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The Begin-Sadat Center
for Strategic Studies
Bar-Ilan University

The War of October 7 – and the One to Follow

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Mideast Security and Policy Studies No. 204

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Brig. Gen. (res.) Eran Ortal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Although the war in Gaza is still in its early stages, Israel must begin learning from it now. The next challenge, a war in the north, might be imminent. The primary lesson taught by the war in Gaza is that no military-size terror threat should ever again be allowed anywhere on Israel's borders. Such threats should be removed by force on the other side of the border. A concentrated force-design process, focused on four or five plans, in addition to basic preparations will enable the creation of a sharper and readier military force. Israel should focus on embarking on about two years' worth of preparations for the next war.

Israel has been at war for three months and is still far from wrapping it up. We do not yet have the historical and personal distance that will be required to provide an incisive professional analysis of either the failure of October 7 or the war that followed it. But like others,¹ I believe we must start learning from the war in Gaza right now, if only because this war is likely a mere prelude to the greater war awaiting us in the near future. This article was motivated by the assumption that a war in Israel's north should be expected within the next few years.

Israel's renewed defense strategy was laid out as a proposal by Gadi Eisenkot and Gabi Siboni². It is a clear paper that has been largely well-received. It includes a call for a decisive military capability to remove

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threats like Hamas or Hezbollah. This paper follows that principle and asks what can be learned from the current war in that context, principally on the strategic and operational levels. It does this by pointing out eleven distinct yet connected observations.

Observation 1 – The failure of the strategy of “deterrence operations”

Unfortunately, Hamas proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that not only is it not deterred by repeated rounds of indecisive conflict, but such rounds strengthen its strategic approach and military readiness.

This observation is not a political statement about Israel’s disengagement from Gaza; nor is it a commentary on the intelligence assumption that Hamas was “weakened and deterred” prior to October 7. It deals, rather, with the modus operandi adopted by Israel in the 1990s. Back then, Israel and the IDF enjoyed an overwhelming military superiority over their adversaries, and their will to continue engaging in a war of attrition against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon was declining. A theory was constructed that air force-delivered punishment against the host state, Lebanon, would be sufficient to deter Hezbollah, thus saving Israel the trouble of direct confrontation.

This thesis was disproved over and over again – yet it was also applied to the Gaza Strip. After Hamas took over the Strip, it was assumed that it would comply with the logic of state responsibility. The comfort of relying on airpower while for the most part avoiding combat friction proved too attractive for Israel to resist, even as rocket and missile threats aimed at the Israeli civilian population intensified. Thus, after a long series of harsh Israeli reprisal operations from the air from which it emerged still standing, Hamas was convinced that Israel’s military superiority did not threaten its existence. The result was the October 7 attack.

The IDF has officially recognized the failure of that strategy,³ but the conceptual traces of 30 years of “deterrence operations” are still apparent in the post-October 7 IDF’s operational conduct. Consider, for instance, the three-week-long deliberation prior to the ground offensive in Gaza. When the offensive finally began, it seemed that some of its actions were rooted in the concept of indecisive maneuver. Between a decisive approach aimed at quickly taking over crucial enemy positions

and one aimed at eliminating terrorists wherever they were, the IDF's maneuvers were more in line with the latter. A maneuver approach would call for multiple simultaneous efforts to prevent the adversary from retreating and reorganizing. However, while fighting in Gaza City continued, the assault on Khan Yunis was substantially delayed.

The IDF was quick to recover from October 7. However, it must be acknowledged that after years of planning and executing operations centered around leverage and deterrence, we had difficulty fully convincing ourselves that the time had come to carry out an offensive aimed at the total defeat of Hamas. Such an offensive should have begun as quickly as possible, with maximum force, while heading towards multiple locations simultaneously. The fact that, at least in hindsight, Israel could have used strategic time better in the war in Gaza must serve as a lesson for the next war.

What does this mean for the objective of the next war and the method of operation?

The aim of a war in Lebanon (and perhaps the Golan) will be similar to that of the current war: to defeat Lebanese Hezbollah by chasing it down in its own territory and removing the threat. This will be crucial to enable future Israeli freedom of operation in Lebanon and the prevention of future threats. This article will discuss several bottlenecks that must be opened for this to be possible.

Observation 2 – Multi-arena orientation

The assault by Hamas came while the IDF and Israel's security establishment were in the midst of discussing the ramifications of a "multi-arena" war scenario⁴. Such a scenario transpired in October, if only partially. However, despite the fact that Northern Command had established a powerful defensive posture and neither Judea and Samaria nor the internal arena posed dramatic threats, the multi-arena scenario appears to have played a part in the hesitation mentioned above. The excessive focus on the danger of a multi-arena war became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The longer the war drags on, the more Iran's proxies are emboldened to step up their challenges.

