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“Deterrence Campaigns” Lessons from IDF Operations in Gaza

Moni Chorev



Mideast Security and Policy Studies No. 115

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BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY**

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"Deterrence Campaigns" Lessons from IDF Operations in Gaza

Moni Chorev

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the thirty years that have passed since the first Lebanon War, Israel has not conducted any wars aimed at achieving a decisive victory. With the exception of Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, all of the IDF's operations and campaigns have been directed at achieving limited goals. The basic strategic understanding that has informed all of these operations is that Israel is currently engaged in an extended period of attritional warfare against asymmetric opponents, as part of a conflict that is insoluble for the foreseeable future. The military operations conducted over this period have all sought to bolster and renew deterrence, so as to allow a return to routine and provide a reasonable level of security. Israel has accrued a great amount of operational experience over the course of these conflicts. However, the attempts to operationalize this combat approach paint a picture that indicates gaps and inconsistencies in logic and in the patterns of military force activity, as well as in the integration of additional strategic efforts at a national level in a way that accords with policy goals.

Deterrence operations need to be conducted as integrated inter-agency efforts at a national level, in which military action must be conducted in synchronization with additional strategic efforts, in support of the defined aims and goals. The experience gained to date has underlined the importance of coordinating military action with diplomacy, economic activities, home front preparedness, public awareness, and media efforts, in order to provide the necessary framework for effectively waging the campaign. Although deterrence campaigns have in recent decades been the leading mode of combat pursued by Israel, and in spite of the limitations of the military to serve as the sole effective tool for achieving strategic goals in campaigns of this kind, in all this time no coherent theory has been developed that draws together the various other national-

level components into a unified strategic approach. The lack of such an approach, and of the mechanisms needed to realize it, leads to a continued reliance on the military effort, despite its significant limitations.

In terms of the military effort, this paper analyzes the operational conceptual framework which is based on the “decisive victory” concept, and calls for the development of a strategic theory and military doctrine suitable for deterrence operations, within the context of a strategic campaign of extended attrition. Achieving fundamental conceptual clarity is a necessary foundation for developing a coherent operational approach, one that is consistent with overall national goals. The attempt to develop these ideas and a doctrine of this kind should influence the planning and operational processes in these campaigns, as well as the IDF force development process.

The paper begins with a review of the opponent in the Gaza Strip, including aspects of the opponent’s ideological approach, strategic logic, and operational approach to conducting extended attritional warfare. The second section discusses the Israeli approach to deterrence operations at a strategic-national level, over the course of a continued, ongoing attritional conflict. The third section focuses on the military level, making use of case studies of deterrence operations in Gaza in recent years, in order to present the principal combat efforts, the difficulties faced, the lack of doctrinal clarity, and the distortions created during the planning and management of these operations. The final section contains recommendations for the creation of a clear deterrence concept and theory, which can be a basis in the future for conducting operations in a more coherent and effective manner, across the range of activities forming the broader national-level campaign.

"Deterrence Campaigns" Lessons from IDF Operations in Gaza

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last thirty years, since the first Lebanon War, Israel has not conducted any wars aimed at achieving a decisive victory. With the exception of Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, all of the IDF's operations and campaigns have been directed at achieving limited goals. The strategic understanding that has informed all of these operations is that Israel is currently engaged in an extended period of attritional warfare with asymmetric opponents, as part of a conflict that is insoluble for the foreseeable future. The ability to live a stable, routine existence in Israel is exposed over time to changes and to the influence of a variety of internal and external strategic conditions in the different enemy camps, which from time to time lead to the outbreak of intense and relatively short combat operations. There is recognition for the fact that currently there is no reasonable prospect of a fundamental change of the strategic situation vis-à-vis these non-state opponents, nor of the creation of a new, more stable reality. At the same time, the absolute strategic superiority of Israel over its opponents means it has no need for "decisive campaigns" that require the investment of precious resources and come at great human cost, and can certainly make do with less. Israel has acquired a great deal of operational experience in conflicts of this kind. However, the attempts to operationalize this combat approach paint a picture that indicates gaps and inconsistencies in logic and in the patterns of military force activity, as well as in the integration of additional strategic efforts at a national level in a way that accords with policy goals.

This monograph examines the main lacunae in the strategic and operative conceptual approach to conducting deterrence operations against an asymmetric enemy, and attempts to describe the steps necessary for Israel

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to develop a relevant doctrine. The monograph will focus on deterrence operations in the Gaza Strip in recent years; will review the enemy's strategic and military trends; and will contrast them with the Israeli conceptual approach, with an emphasis on military actions and their strategic interfaces.

The monograph will propose a framework for planning and assessing deterrence operations, as well as several elements central to this work. Based on case studies of the IDF operations "Cast Lead" (December 2008 -January 2009), "Pillar of Defense" (November 2012) and "Protective Edge" (August 2014), it will conduct an analysis of the strategic logic of these operations and the accompanying conceptual system, and will analyze the link between the military effort and other efforts at the national level. The monograph will address the military aspects of the deterrence operations and will describe the main challenges in carrying them out. Finally, it will make recommendations for assessing and improving the operative and strategic results of these kinds of operations.

The first section reviews the opponent in the Gaza Strip, with reference to its ideology, strategic logic, operative structure and approach to conducting an extended campaign of attrition. The second section discusses Israel's approach to deterrence operations at the national-strategic level, within the context of the extended attrition campaign. It analyzes the strategic goals and aims of the operations, the strategic analysis and learning processes conducted, and the dialogue between the military echelons and the political echelons. Subsequently, the section reviews the central elements of the conceptual system that shapes the operative and strategic discussion of deterrence operations.

The third section focuses on military aspects, using case studies of the three deterrence operations conducted in Gaza in the last six years, in order to present the main combat efforts pursued, the difficulties faced, the lack of conceptual clarity, and the resultant distortions in the planning and command processes of these operations. The final section recommends several development directions for building an advanced theoretical foundation for deterrence operations and for the IDF overall, and makes operative recommendations for the various efforts that together guide the campaign as a whole.

THE OPPONENT

The following strategic analysis of the opponent is not intended as an evaluation of the outcomes or level of success achieved by Hamas. Rather, its purpose is to provide an essential foundation for evaluating Israeli strategy, which requires a deep understanding of the structure and operational logic of the enemy in order to counter it effectively.

For the purposes of the current discussion, the analysis will focus solely on the Hamas movement, despite the existence of other important and influential actors in Gaza such as Islamic Jihad, the Resistance Committees, and others.

Hamas's Strategic Logic

Hamas in the Gaza Strip has developed a unique strategic approach, very different from the classic strategic approaches taken by enemy states. Hamas is founded on an extremist religious ideology. It is fully aware of its political, diplomatic, and economic limitations, and has adopted a long-term goal – the destruction of the State of Israel.¹ Achieving this goal will require a struggle lasting many years, based on extended attrition of the enemy, weakening its resistance until it finally collapses. By a process of consistent and well-funded (relative to Hamas's limited economic capacity) military growth, the organization is developing significant operational capabilities. This is not an attempt to reach strategic parity with Israel, but rather represents a form of force development designed to support the overall strategic campaign of extended attrition of Israel.

Hamas's doctrine of struggle is rooted in religious ideology and in particular cultural characteristics, including patience, a singular attitude toward time, resilience, and a strong fighting spirit, all of which enable it to maintain warfare with no end in sight. The distant overall goal, to destroy Israel, serves as the compass for this “extended strategic campaign.”

From Hamas's perspective, this struggle is not time-dependent.² It is based on slow, steady attrition, rather than on short bursts of wide-scale conflict. Even when wider conflicts do break out, they are relatively

narrow in their aims. During those conflicts that have occurred in recent years, the leadership of Hamas has defined targets that were focused on limited, local improvements in the economic situation in Gaza, and on improving its status and its ability to govern. These included: enlarging the free fishing zone from three miles to six; opening border crossings to free movement of goods; gaining funds to pay salaries to public officials; establishing a seaport and an airport; freedom of movement right up to the border fence with Israel; and so on.³ Achieving these goals does not require large-scale military victories that fundamentally change the strategic picture. Short campaigns that break the monotony of routine and allow Hamas to portray itself as a courageous victim, fighting heroically while managing still to function militarily and as a governing force, are quite sufficient for these limited purposes.

A unique perception of the time dimension, and a willingness to bear continued suffering for the sake of a better future for coming generations, are fundamental components of this strategy of attrition. They allow the leadership to survive ups and downs, difficulties and reverses, while maintaining a steady course that will eventually lead to the certain triumph of the “resistance” (*mukawama*).⁴ Thus Hamas has been able to present the last three military campaigns fought against the IDF (Cast Lead, Pillar of Defense, and Protective Edge) as strategic gains. These operations resulted in a great number of casualties in Gaza, among both the general public and Hamas fighters and senior commanders; inflicted great damage on civilian and military infrastructures; and caused disruptions to day-to-day living that will last for many years.⁵ Yet it appears that for Hamas, this has not given cause for reflection on its methods and their results. Instead, according to an approach that sanctifies the willingness to make sacrifices and give one’s life, these events are seen as temporary setbacks in a demanding, multi-year strategic campaign that is driven by ideology and divine will.

At the same time, Hamas sees itself as the body that gives authentic expression to the spirit of the Gazan public, and to the idea of resistance as a key component of Gazan identity. This approach, together with the *dawaa* welfare mechanism, allows Hamas to maintain a constant dialogue with the broader public.⁶ It conducts extensive public activities through its education system (kindergartens and schools) and its social

welfare networks (food supplies, medical assistance, etc.), which form the infrastructure providing residents with their basic needs and help strengthen the organization's public standing. The support and appreciation accorded Hamas as the faithful representative of the idea of resistance enable it to prevent any internal criticism or protest from developing. Its deep roots in Gazan society—cultural, political, and social—are the life force for the continuation of resistance efforts, in spite of the difficult conditions and the ongoing suffering caused.

Yet since Hamas seized power in Gaza in 2007, there has been a growing number of changes in its activity patterns, in particular signs of its operating as a sovereign state entity. This demands consideration of a new set of constraints, and certain concessions in terms of the core principles and conceptions of the movement. Hamas faces an internal struggle between its basic desire to maintain the ideology of resistance and its more pragmatic concerns as a political entity, requiring it to bend to a broader and more responsible set of concerns.⁷

In the new circumstances in which Hamas finds itself, it cannot ignore the difficulties involved in continuing the strategy of attrition. During the operations of the last several years, Israel has extracted a heavy price for the aggression displayed by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and various terrorist groups in Gaza. The suffering inflicted has led to a certain loosening of the organization's grip on the public sphere. The resilience and patience of the Gazan public were put to a severe test, and were found to be more limited than had been thought over the years.⁸

Moreover, in recent years the idea of resistance has suffered from a lack of support among many elements in the Arab world, on the backdrop of the abandoned struggle over the future character of the regimes in these states. During the recent conflicts in Gaza, Hamas was unable to generate active support from Arab states, nor from the broader international community.⁹ Its failure to achieve any real improvement in social or economic terms in Gaza since it assumed power has attracted growing external criticism, making it harder for Hamas to bolster its status as the recognized government in the Strip. During Operation Protective Edge, for example, there were no organized mass demonstrations in support of Hamas in any Arab state in the region. Instead, throughout the conflict

(and following it) the Egyptian president was busy organizing a strategic coalition—including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and the Palestinian Authority—to fight political Islamic extremism, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.

