
The IDF on All Fronts

Dealing with Israeli Strategic Uncertainty

Pierre Razoux

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Abstract

Facing threats on all its borders as well as social, economic and religious tensions, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are now under significant pressure in accomplishing their core mission: the survival of the State of Israel. While the post-Arab Spring Middle East appears driven by continuing political instability, endemic violence and terrorism, the IDF are attempting to maintain full-spectrum capability in order to respond to a variety of challenges, one at a time or all at the same time if need be. To that end, the IDF are considering both defensive and offensive strategies, the former involving a physical territorial fence, deterrence and missile defense, and the latter involving long-range strikes and raids by special operations forces. To deliver on that ambitious agenda, the IDF need to continue upgrading all their service components – ground forces, air force, navy, and increasingly important cyber force – in a way that is sustainable for both the country's economy and its society.

* * *

Faisant face à des menaces sur tous les fronts, ainsi qu'à des tensions d'ordre social, économique et religieux, l'armée israélienne (Tsahal) est mise sous forte pression pour accomplir sa mission principale : assurer la survie de l'Etat d'Israël. Tandis qu'au lendemain du Printemps arabe le Moyen-Orient reste en proie à une instabilité politique persistante, à la violence et au terrorisme, Tsahal tente de maintenir des capacités militaires adaptables couvrant tout le spectre opérationnel, simultanément si nécessaire. A cette fin, Tsahal envisage des stratégies à la fois défensives (emmurement, défense anti-missile, dissuasion) et offensives (frappes à longue distance, raids et opérations spéciales). Pour mettre en œuvre un programme si ambitieux, Tsahal devra poursuivre la modernisation de ses différentes forces (terrestres, aériennes, navales, et, de plus en plus, cyber) de manière soutenable tant pour son économie, que pour sa société.

Introduction

A *Different Army* would be an apt translation for the title of the latest book by Amos Harel, foremost expert on Israeli military issues, co-author of two reference works on the Second Intifada and the 2006 war with Hezbollah,¹ and well-known columnist for the newspaper *Ha'aretz*. By his choice of title, Harel implies that the Israeli army, better known by its acronym *Tzahal* (*Tzva Haganah Le Israel* – Israeli Defense Forces), is no longer the army established by the founding fathers of Israel, no longer the laurel-crowned, victorious army of 1956 and 1967, but the army of a postmodern society inexorably pulled in different directions by increasingly contradictory forces. He notes that the IDF has become more advanced technically yet is more vulnerable from a human perspective, even though young Israelis are as motivated to defend their homeland as they ever were. At the same time, the Swedish think-tank SIPRI notes that Israel's defense budget is the world's fifth largest as a percentage of GDP (6.5%) and the third largest per capita (\$1,882).² Though not all-inclusive, these rankings nonetheless reflect the very considerable defense effort deployed by a country whose population is barely eight million.

It remains to be seen whether the Israeli army has absorbed any lessons from its Lebanon wars, the two Intifadas, and its recent intervention in the Gaza Strip.³ More importantly, it remains to be seen whether it is ready to face the current and future waves of disruption in the region. With the discovery of substantial natural gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria's civil war, the nuclear crisis in Iran and the implications of revolutions in the Arab countries, Israel faces a broad spectrum of threats that requires an equally broad range of responses. If they are not to exhaust their resources by trying to cover all fronts, the IDF will have to prioritize the threats and prepare accordingly. And it is that discussion which new Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon will have to mediate.

¹ As Amos Harel stated to the author during an interview in Tel Aviv on April 24, 2013. See also Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, *34 Days: Israel, Hezbollah and the War in Lebanon*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; *La 7^e guerre d'Israel*, Paris, Hachette Littératures, 2005.

² According to the 2011 Israeli Military Expenditure Database, prepared by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, available at: <http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4>

³ See the Perspectives Paper by Dr. Eitan Shamir, "Operation Pillar of Defense: An Initial Strategic and Military Assessment," Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv, December 4, 2012.

Uncertain Politics, Fragmented Society

While the Arab revolution in the Middle East continues to cause profound shifts and disrupt the balance within and around the region, the State of Israel is facing challenges of a magnitude and significance not encountered in decades. Given this uncertain and high-risk backdrop to their operations, it seems more important than ever for the Israeli defense community to establish an effective political direction and to maintain its few sources of diplomatic support. At the same time, it must also take account of changes in a society that is both diverse and increasingly fragmented, yet remains the society on which it must continue to rely for most of its resources.

Mitigating Political and Diplomatic Uncertainty

Leaders of the IDF are deeply concerned about the surrounding upheaval. The events collectively known as the Arab Spring have engendered a level of political instability not seen in the region since the end of colonialism, and have shattered all Israeli security paradigms.⁴ Israeli authorities considered their strategic position to be very strong at the end of Operation Cast Lead, yet four years later they fear they might have suddenly lost 40 years of ground. As they see it, Israel will once again have to defend itself on all fronts: after losing Turkey as an ally following the *Mavi Marmara* affair, Israel still has to deal with Iran, which is challenging its nuclear monopoly in the Middle East, as well as with Hamas in Gaza and with Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon. It also has to deal with the jihadist fighters proliferating in Syria and the Sinai peninsula, take account of upheavals on the Egyptian political stage, and keep one eye on Jordan – which could well follow neighboring countries into an uprising – and the other on Iraq, which has a yet uncertain future but might soon have the means to restore its military power. In other words, the Israeli establishment has slid from a manageable balance of powers in which Hezbollah, Hamas and Iran posed the only genuine threats to a new scenario in which amorphous threats could come from anywhere. As Ehud Barak stated a few months before leaving office: “Israel is facing complex challenges, from near and far. We are carefully monitoring how the situation develops, though it’s difficult to predict where things will go.”⁵ At present, Israeli strategists are focusing on

⁴ Noted by the author during a series of interviews with Israeli security leaders carried out at the NATO Defense College in Rome in the spring of 2011, and later in Israel.

⁵ *Guysen Israel News*, September 4, 2012.

threats from the country's immediate environment, the Palestinian territories, and neighboring Arab countries.⁶

On the political and diplomatic fronts, the Israeli defense establishment is also facing a number of time-sensitive challenges, some of which are closer than others. The immediate challenge is purely political: after six years of relative stability in the government, the March 2013 elections seem to have ushered in a different political equation for the Knesset, and led to changes in both players and policy. In the medium term, defense policy is dominated by the fear of a fresh Palestinian uprising – a third Intifada, which would require a political solution. Lastly, long-term issues are invariably subject to the structural nature of the US-Israel alliance, an alliance that the Israeli administration wants to maintain at any price.

Short Term: Government Renewal

In the wake of the March 2013 Knesset elections and after six years as Minister of Defense, Ehud Barak – former Chief of the General Staff (COGS) and former Prime Minister, who boasts he is the most decorated soldier in the Israeli army – finally had to pass the baton to Moshe Ya'alon, also a former COGS, who once fought in the Paratroopers Brigade. In entrusting the Defense portfolio to Ya'alon, a Likud heavyweight who moved from left to hard right, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu maintained a deep-rooted tradition: that the Defense Minister be a former soldier. The period in which that tradition was not upheld – 2006-2007, when Amir Peretz held the post – did not have a positive outcome.⁷

Ya'alon, now aged 62, has taken part in every conflict since the Yom Kippur War, and spent most of his career in Military Intelligence and Special Forces. Formerly commander of Sayeret Matkal⁸, he is considered an expert in Palestinian guerrilla warfare. He was on the front lines for the Second Intifada (1999-2005), first as commander of Central Command and responsible for the West Bank, then as Chief of the General Staff. A key figure in Operation Rampart, the 2002 initiative to dismantle the *fedayeen* military structure, he has made a number of controversial public statements, saying the Palestinian threat harbored “cancer-like attributes that have to be severed,”⁹ and likening the *Shalom Arshav* (Peace Now) movement to a “virus.”¹⁰ In 2005, Ya'alon retired to avoid overseeing the IDF's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, something he openly opposed. His peers admire his intelligence, courage and undeniable leadership, but are less admiring of his laconic nature and inflexible hard line on the Palestinian issue. Senior strategists believe that political, and not only repressive, solutions should now inform Israel's approach to the

⁶ Noted by the author during a series of interviews in Tel Aviv from April 20 to 26, 2013.

⁷ The *Winograd Report*, prepared after the relative failure of the Second Lebanon War and published in 2007, highlighted then Defense Minister Amir Peretz' lack of professionalism and proper understanding of military issues. Peretz is the former chairman of Israel's trade union federation.

⁸ The special forces reconnaissance unit.

⁹ *Ha'aretz*, August 27, 2002.

¹⁰ *Ma'ariv*, August 19, 2009.

Palestinian issue.¹¹ Ya'alon's appointment as Minister of Defense was therefore widely interpreted as a sign of the high priority that the new government coalition, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, would put on preparing for battle in the event of a Palestinian uprising.

Ya'alon's Deputy Minister of Defense is Danny Danon, a young up-and-coming Likud member. Danon, a politician shaped by former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, has taken a stance very hostile to Palestinians and to Iran. He is in charge of Homefront Defense, an administrative structure responsible for the day-to-day management of civil defense and the engagement of armed forces in the occupied territories (Area C), in territories under joint Israeli-Palestinian security control (Area B), and at checkpoints on the border with territories under full control of the Palestinian Authority (Area A).¹²

The Ministry of Strategic Affairs was recently expanded to coordinate intelligence and international relations until a Minister of Foreign Affairs can be appointed.¹³ Housed in the ultramodern Ministry of Defense building in Tel Aviv and under 55-year-old Likud member Youval Steinitz, it is nothing more than an empty shell. The portfolio, held by Ya'alon in the previous government, provides an opportunity to appoint the Prime Minister's close allies to a government post, now that the Knesset has for budgetary reasons done away with the concept of a "Minister without Portfolio". Steinitz is unusual: a philosopher wounded in the First Lebanon War, he was once a member of Peace Now and opposed Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. He is also hostile to a scenario that would involve annexing the settlements while having the IDF withdraw from other West Bank territories at the same time, as in the option envisaged by a growing number of opinion leaders in Likud and the religious parties. Observers note that Steinitz' presence acts as a counterweight to Ya'alon's position on Palestinian issues.

From a structural standpoint, one of the key challenges Ya'alon and Danon will have to face is the inevitable reduction in the defense budget. Given the size of Israel's debt, which amounts to 74.4% of GDP, the ruling coalition will have to make difficult decisions and deep cuts in numerous budgets. In spite of the profound uncertainties reigning throughout the Near East, the IDF will not escape the inexorable rationalization imposed by Finance Minister Yair Lapid, a member of the centrist *Yesh Atid* party,¹⁴ a crucial pillar of the government coalition. After the last election, it was clear that Israelis now consider the domestic agenda – specifically, an improved standard of living for the middle class – more important than any other, including the military agenda. All signs indicate that Israel's defense

¹¹ Noted by the author during a series of interviews in Tel Aviv from April 20 to 26, 2013; also attested to by former Shin Beth leaders in *The Gatekeepers*, Dror Moreh's remarkable Oscar-nominated documentary that aired in the West on ARTE TV, in April 2013.

