



July 22, 2014

World Politics Review®

Strategic Posture Review

ISRAEL



Compilation © 2014 World Politics Review LLC.

First published in 2014 by World Politics Review

ISBN: 978-1-939907-23-3

World Politics Review
231 Front St, Suite 204
Brooklyn, NY 11201
www.worldpoliticsreview.com
(202) 596-9771

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Published in the United States of America

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STRATEGIC POSTURE REVIEW: ISRAEL

BY SHAI FELDMAN
JULY 22, 2014

Editor's note: This report was written before the outbreak of the current hostilities between Israel and Hamas, and has been updated to reflect developments as of publication. The report offers a thorough framework to understand Israel's calculations leading up to the current fighting as well as the lessons the Israeli military will seek to learn from it, even as the nature of warfare suggests that some elements of those calculations will be called into question and revisited by the outcomes of the current conflict.

Israel's threat environment has changed dramatically in recent years, so much so that the change can be characterized as transformative if not revolutionary. This is especially the case when compared to the regional environment Israel faced during its first decades, the 1950s and 1960s, when its defense doctrine was first articulated and its force structure was first conceived. This report will discuss these dramatic changes, identify the new challenges Israel faces, characterize the domestic environment affecting the country's defense allocations and attempt to ascertain the implications of these factors for Israeli strategy. The conclusion will elaborate on the debate now taking place within the country's defense community about the future doctrine and force structure of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

A REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT TRANSFORMED

In the past two and a half decades, Israel's regional environment has undergone dramatic changes, transforming its threat perceptions. Four of these changes have diminished the magnitude of the strategic challenges Israel faces.

First, the conventional military threat has been significantly reduced. The phased destruction of the Iraqi army, first in the 1991 Gulf War and then during the 2003 Iraq War, has eliminated Iraq as a significant conventional threat. It is easy to forget that until this process began, Iraq possessed a very large conventional order of battle and contributed expeditionary forces to the Arab war coalitions attacking Israel in 1948, 1967 and 1973. Until 1991 Israeli defense planners needed to constantly update their estimates of the size of the potential Iraqi expeditionary force that could be sent to join an "Eastern Front" attack on Israel and of the speed with which these forces might traverse Syrian territory and the Jordanian desert to reach the front lines. In June 2014, by contrast, the ease and speed with which a few thousand-strong insurgents of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) caused the newly reconstructed units of the Iraqi military to melt in the face of an attack illustrates how difficult it would be for Iraq to once again constitute a threat to Israel's security.

For the past two years, a very different development in Syria has seriously diminished if not eliminated that country's capacity to pose a significant conventional military threat. The ongoing civil war has weakened Syria's armed forces and has rendered many of its fighting units inoper-

able. This is best illustrated by the functioning of the regime forces in June 2013 in the town of al-Qusayr, not far from the Lebanese border: The Syrian military could not regain control of the town until reinforced by a few thousand Hezbollah fighters, an outcome that can only be described as a humiliating victory.

Indeed, among Israel's close neighbors, only Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Jordan still possess significant conventional military forces. But Egypt has adhered to its peace treaty with Israel for the past 35 years, and Jordan has shown similar commitment for the past two decades. And Iran, while possessing significant conventional military forces, cannot project them over such great distances. Nor would the region's geopolitical realities allow such projection, as Iran is unlikely to risk a major deployment through Iraq, Syria and Jordan.

Second, unconventional threats to Israel have also been significantly reduced. Beginning with Israel's destruction of the Osirak reactor in Iraq in June 1981, and continuing with the destruction of Iraq's chemical weapons arsenal in the immediate aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War and the monitoring and verification regime applied thereafter, Iraq's ability to project an unconventional threat to Israel was dramatically diminished well before the 2003 invasion. In December 2003, this trajectory continued when Libya's strong man, Moammar Gadhafi, agreed to dismantle his country's unconventional arsenal in the framework of a grand bargain with the U.S. Finally, the destruction in November 2007 of Syria's plutonium-producing nuclear reactor, along with President Bashar Assad's agreement in 2013 to dismantle the country's chemical weapons arsenal, has eliminated another significant threat.

