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INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE STRATÉGIQUE
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CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY-CENTRIC WARFARE

INSIGHTS FROM THE ISRAELI EXPERIENCE

Jonathan (Yoni) Shimshoni
and Ariel (Eli) Levite

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BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. (Brigadier General, Ret.) Jonathan (Yoni) Shimshoni is a Visiting Fellow and Research Affiliate at the MIT Security Studies Program. Jonathan served for 25 years with the IDF, in both field and staff positions, culminating his career as Director of Planning for the Planning Division. He holds a PhD in Public Policy from the Wilson School at Princeton, where he has taught; has pursued research on strategy at MIT; published with the *Cornell Studies in Security Affairs* and in *International Security* on conventional deterrence, technology and doctrinal innovation, as well as in the leading Israeli daily ("Haaretz"). Dr. Shimshoni served on various committees of the Israeli National Security Council and in the IDF reserves continued to work on challenging issues relating to strategy, doctrine, technology and economics. He has established and managed a start-up company and served as Managing Partner, PwC Consulting in Israel. In 2018-19 Jonathan was a Wilson Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington DC.

Dr. Ariel Levite is a Nonresident Senior Fellow in Nuclear and Cyber Policy at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace where he has been since 2008. Earlier he served as a Principal Deputy Director General (Policy) at the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission (2002-2007), a Visiting Fellow at CISAC, Stanford University (2000-2002), Deputy Israeli National Security Advisor (Defense Policy) (1999-2000), and Head of the Bureau of International Security (Assistant Secretary) at the Israeli Ministry of Defense (MoD). Prior to joining the Israeli government service Levite was a Senior fellow and head of the Israeli security program at the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (more recently renamed INSS), Tel Aviv university. More recently he has been a visiting fellow at the Belfer Center, KSG, Harvard University. Dr. Levite served six years in the he IDF (honorably discharged in 1977 as Captain), and promoted to Major in the IDF reserves where he served an extra 20 years. He has taught at Cornell,

UC Davis, and Tel Aviv universities, and published extensively books and articles on issues of strategy, military doctrine, deterrence, arms control, proliferation, cyber warfare, and intelligence. He holds a Ph.D. in Government from Cornell University. He has received the Dr. Jean Meyer Global Citizenship Award from the IGL, Tufts University, and made a Chevalier dans l'Ordre National de la Legion d'Honneur of the French Republic.

CONTENT

ABSTRACT

Recently we argued in *Survival* that while warfare has seldom been confined to operational/technological confrontations between militaries, all contemporary rivals of the West have made the social dimension central to warfare, by pursuing society-centric strategies. Western states also engage in such warfare, but lag in adjusting their strategies and doctrines. This article aims to deepen understanding of society-centric warfare and offer implications for strategy, this, through four cases from Israel's rich experience: David Ben Gurion's formulation of Israel's foundational grand strategy and doctrine; the Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition; Israel's confrontation with Hamas; and with Hezbollah.

Ben Gurion exhibited deep understanding of Israel's relative societal weaknesses and advantages in its early difficult geo-strategic environment and the wisdom to devise a commensurate grand strategy and set of operational principles. His analysis led to a concept of repeated rounds, reflecting a territorially offensive operations-centric strategy aimed to minimize Israeli social dislocation, each round to end with a conclusive – but not 'final' – victory. In parallel, he pursued constant investment in Israeli society's human capital to enhance a continuing techno-operational qualitative advantage.

Following the '67 War, Israel attempted to exploit her conquest of the Sinai and position at the Suez Canal to exact Egyptian suit for peace, then settled on *deterrence* of Egyptian aggression. Led by Nasser, Egypt viewed Israeli actions as humiliating *compellence*, and pursued a War of Attrition. Egypt thereby successfully managed to divert Israel's original operations-centric strategy into a societal confrontation, where Israeli frustration led to futile escalatory counter-society steps that ultimately eroded support for war in Israel and served Egypt's strategy.

Hamas' takeover of Gaza in 2007 unleashed a still-ongoing cyclical series of clashes with Israel, offering a striking example of societal warfare against a hybrid organization. Both Hamas

and Israel harbor internally contradictory goals that render coherent strategies difficult to formulate. While both sides may stand to gain from moderate exchanges, several events have escalated to intense violent conflagrations. In these, Hamas has excelled at neutralizing Israel's techno-operational superiority, entrapping Israel into (at times frustration-driven massive) counter-society attacks, leveraging these to impact Palestinian, Arab, Israeli and international social attitudes. This has encouraged the Israeli security establishment to successfully modify its strategy: greatly enhancing its defensive capabilities (to contain Hamas aggression), improving its discriminatory retaliatory options, gearing up to conduct both a societal battle of minds and conflict moderation through encouragement of investment in the quality of life in Gaza.

Israel strove unsuccessfully for decades to pacify its Lebanon frontier through intervention in Lebanon's internal order, culminating in 18 years of military occupation before unliterally withdrawing in 2000 to the international border – only to find itself in a prolonged conflict with Hezbollah, an Iranian surrogate with paramount domestic clout. Hezbollah's strategy has all along been society-centric toward all relevant societies – social welfare internally and multi-front propaganda, force collocation and a massive missile force directed externally. Hezbollah unintentionally triggered a full-scale war in 2006 in which the conventionally-superior IDF neither won decisively nor managed to arrest Hezbollah rocket attacks on Israeli society, but did manage to terminate fighting by waging a painful and costly hard-hand society-centric offensive. Since 2006 a tense arms race and a precarious balance of terror have prevailed. Both parties engage in massive propaganda and intimidation. Hezbollah has greatly enlarged its missile and commando forces and has tried its hand at boring cross-border tunnels into Israel. Israel, for its part, has vastly improved its border and missile defenses, rapid maneuver forces and discriminatory firepower capabilities.

These cases provide critical insight to conflict dynamics and lessons for strategy formulation. Most critically, they demonstrate that even conflicts that begin within a traditional techno-operational paradigm can often degenerate to a society-centric mode, often due to dynamics created by the passage of time, frustration, humiliation and mishap. Thus, we are in an age that requires a different type of planning: focused on the societal impact of all tools (military and other), guided by the need for shorter engagements, moderation of goals, a premium on defense, management of expectations, and on-going monitoring of societal dynamics in all relevant societies. Developing the interdisciplinary tools to support such strategic planning and management is the next critical order of business.

INTRODUCTION

When we think of modern warfare, we intuitively envisage a physical confrontation between two or more opposing militaries. But, that was never the whole story, and is far less so today. Indeed, contemporary warfare increasingly resembles Epee fencing or wrestling: a confrontational duel in which *all* parts and aspects of the body – society, that is – are subject to (and often participate in) attack, constantly exposed to pointed assaults by arms, but also by a host of other no less potent means.

In this context it is worth recalling Michael Howard's observation, made some forty years ago, that military confrontation can be best understood as comprising *four* dimensions – operations, technology, logistics and society; and it is their mutual interaction, within and between the strategies of the warring parties, that shapes the dynamics as well as the outcomes of confrontation and conflict. He went on to warn the strategist of dire implications should he or she 'forget' to consider and apply *all four* dimensions, while identifying which of them is dominant (or decisive) in and for a particular situation.[1] As we argue in a recent article in *Survival*,[2] Howard's wise counsel has been underappreciated in the West, in particular with respect to one dimension – society. We find this to be an egregious failure, for the social dimension has become central to the strategies of *all* challengers of Western nations. We hold this to be true not only for small states and non-state actors, but also for their peers, Russia and China. Of course, Western nations have themselves, on occasion, pursued strategies focused on the social dimension – in particular the US, France, Israel and the UK. But, they have yet to recognize directly and systemically the societized nature of contemporary conflict and adjust to the challenge of confronting,

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1. Michael Howard, "The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 57, No. 5 (Summer 1979).
2. Ariel E. Levite and Jonathan (Yoni) Shimshoni, "The Strategic Challenge of Society-centric Warfare," *Survival*, 60:6, December 2018 – January 2019, p. 91-118.

let alone conducting, society-centric warfare. This shortfall leads them to formulate and adopt strategies that are ineffective and often outright counterproductive.

Our purpose in the article mentioned was to develop a broad conceptual and historical understanding of the society-centric warfare phenomenon and juxtapose it with prevailing Western responses. This, as a step on the path towards more effective strategy formulation. Systematic consideration of the phenomenon and unpacking the concept reveal that society-centric warfare and strategies are by no means new; they have been practiced often since antiquity, discussed extensively by leading theoreticians of war, from Kautilya and Thucydides to Clausewitz, reflected in modern conflicts such as Vietnam and Algeria, and characterize the more recent engagements in Iraq, Afghanistan, and even Mali. Yet, we find that in recent decades, society-centric warfare has assumed center stage, and that the challenge of (and posed by) society-centric strategies has become most *prevalent*, *mainstream* and *inescapable*, for reasons and with consequences we assess in the aforementioned article.

Not surprisingly, Western scholars and strategists have indeed ventured in recent decades to develop concepts and strategies to comprehend and cope with several attributes of the society-centric reality. Yet they have done so in a rather eclectic and selective fashion. Their focus has been mainly on Fourth Generation or Asymmetric Warfare waged by non-state challengers, and it is in this context that they have advanced corresponding strategies (or doctrines) such as counter-insurgency (COIN) or Stability Operations.[3] Only very recently have scholarly efforts begun to confront features of the broader scope of contemporary society-centric challenge, including its centrality to the strategies of the West's peer-state rivals. These essays have brought to the fore such concepts as "Comprehensive Coercion."[4]

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 95-6 and 101-2, and endnotes 10 and 14.

4. See for example Thomas G. Mahnken, Ross Babbage and Toshi Yoshihara, *Countering Comprehensive Coercion: Competitive Strategies Against Authoritarian Regimes* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2018).

However, all of these efforts have not yet come to terms with the fully *prevalent*, indeed *mainstream*, and *comprehensive* nature of society-centric warfare, with its contemporary manifestations that place societal impact at the center of challenging strategies. These strategies marshal an impressive arsenal of traditional as well as innovative kinetic and societal tools to advance them, making people targets, using them as weapons, and conducting the fight amongst them, both physically and in their minds. Furthermore, Western strategists remain reticent to 'admit' that they themselves at times wage society-focused warfare, and continue to shun coming to terms with the *holistic* nature of the society-centric warfare challenge, which requires planners to formulate strategies that address *all* societies relevant to any particular conflict – including their own.

Wishing to correct this shortfall, we have looked for ever-deeper understanding of, and insights to, the societal warfare phenomenon through in-depth historical analysis, including re-interpretation of Western and rival strategies, and the dynamics and outcomes of socially rich confrontations. As part of this effort, the current essay examines societal warfare aspects of a handful of discrete cases, drawn from Israel's instructive decades long experience of confrontation. With the advantage of retrospective clarity, we offer not only analysis of the societal dynamics in the specific cases at hand but also postulate more general insights into the broader phenomenon of society-centric conflict and implications for strategy formulation and management.

The four discrete Israeli historical cases we examine are: (1) David Ben Gurion's formulation of Israel's early grand strategy and military doctrine (1948-49); (2) the Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition (1967-70); (3) Israel's confrontation with Hamas since 2007 and (4) Israel's entanglement with Lebanon since the 1970s. Taken together, these separate case studies do not purport to provide a comprehensive review of Israel's conflicts. But, they do present a variety of situations wherein the social dimension was a dominant – or at least important – factor in the strategies or one or both of the protagonists' strategies. And, they highlight the dynamics, challenges, and responses associated with such

situations from the level of grand strategy (Ben Gurion) all the way through strategy to operations.

The Israeli cases are highly instructive, speaking to the richness and salience of the phenomenon at hand, and we consider them a useful contribution toward building a more systematic body of knowledge regarding society-centric conflicts and for developing apposite strategies for them. But before delving into the cases, it is incumbent on us to calibrate expectations: for all their value, they are but a modest additional step on the long road to a full-blown theory of society-centric conflict and strategy, and from there to actionable doctrine.

