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## **Beyond the Basics: Looking Beyond the Conventional Wisdom Surrounding the IDF Campaigns against Hizbullah and Hamas**

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The United States military devotes great resources and attention to understanding the Israeli campaigns against Hizbullah (2006) and Hamas (2008-9). The Pentagon has sent at least twelve teams to interview Israeli officers who fought in the 2006 Second Lebanon War. "I've organized five major games in the last two years," notes Frank Hoffman of the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory in Quantico, "and all of them have focused on Hizbullah."<sup>1</sup> Only months after the end of Operation Cast Lead in January 2009, the US Army Combined Arms Center's Combat Studies Institute (CSI) at Fort Leavenworth published "Back to Basics: A Study of the Second Lebanon War and Operation CAST LEAD", an attempt to document the changes in the IDF over the two conflicts.

The conventional wisdom, especially in the US military, is that the IDF erred in several key areas during the Second Lebanon War. The IDF ceased training for high-intensity warfare. Perhaps more damagingly, the wisdom holds, the IDF adopted a new doctrine based on Effects-Based Operations (EBO), a doctrine that led IDF generals to abandon ground maneuver, and to believe they could defeat Hizbullah from the air. After the war, according to this approach, the IDF simply returned to previous understandings and doctrine, as shown in Operation Cast Lead in 2008/9.

Unfortunately, the conventional wisdom that has coalesced in America around the recent IDF operations, based largely on "Back to Basics" and other CSI studies, comes from a superficial understanding of the IDF and of its performance during the two conflicts. These accounts inaccurately portray the IDF in 2006, and miss the nuanced but profound change it went through after the war in Lebanon. The IDF that went to war in 2006 was heavily influenced by societal pressure against accepting casualties and by a prevalent low-intensity conflict (LIC) mindset. Caught without a fully developed doctrine, its performance, while not uniformly bad, was often muddled and indecisive. The experience of the war in Lebanon led to new IDF concepts of maneuver and victory, on display in Cast Lead. The dominant narrative in America attributes the products of the societal and LIC pressures to a doctrine never adopted by the IDF, and fails to

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Jaffe, "Short '06 Lebanon War Stokes Pentagon Debate," *The Washington Post*, April 6, 2009. Available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/05/AR2009040502235.html>.

recognize the new IDF concepts. Left uncorrected, this narrative puts the United States defense community at risk of learning the wrong lessons from Israel's recent campaigns.

This study details the voices that have emerged about the two campaigns and what they illustrate about the IDF. Using the prevalent American "Back to Basics" narrative as a starting point, this work will examine how Israelis themselves, more familiar with and enjoying access to crucial sources, see the wars. Finally, it will attempt to distil an accurate account of how the IDF changed over this period and what the United States should be learning from this process.

Timely as this study may be, coming as the US seeks to end its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is bound by several limitations. As the campaigns in question are recent, the perspective gained by distance from events eludes us. The effect of the wars five and ten years later will influence the way they are understood, especially in terms of victory and defeat. The pertinence of the topic renders much valuable material classified.

Second, Hamas and Hizbullah are separate organizations with distinct capabilities and mindsets. A campaign against one will not mirror a campaign against the other. Therefore, judging the IDF by examining its performance against both organizations under distinct circumstances in different terrains should be done with caution. One cannot refight the same war twice. However, combining IDF performance and statements during the wars with other data can create a reliable account of the key changes in the IDF during this time.

## **Back to Basics**

The "Back to Basics" narrative emerged as a leading paradigm among American observers, especially in the military. CSI historian Matt Matthews, a versatile and usually careful scholar, argues that the Israel Defense Force (IDF) wholeheartedly adopted a new doctrine, Effects-Based Operation (EBO), convincing senior officers that Hizbullah could be defeated by a quick air campaign against key targets. He and others at CSI, including those writing in "Back to Basics", see the impressive IDF performance against Hamas as evidence that the Israelis shed EBO and simply returned to their classic doctrine of decisive maneuver. These ideas have entered the academic discourse on the wars, particularly within the US armed forces. In her MA thesis at the US Army Command and General Staff College, Maj. Kellie Rourke, citing Matthews, argues, "Israel adopted EBO, the belief that they could destroy specific, targeted portions of its enemy with precision guided munitions, and achieve the desired effect of silencing the threat."<sup>2</sup> US Army Brig-Gen. Huba Wass de Czege, writing in *Military Review*, also contends that the IDF adopted American-style EBO, which hampered its ability to confront Hizbullah in 2006.<sup>3</sup> The performance of the IDF ground forces in Lebanon was abysmal, argue the narrative's proponents, and Hizbullah earned a victory in the conflict. To them, the much-improved campaign in Gaza is evidence that the IDF simply reverted to its classic doctrine centered on dominant ground maneuver.

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<sup>2</sup> Kellie S. Rourke, "U.S. Counterinsurgency Doctrine: Is it Adequate to Defeat Hezbollah as a Threat Model of Future Insurgencies?" (MA Thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2009), 35.

<sup>3</sup> BGen Huba Wass de Czege, "Systemic Operational Design: Learning and Adapting in Complex Missions," *Military Review*, (January- February 2009), 4.

