The Military Battle against Terrorism: Direct Contact vs. Standoff Warfare

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The processes of force building in the IDF are long-term processes based on the array of operational needs that will address the challenges of the future. The technological advances in long-distance precision strike abilities led the IDF to develop and exercise a range of abilities in the latest conflict against Palestinian terrorist elements in Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip. The voices of those who argue that this approach (standoff warfare) should be the vanguard in the military battle against terrorism are sounded with increasing intensity, reinforcing the school that advocates focusing on development of standoff capabilities. These voices occasionally presume that in the future it will be possible to place most of the burden of the battle on the aerial forces, with the ground forces serving only in support capacity. The growing popularity of this school may substantially influence the IDF as it envisions and plans the future trends of its force buildup.

In his article "Can Modern War be Decided by Aerial Force Alone,"[1] Maj. Gen. (ret.) David Ivri analyzes the aerial ability to decide the outcome in a limited conflict as well as in the battle against terrorism. Most of his arguments relate to the technological and technical aspects of this type of warfare, such as: control and monitoring systems, strike capability, reaction speed, continued presence, and the like. He concludes that "the victory in the limited conflict also requires the achievement of strategic political goals and not just the destruction of targets . . . . The aerial force does not have the practical ability to achieve the stage of civil procedures, and ground forces are needed for that." Gen. Ivry further notes that aerial combat is limited in the war against terror because of the circumscribed ability to obtain the tactical intelligence required specifically for air combat, and therefore it is not possible to win the war against terrorism from the air.

In light of this presumption, this article analyzes and compares two alternate approaches. The first is standoff warfare – fighting that is conducted by striking at terrorist elements with a massive exercising of remotely operated technological devices. The second is the more "traditional" approach, direct contact warfare –

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fighting that utilizes ground forces to strike at terrorist forces while aiming to achieve direct and unmediated contact with these elements. In order to focus the analysis, the concept of outcome or victory in the context of a conflict against terrorism should be set aside, so that the effectiveness of each combat approach can be reviewed comprehensively. Particular attention is directed here to the question: to what extent does standoff warfare serve the overall needs of the fight against terrorism? The analysis that follows includes three sections: the first presents what is required of warfare, both on the strategic and operational-tactical level. The second considers the two operational alternatives, and the third details the proposed operational response. An analysis of these two alternatives prompted the IDF's Judea and Samaria division, from 2003 to 2005, to implement a fighting concept based on the drive for direct and ongoing contact with terrorist elements throughout the entire area of operations.

The Requirement

As a first step, it is important to consider the IDF's various strategic alternatives in the current conflict with the Palestinians:

- The strategy of attrition – a strategy that seeks to wear out the Palestinian side[2] in order to achieve medium-term objectives. For example: the use of the term "illustrating the cost of losing" is in effect one way of realizing this strategy.
- The strategy of overpowering – a strategy that seeks to overpower the Palestinian side[3] and cause it to accept Israel's position. The use of the term overpowering in a strategic context is highly problematic, primarily because of the inability to eliminate the desire (and ability) to continue to exercise terrorism in varying intensities.
- Conflict management – contrary to the desire to wear out or overpower, this strategy seeks to establish a reasonable security reality.

An analysis of these three strategic options (also in light of the attempt to implement some of them, even if it was not planned in advance and resulted from the circumstances), makes it possible to identify the latter strategy as the preferred option, namely, a strategy that aims to manage the conflict out of a drive to provide the political echelon with as much room to maneuver as possible. Given this, efforts by the military echelons toward a strategy of overpowering should stop.

Embracing the strategy of conflict management directly affects the military's operational concept, the concept and purpose of exercising force, and the tactical fighting methods. From here it is possible to continue reviewing the relevant tactical achievements while distinguishing between their different types: a tactical achievement that contributes to a strategic failure (and from the Palestinian side, contributes to a strategic achievement); or a tactical achievement that contributes to the attainment of long-term strategic achievements. The optimal operational alternative should identify and implement an approach that will enable the realization only of those tactical achievements that contribute to long-term strategic achievements. Therefore, it is always appropriate to characterize and define tactical-operational missions while considering whether they contribute to the attainment of long-term strategic achievements.