Indeed, every societal encounter contains elements, or at the very least combinations thereof, that are context specific and sui generis. But more fundamentally, strategy for such conflicts is really about *social engineering*, hence heavily dependent on the availability of a solid theoretical foundation to help capture, conceptualize, analyze and plan for society-oriented conflict. Such a behavioral science-informed basis is critical for the application in every concrete case of a well-founded definition of feasible goals, their translation to effective and constructive ends, and the choice of ways and means that can enable rather than undermine their attainment. Yet, such a critical basis does not presently exist. So, in addition to shedding light on the dynamics of society-centric warfare, the Israeli cases analyzed below are intended to provide a catalyst for future discussion with behavioral scientists who, together with military practitioners, will have to shoulder the burden of this endeavor.

I. DAVID BEN GURION AND THE FORMULATION OF ISRAEL'S STRATEGY, 1948-49

It is befitting to commence the review of the Israeli cases by looking at the most remote historical one, dating back to the country's early days as a state. The reason to go that far back is that it provides the most telling and successful Israeli attempt to formulate a grand strategy and to derive from it both an operational military strategy and other important pillars of Israeli security doctrine.[1] Recounting the formulation of Israel's strategy in 1948-49 is highly pertinent to our present analysis since it highlights a remarkable weaving of critical societal considerations into the formulation of strategy – in this instance an operations-centric military strategy.

Unsurprisingly, this story revolves around David Ben Gurion, Israel's founding father and prime minister for most of the first 14 years of independence, who also held the minister of defense portfolio for most of these years. Starting before it was established, as the leader of the state to be and immediately after its creation, Ben Gurion took upon himself to formulate Israel's first, and to a large extent enduring, grand strategy as well as its operational military strategy. Key to our discussion here are two of the premises he formulated as the cornerstones of Israel's grand strategy. The first was that Israel would be

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1. The key doctrinal military tenets were originally three: Deterrence, (Harta'á) to dissuade neighboring states from encroaching on Israeli sovereignty and endangering core interests; Early warning ("Hatra'a) to allow the call up of reservists only when necessary; and Military Decision (Hachraá) – both to achieve quick war termination and to enhance the deterrence posture. See Ariel Levite, *Offense and Defense in Israeli Military Doctrine* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989). The Meridor Commission, whose 2008 report was never formally endorsed by the Israeli cabinet, managed to insert into mainstream military thinking a fourth tenet, namely Defense. See: Dan Meridor and Ron Eldadi, Israel's National Security Doctrine: The Report of the Committee on the Formulation of the National Security Doctrine (Meridor Committee), Ten Years Later, INSS 2018.

tested militarily by its neighbors almost immediately after its declaration of independence (in May 1948), and repeatedly thereafter. In each of these rounds, he reasoned, Israel would be extremely vulnerable because of its physical inferiority to its neighboring Arab states, individually, and certainly collectively, with respect to several key dimensions: population (at the time its population stood at less than 1 million), territory (which even after the territorial gains in the 1948-49 War amounted to no more than 20,000 square kilometers), borders (the waist of the country between the sea and Jordan in its central area amounted to no more than 20 kilometers), and international backing (where Israel was largely on its own, with only world Jewry to count on).

Ben Gurion's analysis convinced him that Israel could potentially be defeated by the Arabs to the point of extinction, but not the other way around, in essence that there would be no way of overcoming the structural asymmetry in possible future military confrontations. From this analysis Ben Gurion derived two practical conclusions. First, that Israel could and must win militarily in every round of future confrontation, but that realistically it could not achieve victories decisive enough to suppress Arab ambition to liquidate the Jewish state. With remarkable clairvoyance, he foresaw that such a result could be achieved only as a cumulative outcome of successive Arab defeats over several rounds of confrontation, which Israel should thus be prepared to inflict without exhausting its scarce resources in routine preparations for such encounters.

His second premise pertained to the brittle social fabric of the newborn state. Ben Gurion assessed that Israel's social fabric at the time of its independence was remarkably fragile, having been forged mostly from several – including then-recent – waves of impoverished immigrants from diverse Jewish diasporas, including many traumatized Holocaust survivors. As such, Ben Gurion reasoned, Israel could neither field and sustain a large standing military nor withstand a protracted military confrontation. Moreover, it could not absorb and hence tolerate such a war occurring in its very midst, on its territory.

Ben Gurion's preoccupation with social fragility went further, pertaining not just to Israeli society writ large, but also to the social cohesion of the IDF. Here his concern was twofold. The first concerned the social divisions among the various pre-independence armed movements that were now being integrated into the newly formed IDF; these had been very different – even competing – armed organizations that had formed the backbone of opposition to British colonial rule. Second was the dysfunction associated with the improvised social patchwork that was now being conscripted into the newly founded IDF, which also consisted of volunteers from abroad.

All of these premises led Ben Gurion to conceive of the IDF as a hybrid between a full-fledged combat-ready military organization, a social melting pot, and a robust national institution in a state with a weak governmental infrastructure. Hence, he chose to invest heavily in enhancing the IDF's cohesion as an integrated fighting force, while tasking it to perform broader societal roles. This vision inspired Ben Gurion to make personal and organizational choices for the IDF and the Ministry of Defense (or "MoD"), for example charging the IDF to provide medical and educational services to the civilian population in remote areas. But most importantly for our purpose here, these premises and analysis drove Ben Gurion to articulate a strategy that was at once highly defensive strategically and extremely offensive operationally.

The duality of this strategy manifested itself in two core tenets. First among them was the development of a military capability that would diminish the everyday economic burden and human toll on Israeli society by relying on a relatively miniscule standing force. This force would be capable only of defensive and other national missions, be tasked with the role of training conscripts, who would be discharged at the completion of their mandatory service to form the backbone of the reserve army, with day-to-day "current security" missions and would form the first line of defense. This standing army would be designed to hold out until major reinforcement by military reservists could be called up on short notice to provide the mass of IDF offensive power – for the

briefest possible periods and only when absolutely necessary, and discharged as quickly as possible thereafter, fully compensated for their service and sacrifice.

The heavy reliance on the call up of reservists led Ben Gurion both to put in place comprehensive arrangements to compensate and ease the burden on the reservists when called upon for active duty, and to place heavy emphasis on building strong intelligence services. The intelligence was first and foremost tasked to provide at least 24-48 hour warning to the decision makers of evolving situations that would warrant call up of the reserves. In addition, the Intelligence services were assigned to support a war machine that could secure battlefield decision at lightning speed to enable the quick discharge of the reservists, whose call up for military service would bring the civilian economy close to a screeching halt. Remarkably, one of the most dramatic crises faced by Ben Gurion in the early 1950s occurred precisely in this context. Ben Gurion allowed revered Chief of the IDF General Staff, Lieutenant General Yigael Yadin, to resign in protest over his unwillingness to sustain a bigger military standing force. Ben Gurion's fear of the repercussions of the heavy social and economic burden a large standing military would impose on the economy and the population prevailed over his admiration for Yadin.

The second tenet derived from the same societal logic was a focused emphasis on territorially offensive operations. This was designed to spare the vagaries of fighting from the Israeli population, especially along the front lines, by carrying the war into enemy territory as early as possible. While this aspect of his strategy now looks almost trivial, it was anything but self-evident in those days when the IDF's mobility on land was highly improvised and precarious (for example relying heavily on mobilized civilian transportation), and the capabilities of its nascent air and naval forces truly embryonic. To illustrate, the naval offensive power at the time amounted to little more than the capacity to conduct a handful of daring commando raids.

The buildup of offensive capability had one more significant societal manifestation. It involved a serious showdown between Ben Gurion and settlers along the borders together with their political patrons. The settlers worried about the weakening of territorial defense forces – that traditionally would come from their midst and stay put to defend them – in order to build up the mobile offensive forces. Socially astute, Ben Gurion retained the territorial defense units for "current security missions," as a way of reassuring these citizens about their security against cross-border incursions in periods short of war. But Ben Gurion would not bend in his conviction that the core and mass of the IDF's fighting capability should be assigned to offensive, mobile forces rather than defensively oriented territorial units. He mustered all of his formal authority and political clout to make this happen.

The offensive operational bent of the IDF was first illustrated, albeit in a highly improvised manner, during the War of Independence of 1948-49. Yet the skills to carry it out were significantly honed and developed in a far more systematic fashion under the guidance of Ben Gurion in the aftermath of that war, with greater intensity in the buildup to the Suez Campaign of 1956. However, uncertain of the progress the IDF had achieved in upgrading its capabilities and fearing the social consequences of possible failure, Ben Gurion shied away from unilateral Israeli action against Egypt and waited for the trilateral UK-France-Israeli coalition to form. One of his conditions for agreeing to the joint operation was that French planes would be deployed in Israel for air defense missions to spare the general public exposure to Egyptian aerial bombardment. It was only after the Suez Campaign and in light of its most encouraging results that Ben Gurion gained confidence in the IDF's capacity to carry the war into enemy territory quickly and decisively, especially in light of the rather unexpected success of the IDF's still-modest armor and airpower. This then led him to authorize an extensive reform of the navy and its armament to upgrade its capabilities. These were to constitute the IDF's offensive punch that would be tested in the Six Day War of 1967. They performed with distinction.

No less remarkable was Ben Gurion's vision to set in stone two other inter-related societal elements as part of his grand strategy, both related to his conviction that Israel should not make do with only the human and other resources it already had

but should endeavor to circumvent these constraints. This led to his assertion that the only way to offset the numerical inferiority of the IDF to its Arab foes would ultimately be through the buildup of its qualitative edge. This he interpreted first and foremost as a societal function. He thus put exceptional emphasis on developing advanced scientific, technological and industrial capability that the military could rely on. Yet he reasoned that such a base could not be built, let alone sustained, in the absence of a broader societal base of excellence in education and expansion of its human capital. In turn, this made him resist short-sighted military pressure to keep the majority of the best and the brightest minds in their midst, investing heavily instead in a broad educational and scientific base, both widely across the country and in academia. As part of this program, Ben-Gurion diverted extremely precious resources (considering how poor the state was at the time) to send some of the brightest minds to study abroad in the best institutions of higher learning in order for them to return to Israel upon graduation to spearhead the quest for academic excellence.

What is most striking about this case is Ben Gurion's ability to put together a far-sighted grand strategy by fusing military, political, and economic/logistical elements with deep and broad-based societal considerations. He pushed his vision with fearless resolve, and ultimately succeeded in imprinting his view of Israeli society and its implications for Israeli security and military strategy, and ultimately for the IDF's operational doctrine. These endure very much intact to this day, over seventy years since Ben Gurion laid them down.[2]

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2. Ben Gurion's remarkable personal clout and formal authority undoubtedly played a significant role in making this feat possible. But, an important facilitating factor was the absence of an established Israeli military tradition that one would have needed to replace in order to make way for such an innovative and holistic society-focused analysis and, then, strategy. It is ironic that Ben Gurion's formulation of strategic and doctrinal tenets has remained unchanged, whereas his parallel dictum about the need to revisit these strategic principles periodically and adjust them to changing circumstances has largely gone unheeded.

II. THE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI WAR OF ATTRITION (1967-70)[1]

Twenty years into Israeli independence, in June of 1967, Israel found itself engaged in one more round of warfare with is neighboring states, precisely as David Ben Gurion had anticipated. Fighting against standing armies, on this occasion, the already well-honed Israeli military (IDF) achieved a clear cut military victory against its neighboring states, and in record time. In a mere six days it turned a comprehensive Arab military siege into total defeat of the Syrian, Jordanian, and Egyptian armed forces, damaged the Iraqi military, and conquered sizable Arab territory, most spectacularly the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula, in addition to the West bank of the Jordan and the Syrian Golan Heights.

The IDF then settled down on the edge of its conquests, most critically alongside the east bank of the Suez Canal (that separates the Sinai from Egypt), to await geostrategic change. Israel aimed to leverage its resounding victory and use its new territorial possessions as bargaining chips to bring about first and foremost peace with Egypt and, subsequently, peace accords with its other neighbors and normalization with the rest of the Arab world. Israel was determined to maintain its military control of every inch of the Sinai in order to pressure Egypt to agree to such a diplomatic settlement, while in the interim hoping that its demonstrated outsize military prowess would deter Egypt from contemplating a military recapture of the peninsula instead.

