at all and spent most of their time carrying out policing missions in the territories.<sup>106</sup>

In the war, three out of the four divisions that were supposed to occupy Southern Lebanon during the war's last day were reserve divisions, which were far from being ready for this mission. According to the CSIS report, reservists went to war without proper equipment, including such vital items as night sights for sniper rifles, and were missing basic supplies. Most reserve units required a refresher course in training, and many units complained of the lack of forward area supplies.<sup>107</sup> As a result of these problems, the events of the recent war reopened the debate regarding the structure of the IDF's forces.

<sup>104</sup>Alastair Crooke and Mark Perry, 'How Hizballah Defeated Israel', <[www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/HJ13Ak01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HJ13Ak01.html)>.

<sup>105</sup>Cordesman, *Preliminary 'Lessons' of the Israeli-Hizballah War*, 27.

<sup>106</sup>Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 130–1.

<sup>107</sup>Cordesman, *Preliminary 'Lessons' of the Israel-Hizballah War*.

### Poor Professionalism of the Officer Corps

IDF officers have never been ‘intellectual soldiers’, let alone ‘military intellectuals’ – to use Morris Janowitz’s terminology.<sup>108</sup> Instead, they have been ‘practical soldiers’, basing their professional performance on experience, intuition, flexibility, imagination, initiative, and audacity. Military history and military theory have been studied in Israeli military academies and colleges, but were not believed to have any direct practical dividend. This has worked well for many years, to the point of creating the impression that senior IDF commanders were really Liddell Hart’s best pupils, as the great thinker himself said,<sup>109</sup> having watched the IDF performance in 1948–49, 1956 and 1967.

But, as already pointed out, since 1982 experience in conducting war or large-scale operations has hardly existed, as most of the IDF activity has long been of a policing nature in the territories. To make matters worse, in recent years the IDF has undergone a process of superficial intellectualization, the manifestations of which have been a pretentious post-modern approach and a tendency to imitate American military thinking in an absorptive rather than competitive form.<sup>110</sup> One of the outcomes of this process has been a weakening commitment to one of the cornerstones of Israel’s traditional defense doctrine – battlefield decision. According to former Chief of Staff Lieutenant General (res.) Dan Shomron, who investigated the military conduct of the Second Lebanon War, had the IDF decided to revert to its traditional doctrine during the war, it would have been impossible, given the depth of the commitment to the new thinking.<sup>111</sup>

### *Pretentious Post-Modern Approach*

The IDF’s Operational Doctrine Research Institute, which was very influential in the training of the officer corps before the war, believed that delving into non-military post-modern theories would equip senior officers with the tools necessary for dealing with the complex and changing realities of war. According to the Institute’s director Brigadier General (res.) Shimon Naveh, ‘[...] We read Christopher Alexander, [...] John Forester, and other architects. We are reading Gregory

<sup>108</sup>Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier* (New York: Free Press 1960), 43.

<sup>109</sup>Tuvia Ben-Moshe, ‘Liddell Hart and the Israel Defense Forces: A Reappraisal’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 16/2 (April 1981), 369–91.

<sup>110</sup>To use late-nineteenth century – early-twentieth century Jewish intellectual Ahad Ha’am’s distinction in his seminal essay, ‘Imitation and Assimilation’ (1893), in Ahad Ha’am, *Essays, Letters, Memoirs* (Oxford: East and West Library 1946), 71–5.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*

Bateson; we are reading Clifford Geertz. Not myself, but our soldiers, our generals are reflecting on these kinds of materials. We have established a school and developed a curriculum that trains “operational architects”.’