Operational Alternatives

The first alternative is standoff warfare, an approach that strives to utilize standoff weapons with the drive to achieve remote control in an absolute (or close to absolute) fashion in the operational expanse, while devising solutions for maximum strike at terrorist elements from a distance, using advanced technological means. This approach has a substantial advantage when it comes to the ability to operate in areas where it is not possible to engage in large-scale ground operations. Standoff warfare is an approach that strives to achieve the maximum tactical objectives from a distance in the most sterile way possible. The components of this operational approach include: long-distance strikes in a built-up or other area in order to prevent the movement of hostile elements in and out; prevention of high trajectory weapons fire; selective strikes against any chosen target in the expanse, with maximum fatalities and minimal surrounding damage; and the use of forces in the air or on the ground (outside the expanse) to reach inside the expanse while minimizing direct contact with terrorist elements. The operational concept underlying this approach aims to achieve long-distance control through technological means. The designated task of the ground forces is to support standoff operations in order to enable the interception of suspects and terrorist elements, and to use clandestine patrols in order to obtain intelligence.

The use of this warfare approach ensures tactical operational achievements in a substantial number of events, yet harbors several drawbacks. The first is the duration of the technological edge. While the technological advantage over the

Palestinians is substantial, after a period of adjustment following the introduction of any new and sophisticated weapon system into the battlefield, the Palestinian side identifies weaknesses that enable it to reduce, even if only minimally, the effectiveness of the system. This process of identifying weaknesses and the occasional success in thwarting the potential of precise weaponry (for example, the use of household blankets in the Jabaliya refugee camp to foil sophisticated precision technologies) is perceived as an impressive victory and generates much motivation to continue the opposition. The second drawback is glorifying the opposition. The use of sophisticated weapons systems in such massive quantities spawns a David and Goliath syndrome, creating a platform to glorify the stone in the hands of children against the helicopter and the improvised device against the fighter plane. It is necessary to ask whether such massive use of technology that wins in most tactical encounters also leads to long-term strategic achievements. Third, although many terrorist elements are hit, in many cases it is at the cost of surrounding damage that entails injury to passersby. Fourth, there is limited operational use of non-lethal means**.** It is necessary to establish a large standing supply of operational measures that deal with various echelons of terrorist elements (not all groups are "senior" and should have a standoff operation launched against them). There is an ongoing need to obtain intelligence from lower operational echelons in the hierarchy of a terrorist organization, for example, the need to arrest wanted suspects for questioning. Clearly, it is not possible to open fire on those wanted for questioning. Concentrating efforts on exercising counter-means will impede obtaining such intelligence. Finally, there is the incomplete familiarity with the terrain. Familiarity with the terrain is a vital tool for dealing with terrorists and guerillas. Relying on familiarity with the terrain based on a network of sensors, as sophisticated and sensitive as they may be, will not make it possible to be acquainted intimately with the area of operation.

The second alternative strives for direct and unmediated contact – an approach that is built on direct combat contact with terrorist elements while utilizing the technological superiority as a component in achieving precise intelligence and maximizing the surprise element. The use of standoff fighting will be limited to the support of direct fighting and will be exercised only in the event necessary. The components of this approach include: maintaining constant operational superiority in the operational expanse in order to obtain unmediated knowledge of the area; making an efficient effort to gather combat intelligence as a decisively influential factor of

operational effectiveness; using close-range precision shooting while maintaining unmediated contact with the terrain; conducting a series of operations and detentions to strike at terrorist elements while utilizing clandestine activity, creating an element of surprise, and minimizing collateral damage. The use of technological means enables precise intelligence to be obtained and increases the forces' operational efficiency. The use of counter-fire will occur when there is no other operational alternative to a genuine and immediate threat. The role of the aerial forces will be to support the ground combat operations.

