'Knives, Tanks, and Missiles':

Israel's Security Revolution

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Born a small, beleaguered state, outnumbered and surrounded by enemies committed to its destruction, Israel early in its history formulated a distinctive set of principles for its basic defense policy. To outside observers, Israel's approach became emblematic of, indeed, in some respects indistinguishable from its national character. Throughout the quarter-century immediately following independence, the national security concept derived from those principles served Israel well. Beginning with the shock of the 1973 war and continuing through the next two decades, however, events tested that concept severely and raised doubts about its durability. Prodded by these events, Israeli leaders sought to update, amend, and reinterpret the principles underlying essential national security policies. They did so always with an eye toward preserving the basic policy framework, thereby lending an essential continuity to Israel's approach to defense.

Now much of that seems likely to change. Technological, strategic, economic, and social forces are combining to render Israel's traditional approach to national security obsolete. As a result, in the decade to come, Israel faces the prospect of deep-seated and irrevocable change that will transform its national security policy and its armed forces. Altogether, these developments augur a veritable revolution in Israel's security affairs that will manifest itself in dramatic changes in the organization, role, and capabilities of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and in the relationship between the IDF and Israeli society.

This revolution in security affairs is likely to affect Israel's armed forces in the following ways:

- The abandonment of universal military service. Israel is unlikely to shift to an all-volunteer force or to jettison entirely

its reliance on seasoned reservists. Over time, however, the IDF is likely to adopt a hybrid system, retaining the principle of near universal service, but establishing in practice multiple distinctive tracks: for the average soldier, a period of basic training followed by Swiss-style reserve duty; for volunteers (perhaps encouraged by financial incentives), a longer period of active service; for career-oriented professionals (whose numbers can be expected to rise), renewable, long-service contracts.

- A reduction in force structure. More than most militaries, the IDF has wrestled with the tension between quality and quantity. In the future, Israel will trade quantity to preserve quality, as the cost of first-line helicopters, tanks, and sophisticated artillery systems make a mass army unaffordable. Moreover, as the Israeli security perimeter shifts outward, toward Iran and beyond, the IDF will acquire increasingly costly systems that can be effective at considerable distances from the Levant.
- A rebalanced force. The IDF's long romance with the tank, although hardly over, is giving way to a far more complex military, including an ever-growing helicopter force and a more sophisticated artillery arm. The role of Israeli armor will diminish, particularly as attack and transport helicopters take over more of the maneuver role once dominated by the tank. Although the Israeli Air Force (IAF) will still support the ground forces, it will play an increasingly independent role, hunting surface-to-surface missiles or striking nonconventional weapons-related facilities in neighboring states and beyond. The navy will retain much of its independence, though it will assume a more prominent role as a strategic strike force. A different kind of rebalancing may occur if Israel shifts responsibility for day-to-day security to professional units designed for that purpose. Israeli efforts to suppress the intifada with conventionally organized units, both active duty and reserve, damaged morale and disrupted training without yielding success. In the end, specialized units such as Border Guards assumed a greater responsibility for this work, a trend likely to recur in future "current security" contingencies.
- An "Americanized" officer corps. Recognizing that its officer corps requires significant overhaul, the IDF has begun to imitate some-not all-features of the American approach to officer development and compensation. Existing programs for educating more senior officers are clearly inadequate. Already under consideration are proposals to convert the command and staff school to a two-year course, and perhaps to create a military academy that would confer academic degrees.
- A revised strategic doctrine. Rarely in the past have Israeli planners considered the political impact of military actions on Israel's relations with its neighbors, save in terms of deterrence. Since 1991, however, the Arab-Israel negotiations have constrained Israel's use of force. Henceforth, all conflicts will be "wars after peace," conducted with an understanding that permanent postwar settlements (and not mere armistices) may be a real possibility. How will Israeli strategic doctrine change as a result? Three possibilities stand out:

1. An emphasis on defensive and counteroffensive operations in lieu of offensive ones. While never disavowing the preemptive option, Israel will face ever-greater political obstacles to its use. Aside from prospective attack with weapons of mass destruction, a scenario in which Israel will launch large-scale operations without some precipitating use of violence against it is difficult to imagine.

2. The pursuit of regional partners. Acceptance of Israel as a legitimate player in the region leads other countries to see new opportunities in an alliance with the region's most advanced military power. Israel will capitalize on those opportunities by aggressively seeking tacit or overt alliances with nearby states and working in cooperation with foreign partners.