Third, nonstate actors have emerged as major new challenge, but one that has proved manageable. The peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan and the significantly reduced threats from Iraq and Syria left the large rocket arsenals of nonstate actors, primarily Hezbollah and Hamas, the only remaining conventional threat to Israel. A basic pillar of post-World War II deterrence literature was that deterrence doctrines apply to unitary states but not to nonstate actors. Thus, while leaders of states were seen as providing addresses for deterrent messages and as capable of rational cost-benefit analysis that allows them to process threats and to adjust their behavior accordingly, nonstate actors were seen as lacking such properties.

Yet in the past decade, Israel's experience with Hezbollah and Hamas is that nonstate actors that comprise mass movements and control swaths of territory in which they are responsible for the welfare of large populations often behave like states. Thus, the leaderships of both Hezbollah and Hamas have shown that they can be deterred. Hezbollah has not conducted a single significant attack against Israel since the 2006 Second Lebanon War, and not for lack of either capability or motivation. As conventional deterrence can break down even when directed at states, surely deterrence of nonstate actors like Hezbollah and Hamas should be deemed as even less reliable. Yet so far such deterrence has proven quite robust, certainly in the case of Hezbollah and also in the case of Hamas, although to a lesser degree due to the particularities of the Israel-Hamas conflict that make periodic escalation more likely.

Fourth, the alliance structure of the Middle East has shifted, largely in Israel's favor. In the 1950s, 1960s and most of the 1970s, when facing the hostility of the neighboring Sunni Arab states, Israel developed alliances with two types of actors: states located in the periphery of the Arab-Israeli conflict, notably Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia; and some of the region's minorities who were struggling against Israel's Sunni Arab neighbors. The latter included the Maronites of Lebanon, the Kurds of northern Iraq and the Christians in what is now South Sudan. By contrast, in the Middle East's newly transformed strategic environment, Israel is enjoying closer relations with states that in earlier decades comprised the core of its hostile neighbors: Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

With Egypt, Israel shares a common interest in battling jihadi cells in the Sinai Peninsula as well as containing Hamas in Gaza, which Egypt's current leaders regard as an arm of the existential threat posed by the Muslim Brotherhood. With Jordan, Israel regards the preservation of the Hash-

emite regime as a vital national interest. Thus, it regards the defense of the kingdom against possible spillover from the civil wars currently raging in Syria and Iraq as essential. And with Saudi Arabia, Israel shares a strategic interest in containing Iran, with Israel placing greater emphasis on preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons and with Saudi Arabia placing greater emphasis on depriving Iran of its growing regional reach. While these alliances have been brewing for some time, until recently they were kept very quiet and confined largely to intelligence-sharing. More recently, however, leaders of both Egypt and Saudi Arabia have been less reluctant to publicly acknowledge their evolving relationships with Israel.

REMAINING REGIONAL CHALLENGES

While the aforementioned changes in Israel's regional environment are mostly positive, the country continues to face at least four serious challenges.

The first is Iran's nuclear project. Israeli leaders and the top echelons of the defense community continue to debate whether the threat posed by Iran's nuclear efforts is so acute as to be considered "existential." A major facet of this debate concerns the ability to deter Iran in the event that it would acquire nuclear weapons. In large part the answer to this question depends on a more preliminary question—namely, whether Iranian leaders can be counted on to behave rationally in a nuclearized Middle East. Regardless, there is a broad consensus in Israel that if Iran were to obtain the capacity to produce nuclear weapons, the result would be a nuclear proliferation cascade, with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey soon following suit. And there is an equally broad agreement that in a region as volatile as the Middle East, avoiding accidents and inadvertent escalation would be nearly impossible and that if this were to occur after nuclear weapons proliferated to the region, the consequences might well be catastrophic.

To prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear capacity, Israel adopted a multilayered approach: diplomatic efforts to increase international pressure on Iran, primarily through the application of ever-more-biting economic sanctions; covert operations targeting Iranian nuclear scientists and facilities, including the use of cyber attacks; and continued investment in the development and acquisition of kinetic means for destroying Iran's nuclear facilities in the event that the first two approaches fail. Such investment was meant to compel the P5+1 group—comprised of the U.S., France, the U.K., Russia, China and Germany—that is negotiating with Iran over its nuclear program to continue pressing Tehran to roll it back. Finally, Israel continued to maintain and develop the means for strategic deterrence in the event that all other approaches fail and Iran obtains a nuclear capacity.

The second challenge is immunizing the "villa in the jungle," which is the phrase former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak uses to characterize Israel's position in the Middle East. Keeping "the villa" protected from possible spillover effects of "the jungle" has become a serious challenge given the increased chaos surrounding the country in the aftermath of the "Arab awakening." As noted earlier, this is especially the case regarding jihadi cells in the Sinai and both Shi'ite and Sunni extremist groups in Syria and Iraq. Willing to die for the cause and now armed with even greater quantities of weapons and ammunition obtained from the now defunct Libyan state, these cells and groups have become increasingly lethal.

Having gained combat experience in the killing fields of Syria and Iraq, these groups may soon redirect their violence toward the Jewish state. Indeed, once the battles for Syria and Iraq are concluded one way or another, the Shi'ite and Sunni extremists will both look for a new cause. Operating as small cells and groups with low signatures, the size and structure of these groups make the tasks of defense and offense quite challenging. In the absence of clear addresses, application of deterrence strategies against such elusive adversaries is nearly impossible.

Israel has attempted to avoid becoming an object of interest to these extremist groups. As long as Shi'ites and Sunnis remained locked in battle in Syria and Iraq, Israel has refrained from giving

these groups cause to unite. Except when its own security interests have been directly threatened, Israel has kept a low signature and refrained from becoming embroiled in the inter-Arab fight.

In parallel, Israel has intensified its cooperation and coordination with Jordan, especially regarding possible threats from southern Syria but increasingly also against jihadi groups in Iraq. And on its southern front, Israel has increased its cooperation with Egypt regarding the Sinai as well as Gaza, permitting Egypt to introduce forces into the Sinai that exceed the limitations stipulated in the security protocols of the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty.

The third challenge is the changing Palestinian question, which presents an existential issue for Israel as its continued control of the Palestinian population in the West Bank—and, to a lesser degree, in Gaza as well—raises growing questions about Israel’s future identity. Indeed, as current demographic trajectories continue to take their course, Israel will soon be forced to choose between preserving its identity as a Jewish state by continuing to deny these Palestinians participatory rights, thus sacrificing the state’s democratic character, or allowing them such rights, thereby abandoning Israel’s identity as a Jewish state. Thus, Israel’s commitment to its founding values of social-democratic Zionism will sooner or later face its ultimate test.

Yet as a national security issue, the Palestinian file has receded in relative importance in recent years. This is clearly the case when comparing the level of violence experienced in 2005-2014 relative to 2001-2004, when suicide bombers attacked buses, shopping malls, restaurants and coffee shops during the Second Intifada. As daily life in the West Bank improved after 2004—with economic activity, especially in the housing sector, resumed and many IDF roadblocks and checkpoints lifted—it seems that for most of the population there, while far from meeting their national aspirations, the situation was tolerable enough to dissuade the eruption of another Intifada.

As the present state of affairs is far from acceptable to the Palestinians as a long-term proposition, Israel’s defense establishment has no choice but to remain vigilant—that is, prepared to take measures to deter and prevent, and, if these measures fail, to contain any new eruption of violence. This is easier said than done because it requires the IDF to strike a delicate balance between projecting a strong and determined deterrence posture and, at the same time, to maintain a low signature so as to minimize friction with the Palestinian population in the West Bank, and to avoid responses to specific acts of violence that may provoke further escalation.

The final challenge is the growing threats of cyber attacks. As an advanced industrial state, Israel is extremely interconnected. Thus, essential components of the state, notably its energy grid and financial system, are vulnerable to cyber attacks. As individuals, groups and some of the region’s states acquire the capacity for offensive cyber operations, Israel cannot remain indifferent. Thus, it is compelled to invest ever-greater resources in protecting its infrastructure against such attacks as well as in developing the capacity to react by conducting offensive cyber operations.

THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Israel’s efforts to address the challenges it faces are affected by three pillars of its international environment.

First, the alliance with the United States remains the most important base of Israel’s grand strategy. This alliance has only intensified in recent years as the two countries’ defense communities have cooperated to an unprecedented degree. This was manifest in a wide array of areas, including intelligence cooperation, defense against ballistic missiles and rocket attacks, and alleged joint cyber operations against Iran’s nuclear installations.

Indeed, during the past five years, as tensions between the two countries’ “principles”—U.S. President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—often flared, primarily over the Palestinian issue but also regarding the best way of dealing with Iran, relations between the

U.S. and Israeli defense communities often worked effectively to diffuse these tensions. This included intimate and frequent communications between Israel's defense minister and the U.S. secretary of defense, between the IDF General Staff and the U.S. Joint Chiefs, and between the two countries' intelligence communities. Two additional dimensions of these relations immunized them against the Obama-Netanyahu personal tensions: the continued sympathy and empathy toward Israel in the general public—and particularly among America's Evangelical Christians—and the close support of Israel in the U.S. Congress.

The second pillar is energy independence. One of the most dramatic developments in Israel's relations with its regional and international environment is the discovery of huge natural gas fields in Israel's territorial waters off its Mediterranean coast. As a result, within the next decade or two, Israel will become energy independent. How fast this occurs will depend on Israel's ability to exploit all the findings and to convert more of its energy consumption to natural gas. Regardless, for a country that for decades has assessed the lack of natural resources as part of its geostrategic weakness and its energy dependence as a significant vulnerability, this development is nothing short of revolutionary.

The final important dimension of Israel's international environment concerns two unrelated pivots to Asia, that of the U.S. and that of Israel itself. The U.S. pivot is propelled primarily by fatigue from the Middle East, where the U.S. has lost so much blood and treasure since 2001. But it is also in response to the threats brewing in Asia: the growing tension between China and Japan and the unresolved challenge of North Korea. From Israel's standpoint, and the same is true of other U.S. allies in the Middle East, this translates to the perceived need to prepare for a lower level of U.S. attention and commitment to the region.

Simultaneously, Israel is also pivoting to Asia as its economic relations intensify with India, China and, to a lesser degree, Japan. Thus, while Europe remains Israel's No. 1 trading partner, in 2003 the three aforementioned Asian economic giants together replaced the United States for the first time as Israel's second-largest trading partner.

DOMESTIC REALITIES

While Israel's defense policy is tailored primarily to respond to the regional threats it faces and the broader international environment, its ability to allocate the financial resources required to meet its national security challenges is also affected by four domestic realities.

The first is Israel's robust economy, which continued to develop even as the U.S. and European economies faced acute crises in 2009-2011. During these three years Israel's GDP continued to grow at an average of 4 percent a year, and even in 2011-2013, despite a continued global slow-down—especially in Europe—it grew at a solid average rate of 1.3 percent. This allowed Israel to continue to allocate considerable financial resources to national defense and to increase these sums in absolute terms even as their proportion of GDP has shrunk considerably in recent decades.

Second, Israel's high-tech sector is second to none in the region, earning it the oft-repeated title of “the Silicon Valley of the Middle East.” This has two interrelated effects on national defense. First, the high-tech sector is a source of innovation for Israel's defense community, embedding the IDF in what has been referred to as “a culture of technology.” At the same time, the IDF's centers of innovation, such as Unit 8200 of its intelligence community—Israel's equivalent to the NSA—continue to produce and provide talent for the country's civilian high-tech sector, the most important locomotive of its economic growth.

A third factor is the costs of competitive compensations. As is the case in the U.S., manpower costs—including salaries, health care and retirement benefits—comprise a huge part of Israel's defense expenditures. Given the spectacular success of Israel's private sector in the past two decades, it has become increasingly difficult to prevent talent within Israel's defense community from being

lured by this success. Under such circumstances, it has been impossible to scale back the resources allocated to personal compensation.