Hamas's Military-Operational Aspect

A number of components characterize the organizational structure and military conception of the opponent in the Gaza Strip:¹⁰

- **Decentralized deployment** – Hamas distributes its forces throughout the breadth and depth of the battlefield, in accordance with the idea of not presenting targets and “centers of gravity,” instead creating autonomous fighting cells capable of operating effectively as independent combat groups for extended periods. These cells are prepared to operate without auxiliary support (operational or logistical), and with no need for a tight command and control mechanism to oversee them. The defense conception is spatial, and forces are organized in frameworks similar to regular army units: platoons, battalions, and regional divisions. The units’ operational plans are based on possible IDF scenarios and are well-rehearsed, and the operational preparedness required to carry them out is achieved with relative simplicity.
- **Concentrating in the built-up areas** – Full use is made of the complex cover provided by built-up areas and of the ability to blend into the civilian population, in order to make it difficult for attacking forces to identify and attack military targets. Hamas has no compunction about using sensitive public buildings for its military purposes—schools, UNRWA institutions, mosques, and medical facilities. The civilian population becomes a human shield, willingly or not, providing a complex defense against IDF attacks. The ability to distinguish between non-uniformed fighters and civilians, as between military targets in built-up areas and innocent civilian buildings, is greatly diminished. The IDF’s operational challenge grows even further when the urban area also conceals civilians who provide direct support for fighting cells; for example, shelter, storing ammunition and weapons, food, medical assistance, and the like.

- **Extensive use of underground possibilities** – A tangled system of tunnels, at various depths, supplies forces with protection and with the ability to move without detection in order to perform a wide variety of defensive and offensive missions, including raids beyond the borders of the Strip, actions against IDF forces within the Strip, and securing the system of steep-trajectory weaponry aimed towards Israel. While this is not a new aspect of Hamas’s combat concept, there has been a significant growth in the use of underground capacities over time.

As early as the 1980s, tunnels were used for smuggling and trade from Sinai into the Strip. Preparing tunnels does not require a great deal of investment: the ground in the Strip is easily excavated, and manpower and equipment are cheap. There are also relatively good capabilities for concealing and camouflaging excavation works. Thus it is highly probable that the defensive tunnel array, less familiar to the public, is far denser and more complex than the offensive tunnel array close to the border fence. This is both because of the relative ease of extensive excavations deeper in the Strip, and because of the great operational importance of defending Hamas’s main military forces and decentralized military resources.

In the event of IDF ground incursions, this system of tunnels allows defense forces to carry out short attacks against troops who may be stationed in these areas. These attacks might take the form of sniper or anti-tank ambushes, laying and detonating explosive charges on roads and in buildings, kidnappings, and others. The complex web of tunnels enables Hamas to completely subvert the formal, linear structure of conventional defensive spaces. The lack of defined lines of engagement creates a 360-degree scope of attack, making it difficult for offensive forces to maneuver and station themselves within this zone. The offensive activities carried out by Hamas within its defensive zone are not aimed at forcing IDF troops out of the Strip. Rather, they seek to extract a high price for IDF incursions, and inflict as much harm as possible—physically, and in terms of morale—on troops who remain within built-up areas that they conquer.

- **Varied array of steep trajectory weaponry (STW)** – The main offensive capacity of Hamas is based on its well-developed STW system, which can reach several ranges: short- and medium-range mortars and Kassam rockets, long-range rockets and missiles such as the 122mm Grad, the R-160, the M-75 and others. The STW array is a central pillar of Hamas’s military capabilities, carrying a constant threat to extensive areas of Israel throughout any campaign. A basic analysis of STW fire during recent rounds of conflict indicates relatively effective prior planning for its use, as witnessed by the decentralized and concealed distribution of firepower resources; by the orderly allocation of ammunition and a well-defined rate of use, aligned with the estimated possible length of the conflict; and by the constant search for cracks in the IDF’s active home front defense systems.
- **Special forces** – Hamas has developed land and marine special forces to carry out “tie-breaker” operations. Their missions are not solely about the amount of physical damage they can inflict on Israel, but much more about achieving broader effects on the public mindset. Kidnapping soldiers or civilians, or infiltrating Israel to take hostages on an IDF base or in a civilian setting, can help Hamas project an image of strategic success during a campaign, and improve its bargaining position over the terms for ending the conflict. During Operation Protective Edge, these forces carried out attacks via the offensive tunnels (near Kibbutz Sufa and Nahal Oz) and from the sea (near Nitzanim), displaying a relatively high level of competence, even if the operational outcomes were limited. It is reasonable to assume that the trend of developing special forces and capabilities for “high-quality missions” will continue, with the aim of inflicting shock and surprise during the course of future rounds of conflict.
- **Intelligence gathering** – Hamas has developed an intelligence gathering system, based on observation capabilities that can cover IDF troop movements deep within Israeli territory as well as within the Strip itself. Technological developments in its ability to gather visual and signals intelligence (VISINT and SIGINT), alongside a growth in the widespread availability of associated equipment and tools, have allowed Hamas to significantly improve its intelligence capabilities. The flat

topography of the Gaza Strip and surrounding areas makes it easier for Hamas to deploy an effective gathering system that provides an up-to-date intelligence picture of the movement of IDF forces. Additionally, as IDF ground forces move further into the Strip, this picture is also fed by a system of spotters (some of them civilian residents), transmitting precise information about the size and structure of the forces, their movements, and locations in which they station themselves.

- **Explosive devices and booby traps** – Hamas makes extensive use of a variety of explosive devices, both alongside possible routes taken by the IDF outside of the urban areas, and on streets and in buildings. They are cheap and simple to use, and highly effective in creating significant threats to IDF troop movements. The devices can be easily concealed and camouflaged, and are able to inflict a high level of casualties and damage. Hamas's activities in this area require a relatively small number of people who do not have to be particularly highly trained. Furthermore, the geographical limitations that dictate a small number of routes along which the IDF can move forces in the Strip enable Hamas to be very focused in preparing its countermeasures. Based at least in part on experience from previous operations, and from studying IDF military doctrine, Hamas can make highly effective plans and preparations. Operation Protective Edge saw a noticeable increase in the quantity and quality of devices set along main routes, compared to Operation Cast Lead. In addition, widespread use was made of booby-trapping buildings that it was thought IDF troops were likely to enter, whether to clear them out or occupy them.

- **Importance of territory** – An analysis of Hamas's operational behavior indicates that it does not view territory as an essential value; preventing incursions into, or conquests of, its territory does not seem to be of great importance. According to Hamas's conception, any maneuver of the IDF within the Strip will be limited in duration, and it is clearly understood that at the end of the operation IDF forces will return to the other side of the border. Thus no IDF ground operation, however successful, will be taken to indicate a failure of Hamas defenses. Perhaps the opposite may be true: Any incursion takes place in dense and complex areas containing a civilian population very well prepared by

the defender, with military objectives that are difficult to clearly define. The defender has many advantages over the attacker, which stem from intimate familiarity with the terrain and from a thorough analysis of the various options open to the attacking force. It would not be unreasonable to assume that Hamas actually has an interest in the IDF conducting ground incursions, so that it can create operational opportunities for itself and improve its strategic position. The longer IDF forces remain in conquered territory, and the larger the logistical trail required to keep those forces in position, so the operational advantages of Hamas are likely to multiply.

- **Public relations** – Hamas is aware that winning the battle over the “factual reality” is all about the successful creation of subjective images to reflect events. For Hamas, the subjective presentation of events, one aimed at winning the hearts and minds of external observers, is no less important than the facts themselves. Over the years the organization has pursued a media campaign aimed at reinforcing two types of image: on the one hand, presenting an overblown picture of its operational successes, and offering narratives of the heroism of its “resistance” fighters on the battlefield; and on the other, highlighting the results of Israel’s brutal attacks for civilians in the Gaza Strip, and presenting itself as a helpless victim desperate for intervention and aid from Arab states and from the international community.

Hamas’s public relations efforts have four main goals:¹¹

1. Reinforcing the determination and resilience of the Gazan public.
2. Inciting Arab public opinion against Israel, among the Arab states and the Arab citizens of Israel.
3. Degrading Israeli social cohesion, and creating an internal debate about the legitimacy of Israel’s military action.
4. Creating international delegitimization of Israel’s offensive actions, in the political and legal arenas.

DETERRENCE OPERATIONS: THE NATIONAL STRATEGIC LEVEL

The conflict with Hamas is an extended strategic campaign of an attritional nature, and is not currently solvable. It is marked by outbreaks of crises (rounds of fighting) and strategic combat operations that form localized notches along an extended timeline of struggle and resistance, and that aim to achieve concrete goals that are dependent on the strategic conditions and the existing situation at the time. These goals are strictly temporary, and have no pretensions of creating fundamental strategic change in the reality of the struggle between two opponents of completely different cultures, aspirations, and world views.

Israel has well-known weaknesses in its ability to conduct this struggle: it is a small country with limited resources, a developed and ambitious economy, high sensitivity to loss of life, limited patience for drawn-out processes, and a free media that tends to be critical, at times extremely so, in its discourse on current and possible national security strategies.¹² This chapter reviews several central characteristics of Israel's conduct in deterrence campaigns at a strategic level.

Aims, Goals, and National Strategy Management - "The Combined Campaign"

Combat against forces in the Gaza Strip has been going on for years, at varying levels of intensity. Traditionally, military action has been seen as the main practical tool with which strategic goals may be achieved. At the same time, experience from extended attritional campaigns against an asymmetric enemy, in Israel and around the world, teaches that there is a complex relationship between military victory in a given operation and achieving overall strategic-diplomatic victory. Military activities are generally conducted against operational elements of the opponent's combat structures, while the overall conflict encompasses underlying political, social, economic, and ideological strata.¹³ This kind of conflict can be defined as a complex strategic campaign that requires learning and testing additional dimensions and tools, beyond those found within the military world.

Combat efforts are meant to achieve overall political aims; this is their *raison d'être*. The strategic aims and goals as defined by the political echelons serve two main purposes. First, to direct the use of military force, at the national level, toward missions that will help achieve the desired outcomes for the overall campaign. Second, to calibrate expectations and achieve a unity of purpose among the public regarding the overall aims. Based on the definition of the strategic aims and goals of any given operation, a military-operational planning process is held to determine what military action will be carried out, for what purpose, and how, within the broader context of the ongoing war of attrition.