Matt Matthews has written several pieces on the Second Lebanon War and Cast Lead, promoting this narrative. In “We Were Caught Unprepared”, his account of the 2006 war, Matthews presents important findings, but his choice of sources leads to occasional inaccuracies uncharacteristic of Matthews’ work. Observers who fawn over Hizbullah- Augustus Richard Norton, Mark Perry, and Alistair Crooke- are some of Matthews’ most cited sources, and their enthusiasm for Hizbullah’s performance leads Matthews to overstate the quality of Shi’ite organization’s tactics and strategy, which he describes as “brilliant” and “masterful”. They also lead Matthews astray when he neglects to approach their work with sufficient critical caution. Norton identifies Yossi Olmert as the Israeli prime minister in *Hezbollah: A Short History*. Of course, Ehud Olmert was the Israeli PM, and his brother Yossi a professor and diplomat. Matthews makes the same bizarre mistake, suggesting he used Norton’s work, errors and all, too casually.<sup>4</sup>

A more substantial problem, one that colored his perception of the entire war, comes from Matthews’ reliance on Crooke and Perry’s estimate of Hizbullah dead. Crooke and Perry, throughout their three-part article “How Hezbollah Defeated Israel”, argue that every aspect of the war was “a decisive and complete victory” for Hizbullah.<sup>5</sup> Using their casualty figures, Matthews writes, “By 8 August, 61 Israeli soldiers had been killed, while the IDF reported 450 Hezbollah fighters killed. This last figure was highly exaggerated, as it appears likely that only 184 Hezbollah fighters were killed in ground fighting in southern Lebanon during the entire war.”<sup>6</sup> He cites Crooke and Perry’s claim that Israel and Hizbullah lost nearly the same number of fighters:

“Perhaps the most telling sign of Israel’s military failure comes in counting the dead and wounded. Israel now claims that it killed about 400-500 Hezbollah fighters, while its own losses were significantly less. But a more precise accounting shows that Israeli and Hezbollah casualties were nearly even. It is impossible for Shi’ites (and Hezbollah) not to allow an honorable burial for its martyrs, so in this case it is simply a matter of counting funerals. Fewer than 180 funerals have been held for Hezbollah fighters-- nearly equal to the number killed on the Israeli side. That number may be revised upward: our most recent information from Lebanon says the number of Shi’ite martyr funerals in the south can now be precisely tabulated at 184.”<sup>7</sup>

The use of Hizbullah funerals to estimate casualties assumes the media-savvy organization was oblivious to the propaganda benefits of projecting a smaller number of fighters killed, and, not surprisingly, there are authoritative reports in major newspapers that Hizbullah intentionally staggered funerals to create the perception of fewer casualties. Hizbullah itself admits to 250 dead, and the UN and Lebanese sources put the number at around 500. The IDF claims it killed 600,<sup>8</sup> and has the names and addresses of most of the dead fighters.

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<sup>4</sup> Matt Matthews, “We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War”, *The Long War Series Occasional Paper 26* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 36.

<sup>5</sup> Alistair Crooke and Mark Perry, “How Hezbollah Defeated Israel, Part One: Winning the Intelligence War,” *Counterpunch*, October 12 2006. Available from <http://www.counterpunch.org/crooke10132006.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Matthews, “Unprepared”, 51.

<sup>7</sup> Crooke and Perry, “How Hezbollah Defeated Israel, Part 2”.

<sup>8</sup> “Lebanon sees more than 1,000 War Deaths,” *AP*, December 28 2006. Available at [http://news.ustinet.net/home/news/cn/?/world.mideast.misc/1/wed/bq/Alebanon-war-deaths.RYBR\\_GDS.html](http://news.ustinet.net/home/news/cn/?/world.mideast.misc/1/wed/bq/Alebanon-war-deaths.RYBR_GDS.html).

Not only does Matthews rely on a source that gave an unreasonably low estimate of Hizbullah dead to buttress their claims of a Hizbullah victory, he also uses Crooke and Perry's figure imprecisely. Matthews writes, citing Crooke and Perry, that 184 fighters had been killed in ground fighting,<sup>9</sup> but their estimate of 184 dead included Hizbullah fighters killed in all aspects of the war.<sup>10</sup> Nowhere do Crooke and Perry insinuate they were referring only to ground fighting. Overall, Matthews' selection of sources gives the overwhelming impression that Hizbullah won an unequivocal victory in all aspects of the war, and that IDF performance was uniformly lousy.

Matthews also writes that the IDF adopted a faulty new doctrine shortly before the 2006 war. "The IDF's steadfast acceptance of a new doctrine" he writes, "inspired by Effects-Based Operations (EBO), Systemic Operational Design (SOD), and standoff firepower-based operations also proved problematic".<sup>11</sup> This doctrine convinced Halutz that targeting Lebanese infrastructure and key nodes in the Hizbullah "system" would persuade Hizbullah they were defeated, even though they could physically continue. Because of this doctrine, Matthews posits, Halutz was reluctant to order a major ground invasion of Lebanon.

CSI's *Back to Basics*, as its title suggests, takes the position that the major change in the IDF after 2006 was a return to former tactics and concepts. LTC Abe Marrero writes, "the IDF embarked on a return to the fundamentals that characterized their doctrine...".<sup>12</sup> Matthews' piece in *Back to Basics* takes the same position. He argues that the IDF abandoned EBO, and returned to its prior fundamental doctrine.<sup>13</sup> This doctrine, in Marrero's eyes, "shifted the IDF's emphasis back towards the traditional dominant role of land forces."<sup>14</sup> Marrero argues the IDF returned to its classic assumptions, and told its soldiers to "train as you did before 2000."<sup>15</sup>

## No Doctrine to New Doctrine

Many Israeli experts offer an account fundamentally different than "Back to Basics." They make two key arguments- the IDF never adopted EBO, and far from simply returning to past doctrine, it has instead created a new concept of maneuver and victory.

