



PERSPECTIVES

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The Limits of Technological Superiority

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: There is no technological solution to the problem of kite/balloon terrorism. However decisive it may be, technology in and of itself does not guarantee victory.

Even against a simple and creative threat like kite/balloon terrorism, the Israeli defense establishment is aiming for a technological deliverance. To be sure, technological superiority on the battlefield should be exploited whenever possible (for example Israel's Iron Dome system, which provides an effective solution to the rocket threat). But the phenomenon of war, like World Cup football games for that matter, shows that physical factors ultimately depend on the human spirit. As Yigal Allon, one of the architects of Israel's 1948 victory, put it: "Without downplaying the value of arms, the Palmah learned to view the human spirit as the main source of strength in the war."

The Greek victory in the Trojan War, after ten years of fighting, was achieved via the famous ruse of the Trojan horse. Modern screening technology might have exposed the ploy. Yet according to the story, the problem lay not in the absence of adequate technology but in disastrously flawed judgment. The king's daughter, Cassandra, repeatedly warned against the danger posed by the wooden horse, but in the general euphoria attending the seeming end of the war, her warnings fell on deaf ears.

Technology has a calming effect in that it ostensibly eliminates the need for personal vigilance, resourcefulness, and responsibility. It seems to allow us to overcome the uncontrollable randomness of the human spirit, which has always been difficult to gauge in times of crisis and war. Soldiers, like athletes and artists, have always been aware of the critical dependence on inspiration and "a hidden power" that brings them to the peak of achievement in critical moments. Those who have experienced the blessing of inspiration are more

aware than others of the painful deprivation that accompanies its disappearance. In the words of King David's lamentation in the Psalms, "My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Technological support, on the other hand, is not capricious. It is stable in its operational mode and subject to control. When something goes wrong, it is nothing more than a technical failure that can be investigated and fixed. Technology thus mitigates our dependence on the vicissitudes of the human spirit. The machine has no self-doubts or panic attacks and no need for the power of faith. As a result, dependence on technological solutions has increased over the years and gained control of fundamental military and civilian operational modes. But this has come at a high cost. For the lower dependence on faith and the human spirit in times of crisis has diminished the individual and reduced him/her to a cog in a machine.

As shown by Allon's words, a diminution of the human spirit did not characterize the IDF's ethos during the first decades of its existence, something that was acknowledged by its Arab enemies in explaining their defeat in the 1967 War. In the words of Yusuf Karadawi, one of the spiritual leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood: "Returning to the faith and raising the banner of jihad are particularly vital in the struggle against World Zionism, because the Zionists inculcate their soldiers with religious faith and religious dreams." One can of course argue with this prognosis, but his words express a widespread Arab/Muslim perception of the spiritual source of the IDF's strength.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, with the advent of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), military planners found themselves at a new juncture. The Israeli defense establishment chose to focus on the maximizing of Israel's technological edge. Hezbollah and Hamas, by contrast, chose to strengthen their fighters' faith and readiness for self-sacrifice. As Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah boasted in the last days of the 2006 Lebanon War: "The confrontation that is currently taking place surprised the Israelis in terms of the human factor... They discovered that they are fighting people with faith, will, heroism, perseverance, and willingness to sacrifice."

The IDF and the Israeli defense establishment must therefore clarify to themselves whether they have not strayed into excessive cultural and mental dependence on a technological support envelope. Not that one should not exploit one's technological edge to the full, but technology in and of itself cannot guarantee victory.

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