In his lectures Naveh was using a diagram resembling a ‘square of opposition’ that plotted a set of logical relationships between certain propositions referring to military and guerrilla operations. Labeled with phrases such as ‘Difference and Repetition – The Dialectics of Structuring and Structure’, ‘Formless Rival Entities’, ‘Fractal Maneuver’, ‘Velocity vs. Rhythms’, ‘The Wahabi War Machine’, ‘Postmodern Anarchists’ and ‘Nomadic Terrorists’, Naveh and his team often referenced the work of Deleuze and Guattari. ‘War machines, according to these philosophers, are polymorphous; diffuse organizations characterized by their capacity for metamorphosis, made up of small groups that split up or merge with one another, depending on contingency and circumstances.’<sup>112</sup> Classic military thinkers became no more than names, whose sayings were occasionally cited, but whose writings were not read or studied in-depth. Inspired by this institute, IDF officers in military academies and colleges started learning the writings of great architects instead of the writings of the masters of war.<sup>113</sup>

### *‘Absorptive Limitation’ of American Military Thinking*

American military thinking has been received in the IDF enthusiastically with little skepticism, and has affected IDF commanders’ thinking and *modus operandi*. One major influence pertains to the notion of ‘effects-based operations’ (EBO).<sup>114</sup> Not only is the idea of effects elusive,<sup>115</sup> by adopting it<sup>116</sup> IDF senior commanders have distanced

<sup>112</sup> <[http://jdeanicate.typepad.com/i\\_cite/2006/09/why\\_the\\_israeli.html](http://jdeanicate.typepad.com/i_cite/2006/09/why_the_israeli.html)>.

<sup>113</sup> Eyal Weizman, ‘Israeli Military Using Post-Structuralism as Operational Theory’, *Infoshop News*, 1 Aug. 2006, <[www.infoshop.org/inews/article.php?story=20060801170800738](http://www.infoshop.org/inews/article.php?story=20060801170800738)>.

<sup>114</sup> Edward A. Smith, *Effects Based Operations: Applying Network-centric Warfare in Peace, Crisis, and War* (Washington DC: Dept. of Defense Command and Control Research Program 2002).

<sup>115</sup> Effect is defined as ‘the physical, functional, or psychological outcome, event, or consequence that results from specific military or non-military actions’. EBO are defined as ‘a process for obtaining a desired strategic outcome or effect on the enemy through the synergistic and cumulative application of the full range of military and non-military capabilities at all levels of conflict’. Lt. Col. Allen W. Batschelet, *Effects-based Operations: A New Operational Model?* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College 2002), 2.

<sup>116</sup> The Winograd Commission’s Interim Report, 49.

themselves from the old but simple notion of centers of gravity, which has united military thinkers for centuries, except for the dilemma where and against what it would be best to concentrate forces or power in order to achieve battlefield decision.

One of the lessons learned from an exercise ('Firestones-9') carried out two years before the outbreak of the Second Lebanon War was that in order to stop the launching of rockets onto Israeli territory it was necessary to affect the enemy's capabilities rather than its 'consciousness'. 'Leverages and effects' applied against Hizballah proved ineffective in bringing the organization 'to acknowledge' its bad condition within a few days. The IDF nevertheless concluded that the 'leverages and effects' should merely be improved.<sup>117</sup>

The ambiguity of the language used in reference to EBO has been another problem. Major General (res.) Yoram Yair, who investigated the 91st Division's functioning during the Second Lebanon War, found out that using terms like 'swarmed, multi-dimensional, simultaneous attack' in orders issued by the division's commander came at the expense of a simple and straightforward definition of objectives and missions.<sup>118</sup>

### *The Weakening Commitment to Battlefield Decision*

Another military thinking deficiency pertains to a weakened commitment to battlefield decision on the part of IDF senior commanders in recent years. In October 2004 the IDF's publishing house issued an edited volume whose title was *Low-Intensity Conflict*, in which senior military practitioners and researchers analyzed the phenomenon and recommended how to cope with the challenge more effectively. The volume reflects skepticism about the chances of achieving battlefield decision in LICs.<sup>119</sup> Reflective of this new state of mind, which may have disseminated among IDF generals, were also the views expressed by Brigadier General Eyval Gil'adi from the IDF's Planning Branch in an interview before retiring from service, less than three years before the Second Lebanon War, that one would not expect to hear from a professional officer:

When I started my job, I found in the plans the term, 'defeating the Palestinians.' I asked myself, what is that nonsense? Whom

<sup>117</sup>A Report by former Chief of Staff Shomron; Alex Fishman, 'For Your Attention, Gabbi [Ashkenazi]', *Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, 26 Jan. 2007.