¹² Areas designated under the Oslo II Accords, signed on September 24, 1995.

¹³ The Foreign Affairs portfolio, promised to Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the Russian-speaking Yisrael Beiteinu party, is being handled by the Prime Minister's Office until Lieberman settles his legal difficulties.

¹⁴ There is a Future.

spending, the government's largest budgetary item, will be cut by 3 to 5%, after growing continuously for decades. In 2012, the defense budget was \$12.2 billion; with an added \$3 billion in US military aid, total spending stood at \$15.2 billion. In 2013, the defense budget could well be capped at \$11.7 billion. Military leaders are being asked to rationalize their expenditures and opt for cheaper equipment, even when it is not US-made. Under the US Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program, Israel may use up to 25% of the amounts allocated by Congress to purchase non-US materiel. In order to mitigate the impact of the budget cut, the Israeli government is trying to persuade the US to increase its financial aid, which Congress has set at \$3 billion until 2017.¹⁵ During his recent visit to Israel on March 20-22, 2013, President Barack Obama granted Israel an additional \$200 million.

Medium Term: Fear of a Third Intifada

Though purely domestic issues dominate when it comes to short-term defense policy, all are agreed that medium-term policy is shaped by fear of developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has been at an impasse for several years with no tangible factors allowing the hope that deadlock can be broken through negotiation. No recent action has succeeded in establishing conditions that would allow a return to serious dialogue: neither Operation Pillar of Defense, the IDF's November 2012 intervention against Hamas in Gaza; nor the formal recognition of Palestine as a non-Member Observer State by the UN General Assembly on November 29, 2012; nor the designation of Tzipi Livni as the Israeli government representative charged with negotiating Palestinian issues; nor international and US pressure brought to bear against both protagonists.

This apparently unbreakable impasse, taken in conjunction with the persistent rivalry between Fatah and Hamas, makes it increasingly easy to believe that violence – planned or unplanned – will indeed once again erupt.¹⁶ Israeli leaders now seem resigned to the fact that it will.¹⁷ They say they have accepted the two-state solution, specifically for demographic reasons,¹⁸ but are unable to implement it on the ground for lack of a legitimate political partner on the Palestinian side. The Israeli government's indecisiveness is one of the reasons that would explain why Israel did not take back control of the Gaza Strip during Operation Pillar of Defense: it did not know to whom it could “hand the keys” once the operation was over. Israeli leaders are in fact aware that they will have to deal with Hamas, but for the time being are refusing to go down that road.

¹⁵ Israel is the largest recipient of free US aid, ahead of Egypt and Jordan.

¹⁶ Statements made on December 17, 2012 by a number of Knesset members, including Zahava Galon, expressed the view that the Netanyahu government's renewal of the settlement policy would sow the seeds of a third Intifada. That view is also borne out by an *Arab World Research and Development* poll carried out in early December 2012, which showed that 88% of Palestinians believe armed conflict to be the best way of achieving in practice the Palestinian independence that Mahmoud Abbas obtained at the United Nations General Assembly.

¹⁷ Noted by the author during a series of interviews with Israeli security leaders, conducted in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem from April 20 to 26, 2013.

¹⁸ In 2013, Israel and the Palestinian territories collectively comprised 5.7 million Jews and 6.3 million Arabs and Palestinians. This makes the binational state option unacceptable to those who militate for Israel to remain a Jewish state.

In fact, Israeli security forces seem much more concerned about a new planned or unplanned Palestinian uprising, likely to gain the support of a variety of jihadist movements from the Sinai, Jordan and Syria, than they are about Iran, for which policy is firmly established by the US. When it comes to Iran, Ya'alon is being far more cautious than in years past, when he had no hesitation in adopting an extremely hostile stance. It should be noted, however, that as a former head of Military Intelligence, Ya'alon believes in clandestine operations, including those entailing risk, such as the potential air strikes whose usefulness is being challenged even by former Mossad leaders.¹⁹

Long Term: Preserving the US Alliance and the German Aid

As an exogenous entity in the region, Israel has always depended on external support for its security. And that state of affairs, which will persist as long as there is no regional solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict, is even more evident today. With the new strategic landscape taking shape around the Mediterranean²⁰ and given its own growing international isolation, Israel knows it must at any cost maintain its special relationship with the US, and to a lesser extent with Germany. The US and Germany are Israel's most loyal supporters, providing vital military aid that makes it possible for Israel to modernize its arsenal and maintain its current technological edge over potential enemies.

In addition to the \$3 billion contributed annually by Congress, the Pentagon helps the IDF with training and C4I. The US defense industry reportedly delivers the cells and chassis that Israel uses to build *Merkava* tanks and *Namer* armored infantry combat vehicles (AICVs). For its part, the Israeli government has committed to the *Joint Strike Fighter* program, through which it will procure an initial 20 of 75 F-35 stealth fighter-bombers by 2015-16. Israel is now engaged in talks with the Pentagon to acquire at least six V-22 *Osprey* hybrid aircraft for special missions and search-and-rescue of pilots ejecting in enemy territory;²¹ the KC-135 aerial refueling *Stratotanker*, crucial to supporting a long-range strike campaign; and most importantly the F-22, the US top stealth fighter, for which Congress has prohibited export. At the same time, the Israeli government is using its influence in Washington and Berlin to oppose any sale of sophisticated weapon systems to Arab countries.

In spite of industrial cooperation, many tension-engendering issues remain, particularly when it comes to Iran and the Palestinian problem. The tense personal relationship between Obama and Netanyahu is now well known. While increasing military aid to Israel in order to appease AIPAC and Congress, President Obama is now making his own decisions about the major thrust of his Middle East policy without seeking to coordinate it with Israel's. This trend was confirmed by Chuck Hagel's appointment to

¹⁹ Like Efraim Halevy, quoted by the *Guysen Israel News*, October 22, 2012.

²⁰ Pierre Razoux, "Vers une nouvelle équation stratégique en Méditerranée," *Note de Recherche Stratégique*, No. 1, Military College, January 2013, available at: www.defense.gouv.fr/irsem.

²¹ According to Israeli journalists who are experts in this area, during his recent visit to Israel on April 21, 2013 the US Defense Secretary apparently promised the IDF delivery of four Boeing V-22 aircraft for 2014.

the Pentagon, at a time when Hagel proclaimed himself in favor of dialogue with Iran and a harder line towards Israel's settlement policy.

Germany announced expanded military cooperation with Israel,²² but at the same time abstained from voting on the UN resolution recognizing the Palestinian State, though it did not go so far as to vote against it. The German government is providing Israel with free military equipment and cooperating closely with the Israeli government in fitting cruise missiles on board *Dolphin*-class submarines, which are designed to carry cruise missiles with nuclear warheads. The new Israeli government is therefore well aware it has no choice but to be flexible in its relationship with both President Obama and Chancellor Merkel, unless it wants to become completely isolated and leave its people and army to their own devices. Yet support from outside powers like the US and Germany, though crucial to Israel's security, is not enough. In Israel, more than in any other Western country, defense capability is dependent upon the ties that bind armed forces and civil society.

The IDF in a Fragmented Society

In addition to playing a fundamental role in defending Israeli territory, the IDF are a profoundly significant social institution because of the universal conscription system that was first established when Israel gained independence and is now a defining aspect of Israeli identity. Military service, which is mandatory only for Jewish and Druze citizens, lasts two years for women, three years for men, and four years for officers of both sexes. In the years to come, however, the IDF will find themselves in crisis owing to a number of slow but inexorable changes taking place within Israeli society.

The gradually declining birth rate among the middle class and increase in the number of people exempted from military service – 26% of men and 42% of women of drafting age – automatically reduce the number of conscripts entering the army each year. Israel's population has grown steadily since the massive waves of immigration seen in the 1990s, but that growth has not been sufficient to reverse the trend, largely because many of the new arrivals are either past conscription age or are exempted from conscription altogether under bilateral agreements between Israel and their country of origin.

In order to close the gap and mitigate the sense of injustice felt by many Israelis, who are critical of the automatic exemption enjoyed by ultra-orthodox Jews,²³ on August 1, 2012 the Knesset passed the Tal Law, which makes military service mandatory for everyone. It would oblige ultra-orthodox Jews to enter military service in a specially adapted environment, in which no women would be permitted and in which they would have kosher facilities and scheduled times to pray. Application of the legislation is now under debate. The Tal Law is very controversial, especially because

²² *Handelsblatt*, November 29, 2012.

²³ According to a study carried out in 2010, ultra-orthodox groups (*haredim*) now account for 8% of Israel's population, available at: <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3890330,00.html>.

the influence of religious groups is growing, and because many are wondering whether the Law would even be cost-effective. Adapting the needed barracks would be an expensive proposition, yet the number of ultra-orthodox soldiers assigned to combat units in the *Kfir* Brigade will likely not exceed two infantry battalions, and hence remain under one thousand. Moreover, many experts question the ability of these young “men in black,”²⁴ who have not been through the regular school system and have spent most of their time studying the sacred texts, to obey lay officers and handle sophisticated weaponry. Some academics, like Ilan Greilsammer of Bar Ilan University, suggest that rather than obliging ultra-orthodox Jews to bear arms it might be more useful to put them through a shortened period of civil service and have them take regular courses in science, mathematics and languages, so that it becomes easier to include them in society.²⁵

Above and beyond the religious issue, generals and politicians are now debating other means of making the conscription principle more acceptable: these include reducing exemptions; reducing the length of men’s military service from 36 to 30, or even 24 months; and reducing mandatory recall from 4-5 weeks to 2-3 weeks each year. The latter measure, which was recently discussed in the media, is meeting tremendous resistance from reservists’ associations: reserve duty is very lucrative for many officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) who see a significant increase in their pay when they are called up.²⁶

In addition to providing higher pay, the IDF also remain the last bastion of cohesion in a society that is increasingly inequitable in its conscription policy and in many other areas, and is also torn between right and left, Jews of all ethnic origins, religious and non-religious people, the rich and the poor, and urban and rural communities. The IDF’s cohesive role is all the more important because other cohesive factors – primarily education and the social safety net model – have crumbled, giving populism free rein. This period is not conducive to professionalization within the IDF, particularly since military strategists rely on a sizeable army to repel outside aggression, not unlikely given tensions in the region. Through the mandatory reserve system – men are called up for a month each year – the IDF can muster 642,000 men and women (177,000 personnel on active duty and 465,000 reserves) when it needs to mobilize. That means 10% of the Israeli population is in military service, a record figure that only North Korea comes close to attaining. In practice, the number of reservists that can be effectively recalled would be no more than 400,000 men, bringing the total strength the IDF can muster to 577,000 men and women.