Egyptian President Nasser, however, had other plans: he was determined to reacquire the Sinai by force and desperate to preserve his regime and salvage his reputation, both badly shaken by the stinging defeat of 1967. These were to be achieved through a violent attrition campaign along the Suez Canal which he launched in September 1967, only three months after the

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1. The events and dynamics described in this case study are drawn in large part from Jonathan Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare from 1953 to 1970* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

June defeat. This Egyptian action was designed to chip away at Israeli resolve by exacting a heavy price for its continued possession of Egyptian territory.[2] It was also intended as a kind of brinkmanship: to induce international, and especially great power, intervention on her behalf for fear that the daily violence would escalate into another all-out war (adversely affecting oil supply and their other interests in the region) and bar the reopening of the Suez Canal – a vital shipping route between the Mediterranean and Asia.

Israel initially approached the ensuing exchange, which ultimately became known as the War of Attrition, essentially as an operational duel between the two militaries, where it was clearly superior. The IDF failed to stop the hemorrhaging exacted by the daily attrition and so Israel increasingly transitioned its strategy to the social dimension. Israel tried to compel Egypt to stop the daily shelling and incursions along the Suez Canal by attacking Egyptian industry and infrastructure located in and around the cities along the Canal and by taking the fight deep into Egypt through a combination of airstrikes and deep commando raids. In the process, Israel played straight onto the 'home court' of Egyptian advantage, leading to ever-growing Soviet support for Egypt and massive international pressure for a diplomatic breakthrough. The war ended in August of 1970 with a negotiated cease-fire, yet one that reflected Egypt's upper hand in this society-centric match: an Israeli failure to deter, in essence its first major military setback, which set the stage for the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

The origins of this Israeli failure can be traced to its intoxication with the magnitude of its victory in the June War, surprise at the quick rebound of Egyptian armed forces, and ill-preparedness for the new type of violent challenge presented by Egypt. Fundamentally, because Israel consistently failed to appreciate the humiliating impact of the 1967 defeat on Egypt and its

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2. See Dani Asher, *The Egyptian Strategy for the Yom Kippur War: An Analysis* [trans. From Hebrew] (London: McFarland and Company Inc., 2003, 2011), p. 28-9.

Arab partners, it responded not just ineffectively, but ultimately counter-productively. The initial Israeli effort to compel Egypt to stop the attrition was mostly operations-centric, targeting the Egyptian armed forces stationed near the Canal and exerting socio-economic pressure on Egypt by preventing the re-opening of the Suez Canal, its major source of revenue. These proved unable to deter Egypt from continuing and even stepping up its military actions, which then led Israel to escalate and adopt an ever-expanding society-centric strategy. The IDF thus launched attacks and commando raids against military and infrastructure targets ever deeper inside Egypt, aiming to expose Egyptian military weakness and communicate to the Egyptian leadership, directly and indirectly through Egyptian society, that Israel remained omnipotent. Basically, this was an effort to drive home the message that the social and political costs of continuing to challenge Israel militarily could and would exact of Egypt an unbearable price. In addition to these daring deep raids, Israeli actions included the shelling of Egypt's Canal cities and industry, oil refineries and other infrastructure. All to no avail.

As the toll of Israeli casualties continued to climb, so did social dissent in Israel. Domestic frustration with the armed stalemate reached a boiling point in late 1969, triggering an Israeli leadership decision to further escalate its military attacks on Egypt with the aim of securing a rapid clear-cut victory. To this end, in parallel with broad and aggressive action along the Canal, the Israeli Air Force executed an in-depth strategic bombing campaign over several months. Attacks were mostly aimed at infrastructure and military targets deep inside Egypt, all purposefully proximate to Cairo and other civilian centers to ensure the desired societal and political impact. It was enhanced by a series of deliberate low altitude overflights over Cairo. These were designed to embarrass the Egyptian leadership, producing widely felt and moderately damaging sonic booms over the Egyptian Presidential palace as well as the armed forces headquarters. With the exception of a few critical mishaps in which civilians (including children) were hurt, Israel pursued and executed this policy largely unopposed, with great tactical efficacy,

accuracy and determination, achieving excellent operational results. Why, then, did these actions not lead to 'victory' and successful deterrence?

Israel's pursuit of a society-centric strategy rested on a mistaken assessment of the social environment on both sides of the divide, and of basic motivations and interests, coupled with under-appreciation of the dynamics that a prolonged socially intrusive engagement might engender, not just between the two protagonists but also internationally. As a result of the Six Day War, the balance of motivation between Israel and Egypt had flipped: now Egypt was both humiliated and occupied, while Israel had increased its strategic depth and won inestimable domestic and international prestige. And while Israel saw herself engaged in a *deterrence* effort at the strategic level, the Egyptians saw Israel as *compelling* revolutionary strategic change through near-total war. This had two effects in Egypt: first, it induced society-wide refusal to accept the new status quo, engendering broad mobilization and a stiffened willingness to endure hardship. Second, it only reinforced the Egyptian interest in open-ended violence and its attendant brinkmanship, in the hope that Israel's ever more aggressive actions and humiliation of the Egyptian military and their Soviet supplied hardware and advisers, would force the hand of the Soviet Union to step in more forcefully both militarily and diplomatically. This played out as intended: after a long period of procrastination, the Soviet Union overcame its reluctance and restraint, delivering to Egypt state of the art defensive and offensive weapons, and even dispatching Soviet combat forces, mainly air and missile defense units, to partake in its defense. In turn, this process energized the two great-powers, by then pitted against each other in support of their respective allies, to seek a diplomatic end to the military confrontation.

Israel's attempts to impact Egyptian society along the Canal were met successfully by Nasser's strategy, borrowed from Pericles' playbook: he acted to empty Isma'iliya and the other Suez Canal cities, conducting an internal migration of some 500,000 persons as well as transplanting industrial plants. Israel

hoped that the economic damage of a closed Canal would impact Egyptian decision making, but Nasser decided to simply 'live with it'. Gone were the societal targets. Furthermore, blame for economic damage and migration was pointed at Israel and, together with the in-depth actions and bombing, produced the opposite effect of Israel's intent: where there had begun to develop a number of protest movements against the Egyptian regime (over assorted grievances), the repeated and most glaring humiliations suffered at Israeli hands actually galvanized not only Nasser's resolve but also popular support for it, and fostered the voluntary postponement of internal friction. Israeli action reinforced Egyptian political and society-wide willingness to endure sacrifice in order to regain its dignity.[3] To underscore this conclusion, it is important to observe that Nasser agreed in 1970 to a ceasefire only after Egypt was able to restore some of its pride by shooting down the first Israeli F-4s overflying Egypt. Similarly, Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, was willing to embark on the path to peace only after launching the 1973 war, in the aftermath of which Egypt felt it could claim victory.

Beyond this issue of pride and humiliation, a key error in understanding on the part of Israeli decision makers stemmed from their projection onto Egyptian society Israeli normative expectations with respect to a society's willingness to accept a mounting toll of military (and to a lesser extent civilian) causalities, and to endure massive dislocation and degradation of quality and standards of living. Living in a developed-world economy, Israelis completely misread and vastly overestimated the impact that migration or long hours without electricity would have on the population and social stability in Egypt.

Nasser, on the other hand, appears to have understood Israeli society and to effectively leverage its vulnerability. Especially in the last year of the conflict, he strove to cause as many Israeli

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 184. This point is stressed by Egyptian journalist Mohamed Hassanein Heikal in his book on the 1973 war, *The Road to Ramadan* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book Co., 1975), p. 55. See also Avi Shlaim and Raymond Tanter, "Decision Process, Choice and Consequences: Israel Deep Penetration Bombing in Egypt, 1970," *World Politics* 30 (July 1978), p. 498-9.

casualties as possible. As time dragged on with no foreseeable denouement and as the number of Israeli casualties mounted, Israeli society grew demoralized and impatient, leading to significant social and political protest. Ultimately, together with Soviet intervention to assist Egypt, these affected the Israeli leadership's willingness not only to accept a cease-fire under rather unfavorable terms, but also subsequently to acquiesce to an almost immediate Egyptian dramatic violation of its terms.

This case harbors a number of critical lessons for engagement in society-centric confrontation: first is the imperative to analyze the relative strength and nature of the broad strategic motivations and interests of the protagonists, indeed how they define and frame the situation. In the Israeli-Egyptian standoff, Israel did not account for the extreme discrepancies in Egypt and Israel's respective framing of the situation and nature of their relationship. In this situation, the balance of society-wide motivations was heavily skewed in Egypt's favor, and this had far-reaching implications for the relative efficacy of Egyptian and Israeli strategies.[4] Second is the criticality of a full and professional socio-economic assessment of capabilities and expected dynamics in interaction, as these relate to all of the societies engaged or relevant. Such an understanding of Egyptian society – in particular its resilience in the face of casualties and economic hardship – was clearly missing as a basis for the formulation of Israeli strategy

Third, given that sustained friction and interaction can lead to changing and unexpected dynamics (that may be genuinely unforeseeable), on-going real-time monitoring and assessment of its trends is critical, along with the ability and willingness to change course as required. In this case, Israel got herself on

an intuitive society-centric course, and upon encountering resistance acted – succumbed, again intuitively – to the natural tendency to double down on its incumbent course of action, escalating its actions within the same paradigm. This flew in the face of Egypt's demonstration of a most robust socio-political resilience and willingness to endure society-wide suffering, rendering Israeli counter-society actions not only futile but outright counterproductive. Finally, and perhaps most importantly: this case demonstrates the danger inherent in setting maximalist goals in such society-centric situations. Insistence that successive formidable operational military accomplishments can yield a socio-political victory in the form of absolute pacification led Israel to ever-escalating counter-productive action, rendering Israel's situation worse with each step. This case suggests the imperative to consider moderating one's expectations of an outright victory, in essence to accept the idea of an "irreducible minimum" of belligerence and violence.

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4. Perhaps epitomizing these differences in framing and situation assessments is their respective expectations regarding the Suez Canal. Israel and Egypt each believed that its continued closure would provide it with strategic advantage: Israel expected that closure would force Egypt's hand through socio-economic pressure; Egypt 'knew' she was immune to this pressure and expected the Canal's closure to lead to international pressure on Israel to withdraw.

III. ISRAEL'S CONFRONTATION WITH HAMAS SINCE 2007

The Gaza Strip has long been a constant source of instability, both for those who have intermittently controlled it as well as for its neighboring states, Israel and Egypt. Indeed, Israel has had a long and troubled history with the Gaza strip, going back to the early 1950s. In more recent times Israel hoped to buy itself stability and tranquility along its border with Gaza by implementing a unilateral pull-out from the area in 2005. Israel not only withdrew its forces, but also evacuated all Israeli settlements therein. It built a security fence along the widely recognized Israeli border with the Gaza Strip, deployed extensive forces to monitor the fence and fend off attempts to cross it, and severed most ties with this territory, in practice handing over not just the land but also total governance to its Palestinian residents. Thereafter, Israel has reluctantly retained modest and selective ties with Gaza (such as power supply and export of basic goods), mostly out of humanitarian concern. Israel intended its disengagement to enable the PLO-run Palestinian Authority (PA) to assume control of the territory. But, contra widespread expectations and Israeli hopes, after a series of Hamas[1] victories in local elections and in the Palestinian legislative council, prolonged skirmishes and a bloody confrontation between Hamas and the West Bank-centered PLO ensued. These culminated in a violent Hamas take-over of the Gaza Strip in June of 2007.