This leads us to the next war's concept. It would behoove us to sharpen our senses and focus on *how are we going to attain decisive victory*, not *how we are going to react* to enemy threats in secondary arenas. The Iranian axis is not entitled to a vote on Israel's determination to defeat the immediate threat. Israel will have to deal with limiting the constraints imposed by secondary arenas, the specifics of which will be dealt with below.

Observation 3 – Iran and Yemen

Iran's strategy of using proxies to create a suffocating encirclement of Israel is well-known. Yemen has long been on Israel's regional threat radar. Even so, it seems that aside from proper preparations for air defense, we do not have an adequate operational or intelligence response to the Houthi threat.

The Houthi threat to close the port in Eilat by controlling the Bab el-Mandeb Straits and the Red Sea is no different from, and perhaps even more severe than, the Egyptian threat to free navigation in 1967. That threat was a *casus belli*. Escorting ships navigating through the region is only a partial solution.

Unless the Houthis are forced to pay a serious price, they may revel in their victory and stay the course even after the war is over. There is no doubt they will renew their activities during the next one. The IAF may be available to respond with strikes in Yemen, but the IDF clearly lacks a deep understanding of both the Houthi adversary and an appropriate approach to war at long distances.

It is not clear whether an intelligence effort at the scale required is even possible so long as the MID (IDF J2 – Military Intelligence Directorate) is committed to supporting the ground effort in Gaza. And if it does indeed come to this, what kind of punishment could dissuade the Houthis? This provocative, inciting entity has survived a long war with a Saudi-led Arab coalition, supported by the West, that has included both intensive airstrikes and ground campaigns.

Hezbollah's limited role, and the surprising role the Houthis have played in it, reveal that the current war is Israel's first overt war with Iran. Iran

did not initiate it and is short of being fully committed. However, it certainly sees this war as an opportunity to weaken Israel.

If Hamas survives as a military and governing force, the alliance between pragmatic states in the area might completely disintegrate. This alliance has been woven around Israel, which is thought to be a more trustworthy partner than the US itself. This is also the reason for the US's staunch support.

Even if Israel achieves its aims, it is probable that the Iranians will see the war as a success. Exhausted and having suffered a blow to its self-confidence, Israel might be weakened. Hezbollah remained whole and Iran was not harmed – and it never guaranteed Hamas's security anyway.

The Houthi dilemma, and the Iranian role in the war, illuminate the degree to which Israeli strategy lacks significant kinetic capabilities that will enable it to take the fight into Iranian territory, which would cancel out Iran's immunity to the consequences of its actions.

This all means that some of Israel's aerial and intelligence power will have to be allocated to more distant arenas. Ahead of the next war, the MID, the IAF, and the Israeli Navy will have to prepare an approach of punishment and deterrence of Iran and its proxies in the region. Such preparations and actions will necessarily be at the expense of resources needed for war in the north.

Observation 4 – The ground forces' dependence on strained intelligence and the IAF

One of the IDF's most impressive strengths, which was showcased in its operations in the Gaza Strip, is its close joint ground-air efforts. Few are aware of the immensity of the intelligence effort that stands behind such precise aerial strikes and air support. But the impressive success of joint (multi-service) efforts in the stage of operations that involves taking over enemy territory also reveals what is missing. Without that extensive support, it is doubtful that the IDF offensive in Gaza could have been as successful as it was, at least in the war's initial phase. At worst, that success might even have been unsustainable owing to a slow operational pace and high casualty rate.

This should ring alarm bells for several reasons.

The first is that aerial and intelligence support at such depth and scale will not always be available. On the morning of October 7, for example, they were tragically absent. However, this does not pertain only to scenarios of surprise enemy attack. During the likely war in Lebanon, the IAF will be busy executing its own tasks and will itself require immense intelligence support. This means that in scenarios of future wars on our borders, the level of support from air and intelligence for the ground forces is not to be inferred from what is happening in Gaza right now.

The second alarm bell concerns the relative sizes of the areas concerned. Gaza is small, yet nearly all Israel's available ISR assets are allocated to it. During the war in the north, which will be fought in a much larger battlespace, the ISR bottleneck will worsen.

The third alarm bell is the long-range regional challenge. In light of the threat addressed in Observation 3 (Yemen and Iran), it is clear that ahead of the next war, great effort will have to be made to prepare for attacks by Iran and its proxies. These efforts will not only limit real-time support for the war in Lebanon but also the quality of preparations for it.

In general, if we are to explain the conceptual and intelligence failure (in that order) of October 7, we must consider two key concepts: dependence and overstretch.

The first refers specifically to the dependence of the ground forces on intelligence and air support to complete their objectives, even the simplest ones. Without intelligence and air support, the 143rd (the Gaza territorial division) lines of defense would have collapsed. Without impressive joint cooperation in Gaza, in other words, the IDF's offensive would have been much less successful. Artillery support lacks the IAF's capabilities to strike and destroy structures from which an enemy is firing at our forces.