For the military establishment, the crisis in the Arab World at least has one advantage: Israelis feel more besieged than ever, and the IDF appear as the last line of defense for an increasingly isolated country and an increasingly fragmented society. The army believes it can take back some of the power lost to politicians over the past two decades, and hopes

²⁴ Ilan Greilsammer, *Les hommes en noir : Essai sur les parties ultra-orthodoxes*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1991.

²⁵ Interview with Ilan Greilsammer, Jerusalem, April 26, 2013.

²⁶ *Ha’aretz*, April 26, 2013.

to persuade a growingly materialistic and individualistic youth to continue subscribing to the principle of long-term conscription.

By means of considerable investment in training and equipment, military leaders are trying to put an end to a patchwork army made up of a few elite units and a greater mass of widely varying caliber. They are focusing on crowd control and policing, particularly with younger conscripts, who are trained to prevent the escalation of violence that can lead to an uprising. Methods have to be adapted to recruits who are less hardened than their colleagues, or who may be ideologically indoctrinated, such as the conscientious objectors and nationalist settlers. The soldier mothers' lobby is growing in influence, asking to be kept abreast of their children's health and holding the unit commander's personal contact information so he can be called in the event of problems.²⁷ Moreover, the IDF must avoid over-representation of one particular community, such as Russian speakers in the infantry. Communication and censorship strictures must also be taken into account and relationships with the media managed intelligently: in an era where almost everyone has a smartphone, any soldier can broadcast images that could sway public opinion to the media in real time.²⁸ And military leaders must be particularly careful to maintain discipline in an individualistic society open to the influence of organized crime, as we see with recurrent arms trafficking and the recent theft of F-16 engine parts from an Israeli base.²⁹ This involves fostering command methods that are more flexible and better adapted to behavioral changes in conscripts no longer moulded by a kibbutz before entering the army, and that must clearly respect universal moral values in order to gain the hearts and minds of young soldiers who come from all parts of the world and may no longer share the same upbringing and values.³⁰

Lastly, military leaders must take into account the growing influence of nationalist religious communities (*kippot srougot*) and settlers, whose strategy is to take over the military machinery by seeking to hold as many key positions as possible and thus gain the influence needed to oppose any political decisions – such as evacuating the settlements – that run counter to their ideology.³¹ Amos Harel points out that 15% of senior officers, 25% of junior officers and one-third of the rank and file apparently have ties with settler and nationalist religious communities.³² This would become even more of an issue if the Tal Law were implemented and ultra-orthodox recruits ended up on the front lines. At present, the profiles of officers promoted to the top ranks are scrutinized with the utmost care, while orthodox recruits serve together in a few specific units, like the Kfir mechanized infantry brigade, whose operations have been specially adapted to accommodate them.

²⁷ For a detailed analysis of sociological constraints, see Stuart Cohen, *Israel and its Arm: From cohesion to confusion*, London, Routledge, 2008.

²⁸ Marc Hecker, "La communication de Tshal entre hésitations et innovations," *DSI hors-série*, No. 9, 2009, pp. 83-85.

²⁹ *Guysen Israel News*, December 6, 2012.

³⁰ Gal Hirsh, "The moral values determine the outcome," *Israel Defense*, No. 13, April 2013, pp. 8-9.

³¹ Pierre Razoux, "Une armée en pleine mutation," *DSI hors-série*, No. 9, 2009, p.16.

³² Interview with the author in Tel Aviv, April 24, 2013.

Another undesirable effect of the orthodox groups' growing influence involves the place of women in the army, recently challenged by a number of pressure groups. The role of women is being challenged even though they make up one-third of the IDF (albeit with only 2% serving in combat positions), more of them are graduating as fighter pilots each year, and a woman – Orna Barbivai – was promoted to the rank of General in 2011 for the first time. These efforts to exclude women have forced the Chief of Staff to take a stand and solemnly reaffirm his commitment to the role of women in the army. He even went so far as to hint at possible affirmative action to strengthen women's rights and career prospects in the IDF.

As we can see, the new political and diplomatic landscape in which today's IDF operates is fundamentally more complex than it was when Israel had a clearly defined enemy and a cohesive, united patriotic society, as opposed to the broad-ranging threats and fragmented society of the present day. With such challenges to face, the IDF and Israeli defense community writ large must decide on the strategies it will employ, with necessarily limited resources. If those decisions cannot be made, the effectiveness of Israel's entire military machine could well be jeopardized.

An All-Fronts Strategy

Israel's geopolitical environment has been unstable since 2011. In conjunction with the political and social changes taking place within the country, that instability is having a considerable strategic impact. Israeli strategists seem unable to make choices in the present climate of uncertainty; in fact, they seem to be doing the opposite, attempting to prepare the IDF for all eventualities. The siege mentality taking hold and intensifying in this unstable environment, along with growing anxiety about the future of the country and the region as a whole, is driving Israeli decision-makers to return to the country's original basic strategy: secure the territory while maintaining deterrence capability.

Back to Basics

Since they cannot know what form the next war will take, military leaders must prepare for all types of confrontation, including deep strikes, counterinsurgency, urban warfare, high-intensity mechanized warfare, missile interception, and naval action. To reconcile these varied challenges, each potentially requiring radically different weaponry and know-how, IDF strategists are betting the house on going back to basics. In other words, they are returning to the fundamental principles that won the Israeli army their early wars: strike hard, strike far, strike first and take the enemy by surprise; mobilize troops quickly, take the fight into enemy territory, divide your foes, keep the war short, make Israel a safe haven, and punish the enemy to stop further attack.³³ From an operational standpoint, these principles need to be founded on a series of imperatives: the country must recover confidence in itself and its leaders through example, and through a demanding training program based on the notion that an army well prepared for the worst will be better able to less demanding challenges. The IDF must regain infantry and urban warfare capability, including hand-to-hand combat; they must re-establish the synergy of combined-arms and joint operations, to some extent disregarded since the large-scale air and land operations of the 1960s to 1980s; and they must strengthen their long-range strike capability.

For some years now, efforts have focused on the infantry, policing, crowd control (where some deficiencies still remain) and doctrine, but most of all on C4I, a unit that will enable the IDF to synchronize operations more effectively with fewer troops but more firepower.

³³ Sarah Nahoum, *La doctrine d'emploi de Tsahal: entre rupture and continuité*, Doctoral thesis, CDEF, French Ministry of Defense, January 2012, p. 56.

Deep penetration capability in the form of strategic strikes is also likely to increase in the current environment. Deep strikes rely primarily on special forces and the air force, which intervene not only within the country's borders, in the occupied territories and in territories administered by the Palestinian Authority, but also further afield. In returning to the practice of launching long-range strikes, like those at Entebbe, Osirak and Tunis, the IDF are demonstrating a return to basic principles. The September 2007 strike on the Al Kibar nuclear site in Syria,³⁴ the January 2009 strike in Sudan on a truck convoy carrying arms for Hamas, and the more recent October 24, 2012 strike on a Khartoum armaments factory all serve as reminders that the Israeli government will feel free to take action wherever it deems it necessary to stop its enemies from gaining strength. Though clearly aimed at Iran, that message also carries elsewhere. All strikes are now conducted at night, require joint coordination, and involve a strong air component (including MALE and HALE drones), ground component and naval component to secure flight routes over the Mediterranean or Red Sea.

The special forces, who spearhead such missions, now comprise eight elite units specializing in counter-terrorism, reconnaissance and long-range strikes: Shaldag, an Air Force commando unit specializing in combat search-and-rescue (CSAR) missions; Shayetet 13, or Flotilla 13, a naval commando unit; Egoz, a land force commando unit in Northern Command; Duvdevan, in Central Command; Rotem, in Southern Command; Tzanhanim, a paratrooper commando unit; Yahalom, specializing in military engineering, sabotage and demolition; and Sayeret Matkal, the General Staff Reconnaissance Unit under the direct command of the IDF Chief of Staff, that takes on the most dangerous and important missions.

Two-Pronged Strategy: Bunkerization and Deterrence

After its partial failure against Hezbollah in 2006, Israel's military has found it difficult to recover from the shock of the Winograd Report that followed. The Report suggested replacing then Chief of the General Staff Dan Halutz, and decried the lack of fighting spirit in the infantry, insufficient combined-arms coordination, inconsistency in some General Staff decisions, and – an even stronger indictment – a strategy that was poorly adapted overall.³⁵ Generals Gaby Ashkenazy and Benny Gantz, who succeeded Dan Halutz at the helm of the IDF, focused on righting the ship, thus establishing conditions more conducive for Israel to launch Operation Cast Lead against Hamas in Gaza in the winter of 2008-2009. That operation did not achieve all its goals either, and was substantially criticized domestically and internationally. Nonetheless, Israel felt the operation had restored the credibility of Israel's deterrence capability.³⁶

³⁴ Pierre Razoux, "Israël frappe la Syrie : un raid mystérieux," *Politique Etrangère*, No. 1, 2008, pp. 9-22.

³⁵ Pierre Razoux, "Après l'échec, les réorientations de Tsahal depuis la deuxième guerre du Liban," *Focus stratégique*, No. 2, October 2007.

³⁶ Anthony Cordesman, "The Gaza War: A Strategic Analysis," CSIS, Washington, February 2009; Pierre Razoux, "Une armée en pleine mutation," *DSI hors-série*, No. 9, 2009.

Meanwhile, Arab revolutions and the geopolitical disruptions that followed have once again been engendering uncertainty in Israel. While it waits for the region to become more readable, the Israeli government is playing for time and working faster on building and renovating protective walls around its territory. In the south, the new security barrier that runs along Israel's border is almost complete, lacking only a ten-kilometer stretch at the Taba border crossing. Its purpose is to prevent terrorist infiltration into the Negev Desert and limit traffic from the Sinai, and it has proved very effective. In two years, the number of illegal immigrants – mostly of African origin – entering Israel has dropped from 30,000 to a few dozen, while jihadists are finding it impossible to do anything other than shoot rockets across the border.³⁷ On the coast, the sea blockade and land iron curtain isolating the Gaza Strip have remained impermeable, though they cannot prevent missiles from being launched against Israel, as Hamas demonstrated during Operation Pillar of Defense. At the country's centre, the wall running through the West Bank is being extended. It has caused a widespread outcry, but by virtue of restricting and very stringently controlling Palestinian movements inside Israel it has drastically reduced the number of terrorist attacks in the country, and drawn new lines that someday might serve as borders for the two states. In the north, the security barrier running along the Syrian border is being strengthened and updated: it is being systematically wire-fenced, reinforced, raised to a height of five meters, and equipped with sophisticated sensors, monitoring posts and firing posts. Israeli leaders contend that jihadists, who are growing in number at the edge of the Golan Heights, constitute a direct threat to the country's security, particularly if the Bashar al-Assad regime falls. The barrier between Israel and Lebanon is continuously maintained to prevent any infiltration into Israel. The entire structure, which receives priority funding directly from the army's budget, should be completed by the end of 2013.

