



Where Is the Israeli Military Heading?

by Amir Rapaport

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The army's new multi-year plan shows that the IDF is reorganizing its priorities for the coming decade. Military priorities include the attainment of intelligence superiority, development of knockout fire delivery capability, active defense systems, cyber warfare, and border protection systems, while the ground forces are to be downgraded in importance and priority.

The recent announcement regarding future cuts in the defense budget, as well as the launching of the new multi-year plan for the IDF ("*Te'uza*"), prompt the question: where is the Israeli military heading?

The IDF formulated several principles of warfare in recent years: keeping the campaign as short as possible, allowing minimum damage to the home front (assuming that the home front will have a hard time facing a prolonged missile attack), and achieving a clear and definite image of victory. The Israeli military is not interested in another confrontation whose outcome is less than unequivocal, like the 2006 Lebanon war.

In order to uphold these principles, several objectives must be met. At the top of the list stands the attainment of intelligence superiority, followed by the development of a knockout fire delivery capability, mainly from the air. A high priority is also assigned to active defense systems, cyber warfare, and protecting borders (specifically those with Syria and Egypt).

These objectives were formulated at a workshop attended by the most senior officers of the IDF in the summer of 2013, in which participants were divided into work teams. One team, led by the head of the IDF Operations Directorate, Maj. Gen. Yoav Har-Even, addressed the operational concept. A second team,

led by the head of the IDF Planning Directorate, Maj. Gen. Nimrod Shefer, addressed the reorganization of the various IDF branches. A third team, led by the head of the IDF C4I Directorate (responsible for telecommunications), Maj. Gen. Uzi Moscovitch, addressed the advancement of ideas for improving firepower and command and control (C2) through the computer network. The fourth team, led by head of the IDF Manpower Directorate, Maj. Gen. Orna Barbivai, addressed the feasibility of revising the model of the standing army in view of the expected cuts in army personnel.

According to the army Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz, Israel is a world power in three major fields: unmanned vehicles (mainly in the air), precision fire, and C2. The main question going forward is whether to place the emphasis on fields regarded as relative weaknesses of the IDF – such as the maneuvering capabilities of the ground forces – or to further strengthen the fields in which the army excels anyway. Gantz ruled for the latter option.

Continued Spending for R&D and Platform Procurement

Many of the ideas currently on the agenda were in fact included in a previous multi-year plan (“*Kela*”), led primarily by Gantz, Deputy Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot, and then Chief of Staff Moshe Ya’alon, who is currently Defense Minister.

As part of the battle over the defense budget, the army recently created the impression that the cuts annulled much of the procurement and R&D projects designed to significantly strengthen the IDF. This is not exactly the case. The Israeli defense industries and the army itself currently have more than 100 different development projects in the pipeline, most of which are secret.

At the same time, the procurement budgets of the IDF for submarines and fighter planes remain untouched. By the end of the decade the IDF will have six Dolphin-class submarines, with the cost of each submarine touching the billion dollar mark. The army will also receive two squadrons (of 24 aircraft each) of the F-35 future fighter, a deal to be covered by US aid. One squadron has already been ordered, and the actual aircraft delivery will begin in late 2016. The second squadron will be requisitioned in the following years.

Investment in UAVs, Satellites, and Missiles

Over the last decade the Israeli military has invested a fortune in the procurement of unmanned airborne vehicles (UAVs). This trend will continue; in the coming years, new tactical UAVs, as well as larger Hermes-900 UAVs, will be delivered to the IDF. IAI will supply additional super-

UAVs, like the Boeing 737-sized “Eitan” (Heron TP) UAV, as well as an abundance of miniature drones.

By the year 2025, the army’s UAVs will probably be executing all missions, from intelligence gathering – capable of detecting any minor suspect movement on land or at sea – to strike missions. Even today, the operational range of the UAVs employed by the IDF easily covers long-range destinations, such as Iran. It is for this purpose that satellite-based C2 systems were developed for the IDF. These systems render irrelevant the limitation regarding the radio communication required to operate these vehicles at extreme ranges.