In the complex, multi-dimensional struggle against an asymmetric enemy such as Hamas, the physical aspects of a military operation conducted against its forces are not, by themselves, sufficient to gain the upper hand. However, the natural and common tendency during a period of combat is to focus on operative military aspects, and to deal largely with the “how,” rather than the “what” or “why.” The political echelon finds itself sucked into discussions about military developments and the tactical aspects of combat, instead of concentrating on the desired outcomes in the broader strategic context.¹⁴ This is not a new phenomenon, unique to the modern era of asymmetric warfare. There is no lack of historical examples of military victories that failed to bring success on the political or diplomatic front. Maintaining one’s “strategic compass” requires planning and overall strategic management of combat efforts using a perspective that goes beyond the military. The internal, regional, and international situation of both sides to the conflict, and the map of their short- and long-term interests, should inform the thinking and planning processes involved in managing the campaign at a national level. This being the case, operative targets should be defined and managed on the basis of the recognition of the limited capacity of military power to achieve overall strategic goals. While dealing with the enemy necessarily involves a long series of smaller operational undertakings, changing the fundamental form of the conflict is not possible without the coordinated deployment of additional efforts at the national level—diplomatic, political, economic, social, and media.

Defining national strategic goals and aims involves a broad analysis of the enemy, and an in-depth understanding of the gamut of factors that

influence the enemy's conceptual approach, in order to provide a logical foundation for operational planning. Designing the logic of deterrence operations requires knowledge of a variety of areas, including ideology, cultural influences, historical background, social aspects, conceptual approaches, and religious faith. A multi-dimensional investigation of the deeply embedded aspects of the enemy system must also recognize fundamental differences in outlook between the two sides, and the potential cognitive distortions in the process, so as to understand the enemy's strategic logic and options for operational activity.¹⁵ If this foundation and these processes are lacking at the higher strategic level, then the influence of IDF knowledge is such that it grows to become the central element in defining the strategic problem, and dictates the form of its solution.

There is a clear tendency among the political echelons toward a narrow definition of military goals and targets for deterrence operations, which by their nature are limited. "Reinstating Israeli deterrence by hitting hard at Hamas, and returning quiet and stability"—this is the common way of referencing the goals and outcomes defined for operations.¹⁶ These goals enable Israel to escape a security situation imposed on it, and which it finds impossible to accept. This statement contains internal tensions, and it invites a strategic discussion to establish the relative importance of the different goals, in order to create a suitable baseline for operational planning. Israel seeks a balance between the need to renew its deterrence via operational activities that are violent and as short as possible, and the need to minimize any damage to its international status (as a result of the aggressive use of force), as well as preventing a deterioration of the situation and the spread of fighting to other arenas. It also seeks to balance between weakening Hamas by delivering painful military blows, and maintaining it as an effective ruler of the Gaza Strip. The strategic discussion at the political level must develop insights in additional contexts that together provide the operational logic:

- How long should the deterrence last?
- What are the target populations within Gazan society at which the deterrence is aimed? What are the relations between these populations?

- Which tools and operational principles are needed to achieve the goals in each of the domains (military, diplomatic, economic, media)?
- What are the connections and the interfaces between the different operational components, and what is the mechanism for managing and coordinating between them?
- What will other potential enemies learn about Israel's deterrence policy as a result of this campaign? What are the long-term consequences of this campaign for other arenas of conflict?
- What are the practical implications of the strategic concept for the home front? What is demanded of the home front, as a highly important strategic component in how the conditions of the campaign develop?
- What is the desired situation at the end of the campaign, and after it?
- What efforts are required in order to conserve and maintain the end situation, and the deterrence acquired?

As regards the nature of the inter-echelon dialogue in a combined campaign, the military needs to have a deep understanding of the purpose and goals of the war—what it is expected to achieve, and to what end. The traditional distinction of roles between the political echelon and the military echelon defines the government's responsibility as setting out the “what,” in terms of expected achievements during a conflict, while it is the military's responsibility to decide the “how.” However, the accepted interpretation of this separation of roles has also extended to a division between learning and planning processes, which in fact ought to be conducted within both echelons.

In complex campaigns against asymmetric enemies, with a force structure and operational concept as described above, this interpretation can create distortions in the development of multi-dimensional knowledge, a process which is vital for the discussion of complex issues of higher strategy at the political level. The dichotomous distinction according to which “the army is a professional body and should not be involved in politics” may harm the necessary development of shared knowledge and a shared language between the two echelons. This is not to challenge the

separation of authority or the superiority of the political echelon over the military, which is an undisputed building block of the democratic system. Rather, the problem lies in another weighty area, to do with the variation between sources of information, the significant differences in approaches to analysis, and the connections between the worlds of military knowledge and of diplomatic-strategic knowledge. Moreover, the inherent weakness of the political echelon, compared to the IDF, in conducting in-depth research and planning—even if limited to the military context alone—makes it even more essential to conduct this discussion. A different kind of dialogue is needed, one that draws on the different perspectives present to create a shared process of learning and exploration:

“The aim of an intellectual encounter between political and military leaders is to improve knowledge, in a way that maximizes the synchronization between military and political efforts, and the effectiveness of military action toward achieving the political ends of war ... If the political echelon has almost no knowledge to bring to this meeting, and its political thinking is in any case tilted toward military thinking, then the military echelon becomes the epistemic authority.”¹⁷

Furthermore, deterrence operations against a sub-state asymmetric enemy are directed toward limited ends and goals, with a limited use of military force. Thus there is a greater need for the additional use of non-military strategic efforts in planning and managing a national-level combined campaign. The more limited the operation in its aims and deployment of military force, the greater the importance of other components of the national system. Diplomatic, economic, media, and public awareness efforts must also develop knowledge, plan, and coordinate within the framework of a shared, consistent national control mechanism and command conception.¹⁸

The existence of a framework for a continuous strategic learning process, encompassing all the content areas at the higher strategic level, is of critical importance. Such a framework—comprising organization and processes—would make it possible to study the evolving reality in depth and to gain a broad understanding of it. There has to be shared

discourse and knowledge development among the various parties on the implementation side (the military and other strategic efforts) together with the political echelon. This must be the case not just during times of crisis; it should be a constant routine, so that shared language and insights develop, and a suitable response can be formulated for understanding the complex reality.¹⁹ It appears that there is increasing awareness of this at the political level. During Operation Protective Edge there were frequent discussions, some involving the prime minister, minister of defense and the chief of general staff, and some involving the security cabinet.

However, an examination of the formal organization and strategic work processes indicates significant lacunae. There have yet to be instituted suitable organizational structures and working methods for conducting shared learning and knowledge development processes in a methodical and professional manner, both in the day-to-day and during combat operations. Unlike the IDF, which has established processes for strategic knowledge creation and for detailed operational planning, the other strategic implementation bodies do not conduct similar processes. This is a flawed and unbalanced state of affairs: while the IDF's operational plans are inspected and authorized in great detail and with great care by the political echelon, the operational plans for the other national strategic efforts, which are part of the same overall campaign and which play an essential role in the strategic outcome, do not undergo a similar process. An inter-organizational strategic structure must be established, based on the National Security Council, which would act as a general staff and help provide oversight in support of the national command system.

The Evolution of the Conceptual System

The dictionary definition of concepts in the military literature provides only a partial, and sometimes distorted, basis for the strategic discussion of how to conceptualize deterrence campaigns against an asymmetric enemy. By their nature, these definitions are unable to convey the full extent and complexity of the ideas being referred to. This is even more the case when the current strategic picture has fundamentally different characteristics from those described by those definitions in the past.

Israel's security conception has always considered a war of attrition to be an undesirable strategic situation. As a small country, in an inherently inferior position to Arab states, Israel sought to avoid extended wars that would disable its society and economy for a substantial period of time. The idea of bringing wars to a "rapid decisive conclusion" became a guiding light for the IDF's development and use of force, and created a wealth of written and oral conceptual guidelines, detailed operational plans for strategic situations, and accompanying training practices.²⁰

"Deterrence" has appeared as a key concept in the Israeli security conception ever since it was first formed by David Ben-Gurion in the early 1950s. Yet despite the long history of the idea in the security lexicon, the IDF has yet to develop a theoretical approach that would provide foundations for planning and conducting deterrence operations as part of an ongoing war of attrition.²¹ Theoretical approaches are not meant to supply concrete operational solutions to strategic problems; rather, they provide the framework for strategic discourse, and indicate the kinds of considerations that should be taken into account in any given strategic context. Although the vast majority of IDF combat operations in recent decades have been deterrence operations, the lack of a theoretical foundation and an operational doctrine, as well as significant lacunae within the basic system of concepts, has been detrimental to the strategic operational capability during these periods of combat.

In fact, Israel's strategic reality in recent decades has been the opposite of what the "founding fathers" had sought to establish. Israel finds itself in an ongoing war of attrition, at varying levels of intensity, and on several fronts. Attritional warfare is a natural choice of asymmetric enemies, as it prevents Israel from making the full weight of its power felt, erodes hope for peace and quiet, and damages the economy and quality of life. Its aim is to gradually erode the Israeli public's resilience over time, resulting in hopelessness and despair. And yet, despite this pattern of ongoing attritional warfare having become the defining characteristic of Israel's security situation; and despite an understanding of the complex interplay between military accomplishments in deterrence operations and the resulting strategic diplomatic outcome—the IDF and the political echelon have remained wedded to a conceptual framework, and accompanying operational

patterns, that belong to the old conception of decisive victory. The IDF's conceptual lexicon is still tightly bound to the theoretical structure and the conceptual framework of the "decisive victory" strategy, and despite the appearance and growth of this new form of warfare, there has been insufficient recognition of the need to conduct a thorough revision of the operational concepts in use and develop a new doctrine more suitable to deterrence combat operations.²²

Decisively defeating the enemy remains the main focal point in planning and conducting combat operations. It seems that those who have always operated according to this approach, over many years, have an emotional difficulty in transitioning from this traditional framework with its clear, well-defined military purpose, to a new way of thinking in complex and multi-dimensional conditions. A conceptual stasis, according to which every armed conflict must end in a clear decision, has continued to guide military and strategic thinking. Yehoshafat Harkabi provides a critical diagnosis of how military figures essentially relate to the strategy of attrition: "This is a cautious strategy, in which results are achieved incrementally, step after step. It is based on causing damage and destruction, and slowly sapping strength ... The attritional process is not only physical, but also psychological ... In an attritional strategy, warfare is continual, and this difference explains why it is not liked by military leaders, who are eager for the quick route to victory."²³

The failure to thoroughly examine the implications of attrition and deterrence has led to a situation in which the language, concepts, and logic of the decisive victory approach are being used in thinking and planning processes for deterrence operations. And thus although deterrence operations and attritional warfare have become the main pattern of combat in Israel for the last thirty years, in practice no theoretical approach or practical doctrine has been developed to guide operations and accompanying force development processes.