To strengthen this “bunkerization” policy, the Israeli government is unceasingly engaged in efforts to lend credibility to its deterrence strategy, which it envisions as the actions and measures collectively designed to persuade its potential enemies that hostile action against Israel is useless. From the conventional standpoint, the message is the same as that conveyed by operations Cast Lead and Pillar of Defense against Hamas, and by the reprisals Israel has threatened against Lebanon should Hezbollah decide to attack Israel again. Deputy Chief of Staff Eizenkot is one of the fathers of the Dahya Doctrine, established after the 2006 war and named for a Shi'ite neighborhood in Beirut that was under Hezbollah control and devastated by Israeli bombs during the war. The message is simple: since Hezbollah is now an integral part of the Lebanese government, it is the State of Lebanon as a whole that will be targeted if the Shi'ite militia renews hostilities against Israel and Israel strikes back.³⁸ The air strikes in Syria on January 13, May 3 and May 5, 2013 carried the same message, and were intended to prevent chemical and highly sophisticated weapons, such as ballistic, anti-tank, anti-aircraft and anti-surface ship missiles, from falling into the wrong hands – particularly Hezbollah's. From the non-conventional standpoint, the same message is found in President

³⁷ Confirmed to the author by security leaders.

³⁸ Jean-Loup Samaan, “The Dahya Concept and Israeli Military Posture vis-a-vis Hezbollah since 2006,” *Comparative Strategy* (Spring 2013 – in press).

Shimon Peres' enigmatic warning: "I advise our enemies against underestimating our overt and covert military capabilities."³⁹ His statements are all the more meaningful since he established Israel's nuclear program, and is among those who maintain that Israel would gain credibility by openly taking on its role as a nuclear power.

According to estimates, Israel's strategic forces are comprised of three squadrons of mobile surface-to-surface (SSM) ballistic missiles, probably fielding a total of about 50 *Jericho* II, IIB and III missiles with an average range of 1,400, 2,000 and 7,000 kilometers, respectively.⁴⁰ An improved version of the *Jericho* III with an extended 10,000-km range is reportedly under development.⁴¹ Though older and now-obsolete *Jericho* I missiles have probably been taken out of service, some *Jericho* II and III missiles could have been modified by replacing the nuclear warhead with a hardened penetrating warhead for conventional strikes against underground and highly protected targets.

In addition to ballistic missiles, Israel also has combat aircraft to deploy its reputed 200-nuclear-warhead arsenal.⁴² Given not only the technical and political constraints but also the cost of maintaining an operational nuclear arsenal, Israel need not keep a large number of nuclear weapons. Eighty would certainly be sufficient to provide an effective deterrent, and it is likely that Israel has updated and miniaturized the devices it has. The IDF also have Israeli-designed *Delilah* and *Popeye* Turbo cruise missiles – Washington has never let them have *Tomahawks* – that could be carried on three (soon to be four) German Type 800 *Dolphin*-class submarines with air-independent propulsion systems. The missiles have a range of several hundred kilometers and can carry a miniaturized nuclear warhead,⁴³ in theory giving Israel the ideal strategic triad of ballistic missiles, air delivery capability, and submarine launchers – hence second-strike capability. In practice, there is doubt that the submarine leg of the triad is fully operational: three submarines are not sufficient to give Israel a standing operational presence at sea, while the fourth will probably still be in Germany until the end of 2013, and even more probably until the spring of 2014. The fifth will likely not reach Israel until 2015 at best, and the sixth – still not officially purchased – would be delivered to Israel only in 2018 to replace the first, which will probably be out of service by then. Israel's three existing submarines are already being used to full capacity in non-conventional missions, particularly intelligence and commando infiltration and exfiltration. Their somewhat makeshift anchorage at the Haifa Naval Base do not allow them to prepare for the complex management of nuclear

³⁹ *Guysen Israel News*, September 4, 2012.

⁴⁰ Jean-Louis Promé, "Une dissuasion nucléaire fonctionnant sans arsenal nucléaire ?," *DSI hors-série*, No. 9, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-47. The range of these missiles is a function of the mass – and hence the power – of the warhead carried.

⁴¹ Anshel Pfeffer, "IDF test-fires ballistic missile in central Israel," *Ha'aretz*, November 2, 2011.

⁴² *Military Balance 2012*, IISS, London, Routledge, pp. 328-331; Philippe Wodka-Gallien (dir.), *Dictionnaire de la dissuasion*, Marines éditions, 2011, pp. 195-196.

⁴³ If we are to believe the very well informed *Federation of American Scientists* site, in May 2000 a modified *Popeye* Turbo launched by an Israeli submarine cruising in the Indian Ocean apparently reached a target located 1,500 km away. The article can be found at the following link: <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/israel/missile/popeye-t.htm>.

procedures, and this may be one of the reasons that recently prompted the Israeli administration to authorize construction of a new naval base for the submarines.⁴⁴ In any case, while it waits for the submarine component to be properly operational, Israel is no doubt gradually putting in place the tools for a nuclear deterrence strategy aimed at Iran, on the assumption that Iran will acquire a nuclear bomb or – should it choose to remain simply on the nuclear threshold – at least achieve the technological capability to build one quickly.

A Continuing Goal: Territorial Sanctuarization

Paradoxically, Israel has never had as powerful and as technologically advanced an array of tools as it has now, yet the government finds it increasingly difficult to guarantee the sanctuarization of its territory, which – as Hezbollah and Hamas demonstrated in 2006, 2008 and 2012 – remains vulnerable to rocket fire and missile attack. Israelis, accustomed as they are to military efficiency and effective security, fail to understand why the IDF is unable to intercept commonplace rockets and mortar shells, when the very concept of sanctuarization is a pillar of Israel's strategic doctrine and no bombs fell on a major Israeli city during the Arab-Israeli wars.⁴⁵ Nor do Israelis understand why their security and intelligence services are unable to stop suicide bombers in spite of having state-of-the-art tools. But *fedayeen* suicide missions were unknown in the battles against the PLO, even when those battles were at their height. Basically, what Israelis do not understand is that the circumstances have changed, and that the people of Israel are now a target that is far more attractive and vulnerable than the smallest military unit. The paradigm has been turned on its head. Israel's enemies no longer have to shoot down a plane or blow up a tank to sway public opinion and force negotiations; all they need to do is harass Israelis and make their lives untenable. Armored divisions and fighter-bomber squadrons then become useless, unless they engage in massive reprisals that only exacerbate Israel's unpopularity and isolation.

To counter that asymmetric logic, the Israeli administration is developing a two-pronged political and technological strategy. First, it is reviving its settlement policy to bolster its credibility with ultra-nationalists – the only groups it truly fears – and to show Palestinian activists that shooting rockets into Israel is counter-productive. Second, it is speeding up work on establishing a multilevel missile defense system designed to protect city dwellers against projectiles of all kinds. Tactically, missile defense is based on the Iron Dome system, designed to intercept rockets as well as short- and medium-range missiles launched from the Gaza Strip, Southern Lebanon or any territories under the control of a terrorist organization. The system earned its laurels recently: during Operation Pillar of Defense, it apparently shot down 35% of projectiles launched against Israel and 85% of projectiles believed to have targeted major cities.⁴⁶ It is

⁴⁴ "Elbit Systems to construct a new submarine base in Haifa," *Israel Defense*, No. 13, April 2013, p. 69.

⁴⁵ Except Iraqi *Scud* missiles launched into Israel during the Second Gulf War in 1990-1991.

⁴⁶ *Reuters*, November 19, 2012. A first study (*Perspectives Papers*, No. 151) published on October 24, 2011 par the Bar Ilan University BESA Center in Tel Aviv

based on five launcher batteries deployed to provide the country's main urban areas with maximum protection. A sixth late-generation battery is slated for delivery in the summer of 2013, and during his visit President Barack Obama apparently seemed in favor of having Congress fund more. Though it is quite efficient, the system is disadvantaged by its high operating cost: each missile costs some \$40,000, and it takes several to shoot down a rocket salvo costing no more than a few hundred dollars. At that price, ammunition stocks could quickly become depleted.

In the Israeli theatre, air defense is provided by six upgraded *Hawk* and four *Patriot* PAC 2 missile batteries, each made up of several firing units. As of the end of 2013, the aging missiles will gradually be replaced by twelve batteries in the brand-new David's Sling system.⁴⁷ The system was successfully tested⁴⁸ during Israel's last confrontation with Hamas, which also served to showcase the Israeli defense industry.⁴⁹

At the strategic level, three *Arrow 2* missile batteries are in place for the endoatmospheric interception of ballistic missiles that could be launched from Iran, Syria or Saudi Arabia; the *Arrow 2* can destroy its target at a distance of 150 km from Israeli territory. This protection bubble completes Israel's nuclear deterrence strategy, particularly with regard to countries like Iran. The bubble is not completely impenetrable, however: on October 6, 2012, the anniversary of the surprise Arab attack during the Yom Kippur War, Hezbollah managed to send a drone close to the Dimona nuclear power station before it was shot down by an Israeli F-16 fighter. The drone had been detected as soon as it crossed the Israel-Lebanon border, but because of its low velocity and small size the fighter sent to intercept it lost it on radar before finding it again and destroying it. On April 25, 2013, the Israeli fighter planes made up for it by bringing down another Hezbollah drone, this time off the coast at Haifa.

These days, the Achilles heel of Israel's missile defense system is Eilat, a seaside resort on the Red Sea. Eilat is highly symbolic because of the many tourists who bring foreign currency into Israel's coffers and personify the image of security that the Israeli government seeks to project abroad. However, its protection is hindered by a number of technical, legal and political constraints. First, the geographic configuration of Eilat, a narrow strip with mountains on its Egyptian side, partially masking the trajectories of rockets launched by jihadist fighters concealed nearby, reduces the time available for the Iron Dome to intercept incoming missiles and hence reduces its effectiveness. Moreover, under the Camp David

and taking account of operational results achieved during the April 2011 skirmishes indicated that the system's successful interception score was about 90%.

⁴⁷ The last-generation autonomous surface-to-air missiles were built through a joint venture between the Israeli firm *Rafael* and the American company *Raytheon* and are capable of intercepting any hostile aircraft within a range of 250km.