In the coming decades, the IDF will continue to invest in satellites as well, though at a somewhat slower pace than the Ministry of Defense would have preferred. Some satellite projects are in real danger in view of the expected cuts (such as the development of “mini satellites”). The major projects in this field will not be interrupted, and the IDF will continue to employ satellites as a primary tool for intelligence gathering and communication.

Moreover, in the foreseeable future, outer space is expected to evolve into an actual battlefield. Various countries are preparing to intercept one another’s satellites using long-range missiles. One of the options discussed in this context involved the employment of fighter aircraft during wartime to launch miniature satellites that will promptly begin to orbit the earth, so that the enemy would not have sufficient time to study their orbits and intercept them.

Only minimal details have been released regarding a recent secret test of a rocket propulsion system for long-range missiles. According to foreign publications, this test was a part of a major project associated with the development of an advanced surface-to-surface missile, the Jericho-4, which has a range of thousands of kilometers.

Within the shorter ranges, the IDF is regarded as the world’s most advanced military organization in the field of precision fire delivery using missiles launched from the air, ground, sea, and submarines. The world media has even claimed that precision-guided missiles of these types were responsible for the attacks staged in recent months against strategic weapon stores in Syria. In order to hit a target that emerges and becomes visible for only a number of seconds, a state-of-the-art intelligence gathering network is required, along with a permanent link between the intelligence gathering resources and the various types of fire delivery elements.

In order to meet this challenge, new fields of activity have been launched by the IDF, with such impressive definitions as NCW (Network Concentric Warfare) and IBW (Intelligence-Based Warfare). Through the contribution of NCW and IBW systems, the army's fire delivery capacity has increased several times, in comparison to the 2006 Lebanon war. By 2025, the fire delivery capability of the IDF is expected to be more similar to a computer game than to the battlefields of old.

According to the decisions of the IDF General Staff, only projects led by the General Staff – and not those led by the military branches – will be authorized henceforth. The prerequisite to be met by each project is that it must make a contribution to the entire operational capability of the IDF, rather to the capability of a specific branch (such as the air force, navy, or the ground forces). As a rule, the Intelligence Branch and IAF will enjoy total precedence within the IDF until the middle of the next decade, with the Intelligence Branch enjoying a higher priority than the IAF. While all the other arms and service branches, including the IAF, will be closing down units, the intelligence budget will not be reduced. Up until now, the IDF assigned top-quality personnel to the pilot training course of the IAF. Now, however, the cyber warfare teams get top priority.

Until the year 2025, substantial investments will be made in anti-missile and anti-aircraft defense systems (including the new systems Arrow-III and David's Sling, which cannot be "frozen," as these are joint Israeli-American projects). Substantial funds will also be invested in radar systems designed to spot sources of enemy fire and in active protection systems for vehicles, capable of identifying incoming missiles and destroy them in mid-air. In the coming years, IAI will complete a major project, Barak-8, involving a state-of-the-art naval missile defense system.

Reduction in the Ground Forces

The ground forces of the IDF will take the most substantial cut. Between 2002 and 2006, the ground forces budget was cut by no less than 25 percent. This trend was suspended pursuant to the 2006 war, but will be resumed soon. The development of fast, continuous maneuvering capabilities is an issue that is disputed within the military and political echelon.

IDF authorities do not believe that the ground forces will become obsolete because of drastic reductions in training activities, but its order of battle will be reduced. The demobilized armored formations will be replaced by less-expensive formations, equipped with light, agile vehicles, wheels instead of

tracks, and by regional formations that would be assigned to cope with the ever-increasing number of terror incidents along the borders.

The IDF is expected to announce a substantial reduction in the manufacture of the newest Merkava tanks – whose rate of production has been slow anyway – and the complete halting of the production of Namer APCs (armored personnel carriers). This decision will require a \$15 million compensation to the General Dynamics Corporation, which had developed a production line for this APC in the US – in view of the Israeli commitment to requisition a guaranteed minimum amount, a commitment the army will not uphold.

Conclusion

The army's plans look excellent. The main problem is that certain scenarios – such as the collapse of the Hashemite regime in Jordan, the demise of the peace agreement with Egypt, a third Intifada, or a nuclear threat from Iran – can no longer be regarded as unreasonably fanciful. Such developments, or other unforeseeable ones, could render all of these plans irrelevant.

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