Who Won?

Deterrence campaigns in Gaza are habitually followed by a discussion about victory. Harkabi defines two ways of establishing whether victory has been achieved in war: “First: Were the declared goals of the operation achieved? Second: Has the country’s situation been improved for a period of time, regardless of the goals defined for the operation? For this, historical judgement is preferable, because it does not regard defined goals as being the ultimate measure ... The results of war can be seen differently from different historical perspectives, and how they are judged can change.”²⁴

Israel is in the midst of an extended war of attrition, in which deterrence campaigns and rounds of combat are a central element. This is a war that has never been declared, or given a name, and it has no expiration date. But this conflict between the two sides is a war nonetheless.

A policy of deterrence seeks to return things to the status quo, rather than to achieve a solution to the conflict. There is an indirect connection between the military goals of any given operation and the overall long-term strategic outcome, which is also influenced by other dimensions beyond the military. Broadening the outcomes of a military deterrence operation toward an improved overall situation requires the coordinated use of efforts at the national-strategic level. This is a significant part of the combined strategic campaign, and contributes greatly to solidifying the campaign’s achievements. Any discussion regarding victory at the operational-military level alone will by nature be narrow and partial, and can distort the overall strategic picture.

Moreover, history tells us that victory after a particular operation is often unstable. The situation can change, turning a military victory into a strategic defeat. This is even more true against the backdrop of a lengthy timeline, especially in protracted low-intensity wars in which the results of concrete operations have only a temporary and local role, and are nothing more than a means to achieve limited, temporary goals. Changes in circumstances after operations may fundamentally alter the strategic outcome.

An examination of the philosophy of *mukawama* (resistance) and its long-term goals reveals that military victory in any given deterrence operation cannot bring about a fundamentally different strategic-diplomatic situation, which might be defined as victory. This is the principal disadvantage of the regular discussion held at the conclusion of operations, which attempts to evaluate the results and decide “which side won.” As long as the debate about victory in deterrence campaigns is conducted without its broader diplomatic context, and without the perspective of the long-term overall campaign, its conclusions will be partial, and possibly distorted.

Another important element in assessing victory in deterrence campaigns is the “balance of resources” between the sides. This is a war of attrition, in which the stronger side also adopts an attritional strategy. The stronger side must also display stamina and a willingness to continue the campaign, constantly making available sufficient combat resources to achieve its goals and controlling the amount of force used, so that the weaker side understands the futility of continued fighting. One of the key issues for assessing the outcome of an operation is the depth of the damage inflicted on the enemy compared to the relative extent of the resources used to achieve it. In order to conduct an extended, ongoing conflict it is essential to plan and manage the use of combat resources over time and to maintain ready forces in reserve, in order to conserve strength and preserve the stamina necessary to keep up the fight. The clear aim for Israel is to create an operational reality of futility for Hamas, causing it to abandon its principal goals for the campaign, and allowing Israel to impose its own goals instead.

Israel seeks to destroy essential physical components on the enemy side and to erode its resilience, at a “reasonable cost.” This approach requires the IDF to find effective operational ways to create a sharp asymmetry in the “balance of costs” between the sides. The more Israel can bring to bear the gap between its absolute strategic superiority and the clear inferiority of Hamas, the greater the chance of Hamas recognizing (even if temporarily) the futility of the campaign.²⁵ In this context, I would briefly mention the importance of the immense investment made by the defense establishment in recent years in strengthening the active defense of the Israeli home front. This has

allowed a much greater flexibility in deploying military force during conflicts and in planning the length of the fighting while being able to safely negate Hamas's main offensive capabilities.

An additional component to the question of victory is the functioning of the civilian populations on both sides, and their feelings and evaluations when the fighting is over. The subjective feelings of the public are no less valuable than the quantitative assessment of the number of casualties and the extent of the damage. What does the public expect the fighting to achieve, and to what extent is it willing to bear the cost? For Hamas, the main goal of *mukawama* is to damage and undermine the resilience of Israeli society. On the Israeli side, the effect on the Gazan population is a secondary issue, with the main operational goals being the neutralization and destruction of the sources of power in Hamas's military system.

Internal public opinion, and the extent of public solidarity and support during the conflict, are of great importance for creating momentum in combat. Advanced active military defense systems mean nothing unless the general public display strength and resilience. The Gazan population is prepared for and committed to an extended struggle and its costs, and its economic situation is very poor. In these circumstances, in which there is little to lose, it is difficult to create deterrence effects that influence subjective feelings about the utility and outcome of conflicts.²⁶ However, alongside the change in the political status of Hamas, and its sovereign responsibility for what happens in the Gaza Strip, there are initial signs of a softening in its rigid ideological rule in response to shifting public attitudes, and the emergence of a more pragmatic approach. During Operation Protective Edge, for example, there was sharp disagreement between the local Hamas leadership, which sought to end the fighting earlier (at the beginning of the fourth week), and the external leadership in Qatar (Khaled Mashal), which was determined to continue the fighting until its goals were achieved.²⁷

A major limitation in the discussion of victory on the Israeli side is the constant expectation of a clear, absolute, decisive outcome, despite the narrow definition of goals for deterrence operations. The yearning to impose our will on the enemy, to force it to cease firing and accept all our conditions, is unrealistic, and incompatible with the logic of

deterrence operations. The greater the expectations, the greater the dissatisfaction with a “tie” situation, and this greatly affects the nature of the debate about victory.²⁸

Assessing the Effectiveness of Military Actions During an Operation

As was the case in the Second Lebanon War, in combat operations against Hamas in Gaza it has been difficult to assess the degree of deterrence achieved while the operations are being conducted. The picture only begins to become clear when the fighting has stopped. Sometimes the level of success can only be determined months or years afterwards. Even then, if the enemy has refrained from aggression against Israel it can be difficult to tell whether this is because of the effects of the military blow it suffered, or whether the reasons lie (at least to some extent) in other factors: a particular political reality, the socioeconomic situation, positioning in the regional and international arenas, and others.

Deterrence is intrinsically tied to the subjective field of world views, intentions, and interpretations of reality. Assessing the deterrent effect being formed during the operation has on the one hand a physical-quantitative aspect: what was destroyed, what was conquered, how many casualties, and so on; but it is mainly about the psychological-emotional impact on the enemy, which is what makes it very difficult to assess military performance effectively. The difficulty is even greater when the enemy has cultural characteristics and values that are extremely different from our own. An assessment of the “objective situation” has only partial value. What are needed are assessments using subjective interpretational tools, which take into account the unique cultural components and extremist religious ideology that create an alternative view of reality. This kind of interpretation is entirely unlike the rational-logical form of analysis or cost-benefit analysis that are familiar to us. This “distorted” view of reality is the great challenge facing intelligence assessment staff in the defense establishment.²⁹

Preserving Deterrence

Among the declared goals of deterrence operations there is no explicit definition of the length of time for which the achieved deterrence is expected to hold. The terminology used routinely is “establishing security stability for a length of time.”³⁰ Yet it is clear that expectations for long-term quiet have not been met by recent operations in Gaza.

The lack of a defined period is a consequence of understanding the limited capacity of military action to achieve deterrence and maintain it over time using military force alone. The longevity of the achievement does not depend solely on the intensity of the effect of military activities during the operation. We cannot measure the “Dahiyeh Effect” in Beirut, or understand the result of eight years of quiet in Lebanon, only in terms of the variable of military action.³¹ While carrying a credible threat, and being willing to inflict a painful military response to any breach of the peace, are both very valuable components in maintaining quiet, other elements—political, diplomatic, social, and economic—are no less significant variables in the longevity of deterrence. At the national level, does strategic planning combine these elements under an overall strategic view aimed at extending periods of calm? What role is there for initiatives and incentives to encourage Hamas to maintain stability? Is there a policy for responding to possible erosion of deterrence by various terror groups in Gaza? Is too much expectation placed on the military effort, despite an understanding of its limitations?

Normally, we see the beginning of a retreat from the understandings reached via deterrence operations in Gaza a short time after the conflict ends, expressed by the actions of proxy forces or dissenting organizations. Hamas will generally be credited with tactical gains in the realms of security, society, politics, and even diplomacy, if it pursues a slow, measured, incremental process of violations of the cease-fire understandings. This process is also guided by the ideology of “ongoing resistance” preached by Hamas, and to which it is committed. These gains are balanced against the damage Hamas can expect to suffer from Israeli responses to its infractions. Hamas tries to create an assessment of Israel’s “red lines,” its realistic options for response, their possible intensity, and the legitimacy and willingness of the Israeli leadership to carry them out.

After recent operations in Gaza Israel has generally responded to a renewal of terrorist activity in a very localized and restrained manner. It has declared that Hamas is responsible for every act of aggression, and has tracked the activity of Hamas forces to evaluate their efforts to halt infractions. Within a relatively short period of time, however, the situation of “quiet and stability” has become one of just “relative quiet.”³² From here, there has been a steady deterioration towards an entirely predictable situation in which the conditions are formed for the next deterrence operation in the series.

A key factor in the conservation of the results of deterrence operations is the sides’ basic interests. The willingness to carry out threats of using military force is tied to the importance that each side attaches to the evolving strategic situation, its assessment of the internal and external legitimacy it might be afforded, and its capacity for withstanding pressure from the international community.³³ In principle, Hamas is not a sizeable security threat to Israel, and it certainly could not be termed an existential threat. Thus Israel’s interest in immediately halting and dealing with infractions of agreements or understandings which have been reached is generally weaker than the interest of terrorist groups to disturb the peace and return to the path of conflict.

Moreover, the ability to extend the deterrent effect over time is influenced not only by the strength of the military blow inflicted in the most recent operation, or by the policy of responding to infractions. Strategic changes in other fields can also influence the preservation of deterrence:

- Changes in the balance of power – obtaining weaponry or new offensive capabilities (attack drones, offensive tunnels, long-range accurate missiles, and so on).
- Regional strategic changes that create new opportunities.
- Political-economic changes in Israel that present opportunities.
- Changes in the strength and diplomatic status of the sides in the international arena.

It is difficult to maintain deterrence against an enemy that preaches and educates toward constant struggle, and that extols determination and sacrifice, regardless of any short-term benefits, in favor of a far-off rosy future. This is certainly true given the marked inferiority of Hamas in diplomatic and economic terms. It is more difficult to deter a greatly weakened opponent. From its subjective perspective, the price of any breach, and the strategic damage it is likely to suffer from Israel's response, are not seen as unbearable at the strategic level. Crossing the "lines of deterrence" does not carry a particularly traumatic or destructive threat, and the repercussions depend on changes in the diplomatic-social-economic situation. For example, the rise to power in Egypt of al-Sisi, his declaration of war on the Muslim Brotherhood, and the closure of the border crossings from Sinai to the Gaza Strip, were sufficient to bring about the end of the period of stability that had been achieved in Operation Pillar of Defense.

