

Battlefield Decision in the Iron Swords War: Renewing the Discussion

Meir Finkel



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Battlefield Decision in the Iron Swords War: Renewing the Discussion

Brig. Gen. (res.) Dr. Meir Finkel

Executive Summary

In the Iron Swords War, the IDF achieved battlefield decision over the enemy in two theaters of war in a manner contrary to customary IDF doctrine. In Gaza, a tactical and operational battlefield decision was achieved against Hamas based on the erosion of the enemy's forces and capabilities, mainly through offensive ground activity. In Lebanon, a strategic, operational, and tactical battlefield decision (in that order) was achieved against Hezbollah that was based on the stratagem of a series of strikes, including the explosion of pagers, air strikes against capabilities and commanders, and a later ground operation against combat infrastructure in the border area. The concept of the battlefield decision has gradually disappeared from IDF discourse in recent years, but it warrants renewed discussion.

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Introduction

The term “battlefield decision” (“hachra’a” in Hebrew, which is similar, though not identical, to the American term “decisive victory”) is regularly used by civilians, political figures, and members of the military with regard to the Iron Swords War. In this article, I will focus on the military concept of “battlefield decision.”

We will address the period of war dating from October 8, 2023 (the day after the invasion of Israel by Hamas and its large-scale slaughter and abduction of Israeli citizens) until the agreements of November 2024 in Lebanon. The IDF used the term “battlefield decision” to define its achievements against the battalions and brigades of the Hamas terror army during this time, but not to define its concurrent activity against the Hezbollah terror army. Before the war, the IDF’s statements were the opposite. The army spoke of Hezbollah’s defeat (i.e., battlefield decision) and referred to its military goals in a future conflict with Hamas in terms of a “severe blow” that would lead to deterrence.

The Israeli public has expressed much criticism that despite the country’s great effort in the Iron Swords War, “Hamas has not been defeated”. This criticism is directed at the state and in particular at the IDF, especially in view of the fact there are still Israeli hostages in the hands of Hamas after more than 600 days of war. There are also claims that residents of the north are being forced to return to their homes even though Hezbollah has not been defeated.

This article will present the IDF’s conventional conceptualization of battlefield decision. It argues that while battlefield decision was reached on the tactical and operational levels against Hamas during the Iron Swords War, this did not materialize into a strategic battlefield decision and victory – in other words, it did not meet the political echelon’s goals of replacing the Hamas government and returning the hostages. Meeting these goals requires exhausting the military operation for political achievements. In contrast, battlefield decision on the strategic and operational levels was reached against Hezbollah, followed by a tactical one.

Furthermore, the approaches and means by which these outcomes were achieved were contrary to the IDF's conventional military thinking. Battlefield decision in Gaza was achieved through a pattern of gradual and continuous erosion of the enemy's combat capability (the elimination of terrorists and commanders at all levels, the destruction of infrastructure with an emphasis on the underground dimension, and the elimination of weapons and command and control capabilities) through offensive combat by ground forces that was prolonged in the field but that did not "maneuver the enemy", which would have gone beyond the tactical level. The tactical echelon, up to and including the brigade level, resorted to combat patterns that included the use of deception, stratagem, and tricks that more than once made it possible to surprise the enemy, undermine his preparations, and throw him off balance (Perl, 2024).

At the operational level, the only stratagem of which this author is aware was at the beginning of the occupation of the Khan Yunis area. The operational battlefield decision against Hamas unfolded in several ways. First was the disbanding of Hamas's brigade-battalion organization in areas where the IDF was fighting (that is, the enemy stopped fighting in the orderly manner they had planned and switched to guerrilla warfare, meaning that in effect, the "terror army" had been defeated and become a "guerrilla organization"). Next was an almost complete cessation of firing by Hamas at the Israeli home front, and its loss of the ability to conduct raids on settlements in the Gaza encirclement – though in areas where the IDF did not operate (the central camps) and in areas where the IDF did not remain in place after conquering them, Hamas managed to restore some of its capabilities. Battlefield decision through erosion of capabilities is cumulative. From the tactical, to the operational, to the strategic levels, it seems that in order to achieve a strategic battlefield decision, it is necessary to continue erosion or employ a stratagem directly on the strategic echelon.