Overstretch refers to the massive overcommitment of the IAF and the MID over the past decades. The MID has taken it upon itself to serve not only as the national early-warning agency but also to be responsible

for providing alerts about terror attacks; for tactical intelligence in Gaza and Lebanon (mainly via the renowned target bank, which takes up a dramatic proportion of intelligence assets); for the Campaign Between the Wars (a bottomless pit of intelligence concerns); for providing expert information on the Iranian nuclear program and intelligence vis-à-vis all of Iran's proxies and terror organizations in the region; and much, much more. It is "not improbable," as the MID would say, that this overcommitment played a part in the intelligence failure of October 7.

The IAF has similarly assumed a role as something more than the force entrusted with Israeli aerial superiority in the region. It has taken on the responsibility of ensuring low-altitude superiority vis-à-vis the adversaries' UAS and drones. The air force has become a national fire base that strikes all the adversaries' launching capabilities, reducing the rate of indirect fire toward the homefront. The less effective ground artillery became, the more the IAF became "flying artillery" vis-à-vis enemy targets as well as close support to the ground forces.

The air force did all this while promising a high level of readiness for any scenario, including surprise attacks. Moreover, with the Iranian threat looming (particularly its nuclear component), the IAF's core preparations were for combat in distant "third circle" arenas.

The ongoing success in Gaza is covering up some serious IAF failures: the failure to provide air support during the crucial hours of the Hamas assault, the failure to ensure air superiority vis-à-vis UAS in both the southern and northern arenas, and the irrelevance of aerial strikes for reducing the rocket threat.

The overdependence of the ground forces on centralized intelligence and air support is worrisome. It is even more worrisome in view of the obvious overcommitment of the IAF and MID and the rising demands upon them.

This means improving the independence of the forces on the ground. This article will discuss ways to reduce the dependence of the ground force on the air force and intelligence.

Observation 5 – An operational crushing strike⁵

October 7 showed that the IDF is not the only one aware of the concept of an “operational crushing strike”⁶ (OCS). Hamas’s attack was a classic OCS. It created a temporary local advantage that was meant to push the IDF off balance and then capitalize on that to create a permanent strategic advantage. The temporary local advantage consisted of artillery bombardment that suppressed the thin forces on the line and an offensive of approximately 3,000 terrorist storm troopers armed with AT RPGs. The people taken hostage were meant to provide a more permanent strategic advantage that would prevent Israel from mounting an effective counter-offensive.

Determination and courage that Saturday morning prevented the adversary from realizing its schemes to create further operational conditions to deny the IDF’s recovery, such as attacking the Hatzetim airbase, blocking traffic south on the coastal road, and more.

OCS is not new in Israel’s wars. Egyptian president Anwar Sadat understood that the IDF’s superiority relies on its ability to mobilize all its forces. This mobilization is dependent on freedom of movement from the homefront to the battle lines. The Egyptian offensive in October 1973 was meant to be a decisive blow that would bring victory in the first hours of the war as efforts continued to prevent IDF reserves from reaching the front. Hezbollah’s plan to invade the Galilee⁷, and of course the Nukhba’s plans of 2014 and 2023, were all based on that same rationale: victory should be attained in the first few hours.

What kind of OCS will the adversary try to inflict at the onset of the next war? I can envision two options.

The first is a commando assault on the Galilee. This is the more expected scenario for which Israel immediately prepared during the first hours of the ongoing war. Hamas put its trust in massacring civilians and taking hostages to hold onto for the rest of the war. Hezbollah will likely focus on deploying its anti-tank forces in positions that will prevent reserve forces from reaching the front (anti-access) and conquering command and control centers as well as communications and air support centers.

The second is direct and indirect fire. According to this approach, the adversary will employ all its fire components – both multi-barreled launchers and precision guided munitions (PGMs) – from Lebanon and more distant arenas. It will utilize everything at the most uncomfortable time for our air defenses in order to ensure that Iron Dome batteries are completely emptied, PGMs pierce our defenses, and crucial components are destroyed. Unlike our ground defenses, which mostly rely on our fighting men and women, air defense is dependent on batteries, radars, and command posts. Destroying a significant portion of them would make recovery very difficult. Should Israel find itself denied of defenses, it may refrain from continuing the fight. At least, that is what the enemy may think.

Of course, the enemy would prefer to combine both approaches.

This means that Israel's defenses must be inoculated against a surprise OCS. Ahead of the next war, Israel must deny the enemy any OCS opportunities. The following two observations deal with this issue.

Observation 6 – Preventing the aerial defense array from suffering an OCS

Ground defense operations doctrine is focused on the idea of in-depth defense. In air and missile defense (AMD) doctrine, which is less familiar to most people, “depth” has a multilayered meaning.

