In Search of the Holy Grail:
Can Military Achievements be Translated into Political Gains?

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Among military thinkers it is axiomatic that the purpose of utilizing military force is to realize a political end.[1] Clausewitz wrote that the goal of war is to impose one's political will on the enemy,[2] and for Liddell Hart the goal is "a better state of peace."[3] Indeed, according to American military doctrine the finish line of a military campaign is reached when the president no longer needs military tools in order to realize national goals.[4] From the national-strategic end state defined by the president, the military commander deduces the military end state required in order to realize the national end state.[5] Still, the question remains: how is the compatibility between the military action and the desired political result achieved?

The focus on military and political end states suggests that there is a near-scientific formula that enables the engineering of a military end state that will, in a cause and effect relationship of sorts, produce the political end state. Moreover, the term "state" implies a new reality, stable and static. The term "end" indicates that the reality that is achieved is a conclusion to the military and political confrontation and allows for an exit strategy. But is this really the case?

The purpose of this essay is to examine if these concepts and terms apply in Israel's case, or if perhaps, at least in some contexts, more modest formulations are warranted. Two related questions are: Why does Israel's political achievement almost always fall short of its military

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success? And, can Israel find the holy grail of military strategy, i.e., translate a military achievement into a political gain?

This essay will also examine how to better synchronize the military and political worlds. Military doctrines that were developed in recent decades attempt to extend the modus operandi of the senior command staff to the political world, and "educate" statesmen to act on the basis of these professional protocols. According to this approach, the military tries to extract clear directives from the politicians, and it is the military that synchronizes the two worlds. However, showcase examples of finer harmonization between military action and the desired political objective actually entailed the opposite phenomenon. It was not the military that built bridges to the political world; rather it was the statesmen who built bridges to the military world and employed the military on the basis of political dynamics. The initiative and orchestration of war fighting were left in the hands of the politicians who used the military according to their understanding of the political situation.

End State or Ensuing Vector?

Some examples suggest that one can indeed draw a direct link between military action and political achievements. The Falklands War, for instance, produced a clear military end state measured by unambiguous termination criteria. There was almost complete congruence between the military end state (the destruction of the Argentinean army or its ouster from the Islands) and the political end state (the preservation of British sovereignty there). While Great Britain continued to maintain a garrison in the Falklands, final and stable circumstances enabled the withdrawal of most of the British forces from the theater of war and concluded the political dispute that had given rise to the casus belli. "Exit strategy" took on a vivid visual meaning as the British navy sailed northwards for its home ports.

However, such examples are rare, and it is doubtful that they apply to the Israeli reality, where it is more precise to speak of disputes and political processes spanning decades, occasionally supported or interrupted by military outbreaks of various kinds. The Israeli-Egyptian political conflict lasted from 1948, if not earlier, at least until the late 1970s, if not later. During this protracted political confrontation there were from time to time armed outbreaks at varying levels of intensity – sometimes no more

than violent negotiations – that in various ways affected the ensuing political vector.

This effect, however, was not exclusive, and many non-military vectors also exerted their influence. The wars between Israel and Egypt did not actually create either "states" or "ends" but merely supplemented complex political processes that featured multiple actors, most of whom did not even participate in the fighting. More than once, military moves were designed to achieve a political goal vis-à-vis superpowers that were never present on the battlefield. In some of the wars, there was a clear line demarcating the end of the high intensity phase, but the intensity was only lowered or suspended until the next outbreak. For three and a half decades, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) did not depart from the theater of war or disengage from military confrontations, and the "exit strategy" applied to a specific campaign (if that) but not to the conflict as a whole.

Moreover, key processes that shaped the relations between Israel and Egypt included not only the results of military clashes but also – and primarily – key non-military trends, e.g., Egypt's forging of close relations with the USSR in the 1950s and the about-face towards the United States in the 1970s; the Cold War, followed by detente; the transition from the pan-Arab Nasser to the pragmatic Sadat; and Israel's maturation from a pioneer culture to a Western society of affluence. It is impossible to understand the dynamics without understanding the internal political, social, and values-based processes taking place in both Israel and Egypt; the complex fabric of American interests (and the differences between the Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations); Egyptian dynamics with regard to third parties such as Syria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the Palestinians, the USSR, France, Great Britain, and others; global economic trends (the oil crisis) and economic trends in Israel and Egypt; changes in public opinion; and the struggle over the conflict's narrative.

Therefore, the political result of the Yom Kippur War cannot be understood through a purely military prism; in fact, the political outcome to a great extent contradicted the military end state.[6] In the Yom Kippur War, the Egyptian front was breached by the IDF. Large parts of the Egyptian fielded formations were destroyed, the Third Field Army was encircled, and the IDF took up positions on the roads leading to the Egyptian capital. The naive military analyst would be astounded to

discover that the war led to a process that restored the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, forged a closer American-Egyptian relationship, and significantly enhanced Egypt's political power. The analyst would be even more surprised to learn that the Yom Kippur War spawned the Arab narrative of the conflict while Israel neglected an attempt to establish its own post-1967 narrative. Isn't history written by the winners?