In contrast, the battlefield decision over Hezbollah was achieved through a stratagem ("maneuvering the enemy"). The victory was won not by placing forces in the field in a superior position over the enemy organization but by blowing up its pagers, attacking its firepower from

the air, eliminating its senior leadership, eliminating commanders at all levels, and destroying combat infrastructure on the line of contact on a large scale. Significantly, Hezbollah had been deprived almost a year earlier of its ability to launch a ground attack by Radwan forces into Israeli territory as a result of Israel's strengthening of its defense system on the northern front and infliction of quite a few casualties through IDF air strikes.

This combination of factors led to the fact that when Israeli ground forces entered a narrow strip in southern Lebanon, Hezbollah was already on the verge of suffering battlefield decision. The enemy organization still had sufficient capabilities for combat, including fighters in the field, and was even in positions of advantage over our forces, with widely deployed anti-tank weapons, various types of rockets that could still be deployed towards northern Israel, and strike forces operating in Lebanese territory (though the scope of its rockets meant for deep strikes inside Israel had been significantly reduced). But most of Hezbollah's fighters on the ground had lost the will to fight. The IDF's ground operation in Lebanon, which damaged the enemy's longstanding entrenchment and weapons concentration effort, met with little resistance and was the final nail in Hezbollah's coffin.

I will begin by presenting the concept of battlefield decision and describing the approaches to achieving it. I will then describe, using these concepts, what happened in the Iron Swords War (with reference to the connection between battlefield decision and victory, which is meeting the war goals defined by the political echelon). I will conclude with recommendations for the future.

The purpose of this article is to provide a platform from which to revive discussion of a field that has been neglected and that needs to be brought back to the table.

The article does not address the connection between victory, which, according to the IDF's definition, is the achievement of goals defined by the political echelon, and battlefield decision. This connection is explained in the 2019 operations doctrine manual as follows: "1) It is

possible that battlefield decision will not guarantee victory, meaning the battlefield decision will not lead to the achievement of the goals or the realization of the strategic purpose; [and] 2) victory can be achieved without battlefield decision.” Since victory is defined as meeting the goals of the war as defined by the political echelon, both sides in the conflict can define themselves as having won, even if one of them has suffered much more military damage than the other. Those interested in expanding on this matter are invited to read Or Barak’s article on the confusion in military terminology in the context of victory and battlefield decision (Barak, 2021). This article also does not deal with different approaches to the use of force, such as coercion/enforcement, prevention, and containment, which have been widely discussed in recent years. Nor does it deal with war aims - ambitious ones, such as changing the security situation from its very foundation; or more limited ones, such as improving or preserving it.

This article focuses on the return of battlefield decision as a relevant concept for professional discussion and as a guide to military action. As a document from the IDF Instruction and Training Division from 2023 notes (Instruction and Training Division, 2023): “Battlefield decision is the absolute purpose of the use of military power. Therefore, it is the generator of the system of concepts, and in relation to it, all other purposes arise.” Simply put, an army should aim to defeat the enemy, and all other partial achievements (relative to defeat) relate to this achievement.

The term “battlefield decision” unfortunately has multiple meanings in Hebrew, and in the IDF, as will be shown below, it has at least two different meanings: action and result. This article refers to both meanings, and its recommendations relate mainly to actions that will lead to a battlefield decision.

What is “battlefield decision” (as a result of an action), at what level can it be realized, and what is its time frame?

I will not attempt to review the entire history of the practice of battlefield decision. I will instead define the levels of war that are relevant to the discussion and delimitation of battlefield decision

in time, in relation to combat operations. I will refer to battlefield decision within the framework of war, not in other types of conflict.