<sup>118</sup>*Yediot Aharonot*, 13 Oct. 2006.

<sup>119</sup>Haggai Golan and Shaul Shai (eds.), *Low-Intensity Conflict* (Tel Aviv: Maarachot 2004) [Hebrew].



exactly are we supposed to defeat? What does defeat mean? We tried to think of alternatives to defeating the enemy. Initially I talked about a 'victory image', which is merely an appearance. It then became a matter of producing a victory show.<sup>120</sup>

Chief of Staff Moshe Yaalon himself expressed skepticism about the ability to land a decisive blow on a guerrilla organization like Hizballah.<sup>121</sup> Chief of Staff Halutz did not believe that a knockout score was an option in the Second Lebanon War or that 'defeating a terror organization' was achievable. He therefore thought battlefield decision was irrelevant.<sup>122</sup> No wonder that when the Second Lebanon War broke out, Chief of Operations Major General Gadi Eisenkot said that defeating Hizballah was unattainable.<sup>123</sup> 'The military does not even pretend to achieve battlefield decision', was Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni's impression of the military's state of mind during a Cabinet meeting held on 31 July.<sup>124</sup>

### **Hesitant and Inexperienced Political Leadership**

Clausewitz noted the need for political leaders to base their instructions to the military on military assessments and the need for the military leadership to see the broader political picture. The tension between broad political considerations and the 'narrower' military perspective is built into civil-military relations.

While there is a measure of justice in the complaints about the lack of clear instructions regarding objectives and missions in the Second Lebanon War that are partially directed at the political leadership, its hesitancy is also understandable. The political leadership was led by the military echelon to understand that the majority of the work could be done by the IAF, accompanied by small, but highly trained, equipped and skilled Special Forces, which also meant that the war could be fought with a minimum of casualties. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert seems to be right in his claim that had the IDF's performance been as expected during the battles of Maroun A-Ras or Bint Jbeil, things would have looked totally different.<sup>125</sup>

Only when these assumptions were proven false, was there any serious consideration of a large-scale ground operation. This all

<sup>120</sup>*Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, 19 Sept. 2003.

<sup>121</sup>Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 129.

<sup>122</sup>Halutz's testimony before the Winograd Commission, 25.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>124</sup>Ringel-Hoffman, 'This is not How a War Should be Conducted'.

<sup>125</sup>Olmert's testimony before the Winograd Commission, 71.

occurred as the ceasefire was drawing closer. Pressure to display clear-cut military results during the UN Security Council discussions tipped the scales in favor of a large-scale ground operation in the hope of affecting the impending resolution in Israel's favor. If the politicians had known at the beginning of the war what difficulty the IDF would have on the ground and how limited the IAF would prove in responding to the threat posed by the Katyushas, they probably would have refrained entirely from a ground operation, or clearly stated, 'We are at war and in order to put an end to the threat posed to the civilian rear by the Katyushas and end the war with an unequivocal victory, signaling Israel's determination and military capability, a large-scale land operation that might entail quite a heavy cost is necessary.'

On the other hand, it is still unclear whether these shortcomings in the politicians' estimate of the situation at the beginning of the war were the outcome of improper briefings by IDF officers or due to the fact that the chief policymakers – Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz – had no experience at all in conducting a large-scale military operations, let alone war. The available information, so far, indicates that this lack of experience was a serious problem. Unlike Israel's first Prime Minister and Defense Minister David Ben-Gurion who, once in charge of the pre-state Jewish community's defense, a year before the establishment of the State of Israel, took a six-week 'self seminar' to study the defense challenges and crystallize a defense conception, neither Olmert nor Peretz did anything similar.