⁴⁸ "David's Sling success caught on film," *The Times of Israel*, November 27, 2012.

⁴⁹ Israel, which exports 80% of its the weapons it produces, is now the fifth-largest arms exporting country. The high interception rate of the Iron Dome system should also make it easier for Israel to export it more easily. On that point, Vincent Lamigeon wrote; "Ce qu'on ne dit pas sur l'opération militaire d'Israël à Gaza," *Challenges*, November 21, 2012.

Peace Accord, missiles cannot be deployed around Eilat, even for defensive purposes, because the area running along the Egyptian border is supposed to be a demilitarized zone. Lastly, the Israeli authorities are showing restraint because they do not wish to provoke Egypt needlessly; they know that any missiles launched by the Iron Dome would explode inside Egyptian territory, at a time when some members of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood government are looking for an excuse to revisit the Camp David Accord. Salafi and jihadist groups in Egypt and Gaza are well aware of this, and are apparently determined to increase the pressure on Israel by targeting Eilat, seeking to sow enough discord to make Israel and Egypt turn their backs on the peace treaty. Israeli and Egyptian military intelligence agencies therefore work closely together to defuse any misunderstandings in advance. The two services deal with each other directly, managing border incidents in real time. Israel apparently also provides Egypt with space and drone imaging capability so that the Egyptian government can fight jihadists more effectively. And, according to senior Israeli officials, it seems security cooperation between Israel and Egypt has not been this close since the end of Hosni Mubarak's regime.⁵⁰

In view of the broad range of threats it faces and the adoption of an all-encompassing national security strategy, the IDF must adapt both the structure of their constituent forces and their capacity choices. This paper will now examine the capacity choices of Israel's defense policy by considering the ongoing changes in the military.

⁵⁰ Statements made in Israel to the author, from April 20 to 26, 2013.

A Military System in Transition

Unlike other countries in the region and in the West, and unlike any other democracy since the end of the Cold War, Israel continues maintaining a powerful and well-equipped military. The continuing strategic uncertainty and the desire to be prepared for the full spectrum of conflict place a heavy burden of responsibility on the IDF, which can be discharged only at the price of considerable financial and human effort. The existing structure, which was forged when the enemy was obvious and clearly identified, must now evolve; it must become more flexible and develop multiple capabilities, while retaining the critical mass needed for effective defense. Each of the IDF's major components – the high command, ground forces, air force, navy and perhaps future cyber force – must therefore adapt both their structures and their skills to meet the challenges ahead.

Horizontal High Command Structure

To steer the IDF through the challenges they face, Moshe Ya'alon and Danny Danon will be relying on four generals, who together control the entire military institution: Benny Gantz⁵¹ (age 54), Chief of the General Staff, has had his term extended until 2015; Gadi Eizenkot⁵² (age 53), was appointed Deputy Chief of Staff in March 2013 and is directly in charge of the army's general headquarters (GHQ); Aviv Kochavi⁵³ (age 48), is

⁵¹ Benny Gantz, a paratrooper and expert on the Lebanese front – where he served a number of times – can boast of genuine experience in counterinsurgency. Unlike his predecessor, Gaby Ashkanazi, he is as comfortable on the ground as in political and diplomatic circles, and showed it during his 2005-2009 term in Washington as Defense Attaché, when he built networks of contacts that would be very valuable to his career. An opportunist with great political savvy, he was careful to build a cordial relationship with Benjamin Netanyahu, whose views he does not all necessarily share. Gantz is generally seen as a sound all-round man rather than a brilliant one. Detractors believe he lacks strategic vision, though they recognise his genuine ability to compromise, an ability he has used to consolidate his position.

⁵² As Ehud Barak himself concedes, Gadi Eizenkot – who was Barak's Military Assistant when Barak was Prime Minister – is the most talented officer of his generation. A member of the prestigious Golani Infantry Brigade he commanded, Eizenkot is of Sephardic origin. Short and easy-going, he is both witty and shrewd, and adept at gaining the loyalty of his troops and subordinates. Peers acknowledge his strategic ability and remarkable operational experience, while his in-depth knowledge of the northern front could prove extremely valuable if the IDF were to wage a new war against Lebanon. Able to gain the liking of all those he encounters, even journalists, he could end up as an excellent Minister of Defense if he were to enter politics.

⁵³ Aviv Kochavi joined the army during the First Lebanon War in 1982. Originally a paratrooper, he moved to Intelligence and Special Forces, where he then spent his

Director of Aman, the Military Intelligence Directorate; Amir Eshel (age 54), is Commander of the Israeli Air Force and as such responsible for everything in the IDF that flies in air and space, including aircraft, helicopters, drones and satellites. A renowned fighter pilot (he has flown the A-4, Super Phantom, F-16 and F-15) and son of Holocaust survivors, Eshel led the F-15 formation that flew over the Auschwitz death camp in 2003, promising to be the shield of the Jewish people in the event of a new Holocaust. Since then, as the man responsible for planning air operations, he has done everything to ensure that the Air Force is in readiness to strike at Iran if the Israeli Prime Minister gives the order. There is no doubt that his presence in the foursome of generals helps convince observers that, even if the IDF's priority is to prepare for war against Hamas, Hezbollah and the jihadist movement, they nonetheless remain ready to strike Iran. A fifth man, General Ehud Shani, also plays a crucial role as Director General at the Ministry of Defense, by overseeing the Ministry as a whole and interfacing between civilians and military personnel. In that capacity, he has acted as chief of staff for the Minister's office and secretary general for the administration. Also of Sephardic origin, he is a former tank brigade commander whose focus is now on cyber-defense. Considered left of centre and very close to former Minister Ehud Barak, Shani nonetheless exercised his right to retire. His successor has not yet been designated, but will undoubtedly be someone close to the Minister.

If we are to believe Amos Harel, only rarely has Israel had such a team of brilliant and competent generals at the helm of the IDF at the same time, with no scandal to taint day-to-day management.⁵⁴ Paradoxically, the team's excellence is in itself a handicap of sorts because it exacerbates egos and rivalries, especially when it comes to designating Benny Gantz' successor as COGS – even though the general view is that General Gadi Eizenkot at present seems best placed to succeed him.⁵⁵ Amir Eshel, nicknamed “Napoleon” by fellow officers, would certainly like to invalidate former Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi's 2007 statement that an airman would never again be at the head of the IDF after General Dan Haloutz' controversial term; General Haloutz' “all-air” strategy during the Second Lebanon War in 2006 had been strongly criticized.

entire career. A polyglot of Sephardic origin, he is cheerful, shrewd and an excellent communicator, as well as admired by his peers for his rare intelligence, genuine vision and undeniable charisma. Kochavi's successful management of the IDF's unilateral retreat from the Gaza Strip in 2005 fast-tracked his career and in 2010 propelled him to the helm of Military Intelligence, where he became responsible for a sensitive area: managing consequences to the IDF of the Arab revolution, Syria's civil war, and Iran's accelerated nuclear program. On the latter issue he demonstrated great caution, preferring to advocate stronger sanctions and covert action, article available at: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/03/14/what-the-head-of-israel-s-military-intelligence-thinks-of-iran.html>. Many experts believe he has the potential to become Chief of Staff in 2018.

⁵⁴ Interview with the author in Tel Aviv, on April 24, 2013. Gaby Ashkenazi, the previous Chief of Staff, is under investigation in connection with the Harpaz leaks and charges of defamation to influence the choice of his successor.

⁵⁵ General Yair Naveh (age 55), until very recently Deputy Chief of Staff before he entered the private sector through the “revolving door,” is apparently also running. Naveh, a former infantryman with experience in urban and guerrilla warfare who has held all top operational positions, could be an ideal candidate if the IDF were to face a massive Palestinian insurrection.

In spite of the multiple reform plans that have succeeded one another in recent years – Catapult, Tefen/Kela and Halamish – the General Staff, which is under the direct authority of the Chief of the General Staff and his Deputy, remains a horizontal structure designed to achieve maximum responsiveness.⁵⁶

The horizontal structure may facilitate exchange and synergy, but has the disadvantage of engendering internecine quarrels that take the Chief of Staff and his Deputy a considerable portion of their time to manage. There is, however, one area in which coordination appears to be excellent: forward analysis, now shared between the Ministry of Defense Strategic Analysis unit,⁵⁷ under the direction of the indestructible Amos Gilad,⁵⁸ and the General Staff Strategic Planning unit. The forward analysis function is strengthened by the close ties between both units and the Tel Aviv Institute for National Security Studies (INSS - formerly the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies), the Israeli think-tank most advanced on strategic and security issues. The INSS is currently headed by former Aman Director Amos Yadlin and his deputy Udi Dekel, formerly a high-ranking officer in the military intelligence community. Dekel regularly organizes high-level seminars on strategic issues relating to the future of the Near East, as well as on new forms of conflict.

The Deep Action Corps, a horizontal command established in December 2011 and specializing in deep action, owes its existence far more to an intimidation strategy aimed at Iran than to a real shift in operational methods.⁵⁹ The command, which has remained largely an empty shell, is headed by General Shai Avital, former head of the covert action unit Sayeret Matkal. His mandate appears to be coordinating covert action targeting Iran's nuclear program, but in no way involves planning and orchestrating possible strikes against Iran; those remain under the purview of the General Staff.

The Inevitable Reduction in Ground Forces

The 2008-2012 Kela Plan, established after the 2006 war, recommended a significant reduction in the largely overstaffed ground forces, particularly in armored reserve divisions of dubious effectiveness. However, the Arab revolution disrupted – at least initially – the planning of Israeli strategists who fear threats on all fronts. They say they are now seeing things more

⁵⁶ A detailed description of the General Staff is provided in Appendix I. Source: official IDF website, available at: www.idf.il.

⁵⁷ In France, the equivalent would be DAS (the Delegation for Strategic Affairs) at the Ministry of Defense, or CAPS (the Centre for Analysis, Planning and Strategy) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

⁵⁸ Amos Gilad (age 58) has for several years been one of the most influential men in Israel's security machinery, in charge of discreet mission with interlocutors both recognised and unrecognised by the Israeli government. An intelligence professional, he is apparently on the way out because he is considered too close to former Defense Minister Ehud Barak, to whom he owes a great deal.