Gen. Itai Brun, a leading theorist in IDF conceptual circles, argues against the idea that the IDF, led by Dan Halutz and dazzled by new technology, accepted a doctrine calling for victory from airpower alone. "These conclusions provide a superficial answer to a question that merits much serious analysis," writes Brun. "A deeper examination shows that Israel's application of military power was not based on an established perception that wars can be decided from the air. The priority accorded to air power did not reflect adoption of either EBO or strategic bombing as a

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<sup>9</sup> Matthews, "Unprepared", 51.

<sup>10</sup> Crooke and Perry, "How Hezbollah Defeated Israel, Part 2," 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> LTC Abe T. Marrero, "The Tactics of Operation CAST LEAD," in *Back to Basics: A Study of the Second Lebanon War and Operation CAST LEAD*, ed. LTC Scott C. Farquhar, (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2009), 97.

<sup>13</sup> Matt M. Matthews, "Hard Lessons Learned," in *Back to Basics: A Study of the Second Lebanon War and Operation CAST LEAD*, ed. LTC Scott C. Farquhar, (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2009), 24.

<sup>14</sup> Marrero, "Tactics," 86.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

foundation. Instead it was, first and foremost, the outcome of a long process of increasing social and political restraints on military operations.”<sup>16</sup>

Shortly after the costly victory in 1949 over five conventional Arab armies, Israel, led by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, came up with its defense doctrine. Leaders recognized that Israel has no strategic depth, a military dependent on mobilization of the entire society, and greater initiative and skill than its adversaries. The solution was simple- the IDF would strike first, seize the initiative, and drive the fighting onto enemy territory. Aggressive ground maneuver was the decisive element, confusing the Arab armies while bringing about quick decision.

As long as the original collectivist mindset dominated Israel’s discourse, the IDF could rely on casualty-heavy ground operations. But when the public began to distrust the military in the wake of the failures of 1973, and especially the messy invasion of Lebanon in 1982, IDF doctrine had to change to reflect the new reality. This is the “long process” to which Brun refers. As Israelis enjoyed growing prosperity in the 80s and 90s, a new sense of the individual further weakened the sense of collective sacrifice. Compounding this change, Israel fought enemies no longer seen by its citizens as existential threats, as it did from 1948 to 1973. “This shift...” argues Brun, “is the development that most significantly influenced the IDF’s ability to apply its original doctrine.”<sup>17</sup>

For more than a decade before the 2006 war, the IDF had been relying heavily on stand-off firepower, not its classic ground maneuver. The two major operations against Hizbullah in the mid-1990s, Accountability and Grapes of Wrath, were dominated by artillery and air power, with no ground maneuver. These operations against threats from southern Lebanon stand in stark contrast to the maneuver-heavy operations Litani (1978) and Peace for Galilee (1982). A major driver of this change was the need to reduce IDF casualties, in light of changes in the sacrifices Israeli society would accept.<sup>18</sup>

Matthews and others argue that Israel internalized the airpower-centric EBO doctrine in the years leading up to 2006. Israel was indeed in a decade-long process of an organic doctrinal debate when the Second Lebanon War broke out. Stemming from both the internal desire to revisit Israeli doctrine and the reductions in the defense budget, the IDF formally began reviewing the existing doctrine in 2003. Halutz signed off on a document summarizing the new concepts in April 2006.

The summary document itself- an operational concept, not a complete doctrine- had little effect on IDF commanders, as it was published only three months before the war broke out. If one is to glean anything from the document, it is that the new understandings of IDF commanders are reflected in, not caused by, the 2006 document. The Winograd Commission, the Israeli committee charged with reviewing the failures in the war, agrees that the operational concept was not fully implemented. Though a new concept was in the process of implementation, which

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<sup>16</sup> Itai Brun, “The Second Lebanon War, 2006,” in *A History of Air Warfare*, ed. John Andreas Olsen (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, Inc., 2010), 313.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

included changes like giving the IAF control of some sectors on the ground,<sup>19</sup> “the IDF was in an intermediary phase between consolidation and implementation of the new operational concept.”<sup>20</sup> The Winograd Report is quite clear that those who claim there was a new doctrine favoring firepower over maneuver overstate the case, decrying the “mistaken feeling that the clear preference given to “firepower” over ground maneuver...was anchored in a well-established doctrine. In fact, this preference...stemmed to a great extent from other sources, mainly the fear of direct friction with the enemy in the Lebanese theater and its price in human life on the one hand, and the confidence in the ample abilities of the guided precision weaponry...on the other hand.”<sup>21</sup>

The new operational concept overturned the classic notion of the importance of territorial conquest. Conquering and occupying enemy territory was seen as a liability and invitation for guerrilla warfare. Accordingly, ground maneuver, formerly the focus of Israeli offensives, was given a more nuanced role combining it with other elements, and air power was given a central, but not exclusive, role in achieving a decision. The American military’s use of air power and ground maneuver in the First Gulf War contributed significantly to this new doctrine.<sup>22</sup> But, as war broke out so soon after it was signed, it is highly unlikely the document caused the IDF to change concepts or doctrine.