First of all, the lesson learned from the current war may be that our AMD array is a huge success. Israel's AMD has succeeded in dealing with both familiar and not-so-familiar threats from Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere. But October 7 did not pass over the AMD array. Intensive damage was inflicted on the city of Ashkelon in the first hours of the war. The AMD was also unprepared, and thus could not prevent the drone attack that destroyed the remotely operated weapons stations at the border fence. It also failed to prevent some of the UAS attacks at the northern border. And in any case, the Gazan rocket threat is no more than a fragment of the threat from Lebanon and the other Iranian proxies.

Israel's air defense has been preparing for a scenario in which the adversary focuses on destroying it at the onset of the war. As in every defender vs. attacker arms race, the emphases are on shield, mobility, redundancy, and more. But Israel, like any other place, is transparent to both commercial and hostile satellites. Our air defense is exposed and constantly monitored.

The three main principles of an OCS are simple. First is surprise: catching the adversary's defense unprepared. Second is intelligence: studying the adversary's air defenses, their components, and their backups. Three is massive quantities of offensive weaponry: far beyond what is seemingly needed.

In other words: We can be sure that any OCS, including one aimed at our air defenses, will rely on comprehensive, up-to-date information regarding its deployment and readiness, and massive fire. That fire will be composed of simple rockets alongside a variety of PGMs to overcome any known defensive layer. The enemy will deliberately overestimate the IDF's defensive capabilities and will plan its blow while adding significant redundancy. This will be the rocket version of the 3,000 Nukhba fighters of the morning of Black Saturday.

How can the threat of a crushing blow be overcome? On the ground, the answer is clear: depth, specifically forward depth in enemy territory through reconnaissance and fire and depth in the rear with reserves, kill-zones, and containment areas. Depth buys time, which allows for reaction and recovery. The reserve forces enable flexibility and the regaining of initiative. The goal of an OCS is to shorten the fight, while depth gives the defender the time and resilience to respond and seize the initiative.

Our AMD has multiple layers but lacks depth. While several layers of interception and jamming exist, it is impossible to claim that the defender has multiple opportunities to intercept every target. Additional layers, such as the IAF's intelligence-based offensive layers, as well as other efforts, may not be properly employed in a surprise attack scenario. Even in a less challenging scenario, these layers provide only limited support.⁸

For all these reasons, Israel's AMD must develop significant depth. This depth can only be achieved by creating several different opportunities for interception using multiple methods. A multilayered approach, in other words.

A forward defensive-offensive depth layer must be created.⁹ This means Israel must have the ability to intercept a significant portion of the adversary's missiles above its territory – mainly PGMs and UAS, which will probably be more elusive and challenging to intercept on our territory. Another crucial component will be to locate and strike launching points in a matter of seconds, thus significantly reducing the impact of multi-barreled launching systems (MLRS).

The forward layer will be deployed on the border, thus acting as a partial backup to compensate for the fact that the Iron Dome system cannot be deployed nationwide 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Finally, the more conventional AMD, backed up by the forward defense layer that will lessen the load imposed by the threat from Lebanon, will be able to deal with the likely significant rise in missiles, rockets and UAS from more distant threats – including Iran itself.

Depth on the homefront should be attained with a new short-range local defense layer. Short-range, relatively cheap interception systems attached to the most crucial facilities, such as air defense radars, ensure that they remain safe even when other layers of defense are pierced.

The wide publication of the entrance of the laser-interception system into Israel's AMD (while not an independent layer¹⁰) has made our adversaries even more aware of weather-driven limitations on our defense¹¹. It is therefore essential that our new layers not suffer the same weakness.

This means building two new interception and anti-fire-strike layers in addition to augmenting Iron Dome with laser capabilities.

Observation 7 – The defense concept and routine security

On the defense perspective we failed twice. First, we allowed the Hamas and Hezbollah terror entities to build full-size military systems on our doorstep, in populated terrain that deprives us of even minimal

early warning. Secondly, facing that situation, we did not fully deploy for defense. Rather, we kept our deployment on a “routine security” protocol, the IDF’s version of a system of border security.

The IDF has a long history of defensive failures. A partial list includes October 6, 1973 (the Yom Kippur War), July 12, 2006 (the Second Lebanese War), and the tunnels attack by Hamas in the summer of 2014 (Operation Protective Edge). The last of these was a close call that was averted by the brilliant leadership of then Southern Command commander MG Sami Turgeman.

Why do our defenses fail? The answer is simple. The IDF isn’t arranged for defense. It is deployed for routine security. All Israel’s borders are active fighting arenas, but the IDF’s full force is only mobilized during wartime. A permanent defensive deployment is simply not possible.