Avi Kober, in his book on battlefield decision in Israel's wars (1995), defined the term this way: "A military battlefield decision is the negation of the opponent's fighting capacity, during a war, on the battlefield, by military means, when recovery from it within the framework of that war is extremely unlikely." He elaborated that the essence of battlefield decision "is the negation of the opponent's fighting capacity, which consists of will and ability". In terms of level of analysis, a battlefield decision can occur at the strategic level (meaning the enemy's entire military organization has ceased to function, regardless of the political achievement based on this battlefield decision), the operational level, and the tactical level. (In his research, Kober focused on the strategic level.) In terms of time frame, "it refers to the period of time during which the war is being waged, and not the horizon that follows it" (mainly true for the tactical level and sometimes also for the operational level). In terms of space, it refers to the extended battlefield (including strategic targets outside the direct battlefield, such as headquarters, military industry, assembly and deployment areas of forces, etc.). In terms of means, it refers to "using military means only, not means such as an economic blockade, for example." (This is debatable, since an economic blockade weakens the enemy's fighting power at all levels.) In terms of finality, it means that the enemy's "probability of recovery, or convalescence, is extremely low" (during the war, not after it) (Kober, 1995, pp. 25-26).

For our purposes, it is crucial that a battlefield decision is measured during the fighting period, not after it, as can sometimes be inferred from popular public debate. The discussion of whether Hamas or Hezbollah was defeated applies only to what happened during the actual fighting. For example, in the Six-Day War, a battlefield decision had been achieved until June 10, 1967; and in the Yom Kippur War, until October 24, 1973. In the case of the Iron Swords War, the discussion is relevant in Gaza until August 2024 (when the occupation of Rafah ended) and in Lebanon until the end of November 2024. It does not apply to a formal end to the war, which is a political definition that can be extended for as long as the political echelon wishes.

The 1996 IDF Glossary contains the following definition of “battlefield decision”: “Breaking the enemy’s resistance to acting effectively against us by creating a situation in which (in the decision-maker’s assessment) the conditions for achieving the determined mission are met. A battlefield decision state is usually determined by the enemy having lost his ability to act effectively against us” (the definition of loss of ability is not specified). This definition focuses battlefield decision on the operational and tactical levels. The 1998 IDF Glossary retained this definition and added a separate definition for “tactical battlefield decision,” the essence of which is achieving a ground advantage over the enemy.

The definition in the IDF Digital Dictionary as of February 2025 is: “A situation in which the enemy does not want to or cannot advance his goals, and does not want to or cannot oppose the actions of our forces over time. The determination that the enemy has been defeated is left to a commander at his level.” This dictionary also provides a definition for “strategic (and grand-strategic) battlefield decision: “1. Denying the enemy’s will or ability (economic, social, political, military) to continue a forceful confrontation and to act effectively, and demonstrating that he will not be able to advance his goals through continued use of force and violence against Israel; 2. Abandoning an idea, campaign, or strategic initiative in building the enemy’s power.”

This definition also has characteristics of a battlefield decision at the grand-strategic/political level. According to the 2007 operations doctrine manual, “[Battlefield decision is] achieving a situation in which the enemy cannot achieve his goals or prevent us from achieving our goals. In order to impose our will on the enemy, we must achieve a battlefield decision. To achieve it, we must identify the enemy’s weaknesses and damage his main capabilities. It is not necessary to destroy all his assets for this purpose, but rather we must damage assets whose damage will paralyze his main capabilities and lead to a state of helplessness and the necessity of accepting our dictates. A battlefield decision is similar in logic to enforcement. Its purpose is to impose our will on the enemy and make him do something he does not want.”

The 2019 IDF operations doctrine manual defines a battlefield decision as “the result of an action intended to bring about a situation in which the enemy does not want to or cannot advance his goals; nor does he want to or cannot oppose the action of our forces over time. These two components influence each other: physical incapacity and unwillingness.” This definition applies to the three levels of war. Regarding time limits, the document says, “From the moment a battlefield decision is reached, the period of time during which it is valid is relative and depends on the mission, our forces, and the enemy’s forces. The battlefield decision is not a permanent state, and in practice the enemy can always recover, rebuild itself, mobilize additional forces, equip itself, and go out to fight again.” At the tactical level, “military force is required to defeat the enemy in every space, domain, or dimension in which an encounter with the enemy takes place.” I recommend that those interested in expanding on the connection between damaging will and ability and the combinations between them read Eado Hecht’s article “Mechanisms of Defeat - How to Win a War” (2004).