Without a doctrine, and reluctant to risk casualties in a ground invasion, Halutz offered Olmert a massive aerial bombardment of Lebanese infrastructure. Senior commanders expressed doubt as to the public readiness for a ground invasion.<sup>23</sup> Condoleeza Rice impressed to Olmert the Bush Administration’s opposition to any actions, including the Halutz plan, that might threaten the Siniora government, and Olmert quickly relented. Israel was left with a limping compromise that targeted only Hizbullah, but ended up damaging Lebanese infrastructure in the process.

Many who believe that the IDF had no coherent doctrine in 2006 also see a new doctrine in place during Operation Cast Lead. They argue the IDF concept of maneuver was markedly different in Gaza. The IDF limited its casualties there by using the full force of its firepower, while in Lebanon it attempted to do so by limiting their exposure to Hizbullah fighters. Reservists, called up well before their entry into Gaza, had ample time to train. IDF ground troops maneuvered hard and fast, using massive firepower as they sliced Gaza in three.

### **The Importance of Tactical Excellence**

Others add that the IDF’s subpar performance in 2006 was aggravated by new ideas that had eroded its ability to operate soundly on the tactical level. Israel’s record of military success, according to this narrative, hinged on the IDF’s tactical excellence. In the past, the IDF’s tactical superiority compensated for the many strategic mistakes made by prime ministers and military commanders. Even when Israel’s leaders allowed the IDF to start from a horrendous

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<sup>19</sup> The Commission for the Investigation of the Events of the Campaign in Lebanon 2006, The Winograd Commission, *The Second Lebanon War Final Report*, (Israel, January 2008), 275. Available from <http://dwnmedia.a7.org/a7radio/misc/docs/08/vinograd.pdf> (Hebrew).

<sup>20</sup> Winograd Commission, *Final Report*, 321.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

disadvantage in 1973, the skill of Israeli tank crews and pilots salvaged a military victory. In 2006, however, new conceptual ideas had so damaged Israel's tactical abilities that there was nothing to cover up Israel's strategic blunders.

A major revolution in military thought took place under the direction of the brilliant and controversial Brig.-Gen. Shimon Naveh. At the helm of the Operational Theory Research Institute from 1995-2005, Naveh and his team of officer intellectuals introduced into Israeli military thoughts ideas and terms from literary theory, architecture, psychology, and postmodern French philosophy.<sup>24</sup> They aimed to create a means for commanders to make speedy decisions on the constantly changing battlefield. They applied system theory to military art, examining, in the words of Israeli journalist Yotam Feldman, "the operating principles of a particular unit (community organism, computer network) through the totality of the relations between the elements that constitute it and effect of their interactions on the overall system."<sup>25</sup> The bombastic Naveh, who declared that "my main channel of activity is the military one, and in that I am the best in the world,"<sup>26</sup> was forced out in 2005 over a minor billing infraction.

During the Naveh period, theorists pushed several existing ideas to the front of IDF thought, which, according to former IDF doctrine officer Dori Pinkas, muddled commanders' thinking.<sup>27</sup> Naveh presented the concept of Operational Art. "We wanted to create an intermediate level," says Naveh, "between the master craftsman, the tiling artisan or the electrician, who is the equivalent of the battalion or brigade commander, and the entrepreneur or the strategist, the counterpart of the high commander, who wants to change the world, but lacks knowledge in construction."<sup>28</sup> This approach treated the operational level as the centerpiece of military planning, inflating its importance while ignoring the strategic level and treating the tactical as a chance encounter.<sup>29</sup> As Naveh's ideas gained currency, those who refused to buy into his approach had to justify their position. It was Naveh's way or the highway. Though they did precipitate a storm of thought and debate in the IDF, Naveh's concepts caused commanders to think in terms of theories not grounded in operational experience.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, Giora Segal, Director of the Institute for the Study of the Tactical Environment, introduced Operational Rationale (*ra'ayon mivtzai*) into the way the IDF taught officers to plan missions. Commanders had previously planned missions by defining the *mission* and the *approach* (how to go about fulfilling the mission). Operational Rationale, in Segal's construction, asked commanders to consider and define how they would incorporate the ubiquitous IDF idea of *tachbula* into their missions. *Tachbula* comes from Proverbs 24:16, "With *tachbula* you shall wage war". Though it has no clear English translation, it has been defined as wise counsel, cunning, or strategy. With its biblical authority, *Tachbula* always hovered in the minds of Israeli planners. Operational Rationale forced commanders to think explicitly about how their plans incorporate *tachbula*. Instead of planning their mission and

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Yotam Feldman, "Dr. Naveh, or, how I learned to stop worrying and walk through walls," *Haaretz*, November 1, 2007. Available from <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/917158.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Pinkas interview.

<sup>28</sup> Feldman, "Dr. Naveh".

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Pinkas interview.

approach directly, they wasted time and thought inserting the superfluous Operational Rationale step simply because the new concept, Operational Rationale, required them to.<sup>31</sup> The circumstances of the intifada gave the IDF the luxury of additional time to think about missions, but fighting Hizbullah, against whom speedy decision is vital, there was no time to craft convoluted operational plans.