Finally, there is still fallout from the Rothschild Protests—the mass demonstrations and sit-ins that took place in the summer of 2011 to protest the cost of living facing Israel’s middle class and the unfair distribution of the revenues generated by Israel’s economic success. These protests, named after one of Tel Aviv’s most famous boulevards where the most important sit-in took place, pointed to the need to reallocate resources to social services, thus introducing additional pressures on the funds that could otherwise be allocated to national defense.

Defense Doctrine and Force Structure

The implications of both the changing regional environment and new domestic realities for Israeli defense doctrine and force structure are subject to considerable debate inside Israel’s defense community. Before turning to the issues being debated, it is important to acknowledge what elements of Israel’s doctrine and force structure are already undergoing change.

In early 2014, the IDF launched its most recent multi-year plan, called “Daring” (“T’uza”). The plan attempts to respond to the most salient changes in Israel’s threat environment: the vanishing of the large conventional forces that comprised Israel’s peer competitors and their substitution by nonstate actors, ranging from the military arms of large movements like Hamas and Hezbollah to the multiple small jihadi groups in Syria and the Sinai Peninsula. The meaning of this change is that high-signature, large-scale conventional military formations have been replaced by small, low-signature, highly elusive targets. In terms of the IDF’s roles and missions, the most important implication of this change is that Israel’s new threat environment lacks “centers of gravity” against which large force concentrations can be applied.

In response to this new environment, the IDF is changing its doctrine and force structure, primarily in three interrelated ways. First, emphasis is shifting from “maneuver” to “fire.” Second, resources are being reallocated away from what are now considered “legacy platforms” such as tanks and armored personnel carriers. And third, battalions are replacing divisions as the IDF’s basic fighting unit.

In parallel, the IDF continues and in some cases is increasing its allocations to the following five realms.

First, the importance of intelligence has only increased. Target acquisition has become even more critical, but also more difficult, as adversaries have multiplied and reduced their signature. Moreover, instant communication between the collectors of intelligence and its consumers has become critical, as the only hope of destroying a target is in reacting instantly to its acquisition before it disappears again.

The second realm is special forces. While the IDF has placed emphasis on its commando units since the creation of its legendary Unit 101 in the early 1950s, investment in such units has increased exponentially in recent years, as their relevance has only grown given the elusive nature of Israel’s new adversaries.

The third is airpower. Critics of the decades-long priority Israel has given to its air force sometimes describe Israel as “an air force that has a country.” Not only will this not change, the new environment will probably further accentuate the advantages of many unique features of airpower. First, the air force can react almost immediately to a target or threat identified by intelligence collectors. Second, it allows for engaging the adversary without resorting to “boots on the ground,” and in counterinsurgency operations it presents almost no risk to pilots. For a risk-averse, cost-sensitive democracy, this is a huge advantage. Third, it comprises the pillar of strategic deterrence against nonstate actors by allowing the extraction of heavy costs from the state hosting these ac-

tors, and by severely damaging if not actually destroying the host state's infrastructure—its roads, bridges and energy grid.

Fourth, Israel continues to invest in its navy, primarily but not exclusively in its six-unit submarine fleet, which is an impressive order of battle for a small state. Increasingly, Israel's navy plays two roles. First, its submarines project the belief that Israel possesses a secure second-strike nuclear capability—that is, the means to retaliate that are immune to adversary countermeasures. Whether or not Israel's submarines actually comprise nuclear delivery vehicles is both unclear and unimportant—deterrence is derived from its neighbors' estimates that this is the case. And second, Israel's surface vessels and their munitions allow the delivery of precision fire to adversaries' flank and rear, thus joining the air force in creating robust conventional deterrence.

Finally, Israel is investing in precision-guided munitions. While in the air the precision revolution has already taken place, the most important current change is taking place in artillery, where precision-guided munitions are replacing statistical fire.

DEBATING THE REQUIRED CHANGES

Parallel to the changes in the IDF's force structure already being implemented, a serious debate continues within Israel's defense community as to the risks entailed. The debate seems to revolve around three interrelated questions.