As a basis for the rest of the discussion, the kind of battlefield decision to which this article will refer is military. As such, it can and should take place at all three levels of war – strategic, operational and tactical – together or separately. The discussion applies to the time of fighting, rather than the period after it, though there are historical examples of battlefield decisions that remained valid for many years.

The exploitation of battlefield decision after it has been achieved is a central issue for the military echelon (to expand it from one level of war to another) and the political echelon (to use it for political moves). A key example illustrating the importance of defining time when discussing a battlefield decision is the clear one achieved in Sinai against the Egyptian army in the Six-Day War, and the recovery of that army during the War of Attrition leading up to the Yom Kippur War.

How to achieve battlefield decision? The maneuver approach and the erosion approach

This issue has not been discussed directly or in detail in IDF documents over the past decade and a half. This could be due to the belief that a battlefield decision is less relevant to Israel's conflicts than it once was, or simply to difficulty understanding the phenomenon. The most extensive detail, which I will use here, appears in the 2007 operations doctrine manual:

The two main operational approaches to carrying out operations and achieving the mission or battlefield decision are:

A. The maneuver approach, [which] embodies a concept in which the dominance of maneuver is the main means of carrying out a mission or achieving a battlefield decision, and is essentially the stratagem approach.

B. The erosion approach, [which] embodies a concept in which reliance on erosion of capabilities is the dominant way to carry out the mission or achieve a battlefield decision.

The Maneuver Approach

Maneuver is the positioning and operation of forces in the combat space in a combination of movement and fire to achieve a position of advantage over the enemy in order to accomplish the mission or achieve a battlefield decision. This is as opposed to erosion, which is a gradual devaluation of the effectiveness of a military force as a result of the loss of men and material resources due to physical damage. The maneuver approach advocates for maximum reliance on maneuver and minimal reliance on erosion to achieve the mission or defeat the enemy.

Maneuver and stratagem constitute a clever means of waging war. They are designed to exploit the enemy's weaknesses or to create such weaknesses through surprise, deception, or stratagem in order to throw the enemy off balance and cause

him to collapse. The essence of this approach is to achieve the mission or battlefield decision not by confronting the enemy's strength but by neutralizing it. Maneuvering is what allows for the implementation of stratagem by concentrating strength against weaknesses in the enemy's formation in a way that will lead to the neutralizing of his centers of gravity and ultimately his strength. At the same time, maneuvering ensures sufficient protection for our own centers of gravity and the mitigation of their weaknesses.

In the maneuver approach, the goal is to render the enemy incapable of resistance by undermining his ability and will to fight, rather than by focusing on the inflicting of material damage (although material damage is a key component in influencing will). The key characteristics of maneuver are momentum and rhythm, which, when combined, lead to shock and surprise. The emphasis in this approach is on decisiveness and disruption of the enemy's action by taking the initiative and applying sustained pressure with unbearable intensity (from the enemy's perspective), at a time and place where he does not expect it. To succeed in this approach, ways of creating surprise must be sought and originality is required, combined with a determination to succeed. This type of thinking is applicable to any type of military operation, and its fruits are immediate results or results that are disproportionately high in terms of effort and resources. Therefore, it is particularly attractive in a scenario of inferiority or when trying to save resources.

A central feature of the maneuver approach is the attempt to neutralize the enemy's command and control cycle by exhausting the scope of our forces' command and control cycle to create new situations, and thereby achieve a better operational pace than that of the enemy. The aim is to create a situation in which the enemy commander is required to make decisions at a faster pace than he is able to handle, causing him to make mistakes or avoid action altogether and ultimately paralyzing his ability to respond. Of course, any damage caused to the command system by physical or other means accelerates

this paralysis. The maneuver approach has the potential to quickly and directly affect the enemy's perception, resulting from the shock and surprise that may arise from the successful concentration of power at weak points in his centers of gravity and from direct actions designed to influence his perception.