### **“Irrational” maneuver...**

Most accounts of the two conflicts share one underlying assumption- the changed, and more effective, IDF maneuver in Cast Lead signifies a deep shift in IDF thinking, be it the need to return to past doctrine or to create a new one. However, some peel away that assumption, leaving the possibility that the IDF’s aggressive ground maneuver in Cast Lead stemmed from ‘irrational’ reasons.

Brig.-Gen Ephraim Segoli, former IAF pilot and head of the Airpower and Asymmetric Conflict Research Center at Israel’s Fisher Institute, believes that the army needed to simply maneuver after the ineffective ground operations in Lebanon. This was done to prove to its enemies and to itself that the IDF could still conduct large, aggressive ground operations. Segoli also raises the possibility that the IDF might be too enamored with the ground maneuver, especially after Cast Lead. Eyal Ben-Reuven, deputy commander of the Northern Command during the 2006 war, also suggests that the perceptions of Israel’s adversaries influenced the decision to undertake a major ground maneuver.<sup>32</sup>

### **... the more things stay the same**

Even with the addition of the ‘irrational maneuver’ component, all the above takes on the IDF in Lebanon and Cast Lead assume the IDF experienced a major change between the conflicts, though they differ on the nature and meaning of the changes. Removing that assumption, some in Israel have argued that, in fact, no major revolution occurred within the IDF. They come to this conclusion from two opposing points of view- either the IDF never fixed its problems from 2006, or it had no deep problems with its skill or doctrine in the Second Lebanon War, and therefore had nothing essential to fix.

Lt.-Col. Ron Tira, military theorist and author, sees the problems of 2006 recurring in Cast Lead. In both campaigns, the political end-state desired by Israel was not clearly articulated beforehand, and therefore the IDF was unable to shape strategy to it. In both conflicts, if the political goal was increased deterrence, a short bombing campaign would have been in order. A limited campaign would have been appropriate to spur the international community to greater enforcement of its resolutions, if that was the desired end-state. If Israel wanted to destroy Hizbullah and Hamas, it needed to prepare militarily and diplomatically for an extended occupation.<sup>33</sup> Without a clear directive from the highest echelons, the questions about what Israel accomplished arose after Cast Lead as they did in 2006.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Ephraim Segoli. Interview by Author, Gllilot, December 29, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Ron Tira. Interview by Author, Tel Aviv, January 3, 2010.

Tira also sees a repeat of operational problems in Cast Lead. The halting ground raids into Lebanon in 2006 had no synergy, and did not build on the IAF's initial successes. Cast Lead opened up with a similar air campaign, one that took Hamas by surprise. But, after Dec. 27<sup>th</sup>, argues Tira, the IDF remained largely static for a week. Again, the IDF failed to capitalize on the surprise air campaign, rendering the ground incursion a separate undertaking with no continuity. To Tira, the hesitance moving beyond the bombing phase comes from the lack of direction at the top.<sup>34</sup>

As Hizbullah remains quiet, the aftermath of the Second Lebanon War is looking better to many Israelis. The argument that the Second Lebanon War was not the failure reported in the media has begun to take hold in Israeli discourse. While there were undoubtedly tactical problems stemming from reduced budgets and lack of training, the major reason the war in 2006 fell short of expectations was the approach of Halutz and the top generals. Because they never declared the operation a war, the General Staff never went into wartime footing. In a war, the Chief of Staff moves into the war room and operates on a wartime schedule, which did not happen in Lebanon. The Main Operating Headquarters, meant to be used in war, was never activated.<sup>35</sup> In short, the IDF prepared for an operation but found itself in a war. According to this narrative, the IDF would have been fully capable of aggressive ground maneuver, and other demands of full-scale war, in 2006, but were not ordered to do so until the very end of the conflict. Had the government decided to pursue the plans to their maximum desired achievement, the war would have looked much different, but the government had reasons to keep the war from expanding beyond certain boundaries. Without the decision to undertake a major ground maneuver, the IDF of 2006 cannot be judged on its ability to maneuver.

## Synthesis

If observers and officers in the US and Israel are to truly extract lessons from the recent IDF experience, a clear account has to be distilled from the disparate accounts. Far from simply choosing between conflicting viewpoints, it is possible to gain a robust picture of the IDF and its conflicts in the past five years by synthesizing elements of the above observations.

The Back to Basics narrative misses the larger picture, the profound changes that the IDF went through at the doctrinal and conceptual levels. But regarding training and tactics, Matthews and the CIS give a good sense of the shift between the two conflicts. Not expecting intensive warfare in the foreseeable future, the IDF let the skills of its soldiers atrophy. Training was minimal, and increasingly oriented toward low-intensity conflict.

Shortly after the Second Lebanon War, IDF training changed dramatically. Every brigade went through extensive and intensive training periods culminating in full-scale brigade maneuvers. The reservists began their return to combat readiness as well with replenished training budgets. The training of reserve officers was particularly improved. Thirty nine percent of reserve company commanders had not received any training for their position, according to a report released in 2007, but in that same year the IDF launched a training program for reserve commanders. They attended two to three month courses at the officers training school, Bahad 1.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Winograd Commission, *Final Report*, 296.

These commanders were integrated into maneuvers on the Golan Heights, and trained with their units in live-fire exercises.<sup>36</sup> Also in 2007, the NIS 2 billion “Eshed HaNehalim (Stream Rapids)” procurement program began. Under the program, every reservist will receive updated equipment by the end of 2010, and will personally check his unit’s emergency storage facilities once a year to verify their readiness.<sup>37</sup> As Matthews and his colleagues describe, the IDF did go back to the basics of training and logistical support after 2006, and that contributed significantly to its performance in Cast Lead.