The component meant to compensate for the IDF’s thin deployment and provide a proper defense is early warning. But early warning failures consistently recur, even more so than failures in defense. Professor Uri Bar-Joseph, a veteran researcher in the field, lists approximately 20 such failures in Israel’s short history.¹²

However, this is not the full picture. The IDF’s routine security has always been more than just border patrol. In the opening remarks of a DCJ volume that dealt with routine security, MG Yair Golan outlined the concept as one that included preventive actions and disruption and thwarting activities.¹³ In other words, the routine security concept is not meant only to stop small groups of infiltrators, but also – perhaps most of all – to disrupt the enemy’s ability to prepare full-size offensives. Routine security, like the IDF’s concept of decisive victory, is very much reliant on shifting the fight, at least in part, to the enemy’s territory.

If we examine our failures in defense through this lens, we find that there is a characteristic shared by all of them – October 1973, June 2006 (the Gilad Shalit kidnapping), July 2006, the summer of 2014, and October 2023. It is this: the years prior to all these events were relatively quiet. During those periods, Israel refrained from any significant preventive thwarting activity and allowed the enemy to entrench itself right next to our borders. We lost the early warning buffer and did not reevaluate our defensive deployment.

In a different volume of the DCJ, Yehuda Vach wrote about the “fence syndrome.”¹⁴ The fence – the obstacle at the border – was originally meant to make it possible to conduct routine security and prevent infiltrations with fewer forces and more technology. However, at some point, it became a dominant component in the defense concept – so dominant that it began to be treated as a defensive component unto itself, not just a means to support routine security efforts. This is evident from the immense investments in border obstacles over the past decades, the technological components incorporated, and the prominence they were given in the speeches and remarks of prime ministers, ministers of defense, and chiefs of the General Staff. However, an obstacle that is not controlled by a force engaged in observation and fire is not an obstacle, and when the deployment is too thin, the obstacle is not controlled. Thus, on October 7, the obstacle was more of a hindrance to the IDF’s situational awareness than to the adversary’s breaching forces.

We must learn from that experience and apply those lessons to the evolving situation on the northern border. As long as the expected clash between Israel and Hezbollah does not come, the IDF will probably continue to commit large forces to defense there. This commitment will further drain the IDF’s already strained resources, which will continue to be split between stabilization efforts in Gaza, the constant securing of Judea and Samaria, and the race to train and prepare for the war in the north.

In the longer term, a full-size defensive deployment in the north will be unsustainable. To mitigate that, the IDF’s defensive concept should be improved in several ways.

First – The building up of reserve forces by training most forces in the proximity of the Lebanese border. New facilities will be needed.

Second – Militia-based territorial defense. MG Gershon Hacohen’s paper of March 2018 reminds us of the unique role pioneering Israelis once played in early response and defense.¹⁵ With that in mind, consider October 7: Not only did Israeli civilians find themselves having to defend themselves alone, deprived of proper means, but their very presence may have prevented the Nukhba forces from penetrating deeper into

Israel. Tragically, the criminal massacre of civilians slowed down the Hamas offensive in a way that helped some of the IDF's regrouping. A return to more traditional ways of mitigating the IDF's inherently slow response should involve giving frontier communities a much clearer military mission and the means to achieve it.

The current demands to be armed coming from communities in the north must be fulfilled so they can serve not only as first responders but also as strong defensive outposts. In the event of attack, these communities will provide observation and fire-direction, and might even conduct raids. The enemy will be skewered by the two-pronged fork of moving toward critical installations while leaving its flanks exposed or conducting lengthy sieges to take over the communities. Thus, an armed and prepared community can negate an OCS.

Third – Mobile ISR and fire-support assets that constantly operate on the border. Unlike the sensors installed on the fence, mobile combat ISR units that employ aircraft, UAS, and mobile capabilities, with a research and analysis component incorporated into them as well, will enable the territorial division to have a better grasp of what's happening on the other side of the border. It will have improved survivability compared to fixed sensors, the vulnerability of which was clearly demonstrated on Oct 7, and could act as a counterweight second-opinion tactical intelligence agency. There was no such unit on the border with Gaza. Rocket and missile assets deployed at the rear of the front will be directed by these ISR units and will be able to provide fire support to preempt an adversary's advance in the crucial first hours of an assault.

Fourth – Neutralizing launching points. Too many of the battles of October 7 began and ended in bomb shelters where the soldiers at various outposts were trapped. Rapidly locating and striking sources of enemy fire will neutralize the artillery cover critical to such an advance. The IDF once had excellent counter-battery fire capabilities, but they are now outdated. A much faster and more precise capability must be developed that can destroy launchers before they are withdrawn behind cover.

Finally, it cannot be forgotten that even with improved defenses, a proper defensive deployment over time is simply unsustainable. The

goal of the next war will be not only to push the Hezbollah threat away from the border, but more importantly to dismantle its ability to threaten the Israeli homefront. This is crucial to ensure the IDF's future freedom of operation, which will be needed to prevent Hezbollah's subsequent rearmament.