Clearly, then, effective management of the Israeli-Egyptian conflict required an understanding of many variables from different disciplines and the formative influence over these variables.

Multidisciplinary Management

Orchestrating different disciplines so that they interact constructively and form a coherent grand strategy extending over several decades creates two different types of challenges. The first is organizational: what are the working methods and what staffs are required? The second is substantive: how are so many variables studied and influenced?

The organizational challenge requires strong civilian staffs. A particular war and its broader contextual conflict are first and foremost a political phenomenon, but in Israel staffs such as the National Security Council and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs find it difficult to play their roles in shaping wars and in managing the periods between wars in a way that is coherent with the war effort. The activities of the different government ministries are not necessarily orchestrated on the basis of a consolidated grand strategy; in fact, to a certain extent the military and political strategies are contradictory. For example, the unilateral withdrawals from southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip contradict the strategy whereby Israel must allow the Arabs gains only as a result of political negotiations rather than from the application of force.[7]

So, for instance, despite the probability that at some point another round of violence with Hizbollah will break out, it is currently hard to point to an Israeli policy with clearly defined objectives and an action plan with regard to the Lebanese problem for the inter-war period. Israel is not involved today in a serious dialogue with its strategic partners over possible termination arrangements of the next war. It is not engaged in laying the political and public opinion groundwork for actions it is likely to take next time. It is not explaining that the scope of damage that rockets will inflict on Israel in the next round of violence will force it to

take drastic action immediately at the outset of the war, and it is not doing enough to prepare the world for the results predicated on the fact that since 2006, Hizbollah has steadily moved most of its force into the hearts of Lebanese towns and villages. Israeli foreign policy is not doing enough to create a new common denominator for international discourse based on the reality that Hizbollah has become a significant stakeholder in the Lebanese state, and that its power-sharing partners have agreed to the organization's continued military buildup such that the government qua government has no authority over the organization. Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not adopted a serious plan to delegitimize Hizbollah and present it as the proxy of foreign masters, as a main conduit for drug smuggling and money laundering, and as an organization that through violence is eradicating every sign of Lebanese democracy. And Israeli civilian agencies are not making a serious effort to adapt the laws of war to the new reality in which a terrorist organization has strategic high intensity ballistic fire capabilities greater than that of most NATO members yet hides its launchers within its own civilian population. After all, war is the continuation of policy and policy is the continuation of war, and the staffs handling all of the disciplines must support one another and act in concert, during both periods of fighting and periods of calm.

The second challenge is more difficult. The combination between the fighting effort and other military, though – to use American jargon[8] – "non-kinetic" efforts, is a well-established practice in the United States, Great Britain, and elsewhere. The Americans work with "influence operations"[9] designed to shape consciousness and conflict narrative. They have also adopted a "whole of government" approach, designed in times of crisis to bring to the fore all national capabilities, not just combatant ones.[10] Thus, the American government tries to affect political and social processes (the "hearts and minds" approach) among the civilian population in the war theater.

However, non-kinetic activities designed to shape the enemy and its consciousness have very high rates of failure. In recent decades, non-kinetic influence operations, from Iraq and Afghanistan to Cuba and Africa, have largely failed. Israel's attempt to "politically engineer" its enemies have also suffered close to a 100 percent failure rate: the Sinai Campaign strengthened Nasser rather than toppling him, the First Lebanon War did not produce a Christian government in Beirut, and the

"Villagers Associations" did not create a convenient, friendly Palestinian partner. It seems that generating effects on consciousness and political and social trends needs more than military organization, methods, resources, planning, and preparation. Moreover, it is doubtful whether the military is the proper organization for initiating and managing activity of a non-military nature.

The Modest Campaign

The recognition that at least in the Israeli context the military campaign will usually not produce a "state" or an "end" and will not enable an exit from the theater of war and the conflict as a whole; the recognition of the difficulty in engineering political results by military means; and the recognition of the disappointing track record of non-kinetic operations to the point of casting doubt on their reliability as tools for achieving defined results in a given time frame, all oblige us to reconsider which war objectives are attainable. Perhaps it is better to address two fairly modest questions: First, what is the minimal military criterion for ending a campaign (and why would achieving that criterion also persuade the enemy to end the fighting)? Second, what is the ensuing political vector that can be enhanced by the military campaign? These are critical questions, even while acknowledging the major uncertainty regarding the effect of military operations on the political world and the fact that the political achievement will probably fall short of a full resolution of the problem. At most, it would produce a limited improvement in follow-on trends.

Before proceeding with this claim, it is important to examine why the objective of Israeli wars during the first decades of the state's existence − the direct removal of the threat − is losing its usefulness. When the reference threat consisted of the invasion by a symmetric enemy, Israel's defense concept held that the threat must be removed by achieving a decision against the enemy's fielded forces. Today, however, the reference scenario is the enemy's attempt to exhaust Israel and generate diplomatic, political, legal, internal, and economic effects on Israel by means of multitudes of rockets and missiles, concealed and of low signature, and fired from within a widening area within the enemy territory. Hundreds of launchers are deployed, often intentionally, amidst enemy civilians. It is virtually impossible to gain a decision against such an elusive yet

saturated deployment, and it is impractical to speak of the direct removal of the threat in the sense of denying the enemy's capability to fire rockets and missiles.