Matthews writes that the IDF adopted EBO, which adversely affected the IDF’s thought and performance in 2006. Matthews overstates the case. As discussed above, the IDF never adopted EBO or any new comprehensive doctrine, though it was developing a new operational concept. Some of the decisions and actions that Matthews attributes to EBO were in fact symptoms the low-intensity conflict mindset that had descended upon the IDF after years of fighting Palestinian terrorism. Matthews does pick up on new ways of thinking and constructing orders in the IDF general staff; while these ideas were not a complete doctrine, they did affect decision-making processes and orders among some senior officers.

Though there was no new doctrine dominating IDF thought, an intellectual worm had eaten through the core of IDF thought- the low-intensity conflict (LIC) mindset, in which decisive victory is unattainable, enemies must be cognitively defeated, and commanders subscribe to the idea of post-modern warfare . Formed by the struggle against Palestinian terrorism, this mindset influenced IDF conduct in Lebanon far more than the new operational concept or any new doctrine. The LIC paradigm appears in senior IDF commanders’ publications. The professional journal of the IDF, *Ma’arachot* (Campaigns), is a valuable source for extracting dominant ideas in officers’ minds. Commanders writing in *Ma’arachot* before 2006 suggest the IDF should treat its campaigns as rounds within a much-longer fight, appropriate for the low-intensity conflict against the Palestinians, instead of striving for quick victory.

Col. Miri Eisen’s 2003 article, “The Struggle over Consciousness in the Post-Modern War”, clearly reflects LIC thinking, using Moshe Ya’alon’s statements about the defeat of the Palestinian consciousness being Israel’s goal in their war on terror.<sup>38</sup> Ya’alon himself wrote an article in 2005 in which he calls the defeat of the intifada “the end of the current round and the beginning of a new period.”<sup>39</sup> Focusing on the consciousness of the Palestinians, and his view of the struggle as a long, gradual fight, Ya’alon writes: “In the struggle we find ourselves in there is no complete victory and no complete and speedy submission (*hachra’a*)...In this war the winning side is the one that in a string of victories brings the other side to an understanding that violence and terror don’t pay.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Yoaz Hendel, "The Reserves Comeback," *Strategic Assessment* 10, no. 4 (February 2008). Available from <http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=1647>

<sup>37</sup> Hendel, “The Reserves Comeback”.

<sup>38</sup> Miri Eisen, “Hama’avak al HaToda’ah BeMilhama HaPost Modernit (The Struggle over Consciousness in the Post-Modern War), in *Halmut HaMugbal- Kovetz Ma’amarim* (Tel Aviv: Ma’arachot, 2004), 347-376.

<sup>39</sup> Moshe Yaalon, “Tzahal BeFetah HaShanah Ha58 LiAtzmaut Yisrael (IDF at the beginning of the 58<sup>th</sup> year of Israel’s independence,” *Ma’arachot* 400, (May 2005), 2-5.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

The LIC mindset also emerges in the General Staff conferences during the 2006 war. Against a LIC enemy like the Palestinians, it is possible to put off operations if the force is not completely prepared. An arrest can almost always happen the next night if the arresting force needs more time to train. In a war, however, that luxury does not exist. During one of the discussions during the war, Adam stated that an operation could be put off by one day if the force was not ready.<sup>41</sup>

The top Israeli commanders showed their internalization of the LIC way of thinking in their discussions about the meaning of victory between 2000 and 2006. In 2001, senior officers spoke at a conference entitled “Between *Hachra’a* and Victory”. Dan Halutz, then IAF commander, extolled the role of airpower in gaining *hachra’a* (operational decision) and victory. “Is war over territory relevant at all in the future?” Halutz asked. “In my opinion-no!”<sup>42</sup> Citing operations Accountability and Grapes of Wrath in Lebanon, Desert Fox in Iraq, and Noble Anvil in Kosovo, Halutz pointed out that ground power was not used as long as air power was feasible. Airpower, as evidenced by the opening IAF strike in 1967, can play a decisive role in war. Because of the ability of airpower to influence consciousness, it was now an important part of obtaining a decision: “What is *hachra’a*? In my eyes, *hachra’a* is an issue of consciousness. Airpower influences in a meaningful fashion the consciousness of the enemy.”<sup>43</sup> Halutz urged the IDF to break with the assumption that victory equals territory. He also argued against the idea that there existed “physical *hachra’a*”, instead pushing the idea of “*hachra’a* of the consciousness”.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to the LIC mindset, the new ideas introduced into the IDF, as argued by Pinkas, harmed the IDF’s tactical ability in war. It created ways of thinking that took too much time for the pace of war, and muddled commanders’ focus on decisive victory. At the highest levels of IDF command, Naveh’s ideas moved them away from issuing clear orders and looking for decisive victory. On July 20<sup>th</sup>, Halutz issued the order for entry into Lebanon, Operation Changing Direction 3: “A system-wide, integrated, and timed strike (Onslaught) of maneuver operations with all capabilities in order to undermine the operational performance of the organization [Hizbullah].”<sup>45</sup> Convoluted orders wreaked havoc on the commanders’ ability to understand and carry out their missions.