It is essential to note that the impact of an action on the enemy's perception is uncertain, as is the effect of an action on a capability. Therefore, the greater the weight of the effect on perception in the plan, the greater the risk of its failure to materialize.

A successful maneuver requires agility, flexibility, and versatility in thinking, organizing, planning, and executing operations. A plan must be prepared, but it must be adapted to the situation quickly. To this end, a 'mission command' approach is required. To implement the maneuver approach optimally, knowledge is required of the enemy's mode of operation, organization and deployment, strengths and weaknesses, and especially centers of gravity.

It should be noted that the document does not mention the enemy's loss of territory as a factor influencing his willingness to fight. This issue has been absent from the IDF's military thinking for several decades. I discussed it in a previous article, "The Occupation of Territory in War: A Diplomatic and Strategic Achievement for Israel" (Finkel 2024).

The Erosion Approach

Erosion is the gradual degradation of the effectiveness of a military force as a result of the accumulation of losses of men and material resources due to physical damage. The erosion approach advocates maximum reliance on erosion of the enemy to achieve missions or defeat the enemy. According to this approach, maneuver is secondary to the destruction of targets and is intended to prepare the ground for this purpose or to serve as a means of exploiting its results. The erosion of

the enemy will be achieved by physically damaging forces, equipment and infrastructure through massive fire, precision fire, or sabotage in the rear.

This approach may also affect the perception of the enemy commander, but this is a result of destroying his forces until he recognizes that he no longer possesses sufficient strength to achieve his mission. The basis of this approach is the assumption that there is a threshold for the enemy's ability to absorb hits, and exceeding this threshold will cause him to surrender. The pursuit of battlefield decision through erosion is a quantitative-statistical approach according to which the side that wins is the side that can destroy a critical mass of enemy targets without suffering such losses.

Planning and conducting war according to this approach requires:

- A. Defining the nature and quantity of the targets whose destruction is deemed necessary to achieve a battlefield decision.
- B. Defining the means required to achieve the aforementioned destruction rate.
- C. Defining the size of the forces required, taking into account the enemy's capabilities to wear down this force.
- D. Taking the necessary actions to position the means in the appropriate sector of operations and to ensure effective operations at the time and for the duration required.
- E. Operating the means in the best possible manner for the mission.
- F. The conditions for successful erosion:
 - The enemy perceives his quantitative parameters as an essential component of his ability to continue operating against us. An enemy with a heroic mentality, prepared to fight to the last man, will not have any quantitative threshold at which he will decide to stop fighting.

- We have the capabilities and freedom of action required to wear down the enemy, in accordance with the enemy's capabilities and ability to wear us down.

“Attrition” is a gradual and continuous erosion of the enemy's fighting capacity and will to fight by cumulative damage to his troops, weapons, spirit, infrastructure, and rear. Attrition warfare has two meanings:

- Both sides resort to attrition, each hoping to bring about the other's defeat by physically wearing down the enemy's strength and by mentally wearing down the enemy's public and leadership.
- Only one side resorts to attrition while the other side avoids it. In this situation, the target is the perception of the decision-makers and the public on the enemy side. Such attrition is consistent with the maneuvering approach presented earlier.

Between Maneuver and Erosion

In practice, the maneuver and erosion approaches do not cancel each other out; those who undertake maneuver are expected to use erosion as a course of action that serves or complements the maneuver. For example, the battleground can be prepared for the maneuvering force through aerial erosion before beginning a ground move. Those who undertake erosion are expected to carry out maneuver moves to prepare the ground for the destruction of targets or to exploit its results.

Maneuvering enables results that are worth far more than the resources invested in achieving them. That is, it allows for a situation in which the weak prevail over the strong, or the few prevail over the many, or significant results are achieved at a low cost (in terms of resources in general and manpower in particular). On the other hand, erosion, when it occurs over time, requires the victory of the strong over the weak or the many over the few, and its cost is often high, both in

terms of our manpower and that of the enemy and in terms of resources. Just as maneuvering allows for greater chances of success even for weaker forces, it carries a risk of failure due to an incorrect assessment of the enemy's weaknesses or a failure of the concentrated effort to achieve the mission. While failure in erosion will lead to another attempt and is generally not noticeable, failure in maneuver may lead to failure in battle or in a campaign. [It should be noted that the erosion approach can favor the quantitatively strong, but it can also favor the quantitatively weak but qualitatively strong if he manages to kill three fighters for every one he loses (for illustration purposes only)].