⁵⁹ Marc Henry, "Israel se dote d'une nouvelle force de frappe contre l'Iran," *Le Figaro*, December 19, 2011.

clearly.⁶⁰ Two of their major fears seem to have evaporated: a conventional military assault by Egypt through the Sinai Peninsula, and a joint Arab attack on all other fronts. Driven by severe budgetary constraints, the IDF General Staff seems bent on continuing to reduce the military strength, especially because it will at some point have to renovate its dilapidated barracks and severely aging infrastructure. The manpower reduction policy will be implemented in the near future through a new action plan for 2013-2017. For now, the ground forces (125,000 on active duty and several hundred thousand reserves⁶¹) still comprise 16 divisions: two active armored divisions facing Syria and Jordan, six partially mobilized divisions (the armored, paratrooper and particularly the mechanized territorial infantry divisions), and eight armored reserve divisions.⁶²

As the process unfolds, at least three armored reserve divisions (probably the 340th, 380th and 560th) equipped with obsolete weapons – *Merkava* 1 and M60 tanks – should be dissolved, thus bringing the number of divisions down to thirteen. On April 26, 2013, the daily newspaper *Ha'aretz* took up the story, announcing the demobilization of tens of thousands of reserve troops and the disbanding of several large armored reserve units deemed unnecessary and too costly. The trend is towards rationalizing equipment, strengthening infantry units and reinforcing mechanized units by systematically equipping them with armored infantry combat vehicles (AICVs) of the *Namer*, *Achzarit*, *Nakpadon* and *Nagmachon* type, all of which have a combat tank chassis, as well as Puma infantry fighting vehicles. The underlying tactical rationale is the steamroller principle and the protection of combat personnel. Active forces comprise five armored brigades (the 7th, 188th, 264th, 401th and 460th), five mechanized brigades (the 1st, Golani; 2nd, Carmeli; 84th, Givati; 900th, Kfir; and 933rd, Nahal), a paratrooper brigade (the 35th) and three artillery brigades (the 209th, 212th and 215th), one of which is equipped with 30 227 mm M270 multiple launch rocket systems. The units comprise 600 *Mark* 3 and 4 *Merkava* tanks, 765 AICVs, 500 M113A2 personnel carriers and 250 155 mm M109A5 self-propelled howitzers. Even though the units can be engaged by brigade, they are increasingly being formed into tactical groups established as needed to best meet mission imperatives, for example urban combat in the event of action against the West Bank or Gaza Strip. The territorial units comprise sixteen mechanized infantry brigades equipped with M113s, and partially mobilized; frequently, one or two of the three battalions that traditionally make up an infantry unit will be mobilized. They are deployed along the borders, near sensitive areas, or at checkpoints where Palestinians cross. The reserve units – sixteen armored, eight mechanized, eight artillery and two paratrooper brigades – which can in theory be mobilized within 72 hours, are equipped with 1,700 tanks (930 *Merkava* mark 1, 2 and 3; 110 *Magach*-7 and 660 M60), 4,500 M113 personnel carriers and 580 pieces of artillery stockpiled in depots around the country. In all, the IDF thus has 64 combat brigades, 37 of which have the capability of conducting offensive action in enemy territory. By 2020, the

⁶⁰ Conversations in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, April 2013.

⁶¹ Unless otherwise indicated, the figures in this article are sourced from conversations and interviews conducted by the author in Israel, and do not necessarily correspond to those in *Military Balance 2012*, which is cited as a reference but whose figures have been updated.

⁶² For further detail, see the table in Appendix 2.

five armored and five mechanized brigades of active-duty personnel making up the ground forces' immediately available hard core should be equipped with 700 *Merkava* 4 tanks and 660 *Namer* AICVs with a *Merkava* chassis, all fitted with the TROPHY active protection system (APS) to minimize the likelihood of hits from anti-tank missiles.⁶³

Though there is no strict rule for this and some “historical” brigades contain up to six battalions, most brigades generally adopt a ternary structure, with three combat battalions and one or two support battalions providing military engineering and anti-tank combat capability. In the event of offensive action, the armored brigades would not act alone, but would coordinate closely with mechanized brigades tasked with clearing the territory and attacking entrenched enemy positions, including the chain of fortified villages held by Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon, on the hills facing Israel. On that score, the cover article in the last issue of *Israel Defense* is very evocative: “*The IDF prepares for future confrontations on the new Northern Front*,” (April 2013). In that perspective, the paratrooper brigades are supposed to conduct deep operations to encircle the enemy – Hezbollah – and cut it off from its operating bases in the neighborhoods south of Beirut and in the Bekaa Valley. The paratrooper brigades are in fact air mobile units carried by Israel’s impressive fleet of 48 S-70 and 35 CH-53 utility helicopters, slated for eventual replacement CH-53K *Super Stallions*, and supported by some fifteen tactical transport aircraft (twelve C-130E/Hs and three C-130Js) deployed by the IAF. In fact, the IDF has long since lost the know-how for airborne operations; the last dates back to the Six-Day War. Since the Yom Kippur War, Israel has deployed its “paratroopers” either by helicopter or by air landed assault, as in the Entebbe operation.

The infantry’s standard weaponry remains primarily made in Israel. It includes the *Jericho* 941 9 mm pistol; *Mini Uzi* 9 mm submachine gun; *Tavor* and *Galil* 5.56 mm assault rifles; *Negev* 5.56 and 7.62 mm light machine guns; *Galatz* and SR-25 7.62 mm sniper rifles; *MATADOR* 90 mm rocket launchers, developed in conjunction with Singapore; *Spike* and *Nimrod* anti-tank missiles; and *Soltam* M-65 120 mm mortars.⁶⁴ There are two reasons for Israel’s preference: first, it wants to remain self-reliant and equip its ground forces with guns, tanks and armored vehicles without having to depend on any other country; and second, it needs to promote its defense industry, which remains one of the country’s principal sources of foreign currency, accounting for 17.2% of industrial exports in 2010.⁶⁵

⁶³ The distribution of combat brigades in the ground forces is indicated in the table in Appendix 3.

⁶⁴ However, the United States provide the Israeli infantry with all its portable Stinger surface-to-air missiles, Barrett 12.7 mm counter-sniper rifles and unbeatable Browning 12.7 mm heavy machine guns.

⁶⁵ Jacques Bendelac, “Du dirigisme militaro-industriel au libéralisme civil: l’économie israélienne dans tous ses états,” *Politique Etrangère*, No. 1, 2013, p. 46.

Rationalizing Air and Space Assets

With 40,000 active personnel and as many reserves, the Israeli Air Force (IAF - *Heyl Ha'Avir*) remains the spearhead of the IDF, regardless of whether operations involve fighter bombers, attack helicopters, electronic warfare aircraft, drones, observation satellites, or – as often happens – all five at the same time. To maximize coordination of all the assets available, the General Staff has established an integrated air and space command modeled on the US Air Force Space Command, thereby further increasing the synergy between Israel and the United States. The new command, headed by General Amir Eshel, oversees the entire IAF, the Palmachim air force base and spaceport south of Tel Aviv, the reconnaissance and communication satellites orbiting Earth – *Ofeq 7*, *TecSAR 8-9*, *Eros B* and *Amos 5-6*⁶⁶ – the missile defense batteries, and the ballistic and airborne components of the strategic forces. It is all the more effective for its direct link to the US Air Force Space Command GQH at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado, which monitors Israeli airspace and can take over in coordinating hostile missile interception. Coordination is all the easier because the US has a radar station, part of the US missile defense shield, at Mount Keren in the Negev.⁶⁷ It should be noted, however, that the IDF would nonetheless have sufficient autonomy to conduct an operation deemed politically sensitive without outside assistance.

In order to limit the huge cost of the IAF, which takes up just over 50% of the defense budget, the General Staff have been obliged to reduce the number of squadrons and combat aircraft, as well as keep the variety of aircraft to a minimum to rationalize logistics and maintenance. Fifteen years ago the IAF comprised 19 fighter squadrons, 450 combat aircraft of five different kinds, and 150 others in reserve. Those numbers have been pared down to 300 combat aircraft (solely late-generation or upgraded F-15s and F-16s) in twelve squadrons,⁶⁸ on six large air bases: one, Ramat David, in the north; two, Hatzor and Tel Nof, in the centre; and three, Hatzirim, Nevatim and Ramon, in the south of the country.⁶⁹ The number of reserve fighters has been cut by half, and now includes 75 F-16s A/B *Netz*, with the 116th, 140th and 144th squadrons. Similarly, the IAF now has only 75 attack helicopters, down from 120: 45 AH-64 *Apache* and 30 AH-1 *Cobra*, with the 113th, 190th, 160th and 161th squadrons. In line with the same savings rationale, the IAF has just acquired 30 Aermacchi M-346 *Masters* from Italy to renew its training aircraft fleet; they were significantly cheaper than the US competitors' product.

⁶⁶ The Israeli aerospace industry is now working on the *Ofeq 10* and *11* satellites, which will have three times the visual field and twice the resolution at a 600-km altitude than the current generation, *Ofeq 7* and *9*. The first of the two satellites could be launched at the end of 2013.

⁶⁷ Karl Vick & Aaron Klein, "How a US Radar Station in the Negev affects a potential Israel-Iran Clash," *Time Magazine*, 30 May 2012.

⁶⁸ The distribution of air assets among fighter squadrons is provided in Appendix 4.

⁶⁹ Sde Dov, a small air base near Tel Aviv, is used solely by small liaison, observation and intelligence-gathering aircraft. The Ovda base, located at the southern end of the Negev and close to Eilat, is used primarily as a holding facility, where old combat aircraft kept in reserve can be stored under good climatic conditions.

Most fighter bombers have been optimized for long-range strikes, particularly the F-15B/D and F-16D two-seaters, which provide support for the F-15I and F-16I aircraft designed specifically for such missions. Their pilots train on them regularly, freely flying along the Mediterranean and Red Sea coasts to demonstrate their ability to reach far-flung targets. If necessary, the IAF could launch up to 230 attack aircraft sited 1,500 kilometers away from the target. The aircraft, which are also formidable fighters, have the capability to protect themselves. Some of them could be refueled in flight with the 120th Squadron's fleet of three Lockheed KC-130s and seven Boeing KC-707s, thus extending their range two- or threefold. A contract for the delivery of three US KC-135s is reportedly being finalized between Tel Aviv and Washington. For raids, the fighter bombers and tanker planes would certainly be accompanied by the IAF's five Gulfstream G-550 *Nachshon* flight monitoring and intelligence-gathering aircraft – soon to be seven with the two additional units just ordered⁷⁰ – which will detect and blind all airborne enemy offensives. To maximize the surprise factor and minimize the enemy's response capability, strikes of this kind would be carried out at night with the help of night-vision equipment provided to all navigation personnel, and would doubtless follow on the heels of a cyber-attack designed to neutralize all enemy computer system. Moreover, without going as far afield, the IAF is always ready to strike at any potential ground threat from the Golan Heights, should Syria's government take precipitate action and risk all.