Though the IDF did not adopt EBO, as Matthews contends, senior commanders did speak about influencing the consciousness of the enemy and creating effects during the early stages of the war. This is a result of the Naveh influence. On July 20<sup>th</sup>, Halutz said in a meeting with the Defense Minister that “we must continue to operate in South Lebanon... to strike their will to fight.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, according to Gen. Adam, speaking at a July 22 meeting at the Northern Command headquarters, the IDF had “reached the stage of deepening maneuver with the intent of creating a feeling within Hizbullah that we are moving to broad maneuver. We must use the remaining time to create the cumulative effect.”<sup>47</sup> Following the Naveh thinking, Military

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<sup>41</sup> Winograd Commission, *Final Report*, 94.

<sup>42</sup> Dan Halutz, “Airpower as a Variable of *Hachraah*,” in “*Ben Hachra’ah L’nitzachon (Between Decision and Victory)*”: A Joint Seminar between the Center for Study of National Defense- Haifa University and the National Defense College-IDF, 28 January 2001 (Haifa: University of Haifa), 2001, 96.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>45</sup> Winograd Report, 90.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

Intelligence looked for weak spots to strike that could break Hizbullah,<sup>48</sup> and the General Staff set effects as goals of missions, abandoning military language.<sup>49</sup>

After the war against Hizbullah, as Gen. Brun and others argue, the IDF did not simply return to its classic doctrine. It shed the LIC mindset, and emerged with a new understanding of maneuver and victory, on display in Cast Lead. One of the lessons learned from Lebanon was the need for better combined and joint operations. ‘Jointness’ was “a state of mind, evolved into a common language and culminated in the comprehensive, multidisciplinary concept of operations played out in Gaza.”<sup>50</sup> Almost a year before Cast Lead, IDF Southern Command officers sat with Shin Bet members, Navy and Air Force personnel, and intelligence officers to create a joint target bank and a plan understood by all branches. The commander of Combat Engineering Battalion 605 even took his company commanders on a helicopter flight over Gaza so they could see it from a pilot’s eyes.<sup>51</sup>

The preparation proved itself in the fighting. “Most of us all knew one another” said IAF Colonel Dor. “We could recognize each other’s voices over the radio, and that makes a big difference.”<sup>52</sup> The important innovation was putting all combat elements-air, armor, artillery, and engineers- in the hands of the brigade commanders. Intelligence and ground forces worked so intimately that ground commanders had names, addresses, and pictures of local Hamas commanders, and they turned over captured documents and prisoners immediately to their intelligence liaisons. Whereas in Lebanon, airpower played only a supporting role for the ground advance phase, in Gaza they were fully integrated. “I instructed my pilots to consider themselves the flying tank of the brigade commander,” said IAF Lt. Col. Gil. The idea of supporting and primary elements in maneuver did not apply to Cast Lead. Instead, the IDF understood that the air and ground forces should assist one another, depending on the situation. When appropriate, the IAF would provide close air support for the maneuvering tanks and infantry, and in other situations, the ground forces would cause enemy fighters to come out of hiding, rendering themselves vulnerable to air strikes.<sup>53</sup>

With the new concept of joint operations, the IDF also integrated supporting elements in its operations in Gaza. Humanitarian Operations and Public Relations have strategic importance for Israel, and in Lebanon, they were slapped together haphazardly. Warnings to civilians in Lebanon were general calls to leave certain areas. The public relations effort was almost comically improvisational. Michael Oren, current Ambassador to the United States, remembers sitting in a tent with four other reservists on the border with Lebanon, planning Israel’s entire PR strategy.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 262.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>50</sup> Barbara Opall-Rome, “Gaza War is Battle Lab for Joint Combat Ops,” *DefenseNews*, May 11, 2009. Available from <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=4083045>.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>53</sup> Brun, “The Second Lebanon War, 2006”, 334.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Oren. Interview by Author, March 05, 2009, Washington, D.C.

In Gaza, on the other hand, Humanitarian, Legal, and Public Relations officers all sat on the planning teams.<sup>55</sup> The general warnings, sporadically effective in Lebanon, were replaced with specific warnings to individuals in target buildings, including text messages and phone calls to residents of houses. Humanitarian corridors were created to allow food and supplies to flow to civilians. IDF public relations officers stood ready with YouTube and Twitter channels promoting Israel's message.

A change in the way senior IDF commanders talked about victory indicates a new concept of victory after the war in Lebanon. Belief in the possibility and importance of decisive battlefield victory was restored after the LIC mindset had eroded the IDF's focus on victory. Halutz said that "Dahiya", meaning the clear destruction of the enemy's symbolic and physical home base, should be the starting point for all future conflicts.<sup>56</sup> Seven months after the war, Moshe Kaplinsky, deputy COS during the war, showed he grasped the importance of Israel being seen as the victor. "I think there is no "war for symbols," said Kaplinsky. "If you fight, you must win. To win is to cause your enemy to not want to fight and be so wounded it will take him a long time to recover...We did a lot of things that brought us close to victory, but the 'victory' is certainly not a victory."<sup>57</sup>

During Cast Lead, the same understanding of clear victory surfaces. In Gen. Brun's opinion, a central component of Cast Lead was Israel's internalization of the need to attain decisive tactical achievements against an organization for which non-defeat is a victory.<sup>58</sup> Maneuver was quick and decisive, and the IDF took no chances endangering its soldiers. No one but Hamas spokesmen would argue that Israel failed to achieve a decisive tactical victory. With freedom of maneuver and astonishingly low IDF casualties, the press had little negative material to report.