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1. Hamas is a Palestinian political-religious fundamentalist Sunni organization with a significant armed wing, that is an offshoot of the far broader and long established Muslim Brotherhood movement. It was established in Gaza during the first Intifada (1987). Its official charter (or covenant), originally published in 1988, states that "our struggle against the Jews is very great and very serious" and calls for the eventual creation of an Islamic state in Palestine, in place of Israel and the Palestinian Territories, and the obliteration or dissolution of Israel. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas_Covenant. The charter was revisited and amended in 2017, yet still reasserts calls for armed resistance toward a "complete liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea." See https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-hamas-charter-20170501-story.html

Hamas' consolidation of control launched a new and violent chapter in the troubled relations between Israel and the Gaza Strip. The period between 2007 and the present has been marked by numerous rather repetitively similar cycles of violent exchanges between Gaza and Israel, each followed by a quick return to quasi normalcy under cease-fire arrangements, typically indirectly negotiated between Hamas and Israel by Egyptian intermediaries. These arrangements are then imperfectly implemented (mostly by the Palestinian side), fray over time despite constant diplomatic efforts by the UN, Egypt and Qatar, escalate to sporadic violence, and occasionally flare up to the point of an intense brief armed confrontation. Negotiations then typically yield a temporary and often precarious cease fire, roughly along the lines of the pre-existing cease-fire arrangements and unacknowledged restoration of the selective functional ties between the parties. These have been the hallmarks of the situation over the past dozen years – in part because Hamas maintains its commitment to the destruction of Israel (and selectively engages or abets terrorism against it, mostly in the West Bank), in part because Hamas-Palestinian Authority relations remain contentious, and in some measure due to the continued deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.[2]

A major and acute source of this instability have been the continuously deteriorating living conditions in the largely besieged Gaza Strip. For its roughly two million inhabitants this situation is always difficult, at times outright unbearable, creating conditions that politically haunt Hamas. Hamas has found itself frequently caught between popular dissent over its inability to improve worsening conditions, fear of powerful Israeli reprisals whenever it elects to ease internal pressure by undertaking hostile action against Israel, and domestic criticism when it is seen to collaborate with Israel to reign in its own extremists as well as rebel factions (most prominently the Islamic Jihad) wishing to act independently against Israel.

In addition, Hamas is subject to conflicting external pressures. Some sources push for belligerency, most blatantly its militant leadership residing outside the Strip as well as Iran, and to an extent also Erdogan's Turkey. Others push for moderation. These include Egypt, its main neighbor and occasional ally, and the Gulf states, as well as the UN Special Middle East Coordinator, the EU and the US. Still others, for example Qatar – its main benefactor, vacillate between versions of the two. This hornets' nest of often conflicting ideology, interests and pressures, together with Hamas' imperative to maintain its authority, make intermittent – yet moderate – violent exchanges with Israel strategically optimal and beneficial, and at times unavoidable or simply uncontrollable, notwithstanding the price they exact from the population in Gaza.[3]

It is against this complex reality that successive Israeli governments have been improvising policy and strategy to deal with the Hamas controlled Gaza Strip. While not laid out explicitly or publicly in an orderly manner, Israeli strategy appears to reflect for inconsistent policy goals. Israel strives to 1) weaken Hamas politically, materially and militarily, so as to deter it from engaging in, or abetting, violence vis-à-vis Israel and in particular against the near-in settlements; 2) keep Hamas strong enough so it can maintain internal governance and control of other organizations, and discharge its responsibilities with respect to local welfare and avert a humanitarian crisis; 3) undermine Hamas' international legitimacy – in Israel and globally – by leveraging its belligerence and 'unacceptable behavior' towards Israel and the PLO, this mainly aimed to deflect pressure on and within

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2. For a general discussion of the challenges posed by this situation and possible Israeli responses, see Udi Dekel, "Israeli Policy toward the Gaza Strip," in Anat Kurz, Udi Dekel and Benedetta Berti, eds., *The Crisis of the Gaza Strip: A Way Out* (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2017), p. 115-128.

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3. Note the implications of recent societal fragmentation in the Gaza strip and the weakening influence of Hamas for its ability to control and manage events and for Israel to devise effective strategy. Deteriorating conditions in Gaza as well as external assistance from abroad (significantly also from Iran) have strengthened and emboldened the far smaller yet much more extreme Islamic Jihad movement whose role in Gaza had initially been insignificant. See discussion on p. 46, below.

Israel towards peace with the Palestinians; and 4) to refrain to the extent possible from a full scale reoccupation of the Gaza strip that would prove costly militarily and politically to undertake, even more painful to sustain, and would distract Israel from confronting its real nemesis, Iran.

The contradictions inherent in this Israeli policy toward Gaza have been a constant source of fierce political disagreements within the Israeli cabinet, often spilling over to broader political circles, and occasionally engulfing the IDF as well. These squabbles have been especially acute because the only way to try to reconcile Israel's various competing goals would be to acknowledge, what otherwise remains unspoken and of course inadmissible, that the present Israeli leadership in fact harbors an interest in continued Hamas rule in Gaza, even in its belligerence toward Israel, so long, of course, as this does not erupt into high-intensity socially disruptive attacks on the Israeli population.

This state of affairs has de facto left it to the IDF, in close collaboration with its civilian counterparts in the MoD and the internal security service ("Shabak"), to develop and implement a strategy to accomplish the first two goals; and to work with other organs of the state to achieve the first and third goals. Naturally, such competing goals and interests continue to bedevil these efforts to 'square the circle', to develop an enduring, consistent and effective strategy. Despite such difficulties, this remains a high-priority challenge, given that the constant friction in this complex and explosive situation between Israel and Gaza has resulted in frequent exchanges of fire and numerous other incidents. On no less than three occasions in just one decade tensions have escalated to the level of major military encounters – in December 2008 (22 days), in November 2012 (8 days), and in July-August 2014 (50 days) – and to scores of smaller ones, including short but very intense recent ones in November 2018, and in March and May 2019. All of these have manifested the same basic dynamics, yielding similarly inconclusive results.

One striking feature of these major conflagrations has been the consistent society-centric strategy employed by Hamas, a strategy aimed at all of the relevant societies: Israeli, Palestinian

and international. It has involved extensive use of shorter-range mortars and longer-range rockets against an ever-larger swath of Israeli population centers, as well as digging of numerous cross border offensive tunnels into Israeli. These actions have all been designed to divert attention from their domestic woes, attract international attention to their plight, discredit Israel for its responses, unnerve the Israeli population, both near and far, and to afford Hamas the option to dispatch warriors to infiltrate underground and attack nearby settlements at will. Additional Hamas tactics have involved sending (and encouraging others to send) intermittently scores of incendiary balloons and kites across the border to set Israeli fields on fire, conduct occasional raids against IDF posts alongside the border, and repeatedly mobilize masses of men, women, youths and even children to conduct large weekly demonstrations along the Israeli border, protesting against the siege, but at times also providing cover to mask efforts to infiltrate the border or fire against Israel.[4]

Remarkably, all of these actions appear to have been conducted with only modest expectation that they would actually yield serious tangible effects, let along significant casualties, on the Israeli side of the border. But the most dramatic – and cynical – aspect of Hamas' strategy has been a conscious choice to deliberately put their own innocent civilians in harm's way – use hospitals, school, religious shrines, private homes – what we may term "co-location" – and even mass demonstrations in the conduct of military operations, in the hope of leveraging their immunity or seizing upon the ensuing Israeli attacks against them for public relations and political benefit. These actions have been conceived by Hamas as part of a campaign to intimidate the Israeli population, undermine the trust of Israeli citizens in their government and the IDF, and provide a morale boost to their own population. In parallel, they are intended to galvanize Arab and Western support, and leverage it both to extract financial benefit and to help drive an international campaign against Israel in the form of boycotts, divestment of investments and sanctions

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4. Omer Dostri, "Israel's Strategy Vis-à-vis Hamas in the Gaza Strip" (Heb.).

(BDS), UNGA resolutions, as well as legal action against Israel and Israelis both in certain countries and the International Criminal Court (ICC).[5]

In practice, the intermittent large-scale encounters with Israel have exacted a heavy toll from Hamas and the population of Gaza, causing thousands of casualties, extensive destruction, and sustained financial hemorrhage. But they have nonetheless repeatedly won them economic and other concessions from Israel and occasionally also from Egypt, as well as ongoing financial support from Qatar. In addition, they have earned them political and humanitarian support from Turkey, along with some empathy for their cause from the international community, especially among those that might otherwise be indifferent to their plight. Moreover, the confrontations have either produced or fed strong anti-Israeli sentiments and, as a corollary, support for the BDS movement, in the Islamic world and, more selectively, among left-leaning politicians and activists across the globe. On the Israeli side, confrontations have ended up reinforcing the reluctance of many among (but by no means all of) the Israeli political and military elite to undertake additional invasions of the Gaza strip. Most importantly, though, at the end of the day, Hamas' strategy has made it possible for them to retain control of the Gaza Strip and sustain a modicum of support among its population – not a small feat given their weak hand overall and dramatic military inferiority to Israel in particular.

To counter all forms of aggression from Gaza, the IDF routinely maintains a large military deployment along the Gaza Strip border with Israel as well as in the Mediterranean, maintains, together with the Shabak, and extensive intelligence operation aimed at Gaza and applies the IDF in a combination of ongoing missile and rocket defense, fire-fighting units, and aerial retaliation for rocket attacks (occasionally augmented by ground or naval firepower). On the occasions of serious flare-ups these elements are reinforced with massive ground force deployments

designed to facilitate a combined-arms operation into Gaza as though pursuing a traditional kinetic mil-to-mil confrontation. The guiding principle of IDF operations has been to protect and reassure the Israeli population in general and those within firing range of mortars and rockets in particular, and to avert or at least postpone a massive conflagration that would require it to invade the Gaza strip. This, while remaining nominally committed to seek and attain a clear-cut victory in the event that such escalation does materialize. In recent confrontations, Israel actually mobilized the forces necessary to meet this commitment.

While not without some measure of success, this IDF strategy toward Gaza has nevertheless proven to be problematic against a resilient foe, who the IDF can neither easily subdue militarily nor wishes to eliminate politically. While Hamas can get away strategically with occasional skirmishes and if need be also with bigger ones, such a profile of intermittent friction is hardly palatable to the IDF and Israel's political leadership. Hence, these conflagrations have witnessed the IDF's inclination to continuously escalate its attacks in these events, moving from precise counter-force air attacks through careful counter-value air (and even artillery) raids, all the way to limited but massive ground-forces attacks in urban areas that inevitably result in extensive damage to infrastructure and civilian assets.

Unfortunately, this IDF escalatory strategy falls right into the trap of Hamas' judo-like logic of operations, whose strategy welcomes and even relies on IDF attack of non-military targets and massive damage to civilian homes and property (even as occupants had been warned away by the IDF). In this situation, Israel's policy of precision and care to avoid non-combatant casualties cannot compete with Hamas' ability to exact, create and control the image, and to leverage it throughout the relevant societies.[6]

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5. Michael Milstein, "Hamas's 'New Campaign' in Gaza, One Year Later," *INSS Insight* No. 1145, March 8, 2019.

6. Kim Lavi and Udi Dekel, "Looking at the Gaza Strip: From Short Term to Long Term," *INSS Insight* No. 1109, November 20, 2018,. Note that in the heightened confrontation in 2012 Israel made a one-time break with this strategy, an exception that is instructive. In the event, the IDF applied only airpower and that in relative moderation. The critical plank of Israeli policy in this case

Furthermore, on the Israeli side these major encounters have cost Israel precious losses of soldiers and occasionally civilians as well, modest destruction, and some intense but generally brief occasional interruptions of daily life, especially in ever expanding areas within range of mortar and rocket fire from the Gaza strip.[7] What has had a more unsettling effect has been the frustration and anxiety associated with the IDF's inability to produce conclusive military results in its campaigns against Hamas, despite its dramatically superior capabilities and the operational gains on the ground repeatedly secured. The frequent confrontations also unnerve the population of the Israeli settlements adjacent to the border, who realize they are at the mercy of Hamas and more recently even Islamic Jihad, and have occasionally caused the broader citizenry of Israel to feel an acute sense of anxiety on account of their vulnerability to Hamas' ever longer-range rockets.