Observation 8 – Long wars

The current war has been going on for three months. All official spokespersons have indicated that it will continue for many more. Operation Peace for Galilee (the First Lebanon War in 1982) officially lasted four months, until the exile of the PLO. Operation Defensive Shield, which was undertaken to defeat terrorist organizations in Judea and Samaria, lasted approximately three months, with operations continuing in the area for several more years. Wars to defeat fortified, entrenched, and embedded terror militaries are long.

This is not unique to us or to this kind of adversary. The Russia-Ukraine War illustrates the lengthy, attritional nature of modern-day wars. The dominance of fire, and the fact that it is easier to destroy targets on the battlefield at long range and at a high rate, necessarily mean that a war where both sides have precision capabilities will become static and attritional.

These two components – the need to take over territory and clear out embedded, fortified enemies; and the fact that it is difficult to do this under precise fire – draw out wars.¹⁶

Contrary to Israel's traditional defense strategy, Hamas and Hezbollah aim for short wars designed to stop the IDF from mobilizing and utilizing its quantitative and qualitative edge. Israel desires the opposite. Wars that go on into the weeks enable us to fully utilize our military advantage.

However, this role reversal is not total. Israel is not a superpower. Its military is still a militia-reserve-based model. We do not fight overseas but on our borders. The realities of the current war – hundreds of thousands of civilians displaced¹⁷, the market paralyzed, damage to infrastructure, disruption of day-to-day life, and a steep political price – make clear that it is in Israel's interest to avoid wars that go on too

long. Long wars also highlight Israel's dependence on the US defense industry, which is already under strain from the war in Europe, and endanger Israel's economic and technological miracle. Indirectly, long wars put our very existence as a free, flourishing, healthy society at risk.

The IDF must prepare for long wars from two main angles: it must adapt more quickly and effectively to the above-described realities and must shorten wars' durations by modernizing the force and accelerating the pace of battle.

Regarding adaptability, there are several clear lessons we can learn from the ongoing war. 1) The IDF must once again treat its reserve forces as the main part of its strength, and train, equip, and compensate them accordingly.¹⁸ The hesitation to employ reserve units prolonged the fight in Gaza at the cost of precious strategic time. 2) More significant budgets must be allocated to keeping munitions and consumable equipment stockpiles full – and this should be calculated in months, not weeks. Ammunition and equipment should not be a strategic constraint at the onset of a war. 3) More production lines and supply chains must be kept inside Israel, minimizing Israel's dependence on others.

In order to shorten the duration of wars: 1) Upgrade the capabilities of the forces on the ground to expose and eliminate enemies; 2) mitigate the threat of fire on our forces in order to enable rapid movement, in particular by the less armored forces; and 3) make the “search and destroy” stage of war more efficient (see below for more on these points).

Observation 9 – Exposing the enemy and dealing with threats from the air and to the electromagnetic spectrum

The trickiest bottleneck in combat is exposing the enemy so it can be struck and destroyed. As discussed, the enemy has developed an MO aimed at avoiding becoming a target.

The enemy is no longer satisfied with “asymmetric” warfare. It is now contesting IDF dominance in the lower altitude sky and is making serious attempts to deny Israel the electromagnetic spectrum crucial for modern data-enhanced warfare.

Although ground warfare is where the enemy is exposed and domains are contested, the IDF's ground forces have failed to provide an adequate response. The main efforts for intelligence-gathering, electromagnetic warfare (EW) and anti-drone warfare, remain at the general staff level and are insufficient.

The ground forces must develop a response at the tactical level for all the above. A professional force aimed at providing tactical ISR and contesting the sky and the spectrum is badly needed. In support of advancing troops, this battalion-size unit would utilize drone swarms to expose the enemy in both vertical and horizontal dimensions, using ground-based, fixed-wing and quadruple drones. To ensure freedom of action, these battalions will also have to specialize in EW and be able to create an air-picture to identify threats and enable interceptions.

The IDF has been trying for many years to implement centralized capabilities at the general-staff level in the fields of intelligence-gathering, communications networks, EW, and low-altitude aircraft. So long as the forces on the front line are dependent on Tel Aviv to employ the critical components detailed above, it is doubtful that their maneuvers will be quick enough to fulfill the aims of the war.

Observation 10 – Force Protection¹⁹ (FP)

The success of the ground maneuver in the northern Gaza Strip despite the apocalyptic predictions is mostly due to the combination of cutting-edge heavy-armored fighting vehicle protection and aggressive fire support. This combination was especially effective in the limited, dense urban environment in Gaza City. These conditions limited the adversary's AT capabilities to more outdated RPG launchers effective only in relatively short ranges. It also improved the effectiveness of air support, which could easily focus on a limited number of targets identified as threats to the forces ahead.

The expected conditions and terrain in the next Lebanon war will be significantly different. Hezbollah may be deployed in dense urban areas, but advancing toward them will require maneuvering in open areas that are controlled by enemy fire. The current attritional engagement in the north provides a glimpse of how the enemy will employ its advanced long-range ATGMs.