3. Military operations directed at destroying enemy forces rather than seizing terrain. In past wars, territorial gains offered Israel the prospect of a barrier or buffer against attack, useful as a diplomatic bargaining chip and as a means

of enhancing border security. As long as the Soviets willingly replaced lost Arab hardware, the mere destruction of enemy forces promised little comparable payoff. Today, a crippled enemy can no longer turn to Moscow for reconstitution. Furthermore, occupied land is likely to include a hostile populace that greets occupiers with bombs and booby traps. Ground, once taken, becomes difficult to control yet difficult to return.

The most painful changes brought on by the revolution in security affairs, however, may well have to do with civil-military relations. The concern, voiced privately by some active and retired IDF officers, that a growing sense of "alienation" divides the army and society in Israel is overstated. Israeli civil-military relations are not headed toward estrangement and outright antagonism. Nonetheless, the unusually intimate relationship that has prevailed since independence along with the extraordinary deference accorded the army are a thing of the past.

Israeli military history has turned a corner. The revolution in security affairs inaugurates a new post-heroic age in which Israeli warriors are likely to find moral clarity and epic undertakings to be in equally scarce supply. Henceforth, the IDF will find itself obliged to perform tasks possessing neither the glory, say, of the June 1967 War nor the heroic resonance of the Entebbe rescue. Internal security, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency: such will be the dirty work that increasingly defines the lot of the Israeli soldier. For a proud and mighty army, the rewards that derive from that modified role will be mixed at best.

Israel's pattern of civil-military relations has allowed for an extraordinary degree of permeation of the society by the military and vice versa, including a very high level of participation in politics by general officers immediately upon their retirement from active duty. That practice, and certain institutional arrangements-for example, the weakness of the civilian Ministry of Defense bureaucracy and the absence of a national security council-may serve Israel poorly in the years to come. Future Israeli civil-military relations are likely to resemble those of other advanced democracies: complicated, contentious, and inextricably linked to a larger domestic and international political context. At the same time, the adjustments will produce a civil-military relationship congruent with the social and political realities of Israel.

Israel's revolution in security affairs will perpetuate its status as the dominant conventional power in the Middle East. Drawing on a more literate and technically sophisticated populace, and equipped with military hardware comparable, at its best, to that fielded by the United States, the IDF will decisively overmatch the armies and air forces of its neighbors.

The Israeli revolution in security affairs will alleviate, albeit slowly, the three-way tension between manpower, military requirements, and society. A new model IDF, with a larger professional component, will adapt to demographic and cultural changes in Israeli society that have made the old militia system untenable. That new model IDF will look, at first glance, rather more like the U.S. armed forces-high-tech, combined-arms forces, perhaps developing an ethos that places it at some remove from much of Israeli society. Yet this process of "Americanization" will have distinct limits. Indeed, the pressures leading the IDF to incorporate aspects of American military practice will themselves generate resistance aimed explicitly at preserving the IDF's distinctive identity. Thus, the tactical and technological responses that Israel devises to its security problems will, in the final analysis, retain a unique Israeli flavor.

The Israeli revolution in security affairs will widen the breach of Israel's diplomatic isolation. Israeli strategists have long dreamed of being bündnisfahig-an attractive potential coalition partner for regional or great powers. Such hopes-whether to serve as a place d'armes for British or American forces in the Middle East, to construct a grand

coalition of minorities in the region, or to build a grander coalition yet of non-Arab states on its periphery-have never completely borne fruit. Now, the combination of Israel's military sophistication and a more relaxed political atmosphere makes Israel an increasingly plausible military ally.

Despite such beneficial effects, the Israeli revolution in security affairs is likely to leave other problems unresolved. Israel's sensitivity to casualties, for example, will mitigate Israel's dominance in the conventional realm. In the 1940s and 1950s Israelis accepted tens of losses in routine security operations, and hundreds (even thousands) killed in "wars of no choice." Yet, the traumas of 1973 and 1982, along with general societal changes, are fostering a heightened aversion to high-risk military actions in peacetime and brinkmanship during crises. These developments so reduce the tolerance for casualties that even successful military enterprises become politically unaffordable. As a result, the revolution in security affairs will make it even more difficult in the future to generate public support for "wars of choice"-such as the 1982 war in Lebanon. Furthermore, the prospect mass civilian casualties caused by nonconventional weapons will make it increasingly difficult for Israel to go to war for any purpose other than self-defense or survival, and it will make Israel psychologically vulnerable to Arab strategies that exploit Israeli casualty sensitivity.