Making matters worse, the contradictions described earlier that are inherent in the Israeli policy and strategy toward Gaza have become so problematic to reconcile, that in all recent occasions the government has failed to face its own public, explain its strategy, and admit (what was otherwise well-known from 'other sources') that it was actually repeatedly negotiating the terms of a cease-fire with Hamas, albeit indirectly, through Egypt, the UN, and Qatar. An irony that has now become a subject of toxic political debate within Israel. At the same time, Israel's high-powered responses have ended up alienating the international community, notwithstanding Israel's reluctant engagement in these military encounters, its considerable restraint and intense efforts to

avert them, and the IDF's relative caution and discrimination in their execution.

These outcomes have become a constant source of frustration, not just for the IDF but also for the broader Israeli polity and society writ large. In parallel, they have been a great source of pride for Hamas, which has been able to project the image of having emerged with the upper hand, successfully withstanding the powerful IDF. Some of the frustration has assumed powerful political overtones, with calls for an ever more aggressive strategy toward Hamas coming not only from settlers suffering from ongoing harassment and intimidation but also from some significant political factions, including ones heretofore prominently represented in the Israeli governing coalition and the security cabinet, among them the former Minister of Defense and the IDF Chief of the Staff.

But most importantly, this stinging contrast between the IDF's ability to execute dramatic operations and its inability translate these into an effective counter strategy against Hamas – with its underlying motivation and societal logic – has become an important catalyst for change in IDF strategy toward Gaza and Hamas, change it began to pursue, and is continuing to develop, since the frustrating confrontation in 2014. Much of the motivation to search for new approaches has been fueled by the growing awareness among significant parts of the Israeli security elite of the price and risks – both immediate and long lasting – that would accompany another dramatic incursion into Gaza, and a more realistic appreciation of the effort it would take to totally pacify the Gaza strip for an extended period, or to subdue Hamas while leaving it powerful enough to govern and suppress hostile actions against Israel. All in all, these new strategic directions have not been a strategic panacea and have not fully resolved all of these issues, but they clearly represent a significantly more harmonized and effective set of solutions.

In character with the IDF's traditional proclivity to conduct offensive operations, the revamped strategy emphasizes continued refinement of offensive military options against Gaza. But these are optimized to have ever more selective and

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was restraint, an abstinence from pursuing a clear-cut 'victory' and total pacification. Rather, the strategic logic appeared to be a recognition of both sides' intermittent need for a low level of exchange, that if not escalated could be negotiated down to relative quiet, a process that allowed both sides to avoid humiliation and to claim 'victory', while limiting the exchange to eight days.

7. Carmit Padan and Meir Elran, "The 'Gaza Envelope' Communities: A Case Study of Societal Resilience in Israel (2006–2016)," Memorandum No. 188 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2017), p. 67-75.

discriminatory effects through retaliatory, at times also preventive, standoff attacks. The choice of armaments, targets, and tactics (ranging from the employment of airpower to snipers) has repeatedly manifested a combination of resolve to react to provocations and imminent danger alongside restraint in the actual modalities of response. With the aim to offset Hamas' co-location strategy, the IDF has continually sharpened its capacity to conduct surgical air and ground offensive operations in the highly congested Gaza urban terrain with highly localized physical effects and a minimum of civilian casualties.

In parallel with this offensive leg, and in light of the unpalatable prospect of exercising large scale conventional operations against Hamas, the IDF, encouraged and supported by the Ministry of Defense, has gradually developed or beefed up several other society oriented strategic elements. First among them is a robust capacity for nationwide population missile defense, expanding, adapting and reorienting the selective missile defense program originally intended primarily to protect critical national security assets. The population defense leg of the strategy was already being scaled up after the Lebanese war of 2006, but has been further enhanced since the 2014 confrontation, to cover not just wartime but also peacetime deployment. The critical importance of this aspect of strategy has been repeatedly demonstrated by its capacity to give the Israeli cabinet the option to withstand rocket attacks from Gaza without feeling undue societal pressure to retaliate quickly and through another ground operation in the Strip. In parallel, a massive program has been launched to detect and neutralize Hamas' offensive underground tunnels crossing into Israel and to enhance IDF presence protecting the settlements adjacent to the Gaza border.[8]

Both of these strategic elements reflect further refinement of the IDF's traditional strategic bias in favor of operational and technological solutions, but with a pronounced and growing

defensive counter-balance to its heavy offensive bent. This process began budding in the early 1990s but now finds a maturing manifestation in the strategy toward Gaza. But even more innovative is the third leg of the refined strategy. This leg remains contentious to this day within the Israeli government and broader body politic, as it involves a preventive effort led by the IDF and the Ministry of Defense, to selectively ease some of the economic pressure on the population of Gaza and even on Hamas. Both defense institutions have been repeatedly lobbying the government, with some success, to relax the siege somewhat, ease the Israeli embargo on exports to the Strip from and through Israel, and facilitate the infusion of foreign aid and financial support. There have been other measures in this vein, for example conditional but repeated effort to reward tranquility with significant relaxation of the rigid restrictions on the area in which Gaza fishermen are allowed to operate.[9] Finally, an even more audacious initiative of the IDF/MoD has been an effort to mobilize international support for a massive reconstruction program for the Gaza Strip, designed to ease the worsening predicament of its burgeoning population by renovating and upgrading its basic infrastructure.

One more element of the reformed strategy has been in the domain of public relations. Realizing its relative weakness and vulnerability to Hamas propaganda efforts, the IDF has taken upon itself to conduct, while also to guide and coordinate the efforts of other government agencies, a multi-pronged public relations campaign aimed at both domestic and foreign audiences. One of its objectives has been to dissuade the Gazans from perpetuating, supporting or partaking in attacks and milder provocations (which often give cover to the former) against Israel. Another has been to impress on the international community that the IDF's diverse actions are legitimate security responses to genuine threats from Gaza, both necessary and proportional to the threat Israel faces. No less importantly, this

8. Kobi Michael and Omer Dostri, "Destroying the Tunnel: Preserving Deterrence while Preventing Escalation," *INSS Insight* No. 991, November 9, 2017.

9. Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Palestinians pray for fish as Israel opens deeper waters," Reuters, April 2, 2019.

campaign seeks to reassure the Israeli public as to the adequacy of the defensive measures Israel undertakes to shield them from the Gazan threats.

The final layer of this strategy, in many ways dependent on the others, has been strategic restraint. Israel has adopted a policy that distinguishes between tactical standoff responses to provocations from the Gaza Strip and a broad Israeli ground offensive into its territory, and is determined to confine the latter to a last resort, thereby overcoming the strong traditional proclivity to escalate conflagrations all the way to massive offensives in search of clear-cut and fully pacifying 'victory'.[10] While this element of the strategy has been repeatedly and acutely tested by Hamas provocations since 2014, it has proven most resilient.

A dozen years into Hamas' rule in Gaza and five years since the last major ground confrontation, it is evident that the Israeli military strategy has consistently fallen short of preventing occasional violent conflagrations, let alone producing a decisive victory against it whenever push comes to shove, an idea it has essentially abjured, as described. That said, the gradual transformation of the IDF's strategy toward the Gaza Strip and its de-facto ruler Hamas has thus far yielded huge benefits: in making life for the Israeli population living within range of Hamas rockets at least quasi-normal, and in averting another sizeable bloody military showdown that would have ensued had Israel chosen to undertake another large-scale ground offensive.

What has made this possible has been a sophisticated strategy that includes population-wide defense alongside surgical offensive operations, while abnegating massive – and especially ground-force – incisive attacks (while maintaining the ability and option as a deterrent), harnessing diplomatic and economic tools, and undertaking a comprehensive public diplomacy campaign. This strategy has accomplished multiple objectives. First, to reassure the Israeli population that it is reasonably well

protected against Hamas attacks. Second, to deny Hamas major public relations gains while avoiding utterly humiliating it, thus steering clear of igniting its pre-existing desire for attacks and revenge. Third, to calibrate Israeli government and society-wide expectations with respect to the risks and benefits associated with another ground offensive in Gaza but also give the government far more latitude to handle day-to-day friction without the pressure to resort to such campaigns. Fourth, to dissuade Hamas from excessive provocations along the border and further diminish its appetite (and its public's support for) another futile and painful round of large-scale military confrontation with Israel, and to motivate it to reign in most of the malign activity against Israel by Islamic Jihad and others. Finally, fifth, to somewhat reduce the political price Israel would have otherwise paid for sustained pressure on Gaza and the suffering and casualties associated with the current stalemate.

In the final analysis, we are looking at a remarkably successful society-centric IDF strategy, made all the more impressive because it achieves desirable results under exceptionally unfavorable circumstances. Not least among these is the ability to formulate and execute this strategy while facing successive Israeli governments consistently unable to formulate coherent, viable policy or strategy, or for that matter level with the Israeli public regarding the contours of their approach toward the Gaza Strip. Perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of this IDF success can be measured in its ability to provide national leadership with the power to repeatedly resist a combination of populist outcries and public anguish calling for reoccupation of the Gaza strip in response to Hamas attacks. In our judgement, the credit for this notable feat goes to a sophisticated military elite that has grown (clearly by trial and error) to appreciation that in an age of prevalent society-centric conflicts prudent military strategy planning requires a deep and broad understanding of the societies in which it is operating, as well as the wisdom to define constructive and achievable goals and ends. And to navigate in this realm using a military scalpel together with other diplomatic and economic tools.

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10. This strategy also reflects a coming to terms with the notion of an "irreducible minimum" level of belligerence by this kind of highly motivated foe waging an intense society-centric challenge.

Before closing this case study another insight is in order, one with far-reaching implications for strategic assessment and formulation. As described above, over the past dozen years Israel went through a learning process through which it ultimately developed a reasonably effective society-centric strategy to confront Hamas. But critically, its success is predicated on the particular societal and political map and dynamics prevalent in Gaza. More recently, as we noted earlier in the discussion, this map has been in flux: with the rapidly deteriorating conditions in Gaza, Hamas authority has been fraying, with Islamic Jihad becoming a significant independent player that is willing and able to defy Hamas wishes to arrest and control violent exchanges. This has made it a force to be reckoned with, that has its own motivations, interests and relationships with the local population and a rocket force of its own to be counted. In a word – Gaza society and its internal forces and dynamics have changed.[11] And so, pacifying the frontier and perhaps a new cease-fire may now require significant further adaptation of IDF strategy. This is important to note because it alerts us to the imperative to monitor societal change in all relevant societies and their implications for strategic adjustment, lest over time strategy becomes ineffective or counterproductive, as it unleashes negative dynamics where it had previously been effective.

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11. Yoram Schweitzer and Aviad Mendelboim, "Is Palestinian Islamic Jihad Trying to Drag the Gaza Strip into a War against Israel?," *INSS Insight* No. 1185, July 4, 2019.

IV. ISRAEL'S ENTANGLEMENT WITH LEBANON SINCE THE 1970s

Israel has been engaged with and in Lebanon for half a century, often engulfed in serious crisis or confrontation. Starting in the early 1970s, Israel found itself drawn into the Lebanese morass, largely as a result of the fraying domestic Lebanese order, coupled with a growing militant Palestinian presence. The turmoil in Lebanon evolved into a full-scale civil war in 1975, which was then exploited by Syria to project its might onto the scene, and by various Palestinian factions that turned Lebanon into both the primary host of the PLO and a launchpad for Palestinian cross-border raids and other attacks against Israel.

These conditions set the stage for a concerted Israeli effort to shape the domestic political order in Lebanon. Its centerpiece was a covert effort to lend massive military and other assistance to the Maronite Christians and their military arm. This was designed to help them gain political as well as operational control over Lebanon, sign a peace treaty with Israel, and evict from Lebanon both the Syrians and the Palestinian resistance forces constantly harassing Israel. A large-scale Israeli incursion in 1982 (the "First Lebanon War"), pursuant to egregious Palestinian terrorism attacks against Israel, was thus intended by its architects to help accomplish these goals. It was designed to achieve them first and foremost by combining a large-scale Israeli ground offensive going all the way to the Beirut suburbs with parallel advances by Israel's Christian allies, mainly in and around Beirut. In practice, however, notwithstanding the IDF's remarkable operational gains in hitting or driving away militant Palestinians and with only moderate casualties compared to the Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese forces, Israel's effort at social engineering failed miserably. The faith in the alliance with the Maronite Christians turned out to be misplaced, and the initial political and military achievements of the operation proved ephemeral and ultimately counter-productive.