First, what are the risks entailed in relying on Israel's current strategic intelligence estimate? Some of the most important aforementioned changes already being implemented—such as the closing of production lines, the retiring of “legacy weapons” and the replacement of divisions with battalions as the IDF's basic fighting unit—are based on the same overarching assumption: namely, that Israel no longer faces a peer competitor able to project a serious conventional military threat by moving large formations in the style of the World War II, the 1967 War or the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Critics of the change point to the long history of strategic intelligence failures in the Middle East and beyond and ask: What if the estimate turns out to be wrong? What if a conventional threat reappears faster than is currently assumed? For example, what if intentions in Egypt change? How fast will Israel be able to react by reversing the changes in the IDF's force structure currently being implemented should it turn out that the basic premise that propelled these changes is no longer valid?

Second, how far should the IDF go in prioritizing “fire” over “maneuver”? The emphasis on “fire” over “maneuver” reverses one of the pillars of Israel's original grand strategy—namely, that as a small, highly exposed country that lacks strategic depth, Israel, if attacked, must deliver the battle to the adversary's territory as soon as possible. Such strategic maneuvers were meant not only to prevent battles being conducted close to Israel's population centers, but also to threaten the adversary's most important assets, thus compelling a cease-fire. This was the logic of the IDF's deep penetration of the Sinai at the end of the 1948-1949 War and of the crossing of the Suez Canal at the end of the 1973 War in a successful bid to compel Egypt to accept a reciprocal withdrawal.

The problem with such operational and strategic maneuvers is that they require “boots on the ground” from which Israeli leaders seem to be increasingly self-deterred. Hence the ascribed huge advantage of massive, precisely delivered fire: If such fire can “decide the battle,” operational if not strategic goals can be met without “boots on the ground.”

While the appeal of this advantage is self-evident, it may experience the same drawbacks as have previous attempts to replace “maneuver” by “fire,” from elements of Donald Rumsfeld's “shock and awe” to the so-called “effects-based warfare”: namely, that while effective “fire” may break an adversary's capacity to fight, as was the case during the opening phase of the 2003 Iraq War, some-

times the adversary's will cannot be broken without "maneuver" and "holding." During the first Gulf War, Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf achieved the operational goal of compelling Saddam Hussein to withdraw his forces from Kuwait only through a brilliant "deep maneuver" by large military formations, which came after weeks of coalition fire. And as Gen. Eric Shinseki understood on the eve of the Iraq War, even if a small, agile, technology-intensive force were able to decide the battle through "shock and awe," the subsequent "holding" phase might require the massive presence of "boots on the ground."

The lesson here is that placing more of the eggs in the "fire" basket at the expense of "maneuver" and "holding" is only possible if there are grounds for confidence that "fire" alone may break both the adversary's capacity and will to fight and if Israeli leaders can assure the IDF that it would not be required to "hold." As for the former condition, the current conflict in Gaza, where a lengthy air and artillery campaign did not obviate the need for a ground operation, offers reason for tempering expectations. As for the latter, the question remains whether Israeli leaders can make such a promise, and whether the IDF's General Staff trust that such a promise, even if given, will be kept.

Finally, will conditions allow Israel to continue to implement its current deterrence doctrine against nonstate actors? Israel's approach to deterring nonstate actors like Hezbollah and Hamas derives from the paradoxical outcomes of the 2006 Second Lebanon War. Israelis assessed the performance of their military and political leadership as disastrous, leading to the sacking of the minister of defense, the IDF chief of staff, the chief of the Northern Command, the commander of the division responsible for securing the northern border, and others. Moreover, the postwar assessment of the IDF's Directorate of Intelligence was that Israeli deterrence suffered serious erosion as a consequence of its performance in the war.