It is the drones sector that has expanded most, however. Three squadrons – the 166th, 200th and 210th – based on Palmachim and Tel Nof comprise eight MALE *Heron* drones, two HALE *Hermes* 900 drones, 20 drones each equipped with two Hellfire anti-tank missiles, and at least four *Heron TP*, Eitan drones with long-range strike capability. The drones, which are remote-controlled by young trainee pilots who receive one additional year of training, enable the IAF to conduct many more surveillance and combat missions than would otherwise be possible. The missions are very largely automated, with computer-assisted take-off, cruising and landing; the two operators involved manage only the missions' operational component. To retain the human element and prevent missions of this kind from taking on the feel of video games, each mission is closely monitored by a controller who ensures compliance with procedures as well as with combat ethics. Drones are certainly limited in their means of attack, but their staying power – which often tops 48 hours – and the low vulnerability afforded by their small size make it substantially more difficult for anyone on the ground to escape their ultrahigh-performance sensors.

For Israeli strategists, drones – particularly armed drones – represent the future, and their place in the IAF will therefore certainly continue to grow. That vision makes a great deal of sense in terms of efficiency, cost, autonomy and political constraints. Given the narrow shape of the country and the physical closeness of the various theatres, drones are especially suitable for surveillance and one-off strikes. Moreover, in spite of its high-tech equipment and sophisticated projectiles – missiles and laser-guided bombs – a drone remains much cheaper than a combat plane, especially when maintenance, fuel, and investment in pilot training are

⁷⁰ "Two new *Nachshon* Aircraft for the IAF," *Israel Defense*, No. 13, April 2013, p. 60.

factored in. Being the leader in this field also helps Israel achieve greater strategic independence, because it uses devices that it designs and builds itself. Lastly, using drones makes it possible for Israel to avoid needlessly risking the lives of its pilots – not for fear of losing crews, a risk it has always been prepared to take, but for fear of having them captured and used for barter or pressure. The Ron Arad syndrome, which takes its name from a navigator who ejected over Southern Lebanon and has been missing for the past 30 years, coupled with more recent events like the abduction of Gilad Shalit, have had a traumatic effect on the public and political authorities. They fear that Israeli pilots will be put on display in Damascus or Teheran, before being publicly executed or exchanged for hundreds of enemy fighters. The fear is so stark that young IDF officers no longer hesitate to sign public petitions asking that they not be exchanged if they are captured, implying that they would not let themselves be taken alive. Some pilots are even debating whether they should be wearing parachutes at all if they are to engage over Iran.⁷¹ Contrary to the debate taking shape in the West, philosophical discussions on the morality or justice of using drones are simply not being heard in Israel at this time and in these circumstances.

In the foreseeable future, close air support will no doubt be provided solely by drones and combat helicopters. Operation Pillar of Defense was a good predictor of the form this will take: at the time, the IDF did not hesitate to deploy some twenty drones simultaneously over the Gaza Strip, supported by about fifteen attack helicopters. The F-16s were restricted to bombing the Philadelphia axis running along the border to destroy tunnels of communication with Egypt. During the operation, drones charged with monitoring the sector and designating targets remained at medium and high altitudes, out of Hamas' range, while armed drones and combat helicopters flying out of the nearby Palmachim base approached unseen over the sea and took the enemy by surprise. In fact, when they do not require heavier weaponry even long-range strike missions could be conducted by *Eitan*-type armed drones. Drones have a similar appeal for the Navy, with coastal and sea approach surveillance increasingly being conducted by them, especially by *Orbiter* UAVs.⁷² The IDF has shown that a single drone operator is more efficient and far more cost-effective than a naval patrol crew manning a *Sea Panther* helicopter or *Sea Scan* aircraft. According to retired Brigadier General Iftach Spector, an ace pilot with fourteen victories to his credit who has commanded the IAF's Planning and Forward Analysis directorates, by 2030 the IAF will have only five fighter squadrons (two for air superiority, ideally equipped with F-22s if the US agrees to export the aircraft, and three with deep strike capability, equipped with F-35s), supported by a larger number of utility and combat helicopters and especially by many – probably over a hundred – drones.⁷³ The goal would be for the IAF to end up with the following asset ratios: one-third combat aircraft, one-third helicopters, and one-third drones.

⁷¹ Statements collected by the author from former pilots.

⁷² "The Israeli Navy is expanding its use of the Orbiter UAV," *Israel Defense*, No. 13, April 2013, p. 60.

⁷³ Interview with the author in Tel Aviv, on July 5, 2012.

In spite of the growing importance of drones, the IAF still attracts as many – on a par with special operations forces – young Israelis who choose to serve with them if they do well enough on psychomotor tests. Each year, a percentage of licensed pilots specialize in operating drones.

New Missions for the Navy

Substantial gas reserves were discovered off southeastern Cyprus, arousing keen interest from many quarters, and Israel has been exploiting them since early 2013. With Tamar and Leviathan – the two fields claimed by Israel – alone containing some 700 billion cubic meters of natural gas, Israel could envisage becoming energy independent in the medium term.⁷⁴ Israel and other countries in the region quickly staked control over the fields, announcing plans to deploy prospecting vessels to impose their sovereignty. Turkey took a strong stance, all the more unforgiving because it criticizes Israel for coming to an agreement with the Republic of Cyprus, which Turkey does not recognize, to export part of the gas extracted from the two fields. The IDF is thus considering the fields' defense a priority⁷⁵ and thereby raising the visibility of the Navy, heretofore seen as the Army's "poor relative." The Navy, commanded by Admiral Ram Rothberg⁷⁶ (age 49), must at the same time continue to discharge its other duties: defending Israeli coastlines; maintaining the blockade of the Palestinian and Lebanese coasts, by intercepting not only vessels carrying arms for Hamas and Hezbollah but also "peace flotilla" vessels seeking to reach Gaza; and deploying the submarine fleet on intelligence-gathering and combat diver transport missions.

The Navy comprises 8,500 personnel on active duty and 11,500 reserves. It has three submarines (the *Dolphin*, *Leviathan* and *Tekuma*) based in Haifa;⁷⁷ one landing ship (the *Ashdod*); three Sa'ar 5-class helicopter carriers (the *Eilat*, *Lahav* and *Hanit*; the latter was severely damaged by a Hezbollah missile hit in the 2006 war); and ten Sa'ar 4- and 4.5-class missile boats (the *Atsmout*, *Nitzhon*, *Romat*, *Keshet*, *Hetz*, *Kidon*, *Tarshish*, *Yaffo*, *Herev* and *Sufa*), all based in Haifa, as well as some 40 light patrol craft in the Super Dvora, Dabur and Shaldag classes, based in Haifa, Ashdod and Eilat.⁷⁸ The Navy also relies on three support vessels, seven Sea Panther helicopters, three Seascan maritime patrol aircraft, and especially Flotilla 13 with its 300 naval commandos, much talked about after its controversial raid on the Turkish vessel *Mavi Marmara* on May 31, 2010. To increase its naval projection capability towards the Indian Ocean

⁷⁴ *Guysen Israel News*, December 5, 2012.

⁷⁵ Charles Coe, "East Mediterranean energy security must be a priority," *Middle East Oil & Gas Monitor*, NewsBase, 2013.

⁷⁶ Combat diver Ram Rothberg spent most of his career with Flotilla 13, the elite naval commando unit, and distinguished himself during the seizure of the *Karine A* in 2002. Though Rothberg was reprimanded in 2006 following the Hezbollah missile attack that damaged the frigate *INS Hanit* while he was in charge of Maritime Surveillance, Ehud Barak was a great believer in his innovative ideas and promoted him to Commander of the Israeli Navy in the summer of 2011. His peers, however, believe that Rothberg does not have the right stuff for higher positions in the IDF.

⁷⁷ A fourth, the *Tanin*, should be received Israel in early 2014.

⁷⁸ *Jane's Fighting Ships 2011-2012*, IHS, pp. 386-391.

– especially so submarine patrols can approach the Iranian coast – Israel has established port facilities in Bombay, India, and negotiated the use of a shore base in Eritrea to deal with the regular presence of Iranian vessels in Port Sudan.⁷⁹

Admiral Rothberg hoped that the priority given to defending offshore gas reserves would make it possible for him to increase the Navy's budget, but he has had to moderate his hopes. Instead of upgrading his surface fleet with four US-designed Lockheed-Martin littoral combat ships (LCS) or four German MEKO frigates built by ThyssenKrupp, the maker of Israel's submarines, he has had to be content with four *Incheon*-class South Korean frigates, which are part of the FFX project.⁸⁰ Though less high performing, these frigates cost less and are faster to build. This is an advantage, since they will be needed by 2017 to replace some of the aging missile boats in service. For the same reasons, the Israeli Navy has had to abandon its desire for true naval projection capability by means of two high-tonnage amphibious transport vessels.

Admiral Rothberg must therefore use available assets to defend the offshore platforms gradually coming into operation. In addition to redefining his vessels' patrol routes, he will likely consider militarizing the platforms, as the US and Iran were obliged to do with theirs at the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1987 and 1988. The platforms could be equipped with numerous *Phalanx* system sensors, surface-to-air *Barak 8* missile launchers⁸¹ and a landing platform that can accommodate a *Sea Panther* helicopter equipped for anti-surface warfare. Naval marine commando detachments could rotate regularly on the platforms to counter offensives by any enemy force. For the past several months, Flotilla 13 commandos have been training regularly for action on offshore platforms. Given the strategic value of the new offshore infrastructure, it becomes easier to understand the Israeli government's rationale in doing everything it can to prevent Hezbollah from acquiring surface-to-surface missiles, and showing no hesitation in bombing Syrian convoys suspected of carrying such missiles to Southern Lebanon.

Cyber-Defense: Towards a Fourth Service?

The Israeli administration recognizes that cyber warfare is intensifying and will continue to do so,⁸² and admits that during Operation Pillar of Defense it was the target of 44 million cyber attacks.⁸³ Since the number of attacks remains high even during calm periods, Israel recently established a "digital Iron Dome" to protect itself against hackers.⁸⁴ The new system, about which

⁷⁹ *Guysen Israel News*, December 12, 2012. Data taken up by Stratfor, a US global intelligence company

⁸⁰ Incheon-class frigates are 114 metres long, have an empty weight of 2,300 tons, and are equipped with modular weaponry designed to launch cruise missiles.

⁸¹ "Barak-8 missiles to defend gas production rigs at sea," *Israel Defense*, No. 13, April 2013, p. 68.

⁸² Amir Rapaport, "The Cyber War is Intensifying," *Defense News*, No. 13, April 2013, p. 81.

⁸³ All cyber attacks, except for a mere handful, were apparently thwarted. *Guysen Israel News*, November 19, 2012.