Disappointed, Israel subsequently put its faith in the newly introduced, mostly American and French, Multinational Force in Lebanon, hoping that it could take its place and sustain the effort to build or impose a favorable political order. But these expectations also quickly burst into flames in the face of ruthless, Syria- and Iran-backed, Islamic Jihad bombing of their main barracks near Beirut, causing massive casualties and eventually driving the international peacekeepers out of Lebanon. With its grand design in tatters, Israel then abandoned its efforts to engage in grand style social engineering in a foreign land, electing instead to pull its troops back unilaterally to South Lebanon in the hope that its continued limited military presence in the area, coupled with an alliance with the local Maronite Christians and the presumed acquiescence of the local Shi'a population, would at least secure its northern border.

Eighteen (!) years later, however, in May of 2000, Israel finally unilaterally pulled out of Lebanon altogether, heavily bruised by the ferocity of the local Shi'a opposition against it that had built up over time with Iranian and Syrian assistance. Israel then pinned its remaining hopes on the international legitimacy it would gain by retreating to the generally-recognized international border between Israel and Lebanon, anticipating that this would finally buy it some tranquility. But even this hope proved elusive as Hezbollah, initially mainly a Shi'a surrogate of Iran in Lebanon, gradually grew indigenous roots, evolving into an unmatched political and unrivaled local military force.

Much of the rise of Hezbollah's clout in Lebanon and the brandishing of its Lebanese credentials is attributable to two main factors that have gone hand in hand, both societal in nature. First has been its socio-political appeal to the suppressed and underrepresented Shi'a majority in Lebanon, not only empowering them politically but also extending to them theretofore unavailable cradle-to-grave social services. The second has been its clever ploy to position itself rhetorically and operationally – through an endless series of terrorist attacks – at the forefront of Lebanese, and especially Shi'a, resistance to Israel. The unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 played right into

Hezbollah's hands, enabling it to claim credit for driving Israel out and to catapult its appeal well beyond Lebanon. It has positioned Hezbollah as the vanguard of the charge against Israel's very existence and as leader of the campaign to harass it through violent means, not just in Lebanon and in the Palestinian territories but also overseas.[1]

But Hezbollah's strategy has not been free of risks and pitfalls, both within and outside Lebanon. First and foremost, it has incurred Israel's wrath through its virulent propaganda campaign, sustained violent attacks against Israel and Jewish targets elsewhere, and a huge armament effort. That Hezbollah's anti-Israeli campaign did not abate even after the full Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon naturally placed it in Israel's crosshairs. Sensing this danger and aiming to deter Israel from actually taking forceful action against it, Hezbollah launched a major missile and rocket acquisition and deployment program to target the Israeli population (stockpiling some 15,000 rockets by 2006) and embedded its military assets in the homes of its activists, generally within Shi'a villages.[2]

Unsurprisingly, these dynamics gravely escalated tensions, finally leading Hezbollah and Israel to stumble into a full-fledged war in 2006 (the "Second Lebanon War"). It occurred after a series of Hezbollah-initiated small skirmishes with the IDF culminated in a blatant Hezbollah attack on an Israeli military convoy on the Israeli-Lebanese border, killing and kidnapping several Israeli

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1. Attributes of Hezbollah's strategy and the limits of Israel's response are explored in Udi Dekel, "The Second Lebanon War: The Limits of Strategic Thinking," Memorandum No. 167 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2017), p. 27-37.

2. Hezbollah's effort to build its organized warfighting infrastructure against Israel began shortly after Israel unilaterally pulled out of Lebanon in 2000. Some short-range rockets and their launchers were located in private homes, while the core of its combat positions was constructed in the vicinity of the Shia 'villages in southern Lebanon. After the 2006 war, and in light of its lessons, Hezbollah greatly expanded and intensified its effort to embed much of its military infrastructure in highly populated centers, both within the Shia villages in southern Lebanon and in high rise buildings in Shi'a areas of Beirut and in other towns.

soldiers. The political shock and broad social outrage in Israel that ensued, coupled with the long-harbored ambition to set Hezbollah back, produced a massive if improvised Israeli military attack on Hezbollah whose contours evolved over time. In the early part of this 33-day war, the IDF's strategy, driven predominantly by a desire to cap escalation and spare both Israeli and Lebanese civilian casualties, consisted mostly of extensive employment of air and artillery firepower against Hezbollah's military targets. In response, Hezbollah put Israeli society on the receiving end of significant persistent shelling of hundreds of rockets a day, causing public outcry and mounting casualties and damage. IDF air operations, artillery fire and small raids could neither neutralize these attacks nor compel Hezbollah to desist. Worse still, Hezbollah was able to intensify the impact of these attacks and of occasional other tactical gains, such as the damage it inflicted on an Israeli corvette off the Lebanese coast, through an astute information campaign (most dramatically carried out through its Al Manar TV station) that extolled and displayed its accomplishments, greatly exaggerating their scope and success.

In practice, Hezbollah succeeded not only in standing up to Israel militarily but also in projecting a widely inflated image of its accomplishments. In doing so, Hezbollah was relatively effective in reassuring and cheering up its own public – that in reality was licking its wounds from the Israeli attacks, demoralizing the Israeli public and undermining trust in its own government. But these actions, in turn, led the previously divided Israeli cabinet to overcome its initial reluctance to commit the IDF to a stand-in counterforce operation inside Lebanon. Growing public discontent, coupled with its own frustration with the military stalemate, led the Israeli government to cross that line, launch and subsequently dramatically expand a ground offensive into Lebanon. Eventually, as we shall see below, it also moved to authorize an unprecedented expansion of the IDF's aerial bombardment campaign.

On the face of it, this second phase of the Israeli operation in Lebanon had all the hallmarks of a classic conventional ground military campaign of fire, maneuver and conquest. Nevertheless,

it manifested several distinct societal features. First, the IDF launched a deliberate campaign to actively encourage internal migration, driving most of the south Lebanese civilian population across the Litani River and towards Beirut. This effort was accompanied by an improvised humanitarian relief regime to aid the unfortunate villagers who could not flee. Its underlying logic was to clear the area for the IDFs military maneuvers while sparing non-combatant casualties, as well as to subject the Lebanese government and its supporters to heavy societal pressure in the expectation that they, in turn, would lean on Hezbollah to stop the fighting. Second, in a series of moves whose society-centric orientation was initially more implicit, the IDF also engaged in military operations against Hezbollah strongholds in the towns and villages of southern Lebanon and eventually also further north in Baalbek and the Dahiya suburb of Beirut. In short, increasingly frustrated with its inability to pacify Hezbollah and end the confrontation, the IDF elected to wage a predominantly society-centric effort targeting Hezbollah's societal backbone. The rationale was to dissuade it from supporting the ongoing fighting as well as future attacks on Israel, all while projecting highly visible war gains and resolve to the demoralized Israeli public.

This other layer of the IDF's strategy, that originally emerged mostly as an operational improvisation, appears in retrospect to have ultimately proven decisive in reaching a cease-fire and in reconstituting Israeli deterrence against Hezbollah since 2006, all the way up to the present. However, the IDF's success was nonetheless tempered by another societal element that had come into play late in the game. The misidentification of a Katyusha rocket storage facility inside a home in the Shi'a village of Kfar Qana triggered an air force attack that tragically killed scores of Lebanese civilians. This incident played into Hezbollah's hands that were already generating and skillfully projecting painfully real but also fake footage showing its civilian population suffering at the hands of Israel to the world.

This Hezbollah public relations (PR) campaign was pursued both directly and indirectly, targeting the US and France, as well

as Arab parties who up until then had acquiesced to, or even tacitly supported, the Israeli war effort. Indeed, the associated images incensed both the Muslim and Western worlds, causing them to intensify pressure on Israel to cease its military operations. The broader purpose of the PR campaign was to convince these actors to lean heavily on Israel to accept a cease-fire and to soften its demands in return for agreeing to one, and ultimately to also influence the contours of the negotiated post-fighting de-escalation arrangements. All in all, Hezbollah was able to project the image of a victor, having faced up to the far superior IDF in a prolonged confrontation and survived. At the same time, in its heart of hearts, Hezbollah did recognize how heavily bruised it had emerged from this war, and how disinclined to support another forceful encounter with the IDF its base had grown.

Since 2006, Hezbollah and Israel have maintained a fierce arms race and a tense but surprisingly stable balance of terror, with the societal dimension consistently paramount in the strategies of both sides. For its part, Hezbollah has tried, with partial success, to soften the blow suffered by its core base of support as a result of the Israeli military operation. It has done this in part by extending assistance for reconstruction of houses of their supporters that were damaged or destroyed by the war. In parallel, it has engaged in a dramatic effort to offset its vulnerabilities that surfaced in the course of the war by further increasing its reliance on society-centric elements. First among them has been an effort, mostly with Iranian material support and financial assistance, to scale up its capacity to massively and simultaneously hit multiple targets – population centers but also military assets and critical infrastructure – deep inside Israel with missiles and rockets of various types, as well as drones. In this process, Hezbollah has increased its rocket and missile force ten-fold in recent years, reaching an astounding figure of some 150,000, greatly extending their ranges, accuracy, and lethality. In addition, again with critical Iranian assistance, Hezbollah has been making a parallel effort to develop a second front against Israel, in Syria in general and the Golan Heights in particular.

Hezbollah, now with warriors hardened by 'regular' combat experience in Syria, where they have been fighting alongside Assad forces in the Syrian civil war, has also sharpened its operational readiness to conduct daring raids across the Israeli border to harass settlements and take civilian hostages. This it has done in part by emulating the Hamas experience in covertly digging offensive underground tunnels across the Israeli Lebanese border, while in parallel also strengthening its resilience to Israeli attacks. In response to the demonstrated intelligence and precision strikes of the IDF, it has expanded its efforts to relocate an ever-larger share of its headquarters, defensive deployments, and even some of its launching platforms much deeper into urban areas (in both South Lebanon and Beirut), in homes, mosques, schools and hospitals. It has thereby taken to an extreme the cynical strategy of exploiting human and humanitarian shields, as well as the propaganda gains they would generate should they be attacked.

These developments have been accompanied by further refinement of Hezbollah's well-oiled information operations, which have also come to include active suppression of any discussion of combat losses suffered in the fighting in Syria. Even while its fighters have been mainly engaged in Syria, Hezbollah has sustained anti-Israeli bravado with local, Israeli, and Arab populations in mind. Internally, this focus has been intended in part to divert attention and stifle dissent in its ranks over its losses in Syria while reinvigorating its mobilization base. Domestically, the aim has been to sustain the effort to legitimize its outsized role in Lebanon in the eyes of non-Shi'a communities. Critically, externally, Hezbollah has stepped up the effort to dissuade Israel from capitalizing on its preoccupation with Syria and temporary weakness to attack Hezbollah assets in Lebanon. To this end, it wields a propaganda campaign to highlight its growing prowess to wreak havoc inside Israel in the event of another confrontation. It buttresses this campaign by occasionally flying drone missions over Israel and other armed publicity stunts in the hope that these activities and demonstrations will intimidate the Israeli population while diminishing the appetite

for another round of military confrontation among Israel's political and military elites.[3]

Israel, for its part, emerged deeply traumatized from the Lebanese war, mainly because of its perceived inability to deter or arrest Hezbollah's aggression, protect the Israeli population, care for the affected civilians during the campaign, or secure a quick military victory against a dramatically smaller and inferior foe. The trauma was particularly acute given how long the Israeli public was willing to wait and absorb Hezbollah's attacks in the unrequited hope that Israel would ultimately secure a military knock-out. In the immediate aftermath of the war, public pressure forced the government to set up an official commission of inquiry headed by a senior judge to study the conduct of the war, as well as an extensive and highly charged effort by the IDF to analyze its own under-performance. This humbling experience, eventually reinforced by the damning findings of the governmental commission of inquiry, forced out or reprimanded a number of senior IDF officers, bringing about the resignation of the IDF Chief of Staff and significantly weakening the ruling Israeli political coalition.