During the ongoing engagements in the north, Hezbollah AT teams have displayed some knowhow regarding IDF tank techniques and technologies. They have also exposed some of their plans for the future – the intensive use of UAS for offense and to identify targets, more advanced AT missiles, tactics and techniques to counter TROPHY defense systems, loitering munitions, and more.

Hezbollah's well-publicized use of heavy Burkan rockets and artillery gives us insight into its doctrine of combining PGMs and heavy artillery for Area Deny (AD) purposes. Its aim in the first stage of the next war will be to prevent IDF reserves deployment and later to stop the IDF's offensive into Lebanon. Hezbollah has developed its own AT-UAS-PGMs and artillery mixture version of Air-Land Battle (ALB) aimed at preventing the IDF's maneuverability, not unlike the US or Israeli versions developed in the 1990s. It resembles the Ukrainian AD tactics that were successful at stopping the Russian columns in the battle for Kiev of February 2022.

There are other ways in which the success in Gaza City fails to provide a valid lesson for the next Lebanon war. It does not appear that more advanced armed vehicles or air support will make a real difference. For the IDF to achieve its goals against Hezbollah, it will have to find an independent response involving systematic wide-area force-protection capabilities.²⁰

This systematic FP will consist of two complementary capabilities. The first is the rapid destruction of sources of fire in the proximity of our forces with the new version of counter-battery fire mentioned earlier. The good news is that the technological components already exist and can become operational in time for the next war to suppress enemy fire. The second capability is forward-based: enemy PGMs will be intercepted to protect the force.

The combined FP effect is to reduce casualties while allowing the employment of units with inferior armored vehicles early on, thus permitting faster operations and a resulting shortening of the war.

If given an effective range of 10-20 km, FP will enable more than just force protection. It will also act as the forward depth needed in the

context of AMD and help break the enemy's resistance more quickly. With launching sites a less urgent matter, the IDF's offensive will be more focused on enemy command posts and other curtail sites, further hastening the war.

Observation 11 – The clearing pace and the subterranean dimension

A major hurdle of the maneuver in Gaza is the slow pace of destruction of enemy military assets, particularly the subterranean. Above-ground structures can be easily destroyed with bulldozers, explosives, and bombing, but shafts, tunnels, and underground facilities are being found much faster than it is possible to study and destroy them. The complexity of exposing and destroying a vast subterranean infrastructure underneath the fighting force puts the troops in a vulnerable position and significantly slows down the fight.

The Gazan "Metro" is unique, and only possible in the Gaza Strip. Such a large-scale and sophisticated complex has probably never been seen in military history. The subterranean infrastructure in Lebanon is expected to be vast, but not as vast as the "Metro". Even so, underground facilities found by the IDF in the 2006 Second Lebanon War should be considered a mere preview.

To be successful at destroying underground facilities while keeping up the tempo, we must develop simple, highly available techniques for their rapid location and destruction. The totality of the destruction should be compromised, if needed, to gain speed. Once located and fixed, the adversary is trapped, at least partly, in the underground facility. Even if some enemy positions keep up some capabilities for some time, they are still bound to be preoccupied with their own survival.

The quick destruction of local access shafts and basic subterranean positions has to be part of a brigade-size battle group's basic capabilities. At its rear a logistical supportive effort must be organized to ensure the needed flow of materials, explosives and bulldozers. The enclosing siege effect will force the enemy to face an existential dilemma – go out and fight, or risk being buried alive.

Conclusion

The 2023 Gaza War is a vital wake-up call for whoever might still be willing to consider a strategy based on air power alone. The unprovoked, murderously criminal and barbaric attack by Hamas is a clear sign that terrorist entities do not build up capabilities only for the sake of deterrence. Iran's conduct in this war, and the conduct of its proxies Hezbollah and the Yemeni Houthis, makes clear that another Israeli-Iranian war – one with Lebanon at its center – is imminent. In that war we must strive to defeat the enemy as a military organization, remove the threat it poses, and ensure Israel's future freedom of action. This will require an offensive ground army that is independent and adapted to the challenges.

To accomplish this in the next war, while neutralizing the interference of Iran and its proxies, the following capabilities must be advanced:

Iran – Enhance intelligence, air force and navy preparations and capabilities vis-à-vis Iran and its distant proxies, including in Yemen and the Red Sea.

Land – Reduced dependence on the MID and IAF will allow them to better operate as far-range forces while accelerating the speed of combat and shortening ground-force operations. For this to happen, better ground-force ISR capabilities are required, tactical UAS-based aviation and spectrum domains on the front must be organized, force protection capabilities and a forward AMD layer is needed, and the capacity to neutralize subterranean infrastructure must be developed.