⁸⁴ *Guysen Israel News*, October 16, 2012.

we know very little, serves both an offensive and defensive function and is reportedly the responsibility of Unit 8200 in the Military Intelligence Directorate, working closely with the Lotem Unit in the Computer Services Directorate. The Israeli government seems all the more concerned by the new threat because it uses cyber warfare itself, particularly to slow the Iranian nuclear program.⁸⁵ In a recent interview, Moshe Ya'alon clearly stated that cyber warfare is the “fifth dimension of warfare, in addition to the air, land, sea and homefront dimensions. [...] The purpose is to cause actual damage to the enemy in the field through the use of computer viruses and worms, just like dropping a bomb.” This is why the government is giving computer prodigies priority assignments to cyber units.⁸⁶

The Israeli government's awareness of the importance of cyber defense is also reflected in its “offensive” use of social media. For example, during Operation Pillar of Defense, Israeli generals announced the upcoming offensive on Twitter, and broadcast the elimination of Ahmad Jaabari, leader of Hamas' military arm, quasi-live on YouTube. Through such means, Israeli strategists sent a deterrent message to Palestinian fighters, showing them that the IDF's offensive capability would give them no respite, while preventing Hamas from broadcasting disinformation to its own advantage by denying even temporarily that they had lost their military leader. Israeli leaders are clearly seeking to reach a new, younger audience less set in its ideology and to influence it by feeding it news and images. To achieve that goal, after the media disaster of Operation Cast Lead in 2009-2010 Israel set up a new media unit attached to the IDF's communication services. The unit, which comprises some thirty military personnel trained in the use of new technologies, is engaged in the day-to-day management of the IDF's Twitter accounts, and feeds carefully selected images to other social networks. This media strategy clearly raises a number of ethical questions, since it makes images of violence and cruelty available online on communication platforms popular with young people and teenagers. The government appears to have made no decision on this, since there has been no related case referred to the Supreme Court.

⁸⁵ Israel is suspected of being at the origin of the *Stuxnet* and *Flame* computer viruses that infected the Iranian nuclear program, according to *Le Monde*, June 20, 2012.

⁸⁶ *Israel Defense*, No. 13, April 2013, p. 11.

Conclusion

The IDF is now undeniably different from what it was in the time of Israel's founding fathers. It has become a leading-edge, state-of-the-art organization that has learned from past failures. However, the IDF still need to deal with very serious constraints, including budget cuts, manpower reduction and an increasingly individualistic and fragmented society.

The choice of prioritizing high technology is consistent with Israel's industrial ambitions, and is demonstrated by the IDF's emphasis on drones, cyber warfare, space capability and missile defense. However, given the extremely high cost of that choice, Israeli strategists are being forced to rethink the form that the Israeli Defense Forces take. The high cost is also making it impossible to deal with the challenges of the Palestinian issue, which remains the issue most critical to Israel's future security in the long term.

In spite of the changes taking place in the Arab World, changes that have reinforced Israel's bunkerization policy, the foundations of Israel's basic strategy have not changed: it remains completely focused on balance of power, deterrence, unpredictability, the culture of the *status quo*, and the search for rear alliances. Israel is also hindered by the continuing absence of a long-term vision. The country's security leaders have always found it difficult to prioritize the threats and the challenges they must face; they lack a clear vision, in spite of their skilled generals and experienced political decision-makers.⁸⁷

The new, younger team knows that it faces the risk of a new confrontation with the Palestinians, and that it also has to deal with Hezbollah and the jihadist fighters gravitating around Israel, as well as with Iran – in other words, with any group that might be tempted to destabilize Israeli society from within for ideological or religious reasons. It also knows that it must preserve its strategic relationships with the United States and Germany – the two countries that remain Israel's principal sources of political support and main suppliers of sophisticated weapons, crucial for Israel to maintain its deep strike capability and deter its enemies from attacking its territory. As well, it knows it will have to manage Turkey and Russia, with which Israel has much closer ties – particularly economic ties – than it would appear.

⁸⁷ Pierre Razoux, "Les déterminants de la pensée stratégique d'Israël," *La revue internationale et stratégique*, No. 82, Summer 2011, pp. 143-145.

Lastly, the new team knows that it will have to take account of the new geopolitical equation now being established in the Middle East. From that perspective, some events are objectively favorable to the Israeli government, for example the overthrow of Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the return to power of the Egyptian army for a transition period on which no one dares put an end date. The IDF have an excellent relationship with the Egyptian army. On the other hand, other events will force them to think about their strategic options: the inescapable role of an Islamist Turkey in the Mediterranean and Near East; Syria's protracted civil war and the quagmire it is creating, as well as the Iraqi identity crisis, two issues that are increasingly intertwined; and the impact of Hassan Rohani's recent election as President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a development that may herald the potential normalization of relations between the United States and Iran.⁸⁸ That development would certainly be greeted very warily by the current Israeli administration. Rohani's election, however, could also presage an advantageous normalization of relations between Israel and Iran, two countries that, given their respective environments, would both have excellent grounds for restoring the cordiality they once enjoyed. If the Israeli government could be assured of sustainable appeasement with Egypt, Turkey and Iran, it would be far less anxious about accepting the new form the IDF are taking as a result of budgetary and sociological constraints.

⁸⁸ Pierre Razoux, "Vers une normalisation Etats-Unis-Iran ?," *Le Figaro*, June 10, 2013.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Horizontal Organization of General Staff

- **Three Ground Forces Commands:**
 - o Ground Forces GHQ (General Guy Tzur);
 - o Air and Space Force (General Amir Eshel);
 - o Navy (Admiral Ram Rothberg).
- **Six Line Divisions:**
 - o Operations, currently under General Yoav Har Even, an artillery officer who played a leading role during Operation Pillar of Defense – this attests to the growing importance of artillery in IDF wartime operations; Yoav Har Even is seconded by Brigadier-General Ofer Tzafrir, Chief of the Armoured Corps;
 - o Military Intelligence, including Aman and the specialized units and services of all forces, particularly SIGINT airborne intelligence-gathering units – The Division is headed by General Aviv Kochavi;
 - o Logistics (General Yaakov Barak);
 - o Manpower (General Orna Barbivai);
 - o Planning (General Nimrod Shefer);
 - o Computer Service and Cyberdefense (General Uzi Moskovitz).
- **Four Territorial Commands:**
 - o Northern Command, considered the most sensitive,⁸⁹ now under General Yair Golan, seconded by General Noam Tibon;
 - o Central Command (General Nitzan Alon);
 - o Southern Command (General Shlomo Turgeman);
 - o Homefront Command (General Eyal Eizenberg).
- **Nine Directorates:**
 - o IDF Spokesperson (General Yoav Mordechai);
 - o Finance (General Reem Aminoach);
 - o Doctrine and Training (General Eli Reiter);
 - o Command and Staff College (General Yossi Baidatz);
 - o Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (General Eitan Dangot);
 - o Reserve Service (*Miluim*) (General Hoshea Friedman);
 - o Research and Development (Ophir Sham);
 - o Military Court of Appeals (General Shai Yaniv);
 - o Military Rabbinate (General Rafi Peretz).

⁸⁹ As indicated in the article by Amos Harel, "Israel's northern front isn't quiet anymore," *Ha'aretz*, May 5, 2013.

Appendix 2: Combat Divisions in the Ground Forces

NORTHERN COMMAND: 4 DIVISIONS		
ACTIVE UNITS	PARTIALLY MOBILIZED UNITS	RESERVE UNITS
36 TH ARMORED DIVISION: 1 ST Infantry Brigade - Golani 7 TH Armored Brigade 188 TH Armored Brigade 212 TH Artillery Brigade	91 ST MECHANIZED TERRITORIAL DIVISION – GALILEE: 2 ND , 299 TH and 769 TH Brigades	90 TH ARMORED DIVISION 319 TH ARMORED DIVISION
CENTRAL COMMAND: 6 DIVISIONS		
ACTIVE UNITS	PARTIALLY MOBILIZED UNITS	RESERVE UNITS
162 ND ARMORED DIVISION: 264 TH Armored Brigade 401 ST Armored Brigade 900 TH Mechanized Brigade - <i>Kfir</i> 933 RD Mechanized Brigade - <i>Nahal</i> 215 TH Artillery Brigade	98 TH PARATROOPER DIVISION: 35 TH Active duty Brigade 551 ST and 623 RD Reserve Brigades MECHANIZED TERRITORIAL DIVISION - JUDEA-SAMARIA, 8 BRIGADES	70 TH ARMORED DIVISION 194 TH ARMORED DIVISION 340 TH ARMORED DIVISION
SOUTHERN COMMAND: 6 DIVISIONS		
ACTIVE UNITS	PARTIALLY MOBILIZED UNITS	RESERVE UNITS
-	366 TH ARMORED DIVISION: 10 TH Armored Brigade (Reserve) 460 TH Armored Brigade (College) 84 TH Mechanized Brigade - Givati 209 TH Artillery Brigade 80 TH MECHANIZED TERRITORIAL DIVISION - EDOM (3 BRIGADES) 96 TH MECHANIZED TERRITORIAL DIVISION - GAZA (2 BRIGADES)	252 TH ARMORED DIVISION 380 TH ARMORED DIVISION 560 TH ARMORED DIVISION
TOTAL: 16 DIVISIONS		
ACTIVE UNITS	PARTIALLY MOBILIZED UNITS	RESERVE UNITS
2 ARMORED DIVISIONS	1 ARMORED DIVISION 1 PARATROOPER DIVISION 4 MECHANIZED TERRITORIAL DIVISIONS	8 ARMORED DIVISIONS

Sources: *Military Balance 2012*, IISS, London, Routledge, pp. 328-331; Synthesis of articles published in the semi-official magazine *Israel Defense*, Nos. 1-13.

Appendix 3: Distribution of Combat Brigades in the Ground Forces

TYPE	STATUS
21 ARMORED BRIGADES	5 Active, 16 Reserve (6 slated to be disbanded)
13 MECHANIZED BRIGADES	5 Active, 8 Reserve (3 slated to be disbanded)
3 PARATROOPER BRIGADES	1 Active, 2 Reserve
16 TERRITORIAL INFANTRY BRIGADES	Partially Mobilized
11 ARTILLERY BRIGADES	3 Active, 8 Reserve (3 slated to be disbanded)
TOTAL: 64 BRIGADES	14 Active, 16 Territorial Infantry, 34 Reserve (12 slated to be disbanded)

Sources: *Ibid.*

Appendix 4: Distribution of Air Assets in Fighter Squadrons

TYPE	UNITS
25 F-15 I - RAAM	69 th Squadron
50 F-15 A/B/C/D - BAZ	106 th and 133 rd squadrons
100 F-16 I - SOUFA	107 th , 119 th , 201 st and 253 th squadrons
125 F-16 C/D - BARAK	101 st , 105 th , 109 th , 110 th and 117 th squadrons

Source: Johan Franken and Frank Van Der Avoort, "Force Report on Israel Air and Space Force," *Air Forces Monthly*, No. 295, October 2012, pp. 72-83.

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