In summary, an important lesson of the deterrence operations in Gaza has been the need to construct a coherent conceptual approach, and accompanying strategic plans, to the periods between operations.³⁴ It is essential to define a clear policy of response that will receive broad international recognition and agreement, and will protect Israel's freedom to act in dealing with infractions and the crossing of red lines. The trickle of occasional rocket fire from Gaza into Israel is a development that must be halted determinedly whenever it occurs, using combined action in the military, diplomatic, economic, and media dimensions.

"The Boundaries of the Operation" - The Components and Scope of Operational Planning

Operational "boundaries," strategic logic, and planning are also influenced by variables that go beyond the limited geographical zone within which the fighting takes place.

First, there is the issue of internal legitimacy for conducting deterrence operations. A war of attrition lasting many years, and punctuated regularly by active deterrence operations, is not just a military matter. It is a process with deep political and social significance, requiring continued persuasion of the Israeli public that this is the right, and

indeed only, course to take. The strength and resilience of Israeli society are key factors for the strategic outcome, no less important than the military accomplishments accumulated throughout the campaign. Israeli society is the prime target of Hamas, and to a large extent forms the main arena of action for influencing the overall outcome. Preserving the home front's resilience in facing evolving threats needs to be a central strategic pillar of the national campaign.

The second issue is that of international legitimacy for the operation. This is the dimension in which, to a large extent, Israel's strategic freedom of movement to exert its military force will be decided. It will also greatly affect the contours of the agreement reached at the end of the operation. The diplomatic effort is conducted in parallel to the military effort, and involves an assessment of the prevailing attitudes and level of criticism in the region and throughout the international community. The political echelon attempts to balance the desire to use rapid deadly force against a violent terrorist foe with the need to form broad internal and international support for its actions, giving it more room to maneuver militarily. During Operation Pillar of Defense, for example, the synchronization between the military and diplomatic efforts lacked balance and coordination. Massive firepower was used for the first three days, and from then until the end of the operation the intensity of force deployed declined. Negotiations in Cairo dragged on, but it was no longer possible to help them along with an effective threat of using military force. By contrast, the restrained beginning to Operation Protective Edge, and Israel's subsequent willingness to agree to humanitarian and diplomatic proposals for a ceasefire, increased the international credit granted to the continuation of the operation, and to a growing use of firepower, for fifty days, and made it easier for Israel to cope with external pressures and constraints.

Thirdly, although operations are conducted against Hamas in Gaza, there is interplay with other groups and actors in the region. They study these operations, reach operational conclusions, and develop their assessments regarding Israel's strategic logic and operational patterns. Operations allow these actors to evaluate Israel's military conduct and strength, the resilience and determination of Israeli society, and the behavior of the international community.³⁵ While these operations

are conducted within very specific geographic borders, they carry consequences for Israel's image and reputation among other potential opponents. Operations strengthen Israel's deterrence image beyond the immediate space and time in which they take place. Thus those responsible for strategic planning of operations must bear in mind a broader and more far-sighted set of considerations beyond the concrete problem faced in Gaza.

The fourth issue is that of the very great influence of military ethics and international law on the "boundaries of the operation," in terms of the possible extent of the use of military force, and it is an issue worthy of further study elsewhere. In brief, I can note the main problems and challenges posed by military ethics and international law for fighting extremist terrorist organizations, which ignore these considerations completely. The laws are largely based on the Geneva and Hague conventions, which were composed in a time when the contours of combat were entirely different from today's. Since then, international law has remained unchanged, despite the developments in contemporary forms of warfare. The construction of the main defensive array in Gaza within built-up areas, and the conscious use of the civilian population as part of these defenses, pose weighty moral and legal dilemmas for Israel's full use of its military capabilities. The central parameters that permit military attacks on targets, in line with international law, to a large extent inherently contradict Hamas's operational principles and its approach to conducting warfare.

The IDF is committed to taking a great number of precautions: warning telephone calls to owners of buildings prior to attacks; the "knock on the roof" policy; distributing flyers that call for evacuations of civilians; advanced intelligence gathering systems used to establish whether attack targets are inhabited; and the careful matching of offensive weaponry and ammunition to the type of target being attacked, in order to prevent "collateral damage." All these represent a complex operational effort, conducted with high levels of efficiency during the recent operations. Yet despite all these preventative measures, Israel has still found itself at the end of every operation facing clamorous demands for external committees of inquiry. A review of the series of operations in Gaza indicates a connection between the use of firepower

and the collateral damage caused in one operation, and the limits on the use of firepower in the next.

The report of the Goldstone Inquiry into Operation Cast Lead dictated to a large extent the limited “boundaries” of Operation Pillar of Defense, in terms of the use of firepower. Pillar of Defense, which took place some four years later, was conducted as a surgical operation, extremely cautious and limited, and achieved only a very short period of quiet. However, this cautious use of power, alongside other factors which are discussed below, allowed Israel to set relatively broad boundaries for the use of increased military force during Operation Protective Edge.

DETERRENCE IN MILITARY CONTEXTS

The Unique Case of Operation Protective Edge

The goals defined by the political echelon for Protective Edge were largely similar to those of previous operations in Gaza: “A deterrent operation to return quiet and renew deterrence, while hitting hard at Hamas, weakening it and reining it in, yet maintaining its position as the responsible and effective sovereign body [in Gaza] at the conclusion of fighting.”³⁶ However, the operational conception here had a different strategic and operational logic from those of previous operations. It’s worth discussing the uniqueness of this strategic approach for two major reasons:

1. The approach can provide a basis for theoretical and doctrinal development of a conception for fighting deterrence operations against an asymmetrical opponent.
2. The approach does not enjoy broad public approval, and has been the subject of heated debate and much commentary, some of it entirely irrelevant to the existing strategic reality.

An introductory note: One should be careful not to rush to wide-ranging generalizations, or to turn the case of a single operation, conducted in a particular strategic reality, into a broad generic approach. Deterrence operations in the Gaza Strip are not necessarily the same as deterrence operations against other opponents in other combat arenas. The analysis methodology used may be similar, but the practical conclusions should be a function of an analysis of the concrete strategic context, and may be entirely different due to the significant difference between the arenas.

The military conception for IDF deterrence operations, as can be learned from recent operations, has defined two main stages:

1. Massive firepower strikes, lasting several days and targeting prioritized, pre-selected military targets, including commanders and fighters in terrorist organizations, and military infrastructure. In parallel, forces are prepared for a second stage of ground maneuvers, which will take place if the strikes fail to achieve their goals, or if the goals of the operation are widened.

2. Ground maneuvers, involving forces conducting offensive missions within the Gaza Strip, as a stepping-up of pressure on the enemy to the level of existential threat, creating improved conditions for the agreement at the end of the operation.³⁷

In Operations Cast Lead and Pillar of Defense, a high level of firepower was used from the beginning. Most of the targets in the IDF's "target bank" were attacked and destroyed in a rapid offensive phase lasting two or three days. But the enemy's decentralized structure, and ability to blend in within built-up civilian areas, allowed it to recover from these attacks and to continue fighting, including the continuous, controlled firing of steep-trajectory weaponry (STW) into civilian areas in Israel throughout the period of combat. In fact, from the early stage at which the heavy bombardment ended, there was a decline in the intensity of firepower used, through to the end of the operation. This was due to the scarcity of remaining targets, and the difficulty of creating new targets, since the IDF no longer held any real threat to the enemy beyond the threat of ground maneuvers. Once the ground incursion began—in Operation Cast Lead, for example, on the seventh day, with much force, and deep into enemy territory—it lacked high-value targets, and it was difficult to identify a particularly high operational effectiveness for this part of the operation. Hamas fighters assimilated into built-up areas, and limited themselves to opportunistic attacks on IDF forces. The ground troops reached their targets quickly, and made ready to remain in the areas conquered and to conduct searches and patrols. The longer this went on, the more it became clear that there was little that these forces could effectively accomplish. After some two weeks of "dallying" deep within the Gaza Strip, it was decided to withdraw unilaterally.³⁸

In Operation Pillar of Defense, too, attack intensity quickly reached a climax, and then declined from the fourth day until the conclusion of the operation. The scope of attacks and the number of targets tailed off, and Israel found itself negotiating terms for an agreement to end the fighting (with help from the United States and Egypt) without recourse to any military pressure with which to effectively threaten Hamas.³⁹

For Operation Protective Edge, a very different conception was developed. A central element of the operational idea was to conduct

the offensive campaign as a series of steadily increasing steps up to a high point of attack intensity, while also using unilateral ceasefires throughout the campaign. The difference from previous campaigns has several aspects:

A. **Starting gently and offering exit points** – Although the IDF had a large target bank for attack, the operation began with a low level of firepower, with a clear message relayed to Hamas that “quiet will be answered with quiet,” and that it had the option to return to a state of calm quickly and with little cost.⁴⁰

B. **Gradual and controlled escalation** – Once Hamas refused this option, attacks on targets in Gaza were stepped up. The idea of delaying the offensive climax, in order to maintain an effective threat capability throughout the entire campaign, requires a balanced spread of attacks on targets over the operational timeline, the creation of a stepped attack plan, and a continuous effort throughout the operation to identify new targets and prepare attacks on them. Going through increasing levels of firepower intensity, which receives internal and international support, makes clear to the enemy the cost incurred and the likely cost to be incurred further on, and causes it to appreciate the decreasing returns it can expect relative to its goals. It allows Israel to manage the operation while making optimal use of its combat resources, in line with the limited worth and importance of a localized campaign with temporary results against the backdrop of a larger, continued struggle.

C. **Strategic pauses** – A number of temporary ceasefires were called during the operation, initiated by external bodies with Israeli agreement.⁴¹ This is a new phenomenon in these kinds of operations. These ceasefires can be seen as strategic pauses, as they serve a strategic function within the logic of the operation, requiring coordinated efforts at the diplomatic-strategic level in order to achieve the operation’s goals. Strategic pauses have several advantages:

a. They give the enemy time to understand the accumulated results of the operation, and to weigh the desirability of continued fighting. It takes time for deterrent effects to form and influence people’s thinking. This is even more the case with Hamas, whose command structure is spread

out in hiding places and tunnels, and may thus have a limited awareness of the full realities in the field. Temporary halts allow the enemy to look around and internalize the realities of what is happening on the ground.

b. They provide time to analyze the situation and to improve coordination between the national-level efforts, allowing a broader view than just the military perspective. The clock for military operations runs at a different rate from the diplomatic clock. Strategic pauses in the operation allow for an earlier use of diplomatic efforts, aimed at achieving its limited ends and goals in as early an agreement as possible and at a relatively low cost. In addition, strategic pauses help improve the synergy and coordination between diplomatic and military efforts, as well as involving other efforts to be deployed (economic, media, public awareness) under the national command mechanism.

c. They provide an opportunity to convey messages to the enemy, and to increase efforts to affect public awareness. The pause makes it possible to increase understanding of the developing situation among the Gazan public and other military organizations, and make clear the dangers of continued combat. Various communication channels are used for this purpose, including social media and dropping flyers, aimed at different audiences. By these means it is possible to convey messages threatening increased levels of firepower in the next phase, alongside the possible benefits for the enemy of reaching a quick end to the operation. When there are rapid, sharp transitions from bombardments to strategic pauses and back, this can create additional psychological pressure and make it possible to damage enemy resilience, as well as driving a wedge between different groups within the Gazan population.

d. They increase legitimacy for continuing the operation. It should not be taken for granted that Israel was able to conduct a fifty-day operation without having to cope with severe external and internal pressure to end the fighting. The strategic pauses broadened the legitimization given by the international community, as well as strengthening the resilience of the Israeli public. Throughout most stages of the fighting Israel was seen as a moderate and considered party, seeking an agreed compromise, despite its power and absolute military superiority; while Hamas was seen as the uncompromising and intransigent aggressor.