Following this experience, the IDF began to rethink its Hezbollah strategy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the revamped post-2006 strategy has evolved to include an expanded defensive effort alongside a refined offensive operational plan. The expanded defensive vector is most society oriented, intended to reassure the Israeli public and counter Hezbollah's sophisticated propaganda operations. It is designed to provide an unprecedented missile defense shield to protect the Israeli population and critical assets through a combination of passive hardening and multi-layered missile defense. It also includes an enhanced elaborate plan for the government to extend core services to large swaths of the population that might find themselves subjected to prolonged barrages of Hezbollah rockets. Further still, the IDF's strategy is complemented by a concerted, highly publicized, and recently quite successful effort to beef up the IDF's ability to publicly expose its knowledge of the Hezbollah military infrastructure in southern Lebanon, as well as detect and foil offensive tunneling into Israel and defend Israeli settlements along the border. The public exposure of these counter tunneling operations has been designed to complement their operational destruction by the IDF, to boost Israeli morale, deter Hezbollah, and leverage the UNIFIL presence in southern Lebanon to dissuade further cross border tunneling by Hezbollah.[4]

True to its heritage, alongside its defensive and PR effort the IDF has also been investing heavily in further developing its traditional offensive skills, scaling up its capacity to move to the offensive much faster both on the ground and in the air, to both engage in maneuver and apply massive firepower. This, while it continues to struggle with ways to make such an offensive campaign brief, effective operationally, affordable in casualties, and expedient strategically. Not a small challenge when one bears in mind that that more classic offensive operations- and technology-oriented conduct by the IDF, regardless of how necessary they prove and sophisticated they might be in planning and execution, will still up run against a well prepared Hezbollah strategy and deployment. Hence, such an offensive and aggressive campaign is quite likely to 'degenerate' and become a society-centered and messy affair, strategically problematic while extracting from Israel a heavy political and societal price.[5]

3. Carmit Valensi and Yoram Schweitzer, "Hezbollah's Concept of Deterrence vis-à-vis Israel according to Nasrallah: From the Second Lebanon War to the Present," Memorandum No. 167 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2017), p. 115-128. In this context, see Nasrallah's recent remarks, quoted in Daniel Salama, "Nassralah's Target Bank" (Heb.), *Ynet*, July 13, 2019.

4. For discussions of Israeli strategy and action vis-à-vis Hezbollah see Udi Dekel and Assaf Orion, "The Next War against Hezbollah: Strategic and Operational Considerations," Memorandum No. 167 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2017), p. 131-142; Yoram Schweitzer and Ofek Riemer, "Neutralizing Hezbollah's Tunnel Project: The Ongoing Campaign against Iranian Regional Influence," *INSS Insight* No. 1116, December 12, 2018.

5. Gabi Siboni, "The Challenges of Warfare Facing the IDF in Densely Populated Areas," *Military and Strategic Affairs*, Volume 4, No. 1 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2012), p. 5-8.

In order to address this conundrum, the IDF has been enhancing its capabilities to locate, identify, and massively attack Hezbollah's assets throughout Lebanon, and to do so discriminately, even when Hezbollah's targets are located amidst its population. Israel also repeatedly professes a readiness to target Lebanese dual-use state infrastructure which supports Hezbollah's war effort, now that the organization officially constitutes a key component of Lebanon's government. While most of this upgraded capability has been reserved for war-like situations, it has been extensively and deliberately demonstrated in recent years through regular low-profile airborne and covert attacks against Hezbollah and Iranian assets in Lebanon and Syria, and apparently elsewhere as well, in what Israel terms the Campaign Between the Wars (or "CBW").[6] These attacks have been surgically targeting several leading figures of Hezbollah's military arm, as well as valuable assets associated with its effort to acquire and deploy menacing new offensive (precision-strike) and defensive (air defense) capabilities in Lebanon and Syria.

Probably the most novel aspect of the IDF's refashioned strategy is the manner in which it weaves operational capabilities and plans together with a conscious effort, still evolving, to confront Hezbollah's society-centric strategy and to calibrate Lebanese expectations for what lies ahead in the event of another military clash. This involves a concerted, systematic, PR campaign, intended first and foremost to sensitize Hezbollah's Shi'a backers inside and outside Lebanon to the mostly social price that Israel is able and willing to exact from them in the event of another war. This, in the hope that they will exert pressure on their own leadership to desist from actions that could unleash such a calamity. Some of this effort is also geared toward other Lebanese factions and backers of the state within the

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6. For elaboration see Lt. General (Ret.) Gadi Eizenkot's lecture on Israeli security challenges, delivered at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 15, 2019: https://livestream.com/washinstitute/events/7671698, as well as https://www.inss.org.il/the-eisenkot-doctrine/?offset=undefined&posts=undefined&outher=undefined&from_date=undefined&to_date=undefined#_blank.

international community to put them on notice of what might become of Lebanon (and especially of Lebanese infrastructure) if they fail to dissuade Hezbollah from undertaking additional provocations against Israel.

Such efforts to effect deterrence and otherwise coerce Hezbollah, both directly and through the public and third parties, are certainly not entirely new. But several features of the current campaign stand out. It not only involves discussion in public of the decisive (cum ruthless) nature of Israeli doctrine for future offensive operations in Lebanon, but also incorporates a campaign to systematically, if selectively, publicly expose (employing high quality intelligence to back it up) very elaborate Hezbollah military assets residing deep inside Shi'a towns and villages. This is an unveiled effort to impress on Hezbollah and its operators that their military deployment is transparent to the IDF, hence vulnerable, and on those who back them or tolerate their activity that they are bound to become targets of Israeli attacks, that would cause significant military and societal damage, should hostilities break out again. In the process, this campaign is also directed at the international community, designed to enhance legitimacy in the eyes of the international community for the IDF to carry out such operations, were they to prove needed. No less important, these efforts aim to strengthen the confidence of the Israeli public that the IDF is now well prepared for the next round of violence, should it come about.

All in all, this Israeli-Lebanese saga highlights a number of important insights pertinent to our discussion of society-centric conflict and strategy. First, this case limns the ever-increasing role of societies in confrontation. For one, they appear to have a critical role in determining whether military confrontation actually occurs. Furthermore, we witness societies as the objects to be influenced (and in extreme cases even shaped) by military (and related) operations, the cause of friction and escalation, as targets, weapons or tools of choice, and as cardinal elements in deterrent and compellent actions and calculi – critically shaping the character of conflict once it materializes. Illustrating the latter, an important dynamic we witness in this case is the societizing

effect of frustration: prolongation of confrontation, failure to achieve goals or a mounting toll in casualties, civilian suffering and economic cost often bring protagonists to refocus their efforts on society (or people) as objects and targets. Hence, regardless of their theory of victory, it is incumbent on leaders and strategists to prepare purposefully for potential societal pressure and these dynamics, to manage expectations and to plan either to avoid or to prudently wage society-centric confrontation.

Second, the Israel-Hezbollah confrontation illustrates the potential for rivals' society-centric strategies to upend even the most otherwise successful military operations, and to render classic military victories ephemeral and elusive. This, mostly by unleashing forceful dynamics within the adversary's society, in one's own, as well as in the international community that tap, mobilize and/or at times even pacify societal forces, and by applying these in ways that neutralize a rival's strategy and enhance one's own. Put differently, this case further drives home the point that failure to take societal aspects into consideration and accord them the proper weight when planning for contemporary military operations can be perilous, with undesirable societal and political effects that may linger long after fighting is suspended or terminated.

Third, and no less important, the case at hand draws attention to some of the risks, costs and unintended consequences inherent in the improvised application of societal levers as part of a war-fighting strategy. It attests to the serious, complex and sensitive dynamics involved in such encounters, and highlights some of the information, planning, operations, organization, and political requisites that must be both systematically considered and professionally executed. The case instructs us that the core logic of classic kinetic military campaigns should not only be accompanied by societal considerations, but that the latter should be an integral element of campaign planning, at times even the overriding factor guiding the application of classic military instruments.

Fourth, the Lebanese case illustrates how by their nature, society-centric conflicts are often protracted engagements, typically characterized by ebbs and flows in the intensity of actual confrontations. The Lebanon case illustrates that in such situations, it is critical to calibrate expectations of what is likely to lie ahead amid all relevant publics. First, it is imperative to act to predispose one's own society to provide the sustained support needed to carry out such campaigns while understanding and accepting the limited scope for clear-cut 'victorious' results. Of equal importance should be an effort to shape the adversary society's expectations of what it is likely to endure should it support such confrontations. In parallel, it is critical to endeavor to generate sufficient understanding and empathy in the international community for the threat you are facing and what you are aiming to do to last you for the duration. To be effective, these efforts must be undertaken well in advance and subsequently managed throughout, in essence in a continuous campaign of *societal preparation of the battlefield*.[7]

So, perhaps the silver lining in this otherwise grim area are the insights this case offers for war avoidance. It reinforces the insights generated by the Gaza case, drawing attention not only to the potential for purposeful or unintended escalation in the society-centric battlefield, but also for the ability to apply sophisticated society-centric strategies to help *avoid* conflict or at least manage it within tolerable limits of violence. This, by undergirding a tense, perhaps scary, but quite compelling and stable balance of terror – even outside the nuclear context.

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7. A telling illustration of such ongoing societal preparation is the IDF's decision to publicly expose Hezbollah offensive tunnels as it acted to destroy them. This public display was to achieve several purposes: reassure the Israeli settlers living on the Lebanese border and to enhance their general confidence and support of the IDF; enhance Israeli deterrence of Hezbollah and decrease confidence of its local supporters by wounding the organization's stature and exposing its transparency and vulnerability; and 'educate' international audiences regarding Hezbollah's malicious nature and flagrant violations of the UNSC 1701 cease-fire resolution that followed the 2006 war, this in order to elicit sanctions of Hezbollah and to generate an accommodating attitude towards Israeli retaliation against Hezbollah and its society-embedded infrastructure in the event of another round of fighting. See also footnote 4, above.

CODA

We embarked on this eclectic and partial review of cases drawn from Israel's rich history of society-centric conflict in order to seek insights and lessons for strategy formulation and implementation. For the most part, the lessons these cases illuminate are extensions of the analysis in our recent *Survival* article and are otherwise noted in the concluding sections of the particular cases. Here we wish to go further and, based on these cases, delve into a more fundamental understanding of certain dynamics inherent to society-centric warfare. Our intent is to offer a number of principles for planning and managing strategy for conflicts that already are, or may evolve into, society-centric confrontations.

We have previously noted that the imperative for Western strategists to confront the challenge of society-centric warfare and adapt to it stems from the choice made by all of the West's rivals to confront them by employing society-centric strategies. These Israeli cases reveal an additional and perhaps even stronger motivation to do so. The dynamics of conflict they unveil teach us that society-centric encounters often occur not as the intended outcome of design but as a consequence of unplanned developments on the ground as protagonists fail to fully appreciate each-others' strategies and social conditions, and hack their way through the proverbial "fog of war." Thus, all confrontations, including those initiated within operational, technological or logistical paradigms, possess an inherent potential – perhaps a propensity – to escalate to conflict in which the social dimension becomes more and more central, in a trajectory towards increasingly pronounced direct and intense society oriented action and targeting. As these dynamics unfold and rival societies become engaged, conflicts may morph from relatively 'limited' to more 'total' in nature, rendering the attainment of goals more difficult and costly, and victory or some other denouement increasingly difficult to achieve.

In this regard, our cases point to four factors that shape these dynamics of societization and often come into play in conflict. They demand the full attention of the strategist, for when they do come into play their effect can be to confound strategy. They either cause the unintended societization of conflict or undermine the effectiveness of one's already social-centric strategy. In both cases, these factors unleash and drive unintended, escalatory, costly, and potentially counterproductive processes and outcomes. These factors are: *time*, *frustration*, *humiliation* and *mishap*.