AMD – Land FP and fire capabilities, particularly forward interception, will greatly improve the resilience of the air defense and provide depth. In addition, rear depth in the shape of another defense layer attached to critical infrastructure is needed.

Border defense – The described enhancement of ground forces will go a long way here too. In addition, the IDF must rebuild its militia concept based on front-line communities, with sustainable reserves training taking place nearby.

By focusing on four to five major projects, the IDF can rapidly and efficiently enhance readiness for a likely war in the near future. Of course, new capabilities are not a replacement for sufficiently training, exercising, and equipping forces to properly exploit the current ones.

If needed, the IDF will push Hezbollah away from the Israeli border immediately. However, such an operation will escalate, and Israel must be prepared.

At this point, it would benefit Israel to strive for a separation of forces in the north (however far from ideal) while preparing properly for the next war, and turn a strategic constraint into an opportunity.

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Notes

1 Amidror Yaakov, “Initial Lessons from the October 2023 War”, *Jerusalem Strategic Tribune*, November 2023

2 Eisenkot & Siboni, Guidelines for Israel’s National Security Strategy, INSS, October 2019

3 Here’s how then-IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi put it, referring to the long-term implications of the rounds: *“In the long run, our main enemies came out encouraged (...) Increasing self-confidence has led the enemy to incorporate attacks into our territory in its concept of operations (...). All the components together are designed ... to try to gradually present the State of Israel with a new fact: Israel will not be able to win a war, and it will be too expensive and painful for it to attack its enemies and deter them from provocations and from continuing to build the threat on our borders.”* Aviv Kochavi, Introduction to Issue 28-30, Dado Center Journal (DCJ), June 2020 (Hebrew).

4 LG Hertzi Halevi, IDF’s commander, as quoted by Tal Lev-Ram in *Maariv*, Sept 23, 2023 (Hebrew).

5 Derives from the 20th century Soviet concept of Udar.

6 See, for example, MG Amiram Norkin, “A multidimensional operational strike in the UDF’s new CONOP”, DCJ 28-30, June 2020, pp. 129-139 (Hebrew).

7 See also Dvir Peleg, “Umbrellas, Arches and Bubbles: The Eroders of Israel’s Military Supremacy”, DCJ 28-30, June 2020, pp. 70-72 (Hebrew).

8 Brig. Gen. Kochav, former commander of air defense, claimed in this context that “we are gradually refining the response, but find ourselves in an ongoing operational gap,” Brig. Gen. Ran Kochav, “Iran Everywhere Wars Without a Front,” DCJ 35, January 2022, p. 93 (Hebrew).

9 For more on forward interception in enemy territory, see Brig. Gen. Shahar Shochat, Commander of Air Defense, and Dr. Yaniv

Friedman, “Systemic Air Defense,” DCJ 4, July 2015, p. 77, and Shlomit Rudnitzky, “From Iron Dome to Glass Ceiling,” DCJ 16-17, July 2018, pp. 61-80 (Hebrew).

10 According to an article in the IAF bulletin: “On the other hand, and despite all the advantages of the laser system, it seems that it is not about to replace the Iron Dome. A laser interception system will be integrated. It is designed to complement the capabilities, emphasizes Maj. Guy.” Shani and Kulko, Magen Or, February 13, 2022. From the Israel Air Force website. (Hebrew)

11 Weather and visibility conditions are an inherent limitation of laser weapons, according to the system’s developers, R. “Developers of the Light Shield Laser System”: “We may not need to set off alarms on the home front” Yuval Azoulay April 26, 2023, from the Calcalist website (Hebrew)

12 Lecture by Prof. Uri Bar Yosef, closed forum, December 23. (Hebrew)

13 Foreword by Maj. Gen. Yair Golan, March 2018, DCJ 15, p. 12. (Hebrew)

14 *Iron Needles for an Border Wall: The Fence Syndrome on Israel’s Borders and its Impact on the IDF*, Yehuda Vach, October 2019, DCJ 22-23 pp. 165-181. (Hebrew)

15 “Spatial Defense at the Frontier”, Gershon Hacohen, March 2018, DCJ 15 pp. 61-71. (Hebrew)

16 See also Gershon Hacohen, “The Short Wars Are Over,” Israel Hayom, December 26, 2023. (Hebrew)

17 The number of displaced Israelis due to the war in the south and the north is estimated to have been 330,000 at its peak and at 200,000 currently (Israel Democracy Institute, <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/51129> Oct 22, 2023).

18 On the reserve crisis, see Gal Pearl-Finkel, “The IDF is already coming,” DCJ 41, April 2023 (Hebrew).

19 Unlike the broad use by the US of this term, the IDF's use of the term "Force Protection" refers concretely to the fighting forces deployed and their necessary infrastructure.

20 See also Oren Hess, "The Sixth Function: Force Protection — The Missing Function in Land Warfare," MAARACHOT, February 15, 2023.

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