



The Terrorist Defense Force

by Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaacov Amidror

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: In the near future, Israel is unlikely to be threatened by conventional armies in the region. Instead, Israel faces the threat of non-state entities motivated by Islamic ideology that have managed to amass increasing power and weaponry; Hezbollah, Hamas, the Islamic state and its offshoots. However, more dangerous is the possibility that some time in 2015, Iran will reach a deal with the West that will allow it to continue to pursue nuclear military capabilities. Israel's military must therefore be prepared for both ground warfare against Islamist extremists and an operation in Iran.

When summarizing the security situation in the State of Israel, no "real" army is among the threats that Israel faces as 2015 begins. Some states still possess armies in the region, primarily Egypt, yet Israel does not seem to be their commanders' prime target. Egypt's military leaders have yet to cement their hold in Egypt itself, and they definitely have not found a way to solve its problems.

The rest of the militaries in the region are irrelevant for many reasons. The Syrian army is wasting strength fighting against Syrian civilians, and while it still possesses a substantial arsenal, its units have been compromised, its morale is extremely low, and many of its commanders fear for their lives if the other side should win.

The once-enormous Iraqi army, at one time seen as having the ability to change the balance of power on the eastern front against Israel, has ceased to exist.

Today, the Americans are working to rebuild it, in the hopes that Iraq can assist them in the fight against the Islamic State.

The small but professional Jordanian army is looking east and north, toward the crumbling states of Iraq and Syria. Islamist terrorists are thriving within the power vacuum in both countries, and Jordan may already be in their crosshairs.

Radical Islam could, potentially, rear its head in Jordan, and Amman certainly does not see Israel as an enemy. The Lebanese army was and remains a small force that is currently busy fending off Islamist extremists that are trying to export the war from Syria to tiny Lebanon, so far with little success.

While it is true that Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf emirates are arming themselves with the best Western weapons, mostly American ones, Israel is not their target. Iran, the dark cloud looming over the Persian Gulf, is the reason for the rapid arms race in that region. It is obvious that from the moment the weapons are there, anyone who is in control of those countries can use them. There is room for concern about the future, but that will require a great change that, if it should take place, will take a great deal of time.

After having been accustomed to a situation in which large regular armies with armor, artillery, hundreds of aircraft and thousands of troops were arrayed on Israel's borders, there can be no doubt that Israel has moved into a different world.

The current threat to Israel is different. It consists mainly of non-state entities motivated by Islamic ideology. The strongest of them is Hezbollah, which was formed with a dual purpose in mind: It represents Iran's long reach in the area and against Israel, while at the same time it aims to control Lebanon, where the Shiites are the largest ethnic group.

Hezbollah's capabilities most closely resemble those of an army. Its arsenal numbers some 150,000 missiles and rockets, several thousand of which have a range that cover the entire State of Israel. This rare and substantial firepower apparently even exceeded the firepower possessed by most of the European states combined.

Hezbollah also has long-range surface-to-sea missiles, anti-aircraft missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, and modern anti-tank missiles. It is well organized into a military-style hierarchy and appears to possess command and control

systems of high quality. It was established by Iranian leaders, but its leadership has always consisted of Lebanese people who were closely linked to Iran's interests. Hezbollah assisted the Shiites by providing for their needs in the civilian sphere as a base for building its military power.

Hezbollah is currently busy assisting Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime in Syria. It has sacrificed hundreds of its own people there and is acquiring substantial battle experience, but from its perspective, the battle is over its survival. It fights beside the Syrian Alawites because it needs them to stay in power. If Assad survives, Hezbollah's status in Lebanon will increase, as will its status in Damascus.

The second organization that constitutes a steadily rising threat to Israel is Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, where the group has established impressive military capabilities with assistance from Iran and Hezbollah. Its most significant capabilities are its ability to produce its own long-range rockets and its expanding grid of terror tunnels.

After Operation Protective Edge in Gaza over the summer, Hamas was left in possession of 3,500 rockets. The big question is the speed at which Hamas can regain the capabilities it has lost. For Hamas, the current regime in Egypt is a formidable obstacle. Hamas has the markings of a well-organized military organization, as well as an impressive ability to learn and improve.

The Islamic Jihad, largely run and established by Iran, operates alongside Hamas. Although the Islamic Jihad is a small organization with a smaller rocket arsenal of lower quality, it cannot be disregarded as insignificant.

The Israeli military must also take into account that radical Islamist groups are growing stronger near the borders of the Sinai and Golan Heights. Some of them are Islamic State offshoots, and all of them are improving their capabilities and growing more powerful.

The threat that these groups pose is less significant. Even if they have the ability to pull off a successful operation that could be extremely unpleasant for Israel, such as an abduction, they are still not all that strong. A group like Islamic State can do a great deal of damage if it succeeds in disrupting the calm, and certainly if it brings about the collapse of a neighboring country. While such things do not seem high on the list of possibilities that could come true, they are the sorts of incidents that Israel should take into account and be prepared for.

Assuming that the current situation in Judea and Samaria continues as is, it does not appear that the security in the region will significantly decline. A deterioration in relations with the Palestinian Authority could lead to tension on the ground, mainly demonstrations and rioting and perhaps more grass-roots terrorism, but we can assume that this will be more of a policing challenge than a substantial security threat.

The most significant threat to Israel's very existence is the possibility that some time in 2015, Iran will reach a deal with the West that would allow it to pursue some form of nuclear military capability. This process will not come to fruition this year, but a bad deal with the superpowers would be an important milestone for Tehran.

This may be Israel's main security challenge, and any deal between Iran and the West will make it difficult for Israel to deal with it. This means that together with providing ongoing security, the Israeli military must be prepared for both large-scale ground warfare in Lebanon, attrition in Gaza and an operation in Iran – a feat that will be neither easy nor cheap.

Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaacov Amidror is the Greg and Anne Rosshandler Senior Fellow at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, and former national security advisor to the Prime Minister.

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