D. **The time dimension** – A deterrence operation lasting 50 days is seen as unacceptable by large sections of the Israeli public, mainly because of the history of previous operations (Cast Lead lasted 23 days, and Pillar of Defense only eight). Is it possible or desirable to seek a short timeframe for operations when the enemy is prepared for a lengthy engagement? There are several considerations regarding time planning for deterrence operations.

First, the desire to keep operations short is common to all wars, but the desired period here should be assessed in the context of the current conflict with Hamas.⁴² On the one hand, it would seem that if there is a possibility of conducting a quick series of deadly and successful strikes that will bring fighting to an end, then there is no reason to hold back. On the other hand, in this kind of conflict, in which strategic efforts are not directed solely against Hamas's military capabilities, there is good reason to slow the pace down, in order to allow the enemy to achieve a better picture about the battle consequences. The question of whether the function of time has a preferential status over other operational and strategic considerations is worthy of a debate that goes beyond the usual conceptual template. Perhaps what we have here is the dominant influence of the "rapid decisive victory" conception in Israeli strategic thinking, which is not applicable in this kind of conflict. A fast-paced operation tends to go hand-in-hand with massive use of force. Too early a climax in the operation's level of intensity, without effective coordination with the parallel diplomatic campaign, can impede the achievement of the operational goals.

Second, the common claim that Israel is unable to conduct lengthy combat operations because of international intervention and imposition of ceasefires within a short period of time needs to be re-examined. External intervention to force a ceasefire is not a given. Recent operations have shown that, with correct handling of diplomatic efforts, the international community will not necessarily seek to impose a timescale on the conflict.

Third, deterrence operations involve an inherent tension between the desire to maintain both legitimacy and effective threat throughout the operation and the desire to take a series of aggressive steps aimed at ending it quickly. Attempting to shorten a deterrence campaign necessarily

involves a massive use of firepower. The opening bombardments of Operations Cast Lead and Pillar of Defense, for example, sought to destroy most of the targets in the IDF's "target bank." But what if this bombardment proves insufficient, as it did in both these operations, and the enemy—well-prepared in tunnels and in built-up areas—immediately recovers and continues fighting? After all, this is precisely what the enemy prepares for. What can the IDF do if Hamas maintains continuous STW fire into Israeli territory even after the pre-identified targets have already been destroyed? At this stage, the threat of escalation and increased damage cannot maintain high credibility, and it is entirely possible that even a unilateral Israeli offer of a ceasefire may be refused, and the firing continue. What then? Israel may well be perceived regionally and internationally as the aggressor, due to the intensity of the opening bombardment. It may lose legitimacy and diplomatic credit. And if the firing continues after the targets for strikes have been exhausted, then there is no alternative to a ground incursion. This may in fact extend the length of the operation and lead to a large number of casualties, reducing the desired level of asymmetry between the extent of damage suffered by each side.

Fourth, the claim that the Israeli home front is incapable of withstanding an operation lasting several weeks also requires close examination.⁴³ We are dealing here with an operation that does not seek a decisive military victory. For the enemy, the engagement is aimed very much at the Israeli public, and its determination and resilience. The Israeli public plays an active and strategically important role in the operation and in determining its outcome. This is not just about making sure that the public follows instructions regarding passive defense within shelters and protective rooms, but about core public support for the struggle. The key question will be: What (and how) does the mood and opinion among the public project to the enemy, to Israel's political leadership, to front-line forces, and to the international community? Resilience is not a natural trait, but a source of strength that must be developed and nurtured. This issue has immense importance for the outcomes of operations, and requires suitable attention and planning at the national level, both in terms of the psychological aspects, and of preparing coordinated defense plans.

The main conclusion of this brief discussion is that deterrence operations require a different way of thinking about time, and speed should not be the leading element in operational planning. Creating internal and international legitimacy, and the ability to plan escalating levels of threat for the duration of the operation by means of which continuous pressure can be exerted on the enemy, are the first principles for seeking to set a timescale. In practice, this approach may even bring about a quicker end to the conflict, but it is certain to achieve better conditions for a negotiated agreement.

E. The “pain map” concept – This is a deterrence strategy that tries to make clear to the enemy the level of damage already caused, and the damage likely to be caused should the conflict continue, in order to force the enemy to recognize that continued fighting will not further its aims. This strategy uses physical means in order to create a psychological effect. Thus it is not only concerned with quantitative aspects of targets attacked, but also qualitative aspects that contribute to the deterrent effect. What are the main types of targets that have this quality? How can attacks on them be planned so as to allow an increase in firepower deployed over the course of the operation?

The first and most trivial circle of targets comprises enemy weaponry and command systems. Attacking these causes direct damage to military capability, and reduces operational capacity. The process of rearming and reinforcing that Hamas has undertaken in between operations has meant that the number of weaponry targets is constantly increasing, quantitatively and qualitatively. Experience has shown that even lethal attacks that destroy a significant portion of the enemy’s military capabilities only lead to a rapid replenishment with even more advanced weaponry when the operation is over. During these operations, the IDF finds itself engaged in a Sisyphean effort to “mow the grass” and neutralize Hamas’s main military capabilities, despite it being clear that any advantage gained will be entirely temporary.⁴⁴

It is possible that the analysis following Operation Pillar of Defense brought an improved understanding and awareness of the need to go beyond this “first circle” of targets in such operations, so as to improve the potential for achieving a deterrent effect. Pillar of Defense

saw a series of lethal, large-scale, highly precise air strikes that had little impact in terms of deterrence and stability after the operation. Despite an immense investment in precise intelligence, advance attack capabilities, and accompanying command and control systems, the operation did not achieve the desired strategic results. It appears that, following the operation, there was growing recognition of the relatively limited effectiveness of large firepower offensive efforts, while maintaining a surgical level of precision. Given the scope of Hamas's re-arming capability, the embedding of its offensive array in the heart of built-up areas, and its decentralized distribution of resources throughout the Gaza Strip, a different approach to firepower deployment is required in order to achieve operational goals.

The first use of the “pain map” concept was made during Operation Protective Edge,⁴⁵ indicating a new planning direction for analyzing and prioritizing targets. This is not an innovative idea in terms of the theoretical logic of deterrence operations, but this may indicate a change in the willingness to implement it operationally. Although this subject hasn't gained much attention in the media, it is worthy of attention, and its advantages and limitations should be looked at. The “pain map” concept looks to explore and identify additional areas and components of the enemy structure, beyond the “first circle” targets. This is a group of targets containing high-value assets, of strategic or symbolic importance to the enemy, the loss of which might serve as a catalyst for an early end to the operation. These are not targets from which terrorist operations are launched directly, but they do provide underlying infrastructure. Examples include military infrastructure, stores, government buildings and the like. Hitting these targets can create significant direct and indirect pressure on enemy leadership, and influence enemy willingness to continue fighting.

Attacking targets according to the “pain map” emphasizes the tension between the search for attack targets that hurt the enemy, on the one hand, and on the other, the desire to maintain ethical behavior and follow international law. The scattered enemy forces within densely populated urban areas make it immensely difficult to follow both these directives. The use of a “pain map” as a compass for planning the incrementally increasing use of firepower raises sensitive planning

challenges, both in terms of intelligence assessments and as regards ethical-legal considerations:

a. Are we able to estimate the influence of this “pain” on the enemy’s operational capability? This is more a qualitative assessment process than one of assessing quantitative results, and requires a deep understanding of the enemy across a range of contexts, both military and non-military, some of which lie outside areas of military expertise. In an operation whose results are contingent on creating deterrence in the mind of the enemy, it is not sufficient to restrict oneself to narrow “target-oriented intelligence”; a broader investigation of the enemy’s deeper cultural strata is required.

b. It is necessary to be able to directly link the targets that emerge from the “pain map” to terrorist activity in a way that meets legal and ethical demands. For example, if the apartment of a Hamas commander has been regularly used for meetings and to plan terrorist attacks, is it a legal “military target” for attack, or a civilian dwelling on which an attack would be a form of illegal collective punishment?

c. Reducing “collateral damage” of attacks, particularly casualties among civilian bystanders, by issuing prior warnings and calling on civilians to leave the area before attacks are carried out; via intelligence assessments of whether target buildings are occupied; and by selecting appropriate types of armament for the target, in terms of size and accuracy.

Psychological Warfare Component

In recent years, the IDF has built up its capabilities for creating an increased impact on the enemy mindset.⁴⁶ Deterrence operations target the psychological plane, and efforts aimed at the opponent’s mindset are a central component, complementing and amplifying the physical results. What happens in the minds of the relevant actors is no less important than what happens in reality, and yet it is difficult to assess the effectiveness and contribution of this effort in changing opposing mindsets.

The enemy is not a homogenous whole. The resilience to IDF bombardments, and the internalization of developing results during the engagement, are factors that vary among different enemy elements, and are vulnerable to influence to varying degrees. Even extremist ideological groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, whose thinking processes are sometimes difficult to comprehend, conduct evaluative processes and cost-benefit analyses from their subjective viewpoints. This very different and particular conceptual structure does contain an organizing logic (seemingly more than one), however different, which influences the motivation for action.

For example, following Operation Cast Lead, commanders in Hamas brigades were removed from their positions because of poor combat performance. In Operation Protective Edge, too, there was great variation in the combat performance among different Hamas brigades, which was not necessarily due to differences as regards commanders, equipment, or prior preparation. Again, in terms of the willingness to bring an end to the conflict, it was Khaled Mashal, from his residence in Qatar, who pushed for the fighting to continue, despite growing calls from local leadership for it to be halted.