For years the IDF has enjoyed dominance in the decision-making process on defense matters. Military Intelligence has been in charge of the national intelligence estimate, strategic planning has been led by the military, the military echelon has often undertaken to formulate Israel's war objectives for the political echelon, and the political echelon has never really liked the idea of creating a strong national security staff at the government and prime minister's disposal, although it has been accustomed to paying lip service to that idea. Explanations for the military's dominance are both realistic and cultural: the constant military threat to Israel, and a strategic culture that stresses military solutions to security challenges and still believes in the military's professionalism and impartiality.<sup>126</sup>

A political echelon without military background could always lean on an experienced Chief of Staff (e.g., Prime Ministers Levi Eshkol on Yitzhak Rabin, Golda Meir on David Elazar, Menachem Begin on Rafael Eytan), and a political echelon with military background could

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<sup>126</sup>For the extent to which the military shapes Israeli policy and explanations for its dominance, see, for example, Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room* (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace 2006).

check and balance the military echelon (e.g., Prime Minister/Defense Minister Rabin, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, Prime Minister/Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Prime Minister/Defense Minister Ariel Sharon).

The 2006 case was unique in the sense that a prime minister and a defense minister having no military background (for the defense minister, who was in charge of the most complex ministry, it was the first ministerial position), coincided with a Chief of Staff who had been a pilot and had only poor experience in running inter-arm and inter-service operations. Infrastructure Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer put it blatantly: 'One day the PM woke up and found out he had become prime minister. [...] Defense matters are alien to him. Defense Minister [Peretz] wished to be minister of the Treasury, but accepted [Prime Minister Olmert's invitation] to serve as defense minister. And the Chief of Staff was not fit for the job from the start.'<sup>127</sup> 'Is it reasonable that in a state like Israel, which is still conducting existential wars, the prime minister or the defense minister would be without any military background?' Ben-Eliezer asked rhetorically.<sup>128</sup>

Halutz had been appointed by Prime Minister Sharon and Defense Minister Mofaz – both military authorities. Had these two stayed in their positions, he would have been balanced by their military experience and understanding. Under the new circumstances, and given Chief of Staff Halutz's charisma and excellent record as IAF Chief, the IDF enjoyed the greatest influence ever. To cite Minister of Transportation Shaul Mofaz, 'Whatever recommendation the military brought, we [the War Cabinet] approved.'<sup>129</sup> With only one exception – hitting infrastructure targets in Lebanon, which the political echelon was unwilling to approve due to American pressures – the IDF usually had the last word.

According to Halutz, he supported a more balanced relationship between the political and military echelons, and advocated the strengthening of the former at the expense of the latter to that effect.<sup>130</sup> Former Chiefs of Staff neither thought along these lines nor ever thought that airpower could decide wars. Given Halutz's opinion regarding the necessary balance between the echelons, it is very ironical that it was under his tenure that the IDF enjoyed such an unprecedented power.

<sup>127</sup> Ben-Eliezer's testimony before the Winograd Commission, 19.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>129</sup> Mofaz's testimony before the Winograd Commission, 38.

<sup>130</sup> Halutz's testimony before the Winograd Commission, 5–6.