Despite the improved, but limited, maneuver, Operation Cast Lead exposed persistent problems. As identified by Ron Tira, operations did not follow one another smoothly. There was a lack of synergy between the initial bombing campaign and the ground invasion, and to some extent, between the maneuvering brigades in Gaza. The IDF still needs to solve its operational problems. Tira also identifies a gap between the political end-state desired and the strategy in both Lebanon and Cast Lead.<sup>59</sup> Though the Israel did strengthen its deterrence in both conflicts, it is by no means evident that the fighting in Gaza was planned with a logical, clear connection to the desired political goal.

The IDF reached important conclusions after Lebanon and Cast Lead. Bound by the same societal restrictions, it still seeks to minimize its casualties. In 2006, the IDF attempted this by avoiding ground maneuver as long as possible, while in 2008/9, it relied on overwhelming firepower to protect its troops. The Dahiya Doctrine, or the massive destruction of the enemies' symbolic and strategic home, has taken hold, especially as Hizbullah has been quiet for the four

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<sup>55</sup> Segoli interview.

<sup>56</sup> Ephraim Segoli. Interview by Author, January 1, 2010, Gllilot, Israel.

<sup>57</sup> Yisrael Bar-Tov, Eli Pollack, "Yisrael-Hizbullah," 31-2.

<sup>58</sup> Brun, "The Second Lebanon War, 2006," 29.

<sup>59</sup> Tira interview.

years and counting after the war.<sup>60</sup> Detering semi-state organizations like Hamas and Hizbullah is possible, in the IDF's eyes.

Of course, since deterrence exists only in the mind of the deterred, Israel's enemies can decide at any point that the cost of attacking Israel is tolerable once again. Israel expects this, and its goal is to keep the time between flare-ups as long as possible by deterrence through firepower, and to keep enemy rocket fire as low as possible during the flare-ups by ground maneuver.<sup>61</sup> This understanding was absent for most of the war in Lebanon, as the General Staff set stopping Katyusha fire as an objective only on August 5<sup>th</sup>, more than three weeks into the war.<sup>62</sup>

Maneuver, a central component of IDF concepts in recent years, also has a new place. The dichotomy of ground maneuver or airpower has given way to a nuanced discussion of a combined role. Sometimes, ground maneuver supports the IAF by causing targets to expose themselves, and at other times, the air force's close air support and intelligence supports the ground forces. It is no longer appropriate to speak about a purely "supporting" role. To make any maneuver possible, especially on relevant to Hamas and Hizbullah, all elements must be integrated and capable of performing their tasks. Tank crew must know how to operate their Merkavas, and engineers must know how to clear routes for advancing forces.

In short, in America, the conventional wisdom holds that in Lebanon, the IDF was an unprepared force with a flashy new doctrine, and flailed around southern Lebanon for a month with little to show for it. In Cast Lead, however, a well-prepared army returned to its classic maneuver and doctrine and won a decisive victory. This view misses the nuance that the Israeli voices provide. The Second Lebanon War, while disappointing and painful for Israelis, was a strategic accomplishment in many ways. The problems arose from a lack of a clear concept, not a new doctrine. Cast Lead, while tactically impressive, featured effective but limited maneuver, and is similar to 2006 in the operational shortcomings and strategic effect of the campaign.

The United States military has important lessons to draw from the Israeli experience. Becoming too committed to a certain paradigm, like LIC, could blind commanders to developing dangers. Naveh introduced innovative, exciting ideas, and those who refused to buy into them were marginalized. The US military should be very vigilant about preventing a similar situation, regardless of the type of warfare being fought. This includes the dominant counterinsurgency paradigm, population-centric COIN. America might well face an enemy against whom COIN is irrelevant or inappropriate. The harder commanders push population-centric COIN, the more likely the military is to apply it simply because that is its expertise, or to find itself fighting an enemy for which it is not trained. Dissenting voices need to be heard, or the dominant concept might blind commanders to important counter-evidence. The IDF has found a form of maneuver relevant for fighting sub-conventional enemies, and has found it possible to deter them. The US military should take this lesson to heart, and make sure the current emphasis on COIN does not cause an erosion of conventional combat skills needed in ground maneuver. It will take an integration of all elements, a speedier transmission of intelligence, and careful planning, but the US must maintain its ability to maneuver against skilled enemies.

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<sup>60</sup> Brom interview.

<sup>61</sup> Siboni interview.

<sup>62</sup> Winograd Commission, *Final Report*, 251.

The United States military is focusing its attention in the right place as it attempts to prepare itself for future conflicts. The Israeli experience contains important and relevant lessons for America and other countries facing skilled sub-conventional enemies. But drawing the wrong lessons is as harmful as not adapting at all. The studies circulating in America will not lead the military to the right conclusions, as they are based on superficial understandings of complex issues. Including Israeli experts with intimate knowledge of the IDF in the conversation will allow the US military to learn from the IDF's new concepts of maneuver, deterrence, and victory, and to develop relevant aspects for the United States. These concepts allowed Israel to recover quickly from its 2006 failures, and must be considered as the United States continues to adapt against contemporary and future enemies.

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