In addition, the revolution in security affairs will not remove or even greatly reduce Israel's vulnerability to terror or insurgency or to attack by nonconventional (chemical, biological, or nuclear) weapons. Indeed, to the extent that Israel's conventional dominance grows, potential opponents will rely ever more on these instruments of violence that Israel finds difficult to counter. Through just such means, one can argue, the Palestinians have succeeded in achieving much of their political agenda-recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and an autonomous political entity comprising Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, pointing toward eventual creation of an independent state. Technology is not likely to give Israel a substantial edge in waging low intensity conflict if the true objective is not military victory as such but mobilizing a civilian population on behalf of a cause and influencing world opinion.

Transformations of the kind discussed here also give rise to their own complications. One may identify at least three in Israel's case. First, given Israel's new diplomatic standing in the region, its expanding web of regional relationships, and changing popular attitudes with regard to war, Israeli governments will find their military options far more restricted than in the past. Concerns about world opinion, relations with the United States, and the stability of neighboring Arab states will diminish the utility of Israeli military power. Fighting terrorism and perhaps engaging in limited wars against its remaining enemies without harming ongoing negotiations or endangering existing peace treaties will challenge political leaders and military commanders. During the Cold War, Israel often chafed under United Nations or U.S. pressure that would prevent it from achieving decisive battlefield victories. In the future, an adversary facing conventional defeat might unleash a biological or chemical attack against Israeli population centers, a prospect that dramatically increases the risks inherent in allowing IDF field commanders a free hand.

A second new problem relates to Israel's relationship with the United States. Simply put, Israel's strategic dependence on its patron will grow in coming years. Developing an effective defense against missiles and nonconventional weapons will require a high level of technological cooperation. Likewise, with some of the most dangerous threats facing Israel coming from comparatively distant countries, the importance of intelligence cooperation with the United States will increase. Finally, although the principle of self-reliance may remain theoretically intact, Israel is likely in a future war to require some form of direct U.S. assistance, continuing the precedent established in 1991 when U.S. Patriot batteries defended Israel against Iraqi missile attacks.

Yet even as Israeli dependence on the United States increases, Washington's commitment to Israel will come under increasing pressure. To be sure, mutual interests in curbing religious extremism, terrorism, and the proliferation of nonconventional weapons should provide an adequate basis for sustaining the strategic partnership. Having said that, the end of the Cold War has already severed one common bond. The demographic stagnation of the American Jewish community and corresponding growth in the Arab-American and Muslim communities within the United States undermines another. Relations with the American Jewish community have also come under strain over debates in Israel about "who is a Jew?" Differences between Washington and Jerusalem over the peace process or the sale of Israeli military technology to countries such as China could induce the United States to curtail strategic cooperation. These factors, combined with the fact that Israel's share of the foreign aid budget looks increasingly at odds with that country's growing economy and the supposed outbreak of peace, cast some doubt on Israel's prospects of sustaining accustomed levels of U.S. support.

A final problem will emerge as a byproduct of Israel's gradual abandonment of its nation in arms concept. The IDF is already backing away from its longstanding role as "school of the nation." Indeed, the army reached a milestone when, as occurred recently, its Nahal (noar halutzi lohem-"fighting pioneer youth") units began training young Israelis to become urban entrepreneurs rather than hardy farmers on border kibbutzim. At a time when the Jewish state faces growing internal fissures, the demise of the IDF's role as a unifying and assimilating force in a country of immigrants may well leave a void at the very center of Israeli society. In that sense, the effects of Israel's revolution in security affairs will extend well beyond Israeli security.

The Israeli revolution in security affairs will not be a panacea for the Jewish state. Once complete-a process that might take a decade or more-Israeli conventional military power will appear to its neighbors more potent than ever before. The IDF will dominate neighboring armies and acquire the capability to deliver damaging blows to more distant ones. For a nation that was born in war and that has lived, ever since, in its shadow, the prospect of surmounting such threats is no small accomplishment. Hard experience has taught the Israelis, however, the limits as well as the utility of military power, and the ways in which superiority in one form of conflict can merely goad an opponent to develop others. Israel's security will continue, as in the past, to require large sums of money and a spirit of dedication from soldier and civilian alike. But more than ever it will require a willingness on the part of Israeli politicians and the leaders of the IDF to change.

- **56 Pages**

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