Yet for the past eight years, Hezbollah has refrained from any serious direct attack against Israel, thus rendering the DMI's postwar estimate wrong. In light of the IDF's underperformance in the war, what explains this outcome: robust deterrence of Hezbollah? The only persuasive explanation is that Israel achieved such deterrence not through the costs it extracted from Hezbollah but, instead, through the costs it extracted from the Lebanese population at large, including all of its various sects. The Shiites paid the heaviest price with Israel's destruction of the Dahia neighborhood of Beirut, where Hezbollah headquarters were located. But the broader Lebanese population also paid heavily, due to the destruction of much of Lebanon's infrastructure, notably its roads, bridges and energy grid. This produced a clear message from all sects of Lebanon's population to Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah: Don't ever embroil us in another such adventure. And since Hezbollah is not just a terror organization—it is also a mass movement that participates in Lebanese politics and whose leaders run for parliament and fill Cabinet positions—it had no choice but to heed this public demand.

Having realized that the 2006 War produced far more robust deterrence than originally anticipated, the IDF turned its conclusion—that deterrence was achieved not through the costs extracted from Hezbollah, but rather through the heavy price extracted from Lebanon's population—into a doctrine: Articulated by Maj. Gen. Gadi Eisencot, then the IDF chief of the Northern Command and currently the IDF's deputy chief of staff, it was coined the Dahia Doctrine.

The dilemma this poses to Israel is that, while by trial and many errors this cost extraction seem to have provided robust deterrence, it was achieved at a heavy cost for Israel as well: The destruction it left in Lebanon created an international outcry, with the "other side" winning the war of narratives as it convinced many in the West that Israel exercised an "excessive use of force." Thus, when Israel applied the new doctrine to Gaza in late December 2008, an international commission of inquiry headed by Judge Richard Goldstone was created, later finding Israel—but also Hamas—responsible for acts that it deemed should be considered as war crimes.

This invites the following question: Should deterrence fail and need to be restored by providing a reminder similar to or in excess of Israeli use of force in 2006, would the country's political lead-

ers be willing to authorize this in the face of the apparent costs and the nerves of steel required to withstand the resulting international condemnation? Would Israel not be self-deterred just at the moment when decisive but costly action would be most needed to sustain the Dahia Doctrine? What would be needed to convince Israel's adversaries that it would not be deterred from exercising its deterrent threat? The current conflict in Gaza has answered this question for today's leaders in today's circumstances, but leaders and circumstances will change, making the question an open-ended one moving forward.

CONCLUSIONS

The monumental changes now underway in the Middle East are affecting Israel's threat perceptions, some favorably, others less so. In turn, they are already propelling significant changes in the country's national security policy and in the IDF's doctrine and force structure.

However, how far Israel should go in implementing such changes is a subject of considerable debate. This is not surprising: As not a single intelligence agency in the West had anticipated the recent revolutionary changes known as "the Arab awakening," it is understandable that some Israeli defense planners are nervous about making dramatic changes in the IDF's doctrine and force structure that may not be easily reversed. The resulting debates are relevant to other Western militaries, including the U.S. armed services, facing similar dilemmas.

At this writing, Israel finds itself in the midst of a violent confrontation against Hamas. The violence provides a laboratory test for many of the propositions suggested in this report. Moreover, the outcomes of the campaign against Hamas may affect, directly or indirectly, the aforementioned debates. What lessons will be drawn from this experience about the difficulty or ease of restoring deterrence against a nonstate actor? Will Israeli leaders be willing to sustain the costs associated with the international criticism associated with the punitive action that would need to be taken to restore deterrence? Will the fact that Hamas was not coerced into changing course by "fire" alone—that is, without a "maneuver" that required putting "boots on the ground"—alter Israel's shift away from a military capable of "holding" territory? Will Israel's investment in intelligence, special forces and air power turn out to have paid off? Will Israel's operational success against Hezbollah create a strategic catastrophe with Hamas, with numerous, ever-smaller groups and cells replacing Hamas and transforming Gaza into a chaotic theater, thus threatening "the villa in the jungle"? Only time will tell how and in what manner the current confrontation will contribute to resolving Israel's dilemmas. Here, too, the experience of the 2006 campaign against Hezbollah is instructive, for the initial conclusions drawn may not be those that shape Israel's strategic calculus moving forward. □

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