The concept underlying this approach touches on three operational components:

- **Upsetting the rival's equilibrium** in its operational expanse is a most powerful move. Attaining unmediated contact with terrorist elements in the expanse where they operate is of considerable importance in this context. The ability to operate silently, reach any point, carry out an arrest, strike at terrorists in a surprise attack and with "a knife between the teeth" is an ability that scores influential results: both in the immediate tactical success and in the overall continuum, which contributes to the attainment of the long-term strategic goal. Achieving this operational ability requires the use of a wide range of technologies in order to obtain intelligence superiority and the ability to achieve a surprise in every encounter. While clearly there may be scenarios where there will be no option other than the use of precise counter-fire, they are to be considered the exception. The management of the operations is unequivocally ground management.
- **Striving for an acknowledged symmetric arrangement** – the desire to minimize as much as possible the rival's ability to establish a lack of symmetry, i.e., to prevent it from gaining the achievement of being the "weaker" element lacking technology and advanced capabilities. Creating the sense of an operation on equal turf will contribute in the long term to reducing the power of the Palestinian myth of the few and the weak (the Palestinians) against the many and powerful (the Israelis).

- **Operational ability of countermeasures**, which preserves the ground commander's freedom of operation to use weapons and counter-fire. Maintaining this ability enables strikes on expanses where it is not possible to utilize forces, or strikes according to timetables that could not otherwise be adhered to. The ground commander should establish overall command and control capabilities that he can use in order to exercise the range of operational capabilities that are given to him.

These two operational concepts differ in three main characteristics. The first lies in the contrast in the operational balance. In the standoff option, the emphasis is on utilizing counter-strike capabilities while minimizing the friction caused as a result of direct contact, to the extent possible. In the direct contact option, there is a preference for utilizing forces to the extent that is possible from an operational perspective. Only in cases where it is not possible to achieve a quality result at the cost of a reasonable risk will use be made of countermeasures, for example, where there is no ground operation capability in a given sector and it is possible to prevent terrorist activity that entails an immediate risk only by using counter-fire.

The second difference concerns the command patterns. The command method is the core component of every operational alternative. The command concept behind standoff measures relates to the ability to provide commanders with a technological platform so that they have at their disposal abundant and quality information. The operational command takes place from a distance. In many cases, the desire for this alternative is to transfer operational command to long distance technology stations. The direct ground command in this alternative is a supporting tool in the use of counter-fire. On the other hand, the command in the direct contact warfare is direct and unmediated command by the ground commander over the operational expanse. The other elements involved in firing are subordinate to his command and support his command and control processes.

Third, there is a difference in the deterrent effect. The use of counter-fire can have less substantial deterrent capability than achieving those same objectives through direct contact. Realizing the operational capability to circulate in large swathes of the area while conducting undercover and other operations enables the creation of a greater deterrent effect than using counter-fire. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the more time goes by in which the primary operational method is counter-fire, there

will be an adjustment process on the part of the terrorist elements in which they adapt to this method and the deterrent effect will be weakened.

The Proposed Operational Answer

In order to find the best operational alternative, each approach's compatibility should be reviewed against the operational objectives that were defined. The approaches should address both the strategic and tactical needs. The ability to implement an overall operational approach in the expanse as well is critical. This approach must prevent a situation where tactical achievements contribute to the strategic failure (a strategic achievement for the Palestinian side) and instead seek tactical achievements that contribute to the attainment of long-term strategic achievements. The unmediated direct combat approach has greater potential than the standoff approach, as it is possible to utilize fully a complex mix of operational capabilities in order to attain effective results in combating terrorism and guerrilla warfare while maintaining the advantages in the following areas:

- Command patterns – maintaining the direct and unmediated command capabilities, knowing that the ground commander has the best understanding of the overall operational situation
- Surrounding damage – reduction of collateral damage, out of both ethical reasons and the value of reducing the motivation for terror caused as a result of strikes against innocent bystanders
- Non-lethal operations – maintaining the ability to carry out arrests to obtain intelligence and strike at minor figures involved in terrorism
- Familiarity with the terrain – maintaining an intimate familiarity of the area of operations among a large number of commanders and units
- Upsetting the rival's equilibrium – realizing unmediated contact with terrorist entities in the expanse where they operate while preserving the ability to operate silently is of the utmost importance, and provides results with a cumulative long-term effect
- Awareness of a symmetric arrangement – reducing the opponent's ability to create a lack of symmetry and preventing him from gaining the psychological benefits of being the weak element lacking technology and advanced capabilities

- Utilizing the deterrent effect – the operational ability to act and be present in large swathes of territory while carrying out undercover and other operations helps create a substantial deterrent effect
- Optimizing the technological advantage – using technologies as a supporting element and not as a core element in combat, which will lead to the full utilization of the technological edge over terrorist elements and will not hasten its erosion
- The operational blend – it is desirable to preserve the operational blend between direct contact and standoff capabilities, which enables freedom of operation to be given to the ground commander to use weapons and counter-fire as necessary.

Conclusion

The challenge of fighting terror requires constant thinking to find operational approaches that reduce terrorism while contributing to the state's long-term strategic goals. There may be many cases where standoff warfare will be the primary operational alternative (for example, post-disengagement Gaza or Lebanon). In such cases analysis shows that the ability to attain significant achievements is very limited. In order to enable the realization of operational capabilities based on direct contact, it is necessary to have a range of command and control capabilities, arms development, and training for operational units and their commanders. A vital condition is the construction of an integrated fighting platform of all the branches of the military, while engaging in a shared operational dialogue. These conditions can be achieved through a broad vision, enjoying the support of a technological effort for the operational approach without becoming indebted to it. The main principles of a targeted fighting approach are:

- Striving for direct contact in the fighting expanse with the terrorist elements, while building and maintaining the operational capabilities of direct contact via specially trained units and levels of freedom of operation that enable the undertaking of special missions with very short notice
- Using ongoing offensive effort in every expanse at the same time as preserving the IDF's degree of freedom in every expanse, while implementing many non-lethal operations

- Focusing intelligence capabilities around the requirements of direct contact operations and striving to improve combat intelligence with elements operating in direct contact in the understanding that it is quality intelligence that enables a platform for refined operational capability.

Fighting methods that focus on the ability to strike at targets from a distance do not in and of themselves serve the overall operational needs. The standoff method should not be expected to provide a complete answer to the challenges of terrorism, even if it is supported by assistance from the ground forces in varying extents. The continued terrorist activity and high trajectory weapons fire from Gaza prove this all too clearly. Consequently, it is important to review the operational blend and avoid tipping the resources of the IDF power structure in directions where its overall effectiveness and contribution to the attainment of Israel's long-term strategic objectives are left in doubt. The fighting approach presented above is based on a desire to strive for direct contact in every place where it is possible. It is worth considering the impact of this approach on the processes of building the power structure in broad contexts such as: reviewing the compatibility of the operational approach given the location of the threat from the inner circle (terrorism and guerrilla warfare) against the threat from other circles of conflict; and reviewing the operational concept in light of the limitations of the national resources to support the security effort and the need to maintain the technology gap as a force multiplier that enables savings while preventing rapid erosion of capabilities. Only if we are wise enough to develop balanced fighting capabilities based on constant assessments of their operational effectiveness will it be possible to maximize terror fighting abilities and reduce terror to a reasonable level.

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[1] The Fisher Brothers Institute for Air and Space Strategic Studies, collection of articles, no. 26, 2005.
[2] See Yehoshafat Harkaby, *War and Strategy*, p. 126.
[3] Ibid.