



War Prevention: A Top IDF Goal

by Yaakov Lappin

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Though it receives little public fanfare, war prevention is the IDF's number-one goal. If war cannot be prevented, the object is to win so quickly and decisively that the enemy will be unable to launch another war for many years to come.

At the end of October, Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman addressed graduates of a military officer's course at Training Base 1, deep in Israel's Negev Desert. During his speech, he warned of Iran's attempt to place a chokehold around Israel, including an attempt to take over Syria. He warned that Israel would not back down from the need to act when necessary to lift this chokehold.

"We do not search for adventures, and our role is to first of all ensure the security of the citizens of the State of Israel, and to prevent wars as much as possible," Lieberman said. "And that occurs, first and foremost, through strengthening deterrence, and through an effort in the diplomatic arena."

Those brief comments accurately reflect the priority list guiding the Israeli defense establishment. War prevention is at the top of the list, but if war cannot be prevented, then winning it as quickly and decisively as possible shares the top spot.

War prevention receives little attention among the general public, yet it is a central planning component that guides the decision-making of the Israeli defense establishment on a daily basis.

The merits of war prevention are self-evident. The absence of high profile armed conflict, and the stability offered by prolonged periods of quiet, cultivate the Israeli economy. They offer Israeli citizens the chance to focus on their daily, routine affairs, free from the traumas and severe disruptions created by

conflict, and free from enemy projectile fire on Israeli cities and towns. This boosts Israeli morale and national resiliency.

A prolonged quiet also enables the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to focus on force build-up and restructuring programs. These are critical in allowing the military to adapt to the challenges posed by the 21st century hybrid terrorist armies that have formed across the Middle East, and to prepare for the multiple challenges posed by the Iranian regime.

Lieberman's comments alluded to a central tactic used to promote war prevention: deterrence. This is a somewhat hazy concept and far from an exact science, but recent experience has shown that it can be developed and fortified through a range of actions. These include an effective force build-up program accompanied by the selective use of Israel's enhanced strike powers.

In the War Between the Wars – Israel's low-profile military and intelligence campaign to selectively disrupt the force build-up of the Iranian-led axis – force has reportedly been used for at least six years. In other words, low-profile, pinpoint military strikes, made possible by breakthrough intelligence capabilities and advanced weaponry, have served the goal of war prevention. They demonstrated to enemies both the extent of Israel's intelligence penetration of their activities and the lethality of standoff, precise firepower that can strike targets near and far.

These strikes also, according to international media reports, place limits on the force build-up program of Hezbollah and its Iranian sponsors by preventing them from becoming overconfident. They are now less willing to launch provocations against Israel that can deteriorate into war, as Hezbollah did in 2006 when it attempted to kidnap Israeli soldiers.

In this complex security environment, then, military strikes, if conducted correctly, can push back war and promote the goal of war prevention.

"We will not hesitate, even for a single moment, to prevent the Iranians from setting up a chokehold [in Syria]," Lieberman vowed. Such a statement is designed to enhance Israeli deterrence, and thereby serves the objective of war prevention. This deterrence is magnified when it is backed up by action. This thinking can be found across the Israeli defense establishment, and has been alluded to in comments by the high command.

"The IDF's first challenge is to prevent war, to provide security, and to make every effort to enlarge the window of quiet for the country, out of strength, and an understanding that this contributes to national security, allowing the country to flourish and develop," IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Gadi Eisenkot told

the Herzliya Conference in June this year. The second challenge is "to win in any war – in combat against terror or in large-scale combat, in a crushing manner, and to push back the next war."

If the next war cannot be postponed, Eisenkot said, the IDF will seek to win it so decisively that Israel's enemies will not be able to mount another military challenge for many years to come. Thus, even plans for war are guided by the objective of preventing the war that could come after it.

Yaakov Lappin is a Research Associate at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies. He specializes in Israel's defense establishment, military affairs, and the Middle Eastern strategic environment.

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