Attempting to understand the situation on the ground as it is viewed by the enemy; mapping the differences between various enemy elements; and creating an offensive plan of psychologically oriented action focused on the segmentation of target populations, both military and civilian—all of these processes can help deepen cracks in the enemy's resistance and contribute to achieving strategic outcomes. Developing and maintaining these capabilities does not require great investment. The benefits gained, even if not given to precise evaluation, undoubtedly justify the expense.

Changes in Military Planning Processes

As described, for deterrent operations conducted as part of an ongoing struggle with Hamas, the non-military elements are of great importance and are closely tied to the conduct of the military elements, both influencing and being influenced by them. This has unique implications for the operational planning structure and processes.

First, the understanding that the end of the operation means a return to the routine of an ongoing war of attrition demands that planning for operations relates also to the broader strategic dimensions. These dimensions lie beyond military concerns and extend beyond the duration of the operation, but provide the essential framework for the context in which it takes place.

Second is the issue of “planning backwards” as opposed to “planning forwards.” Classic military planning adopts an approach in which certain end situations are defined for the operation, from which are deduced a series of secondary missions, the operational forces to be deployed, and the methods and means used to achieve those ends. In deterrence operations that form part of a continuum of ongoing attritional warfare, some of the operational goals may be defined while the operation is underway. Having defined end situations as the sole focus of planning processes is problematic, because it is difficult to predict certain environmental variables (internal and external) that directly influence the engagement, and which may significantly change the planning logic. For example, in Operation Protective Edge the decision to carry out an offensive to neutralize the tunnels was made only after several days’ combat. In Operation Cast Lead, too, different possibilities for changing and broadening the ground incursion were considered in the operation’s second week, when ground forces were already positioned in their assigned zones in Gaza. Eventually, after several days of inertia, it was decided to pull the troops back swiftly into Israel.

Moreover, the difficulty in identifying targets for deterrence operations against asymmetric opponents also lies in the latter’s decentralized structure, the concealment of its operational “centers of gravity”, and the high level of autonomy granted to the lower tactical levels. Planning processes generally seek to define targets and desired gains, couched in the language of effecting change in the enemy’s situation: what do we want to do to the enemy, how, when, and where, and how should this serve the overall structure of the campaign? However, in the current combat conditions it is difficult to define solely physical targets that exemplify the logic of the operation (what to conquer, where and whom to strike and how much, etc.), because these are insufficient. There are also targets described in terms of desired trends and

developments, using softer language, such as “reducing motivation,” “depletion and attrition,” “[forcing a] realization of futility,” and so on. Of course, these definitions rule out the use of closed and rigid planning approaches, and instead require the use of complex analysis and evaluation processes while the operation is in progress, as befits operations largely aimed at the enemy mindset.

The practical conclusion is that a “flexible planning” process is needed at the operational level, to allow a combination of the target-oriented approach (working backwards from ends) with the “learning on the way” approach (while the operation is underway) and events-oriented planning (working forwards from the present to the future).

In addition, the IDF will need to develop its ability to gather and prepare forces during the engagement, away from the front, for evolving missions that arise from the “forward planning” process. This kind of improvised model of operational forces was created by the IDF Southern Command during Operation Cast Lead, and made an important contribution to rehearsing and preparing troops ahead of the ground incursion, which began in the second week of fighting. The lack of a similar body during Protective Edge was detrimental to the preparation conducted (over the course of several days) for operational forces ahead of the mission to capture and destroy Hamas’s offensive tunnels, the first time such a large operation of this kind was carried out by the IDF.⁴⁷

Intelligence Gathering

Given the enemy entrenchment within built-up areas, the concealment among civilians, and the dense network of underground tunnels, the IDF faces a real challenge in locating the enemy and determining the level of precision required to strike at it. Most attack targets have a small signature, are revealed for shorter and shorter periods of time, sometimes even just a few seconds, and their location within densely populated civilian areas places severe limitations on the IDF’s ability to strike at them in accordance with ethical guidelines and international law.

In all its recent engagements with Hamas, Israel operated within a single theater of operations, which made it relatively easy for the IDF to concentrate its intelligence gathering efforts and tighten its intelligence control of the field. There are around 20,000 Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters in the Gaza Strip. It's important to note that, despite its dense intelligence gathering coverage of the Strip, the IDF was able to kill or wound only a few hundred fighters, and a small number of commanders, in each of its recent operations. This is no small accomplishment in itself, but it is clearly insufficient, and it indicates a significant gap in operational effectiveness. Despite the immense investment in recent years in intelligence gathering capabilities, the operational gains—within the particular and complex operational conditions created by the enemy—have been relatively small. To a sizeable degree, the enemy has successfully neutralized the IDF's impressive intelligence gathering capabilities, in terms of “target-oriented intelligence.”⁴⁸

Moreover, this gap in intelligence effectiveness is also evident in assessments of enemy capabilities and intentions. This is perhaps because the task of “analyzing the achieved level of deterrence” has not been seen by the IDF as a well-defined, high-priority mission, and no sufficient formal intelligence effort has been conducted to understand developments in the deterrent effect caused to relevant enemy elements. In every deterrence campaign in Gaza, and particularly in Operation Protective Edge, military intelligence struggled to form a clear picture of the enemy's ability to withstand attacks, and of the extent of the enemy's determination to keep fighting. That the engagement lasted fifty days was way beyond any prior assessment. In the words of the former Deputy Chief of General Staff, General Yair Naveh: “We knew exactly where every terrorist was, but we didn't know how to correctly assess what Hamas really wanted. What its red lines are, what punishment it can and can't take, whether or not it will be deterred from action during the operation.”⁴⁹

Those responsible for the planning processes for combat operations try to construct a foundation of knowledge about the enemy, including its structure and forms of deployment, and to assess its possible actions. But in fighting an enemy guided by a fundamental ideology of “resistance,” the ability to translate these concepts into quality

intelligence knowledge requires broadening the analytic spectrum beyond the physical components of military force. The operational reality cannot be understood without a deep understanding of the diplomatic and political realities, nor without studying the culture and historical traditions from which they have emerged. This is the context in which the operation takes place, and any “objective” analysis of the physical aspects of the enemy which does not take a broader perspective is liable to create a partial and distorted picture. “The understandable tendency to engage with questions to which the answers are clear and mathematical, such as the size of the opposing forces and their deployment, can distract military intelligence from addressing more important questions, which actually shape events. This is how the professionalism of military intelligence can be its Achilles heel.”⁵⁰ Moreover, deep cultural differences between the sides also contribute to distorted conceptions among Israeli assessment bodies. Talk about the “irrational enemy,” driven by an extremist religious ideology which supersedes any “logical” considerations of cost and benefit, is an expression of how difficult it can be to analyze facts via the correct prism, in order to construct a relevant picture of reality.

Conducting a complex effort to understand the enemy’s operational intentions, and willingness to execute them, involves a change of emphasis within IDF intelligence. There needs to be a different prioritization of the subject and relevant learning processes, so that the professional analysis of the enemy will be extended to additional dimensions beyond force size and deployment and military behavior. The study of the cultural background, historical developments, socioeconomic situation, political sensitivities, and broader diplomatic context is an essential foundation for improved understanding of the enemy and prediction of its operational behavior during combat.

The Ground Incursion and Standoff Weapons

Classically, ground maneuvers are designed to capture operationally valuable territory and destroy enemy forces stationed there.

The IDF traditionally maintained this approach in its planning of deterrence operations, leading to the development of a ground threat that may be deployed if the initial bombardment stage does not cause the enemy to accept Israel's conditions and cease fighting. The dominant approach held that the ground operation is a necessary (if insufficient) condition for destroying enemy forces that can increase pressure on the enemy leadership (military and political); and in addition, that serves as a declaration of willingness to take sizeable risks, reflecting the great importance of the interests for which the battle is being fought.⁵¹ In the three recent operations in Gaza, there was heated debate on the need for a large ground incursion in order to improve the operation's outcome. In Operation Cast Lead, consideration was given to expanding the incursion toward Rafiah and cutting off the Strip from the Sinai, so as to damage Hamas's future rearmament capacity. Also examined was the option of going deeper into Gaza City in order to threaten Hamas rule.⁵² In Operation Pillar of Defense, after several days of bombardment, when it had become apparent that Hamas would not agree to Israel's demands at the Cairo negotiations, a similar demand was voiced. The same happened during Operation Protective Edge as the fighting dragged on and the hoped-for results seemed out of reach. In all these cases, the ground incursion was discussed as an effective option for moving the operation forward out of the strategic doldrums towards its goals.

Hamas forces in Gaza are decentralized, embedded within civilian spaces with no clear demarcation of "front" or "flank." They are supported by a well-developed underground network for protection, hiding, and moving forces surreptitiously, and are protected by mines and booby traps on possible IDF routes and in selected buildings. This situation means that any ground incursion will struggle to identify clear targets. It is not surprising that the first stage of the ground offensive in recent operations was completed very quickly, with forces reaching their targets with little difficulty. During Operation Cast Lead, for example, ground forces reached their target areas within about half a day. The same was true in the short ground offensive in Protective Edge. However, most of the fighting occurred not during the phase of reaching target areas, but during the continued presence of forces in those areas. During this phase, the enemy forces were able to deploy their operational capabilities in an optimal manner: close familiarity

with the territory, hiding and blending in with civilians, moving freely through underground tunnels, able to conduct pinpoint surprise attacks in short bursts—all of it with no intention of repelling IDF forces from their territory, but rather aimed at inflicting casualties, degrading IDF forces' morale and physical condition, and undermining belief in their ability to complete the operation and achieve its ends.

From the IDF perspective, calling up reserve forces and concentrating troops in staging areas in preparation for a ground offensive represents a clear threat. For Hamas, however, not only might this not be considered a threat, but in fact it is an operational opportunity to draw large numbers of IDF troops into areas which were prepared specifically for this eventuality. In fact, it may be that the threat of a massive ground offensive to conquer significant tracts of territory in Gaza is Hamas's preferred operational situation. In a wide-ranging IDF offensive against the Hamas defensive array, the defender creates new operational opportunities to improve the strategic situation. An extended stay of IDF forces in forward areas within the Gaza Strip, with no clear results achieved, in a situation of growing tiredness, growing internal public debate, and growing international criticism, grants Hamas an opportunity to reverse the strategic equation.

Even a more restricted and focused maneuver, such as the attempt to reduce the number of launchers via an incursion into "launch zones," has not been seen to be particularly effective. Launch zones are scattered throughout Gaza, hidden within built-up civilian areas for protection. During Operations Cast Lead and Protective Edge, there was no significant reduction in the quantity of STWs fired during the ground offensive or the long period of occupying territory that followed it. Any drop in the number of launches can be explained in terms of Hamas command planning and control, and its management of the quantity of armaments stored and used over the course of extended combat. The system of launchers is scattered and hidden, allowing it to continue to function effectively even during a large IDF ground offensive in the area. Furthermore, continued firing of STWs during IDF ground maneuvers can result in harsh criticism of the effectiveness of this tactic, undermining internal unity within Israel and support for the military and political leadership.