Ceteris paribus, the very passage of time in conflict holds great potential for the cumulative experience of protracted fighting (with the attendant casualties and/or symbolic damage) to have an immunizing or numbing effect. Thus, experience and time in conflict drive a repeating collapse of previously held limits to aggressive and indiscriminate ways and means, thereby resetting the benchmark for acceptable behavior. The significance of this time factor is greatly amplified when a protagonist also finds that, despite its efforts and the passage of time, its goals and victory are proving elusive, frustrated by its rival. Under these circumstances, the natural and instinctive proclivity is not to revisit the goals for the campaign, but rather to escalate one's actions, shifting the focus from targeting military assets to increasingly attacking rival civilians, economy and infrastructure, as a "quick fix" to secure victory in this forestalled or deadlocked situation. At least in the short run, the likely result is to unleash retaliation in kind from one's rival, or at the very least to cause it to dig in its resolve. In both cases, this exchange will likely take the conflict to another level of 'shared' social misery in a self-enforcing upward spiral of violence and obstinacy. Just as these dynamics dramatically affect the level of mobilization and commitment of both protagonist societies, they may also further engage the international community and alter its attitudes and positions with respect to the conflict.

Humiliation of a rival society creates an open and festering wound, engendering lingering emotions of resentment, anger, and outright hostility even among those who might have previously harbored misgivings about the conflict. In most cases, this situation unifies ranks (at least in the short term), creating a demand for redress and retribution that cannot be quashed by coercion short of physical annihilation, internment, or expulsion, at least not on an enduring basis. As our cases demonstrate, exposing a society's extreme impotence to respond to demeaning provocation or extended occupation of its 'homeland' can be prime causes of such feelings of humiliation.

Finally, mishaps can never be ruled out in warfare. While in an operations-dominant conflict successful execution of strategy is relatively forgiving of small technical or tactical errors and mishaps, when fighting occurs, to quote Rupert Smith, 'amongst the people', especially over extended periods of time, the odds rise that sooner or later a local tactical or technical error with strategic consequences (and moral difficulty) will occur – such as the inadvertent targeting of civilians and other collateral damage. Such events can convert rival social sentiments of fear or indifference into resentment and anger and may also catapult a conflict onto the stage of disapproving attention of broad elite and public audiences, at home and globally, drawing them into the conflict in one form or another.[1]

These four factors and their attendant dynamics have consequential implications for how we should approach and manage strategy as well as for knowledge and knowhow that must be created in the future as a basis for strategic assessment and planning. The frustration-driven tendency for counterproductive escalation of these society-centric conflicts suggests a number of such considerations. One important mechanism for avoiding frustration is to purposefully set shorter time limits for encounters, which in most cases will go naturally hand-in-hand with more moderate goals. Limiting duration and moderating goals

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1. In IDF folklore, this has been termed the "syndrome of the strategic corporal," reflecting the idea that even one very junior trooper, who would have no individual significant leverage over the outcome of traditional operations, may, in today's society-centric environment, cause extensive strategic damage through a one-off misguided action, with results that are quickly amplified by the media or social networks.

can furthermore help diminish the prospects of humiliation,[2] as well as the risk of mishaps.

Indeed, a key element in all this is to consider very seriously the possibility of planning for results short of clear-cut and absolute victory, that allow for non-zero-sum outcomes and that might 'satisfice' and still be defined as 'success'. While such moderation of goals will often in and of itself help shorten the timeframe of the exchange, there may be circumstances in which such moderation of goals does not foreshorten the duration of conflict or friction. However, the extended but lower level of violence may fall within the defined parameters that 'satisfice', in which case: goals achieved. Either way, by moderating goals and the attendant profile of violence, the escalating risks of frustration, humiliation and mishaps can be significantly reduced.

Very much related to goals are expectations, a critical area that requires focused attention. Unmet expectations held by political leadership or the public can develop quickly into frustrations which can, in turn, produce pressure to escalate and, as we have seen, further involve, engage and target society – not only in operations, but in (re)defining goals as well. For Western actors, expectations can be a particularly invidious stumbling block in the way of effective society-centric strategy. This is because successful, and especially enduring, impact on a rival society is inherently difficult. It usually requires either extreme brutality (that contravenes Western-nation norms) or considerable patience, perseverance and resources, and even then often demanding sacrifice and imposing casualties and destruction way beyond the appetite and instinctive expectations of Western decision makers and publics. Hence, educating, openly discussing, calibrating and shaping expectations before the event and managing them throughout can be critical for effective and controlled strategy.

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2. Just recently, the departing Chief of the IDF General Staff noted that in its response to Iran's efforts to enhance its presence in Syria, the IDF has been assertive and quite aggressive in kinetic action while taking great care to maintain a low signature and a profile of action least likely to humiliate the Iranian people and regime.

These challenges and pitfalls inherent to society-centric conflict underscore the potentially critically advantageous role in strategy of defense and reassurance – both force protection and homeland security. When engaged on strategic offense, such defense can provide leadership with an enhanced buffer cum window of opportunity – helping to maintain public support for the campaign, or at least acquiescence and patience. They can diminish the prospects for strategically upending mishaps, and ease public pressure (that would otherwise result from its vulnerability) to escalate action and pursue unrealistic and counterproductive goals.

The advantages of these defensive (but proactive) elements in support of a more controlled offensive strategy suggest that serious a priori consideration should also be given to an overall defensive strategic posture. Such a stance may render restraint more politically viable and diminish the imperative to embark on retaliation and offense. Further extension of this logic suggests that, should offense and conquest be unavoidable or strategically required, planners should consider how a later-stage timely transformation and even pull-back from offense to a defensive posture could help them limit fighting and occupation, inter alia to help avoid humiliation and escalatory, often gratuitous, friction.

These last points suggest another more general lesson: strategy for conflict should be designed and formulated to cover and include both the pre- *and* post-conflict periods, as this can be most critical for the success of the entire venture. As we have seen, this imperative is especially germane in a society-rich confrontation, where failure to devise and execute a strategy to manage and shape the pre- and post-confrontation stages may first produce escalation and subsequently unleash extreme society-driven reactions, and indeed overturn the campaign's results, causing defeat to be snatched from the jaws of victory.

The potential for change and escalation in these conflicts imputes two additional related guiding principles: the first is to prepare contingency strategic plans for conflicts to assume unexpected, often sudden, society-driven directions; for societies can

be quite fickle, and rival and international attitudes and strategies may change precipitously and not always predictably. Contingencies of this nature may require abrupt and fundamental adaptations, but a sudden shift toward a society-centric confrontation cannot be effectively and productively handled without advance planning and preparation, for these are quite different in nature from those required for classic operations- or technology-centric campaigns. As we have seen, society-centric conflict imbues even classical military moves with a different meaning, requiring that in strategy they be subjected to a rather different operational logic, one that is often unnatural for military strategists to contemplate.

This leads us to consider the second principle: the need to monitor closely for such changes and to be prepared organizationally to adapt. Put another way, the implication is that society-centric strategy is not to be seen merely, certainly solely, as an ex-ante formulation to be executed in conflict. Rather, it should be treated as a 'living organism', to be constantly assessed, adjusted and reformulated throughout an exchange and (as suggested above) even after confrontation appears to have ceased. This logic extends yet one step further: we have seen that operations-centric strategies can themselves escalate into the society-centric realm. Hence, such socially oriented contingency planning, monitoring and on-going formulation are essential even when pursuing an operations- or technology-centric campaign, though foreign and perhaps strange this injunction may feel to the 'traditional' strategy planner.

This last point has an important theoretical implication with policy ramifications, for it underscores and extends an argument we have made previously: there is no escaping serious and focused attention to society-centric warfare and strategy. As we wrote in *Survival*, all challengers of the West pursue such strategies, rendering society-centric confrontation unavoidable, whether one pursues engagement, restraint or isolation as grand strategies. But, now we can add the following notion: considering societal dynamics and contingencies is critical for *all* types of conflict regardless of the protagonists' original strategies, as

these may often morph into a society-centric modality, and not by design. These characteristics of contemporary challenge highlight and give urgency to the need for Western nations to correct their current course of strategy formulation and its derivatives in doctrine, procurement and organization. They must purposefully pull away from their professional and ethical comfort zone of peer or near-peer competition that focuses on operational and technological dominance, lethality and victory, and take to the complex and much less-well chartered waters of society-centric warfare and strategy.

In this respect, values and ethics are an important source of Western militaries' reluctance to confront, much less embrace, society-centric strategy. Indeed, it stems from the correct notion that society-centric strategy is to a large extent about *social engineering*, and seeks to impact all relevant societies, often in painful and fundamental ways. To this we respond that ignoring or denying this critical nature of contemporary warfare (while continuing to engage societies nevertheless), and continuing to plan for the wrong kind of war, is actually the morally indefensible position, for it essentially guarantees, as we have seen, that unnecessary violence, escalation and killing will occur – again, in *all* relevant societies.

From a theoretical perspective, if we are to approach much of contemporary strategy as an exercise in social engineering, it is disconcerting to recognize that the current state of art is worrisome: we presently have little to build on that is sufficiently general, reliable and actionable that strategists can rely on if they are, for example, to appreciate, predict and impact society or group resolve, understand the emotional reactions to different stimuli, assess behavioral implications of these emotional reactions, or make plans that account for social fickleness and precipitously changing attitudes.[3]

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3. One particularly confounding phenomenon that requires attention is that identical stimuli may engender totally different societal reactions. Understanding the situational or other underlying conditions that drive such differential results is critical for the formulation of effective social-centric strategy.

And so, the search for effective strategy invites us to push knowledge beyond our intuitions, to develop a behavioral science-informed understanding (or 'theory') of societal impact in conflict: how to apply military (kinetic), economic, informational and other tools to predictably counter and if necessary engender different emotions in groups and societies writ large (e.g. fear; indifference; positive affect) and/or how to avoid others (e.g. resentment; anger); how to manage expectations and construct effective framing. Critically, we will want such theory to inform the strategist as to the different conditions and requirements for inducing transient vs. enduring attitudinal changes, as strategy demands. Finally, in order to operationalize such understanding, we will require this body of knowledge to employ clear and actionable terminology, a relevant and applicable new operational 'language' of societal impact.

Closing these gaps and developing the requisite body of knowledge and these abilities is a tall order. It will require mobilizing and developing knowledge in a number of behavioral disciplines and areas – economics, psychology and psychiatry, political science, sociology and anthropology, even advertising – and integrating them with traditional military science. However, if there is no escaping society-centric challenge and strategy then there is no breakout from this requirement, for it is this behavioral element that intervenes between goals and ends on the one hand and ways and means on the other. Understanding this behavioral conveyer is essential if the strategist is to set attainable goals and feasible ends, and translate them into an effective, coherent and otherwise acceptable set of ways and means.[4]

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4. The formulation process is, of course, iterative (or circular). Having established an initial set of goals and ends, the strategist may discover that they simply cannot be translated to an effective, or perhaps morally or politically acceptable, set of ways and means, a realization that may send him or her to revisit and redefine goals or ends, or both.

CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY-CENTRIC WARFARE

INSIGHTS FROM THE ISRAELI EXPERIENCE

Jonathan (Yoni) Shimshoni and Ariel (Eli) Levite

Shimshoni and Levite offer a fresh look at the transformation of warfare, focusing on its evolution from post-Westphalian struggle predominantly taking place between opposing military organizations into society centric confrontations. They submit that all contemporary opponents of the West have made the social dimension central to warfare, de facto pursuing society-centric strategies even when they apply traditional force. They argue that several Western states currently similarly engage in such warfare, but without fully admitting as much or effectively adjusting their strategies, doctrines and force structures. Building on their recent expose in *Survival* of the theoretical and historical underpinnings of this phenomenon, the authors turn to the rich and varied Israeli warfighting experience for additional insights into the nature and dynamics of contemporary society-centric confrontation.

In this paper the authors examine the societal warfare phenomenon in four Arab-Israeli cases: Ben Gurion's formulation of Israel's foundational grand strategy and doctrine; the Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition; Israel's ongoing confrontation with Hamas; and with Hezbollah these past two decades. They conclude with observations on factors that tend to escalate and increase the undesired societization of warfare, discussing critical implications for the study and practice of strategy.

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