The phenomenon of maneuver (or stratagem) entails a need to distinguish between the different levels of conflict, the hierarchy of operations, offensive and defensive combat, and the various forms of combat. When dealing with erosion, there is no difference between attacker and defender, between battle and campaign, or between tactics and strategy; in all of them, the only criterion is how many of the enemy's forces you have destroyed and how many of yours he has destroyed.

That's all for the long quote from the 2007 operations doctrine manual. It should be noted that the 2019 operations doctrine manual includes an explanation of centers of gravity and the need to identify them as a basis for action against them, as well as a detailed discussion of "decisive points," which are the key to attacking a center of gravity or defending our own center of gravity. There is no discussion of the type cited above about how to operate against centers of gravity in the context of battlefield decision. Those interested in expanding on the context of maneuver-erosion approaches are advised to read Yuval Bazak's article (2019).

Battlefield decision in the Iron Swords War

The following table presents my understanding of what happened in the two theaters of war when they were the main theaters. I do not address the enemy's war goals here, but it appears that Hezbollah's goals were certainly not achieved. In relation to Hamas it is difficult to assess.

Parameter	Fighting against Hamas in Gaza (main theater of war) – October 2023 to August 2024	Fighting against Hezbollah in Lebanon (main theater of war) – September-December 2024
Israel's war goals/objectives	<p>Collapse of Hamas rule and destruction of its military and governmental capabilities.</p> <p>Removing the terrorist threat from the Gaza Strip to Israel.</p> <p>Maximum effort to resolve the issue of the hostages.</p> <p>Protection of the country's borders and citizens.</p>	<p>Returning the residents of the north to their homes safely. Although this was not explicitly stated, achieving this goal required a significant blow to Hezbollah.</p>
The IDF's combat objective	Broad: dismantling Hamas's military and eliminating its political leadership.	Broad but not decisive: Severely damaging Hezbollah's firepower capabilities and removing the threat of raids by destroying the combat infrastructure that enables them.
The main physical action pattern that led to battlefield decision	Conquering territory and cleansing it in some areas through the destruction of fighters, combat infrastructure (especially underground), and weapons.	Attacks via air strikes and exploding pagers to destroy commanders and leadership at all levels, which created functional damage to the command and control system and demoralized the ranks of the organization*, and massive air strikes against long-, medium- and short-range weapons of all types – all against the backdrop of the neutralizing of the offensive capability of the Radwan forces over the previous 10 months.

<p>The result on the battlefield (extended, according to Kober)</p>	<p>Battlefield decision at the tactical and operational levels through cumulative erosion of enemy capabilities. Hamas lost the ability to fire significant amounts of rockets into Israeli territory and to defend territory from attack by our forces. The “terror army” was defeated and switched to guerrilla warfare.</p>	<p>Strategic and operational battlefield decision through stratagem – a series of blows – on strategic leadership, command and control and fire capabilities that demoralized the forces, followed by a ground operation. Hezbollah “lost its balance” and with it the will to fight. The evidence: Contrary to our expectations, they barely put up a fight when IDF ground forces entered Lebanon and have remained subdued for months since.</p>
<p>The gap in relation to military thinking</p>	<p>An erosive battlefield decision through “maneuver” that was not based on stratagem throughout most of the fighting (except at the tactical level and in the encirclement of Khan Yunis at the operational level) but rather on a slow and systematic frontal advance to conquer territory and clear it as much as possible.</p>	<p>A stratagem (“maneuver”), mainly through air strikes and the pager explosions, and its subsequent exploitation for a broad ground operation against combat infrastructures in the border area. This occurred in a campaign that was not defined in advance as decisive.</p>
<p>Maximizing the battlefield decision into victory (meeting the war goals as defined by the political echelon)</p>	<p>The military wing of Hamas has been defeated at all levels and its leadership comprehensively eliminated, but the Hamas regime has not collapsed. Over time (after the end of the intense fighting but within the ongoing war), the achievement of the battlefield decision has been eroded, at least partially, by the recruitment of new fighters. The return of the kidnapped has been influenced by continued pressure and the use of captured territory as a bargaining chip.</p>	<p>The exhausted enemy organization agreed to a political settlement on terms it had not previously accepted, including a disconnection between Lebanon and the Gaza Strip.</p>