Moreover, a massive ground incursion into Gaza might actually significantly extend the length of the operation, and reduce the gap in damages suffered by each side. It thus contradicts the overall strategy, and shifts the operational logic away from deterrence toward a logic of destruction and defeating the enemy. As the ends and goals of the operation are not defined in these terms, this has no place.

The operative conclusion is thus that, when high-value targets cannot be identified, the ground offensive in its classic form is no longer an option. Thought needs to be given to alternative forms of ground maneuver, focused on specific areas and targets of high operational worth, which are problematic to be attacked by remote strikes. This kind of maneuver differs from the traditional ground offensive, aimed at acquiring and holding territory over time. It offers a response to the complex operational difficulties described above, using a more up-to-date approach, and forces designed and trained to achieve excellent operational results, unobtainable with bombardment alone.

The operational logic of deterrence operations, aimed at achieving direct and indirect influence on the enemy mindset so as to achieve the desired goals at relatively low cost, gives preferred status to the use of large firepower within the desired mix of operational tools. Remote strikes allow tight control over the intensity of damage to the enemy while minimizing risks to one's own forces, increasing operational freedom of action, and giving a relatively high level of control over the extent of environmental damage caused. Recent technological advances in the fields of intelligence gathering, UAVs, precise weaponry, communications, and command and control systems have greatly improved the effectiveness of standoff weapons even in asymmetric confrontations. Advanced research capabilities to identify targets before and during operations; tight "intelligence control" on the ground; the ability to assess whether targets are inhabited by bystanders; operations research into optimization of fire attack methods and characteristics; and the ability to distribute targets quickly, via command and control systems, among the various intelligence gathering and firepower units—all have made it possible to increase damage inflicted on the enemy and erode enemy capabilities more accurately, at appropriate levels of intensity, and at a low level of risk to IDF troops.

At the same time, the use of remote strikes against a decentralized enemy embedded in civilian areas and underground presents a highly complex challenge, both operationally and in ethical and legal terms. Without engaging in a detailed discussion of the legal issues, I will simply note the main difficulties and operational limitations that restrain the full use of the IDF's advanced firepower capabilities, stemming from international law:⁵³

1. **Difficulty in identifying military targets** – The imperative in planning is finding military targets. That demands explicit identification of military activity that takes place there, and that identification must meet stringent criteria. But in Gaza, it is likely that military targets (such as rocket launchers, a terrorist about to conduct an attack, and so on) will be concealed and protected by residential buildings and the civilian population, or in underground tunnels. They are very difficult to locate, let alone attack with surgical accuracy. Other targets that are easier to find and attack are likely to also host civilian activity, intended to blur the boundary between military and non-military contexts—for example, a command post located within an apartment building that also holds civilian dwellings.

2. **Difficulty in differentiating and separating terrorist fighters from innocent civilians** – This is largely a function of the willingness and ability of the civilian public to evacuate combat areas. In this aspect, the IDF self-imposes limitations even beyond the requirements of international law.⁵⁴ In fact, according to the laws of warfare, a civilian area used for military activity becomes a legitimate military target. The immense efforts made to warn civilians and distance them from attack zones (telephone calls, “knocks on the roof,” dropping flyers) form a severe limitation that the IDF chooses to impose, despite the significant reduction caused in the operational results that can be achieved.

3. **The demand for “proportionality” in the use of firepower, compared to the level of threat posed to one’s own forces by the target being attacked, while also trying to avoid “collateral damage”** – This is a more general and abstract demand, and there are no clearly defined criteria for “proportionality.” Is there any way for proportionality to be determined except after the event, once the effects of the strike become clear? Can the potential damage that might be caused to IDF forces if

the target is not attacked be evaluated? Is it possible to lay down fully all the considerations and steps that should be taken in planning, in order to effect a “proportional” strike, and to reduce the possible environmental damage to a reasonable level? In this aspect too, the IDF imposes restrictions beyond those required by international law. The commanding guidelines in Operation Pillar of Defense were that air strikes were to be conducted with zero collateral damage.⁵⁵ The results achieved were indeed impressive, and very close to this definition. But the period of quiet achieved after the operation lasted less than a year. Thus an in-depth examination is required of the implications of this definition for the IDF’s ability to conduct an effective deterrence operation based on remote strikes.

An additional issue regarding the balance between standoff weapons and ground maneuvers is that of the suitability to the operational demands of existing weaponry and other means. Originally, most of the existing weapons systems were developed for high-intensity warfare against a developed enemy in symmetrical warfare. Over the years, certain modifications have been made to improve the ability to respond to the evolving scenarios. A look at the current situation provides the following picture:

1. In terms of ground offensives, there are some very large lacunae: a low capability for dealing with underground tunnels (especially defensive tunneling); limited engineering capabilities for dealing with the threat of explosive devices and booby traps on roads and in buildings; limited ability to face the growing anti-tank threat in the Gaza Strip on a broad scale; and the lack of less lethal means for use in an environment containing civilians and terrorists.
2. In terms of large firepower, thought should be given to adapting existing capabilities to the common scenarios encountered in deterrence operations. The suitability of existing armaments to the types of targets should be examined, as well as increasing the arsenal of less lethal weaponry, and the quantitative aspects of the weapons arsenal should be analyzed in relation to operational needs. In general, though, the existing capabilities in this area provide a high-quality response to the operational needs of deterrence operations, despite the fact that most of them were developed for use in high-intensity warfare.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Israel lacks a national-level “integrated campaign” approach, and this is the main cause of strategic ineffectiveness in deterrence operations against an asymmetric enemy. Over the last thirty years, this has been the main form of conflict in which Israel has been involved. Yet in all this time, despite the limitations inherent in the use of military force for achieving strategic goals in campaigns of this kind, no coherent theory has been developed to combine the various national efforts into a consistent strategic approach. The lack of such an approach, and of suitable mechanisms for operationalizing it, leads to a continued reliance on military force as the main tool in this war, in spite of its severe limitations.

There is a need for a strategic mechanism for planning and conducting national-level operations, to provide necessary depth and long-term vision for the campaign as a whole. Such a mechanism would offer in-depth analyses of the enemy and of the diplomatic environment; support a broader and more suitable approach than that provided by military analysis alone; and contribute to the integration of all strategic efforts, alongside military activity, leading to collaborative learning processes, and to better-synchronized and more effective action at the national level.

It is time to revise outdated conceptual approaches—founded on the classic idea of the “decisive victory”—and develop a strategy and military doctrine appropriate for deterrence operations, within the context of an overall campaign of extended attrition. This will first of all require achieving conceptual clarity; with this foundation in place it will be possible to construct an advanced operational approach that is aligned with the state’s overall strategy. Efforts to develop these concepts and doctrines should also influence the IDF’s force development processes, so as to improve the weaponry and the operational options available to it in the future.

It is necessary to re-examine the time element in operational campaigns of this kind, and in particular the traditional aspiration to “shorten the period of combat”; that is, to attain a victory in the shortest possible time. This objective (at least in the current realities of Gaza) can sometimes

lead to distorted operational approaches and cause strategic damage. Deterrence operations are to a large extent directed at affecting the enemy mindset, and such effects take time to come to fruition. Seeking shortcuts can lead to the use of too much force at too early stage.

The strategic approach employed during Operation Protective Edge—a steady increase in the intensity of deterrence operations—should be developed further. According to this approach, the use of military force is incrementally ratcheted up over time, thereby maintaining and strengthening internal and international legitimacy, while also demonstrating to the enemy the futility of continued fighting. This makes it possible to increase the effectiveness of combat efforts at the operational level, improve the coordination between military and diplomatic efforts, effectively integrate efforts directed at the enemy mindset with practical demonstrations of the effects of military power, and give the enemy time to analyze and understand the overall strategic picture.

Improvements should be made in the way in which intelligence assessments of the enemy are researched and constructed. The IDF's advanced capabilities for providing target-oriented intelligence are not sufficient in and of themselves. The IDF must also be able to carry out broad analyses of the opposing system, including cultural, historic, and diplomatic aspects, and the enemy's set of internal and external interests. These provide an essential basis for the high-quality strategic planning of various deterrence efforts which together form a national-level integrated campaign.

The aims and goals defined for deterrence operations, within the long-term context of continued conflict, should be limited in scope. The potential achievements of any given operation tend to have a short lifespan, and are dependent not only on the extent of the military harm inflicted on the enemy, but also on the regional political, diplomatic, and strategic contexts. Given the transient nature of their possible strategic results, military operations should be designed around a clear imbalance between a high level of attrition inflicted on the enemy versus a low level of casualties among one's own forces, with a relatively small investment in terms of combat resources. This is a key requirement for Israel to be able to maintain its strategic flexibility, and to demonstrate to the enemy the

futility of continuing the campaign. This guiding principle influences the structure of the operational balance between ground offensive operations and the use of large-scale firepower.

It is worth exploring the development of new forms of ground maneuvers, different from the ground offensive concepts that dominate traditional military thinking, and better suited to the conditions and characteristics of deterrence operations and to the unique deployment of the enemy. These forms will necessarily require changes of direction in Israel's force development, including weapons, equipment, and training.

Efforts should be continued to strengthen the effectiveness of IDF firepower as one of the essential operational components in deterrence operations. There are two areas of activity required in this respect:

- Reviewing the existing weaponry and modifying it to make it more suitable, with an emphasis on increased quantity, reduced cost, and variations in lethality.
- Concentrating efforts on the legal and moral aspects, and working with appropriate parties from the international community to update the norms and rules laid down by international law, so that they are better adjusted to the current realities of combat.

The home front and national resilience play a central role in achieving strategic outcomes. Hamas targets the heart of Israeli society and its ability to endure. Continuous and well-organized efforts at the national level are required to bolster fighting spirit on the home front and improve the society's ability to withstand extended campaigns. Creating public awareness of the importance of the issue; improving public understanding of the nature of attritional warfare; and calibrating public expectations regarding the realistic outcomes and achievements of deterrence operations—all of these are necessary conditions for garnering public support for engaging the enemy, and help prevent internal processes that may harm the strategic outcome.

Efforts in the realm of public opinion and public consciousness should be continued and strengthened, so as to enhance successful outcomes of

the campaign. This is true of efforts vis-à-vis the various publics in Gaza, the Israeli population, and the broader context of international opinion.

Israel has conducted three deterrence operations against Hamas in Gaza in the space of about six years. Hamas may not be the central strategic threat facing Israel, but it is certainly the most immediate threat. Its ideology and military structure, alongside the operational experience it has gained in recent years, require Israel to respond to the challenge it poses. Formulating this response offers the opportunity to develop the doctrines and tools that are currently lacking at the strategic level; it is apparent that these will be essential to Israel's security for the foreseeable future.

NOTES

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⁸ Minister of Defense Moshe Ya’alon, in a lecture given at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, September 29, 2014.

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