During Amir Peretz's testimony before the Winograd Commission Judge Winograd drew the minister's attention to the fact that he had always reiterated the IDF's position, having no original idea of his own,<sup>131</sup> and never questioning the conception regarding the aerial solution for the Katyushas challenge.<sup>132</sup> Notwithstanding the establishment of a Policy and Political-Military Affairs Bureau at the Ministry of Defense by his predecessor Shaul Mofaz, Peretz admitted that he saw the Chief of Staff and the General Staff as his 'number one advisory body' on operational matters,<sup>133</sup> and that there was no point in having a staff at the defense minister's office, as this would only be considered by the military a 'super general staff'.<sup>134</sup> On the operational conduct of the war Peretz said the political echelon gave the military the strongest backing and greatest freedom of action possible,<sup>135</sup> and that he could not ignore the unequivocal position of the senior military echelon against a large-scale ground operation.<sup>136</sup>

## Conclusion

Whereas in the past, Israeli successes on the battlefield compensated for deterrence and/or early warning failures, in the Second Lebanon War serious problems in Israeli military capability and conduct of war were exposed, the causes of which have been analyzed in this article. These factors harmed the chances of ending the war with any significant military achievement. The IDF did not achieve battlefield decision against Hizballah, while a grand strategic decision could not be achieved (much to the Chief of Staff's discontent) due to limitations on attacking infrastructure targets in Lebanon, whose government was considered one of the US's greatest achievements in its quest for the democratization of the Middle East and a potential partner for peace with Israel.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>131</sup>Defense Minister Amir Peretz's testimony before the Winograd Commission, <<http://www.vaadatwino.org.il/pdf/תמליך%20עמיר%20פרץ.pdf>>13.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, 39, 80–81.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>137</sup>Nahum Barnea and Shimon Shiffer, Interview with Prime Minister Olmert, *Yediot Aharonot New Year Supplement*, 22 Sept. 2006. According to the testimony of the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff Yoram Turbowitz before the Winograd Commission, on the first day of the war Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asked Israel not to direct its attacks on Lebanese Prime Minister Seniora, and the Israelis understood that they were asked to refrain from hitting infrastructure targets in Lebanon. *Haaretz*, 8 March 2007. See also Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, 53.

The unrealistic declared Israeli war objectives raised the level of expectations, and, when they were not achieved, deepened the sense of failure. Also, the realization of some of Israel's objectives depended on foreign players – the Lebanese government (for deployment of the Lebanese Army in Southern Lebanon) and the UN and other countries (for deployment of an effective international force).

The sense of missed opportunity after the war was sharpened by the fact that the war began and was mostly fought under almost optimal conditions. Paradoxically, this wide room of maneuverability may have accounted for Israel's primary mistake – failure to end the fighting a few days after it had begun.

This failure led to the exposure of the IDF's major weaknesses. Notably, in light of these weaknesses it has been argued that the IDF was lucky to have exposed them vis-à-vis a relatively weak enemy, and that against a stronger opponent things might have ended up much worse. This claim seems to be unfounded. It is more logical to assume that against a regular army of a state, such as the Syrian Army, where the IDF could make far more effective use of its technological edge, a battlefield decision was attainable. Defeating a conventional opponent is easier for the IDF than winning a war against a diffused enemy like Hizballah, just like it was easier for the US-led coalition to defeat Saddam Hussein's armed forces than to put an end to the LIC that followed the high-intensity conflict in Iraq.

And indeed, the Israeli case is representative of both Western democratic and high-technology countries waging asymmetrical wars. It is a warning sign against the over-reliance on technology in general and on airpower or network-centric warfare in particular, or the illusion that thanks to technology such countries can rely on 'small but smart' militaries, and that technology minimizes fatalities, eliminates friction, decreases the dependence on logistics, breaks the enemy's will and can achieve quick victory by itself. RMA conceptions may be elegant and sophisticated, but they cannot replace simple military notions that have been held by military thinkers for centuries, such as the identification of and operation against centers of gravity – not just creating 'effects'; the role played by ground forces in battlefield success; the importance of inflicting physical damage on the enemy – not just 'burning its consciousness'; and the fact that the enemy does not abide by the rules one wishes to dictate.

A highly ideologically motivated and determined enemy, conducting heroic warfare, using simple but effective technology, and relying on a decentralized command and control and logistical system can compensate for its quantitative and qualitative inferiority. No RMA-inspired warfare doctrine can effectively work against such a combination.

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