* A central component of this was the elimination of Hezbollah's "Chief of Staff" Fuad Shukar (born in 1961, considered Hezbollah's commander from 2016) and the commanders of the regional units Aziz-Abu Naama Nasser (born 1965, commanded the unit from 2016) and Nasr Abu Taleb (born 1969, commanded the unit from 2016). Nasser and Taleb were the equivalent of division commanders in the IDF. They were key figures from a functional perspective and bearers of Hezbollah's legacy from key events in the organization's past. These veteran commanders had served in their positions for eight years without replacement. It appears that no significant chain of command had been constructed below them, which accelerated the collapse of the command and control system after they were hit.

Thoughts for the future

- Military thinking in the IDF in recent years has focused war-making, in a state of war, on "capability erosion" and has minimized discussion of the "soft" components of warfare, such as the enemy's fighting spirit. The difficulty in translating a tactical and operational battlefield decision into a strategic battlefield decision and victory against Hamas due to its determination at the political level, and Hezbollah's strategic and operational battlefield decision, which led to its loss of the will to fight at the tactical level, should lead to a rethinking of the human dimension on the battlefield - how it is affected both directly and indirectly and not just through capability erosion. It is also possible to think about combining these approaches at different stages of a war, as occurred against Hezbollah.
- The term "maneuver" is overused in several very different ways: reaching an advantageous position over the enemy while implementing a stratagem ("maneuvering the enemy"), and an offensive ground operation of any kind (the "maneuvering capability"/"maneuvering array" of the IDF's ground forces). In the past, in the IDF's "maneuvering wars" (1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982), in which "maneuvering the enemy" was indeed carried out, it was not called a maneuver but offensive activity. Over the years in which no significant offensive activity was carried out,

the term's definition shifted to describe a capability or any cross-border ground operation. Since it will probably not be possible to turn the clock back, it is recommended to focus the discussion on how to employ stratagem in land warfare at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.

- Hamas began the war with a stratagem based on a ground operation that neutralized the Israeli defense system, and it is possible that there was also an element of deception. Over the years, the IDF has abandoned the use of stratagem on land warfare, developed extensive intelligence and fire capabilities against various components of the enemy, and tried to implement stratagem mainly through these capabilities. An example of this is the attack on the underground "Metro" in Gaza during Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021, and various attacks in Lebanon during the Iron Swords War. On the ground, it seems that the issue of stratagem was abandoned in favor of frontal attacks aided by massive fire support. It is advisable to discuss in depth the question of how to achieve stratagem in land warfare, also based on learning from cases in which it was implemented in Gaza, since in operations in wider areas, such as Lebanon, or in a multi-theater war, it may be possible to implement stratagem by "maneuvering the enemy" on the ground as well.
- Discussion of the concept of battlefield decision is vital since it is the historical foundation of achieving deterrence. This is despite the difficulties in defining and achieving it, particularly in the face of terrorist and guerrilla enemy organizations. As we have learned in Gaza, limited operations ("Cast Lead," "Pillar of Defense," "Protective Edge") can allow for periods of relative calm even without battlefield decision over Hamas – but the current war shows that battlefield decision is still very relevant against this type of organization, not only against state armies as was claimed in the past (in, for example, the 2006 operating concept). Even if battlefield decision does not apply to every situation and victory can be achieved even without it, discussing it is essential to create an "opposite pole" to the "war between wars" and limited operations/deterrence operations.

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