If this is the case, only a few military objectives remain attainable. As an alternative to decision, Israel must be able to generate a concrete threat that would limit the enemy's strategic freedom of action to continue fighting and persuade it to cease the hostilities altogether. Such a threat must be formed rapidly in order to shorten the fighting. At the same time, it is necessary to exact enough of a war toll to have a tri-fold impact: persuading the enemy that embarking on a war is an error of judgment; extending the period the enemy needs for reconstruction and recovery, thereby also extending the inter-war period; and dampening third parties' appetite to fight.

However, the lessons of 2006 and 2008 are that it is essential to attain one more military objective: demonstration of tactical superiority. In order to continue to project national power and end the war from a position of dominance, the IDF must demonstrate anew, in every round of confrontation, field effectiveness and freedom of action to reach any location and strike any target. The IDF must display operational excellence in the execution of a plan, no matter what its contribution to the ensuing political vector. Moreover, tactical success produces political cards – even vis-à-vis allies – and provides the basis for a sturdy political give-and-take, whereas tactical failures or non-successes entail the payment of a political price for exiting the conflict. Thus, tactical excellence has important ripple effects and indirect consequences.

The desired political follow-on vector for ending the fighting must be even more modest. Take Lebanon as an example: in many respects this is a failed state that finds it difficult to impose its sovereignty throughout its own territory and over the armed elements at home within it. The Lebanese military is neither effective nor reliable in executing the will of its government. The government itself is deeply divided and in many senses paralyzed, having a symbolic value only. Foreign forces are free to act there as they please. The root of Lebanon's problem is the absence of a cohesive Lebanese nation, while the various ethnic groups have been engaged in violent struggles for generations. This problem cannot be solved by a military campaign.

No military campaign in Lebanon, whether it includes standoff firepower, or limited ground maneuvers in the south, or even the occupation of Beirut and half of Lebanon for a decade, is capable of changing the basic reality in the Land of the Cedars. Therefore, it is impossible to dismantle Hizbollah as an armed player in the Lebanese system, and a scientific-like plan how to weaken it as a political power through a military campaign is likewise tenuous at best. Israel is not able to resolve the confrontational status of the Shiites inside the Lebanese inter-ethnic arena and is not capable of preventing Iran and Syria from interfering with Lebanese affairs. Neither carrots nor sticks will make the central government strong, effective, and able to impose its sovereignty. It seems impossible to plan a military end state that would produce a reality-changing political end state, allowing for an exit from the political conflict as a whole. Different campaign plans, extensive or limited, will have different military results, but the political outcome will remain similar. Actors' capabilities and behavior within the given system may be affected, but the existing system cannot be dismantled and replaced with one that from Israel's perspective is more convenient. No campaign design is about to alter Lebanon's DNA, at least not at a human, political, diplomatic, and economic price that Israel is prepared to pay.

Thus, the realistic ensuing vector is likely to be either exposing Hizbollah as in service of foreign masters and demonstrating that it is acting in a manner that is detrimental to Lebanon's best interests and threatens the state order; or undermining the ability of Iran and Hizbollah to participate in Lebanon's reconstruction after the war; or dimming the Shiite appetite for further confrontations with Israel. That is it, and nothing more. This sort of campaign, "the modest campaign," would present a yardstick of military and political achievements that is not overly ambitious.

Operation Cast Lead: The Peculiar Campaign

Public opinion deemed Operation Cast Lead a success, though in many ways it repeated the errors of 2006. Once again the political echelon failed to fully play its role in war fighting, and once again there was insufficient synchronization between the military operation and the desired political achievement, which anyhow was not clearly defined at the outset. There was an extended pause following every phase of the operation, and only

then was the next stage decided on, as there was no prior clarification of the comprehensive political and military rationale.

The objective of the operation was to "deal a heavy blow to the Hamas terror organization, to strengthen Israel's deterrence, and to create a better security situation for those living around the Gaza Strip that will be maintained for the long term."[11] The parts of this sentence are vague and do not offer a clear political directive for a military campaign. It is not clear what is meant by "a heavy blow to Hamas"; some contended that this was achieved with the Israel Air Force's opening sorties, while others claimed that the operation never achieved it at all. Worse still, the directive "to create a better security situation" is amorphous and lacks direction, and could conceivably encompass a wide range of political objectives and ways for applying military force.

Indeed, "better security situation" can be translated into at least five different "end states" (or ensuing trends) and various termination mechanisms (or combinations of sorts): one, creation of deterrence vis-à-vis Hamas without an agreement; two, a ceasefire agreement with Hamas; three, an agreement with Egypt providing mechanisms for reducing arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip; four, permanent occupation by Israel of the Gaza-Egypt border zone, thereby reducing the arms smuggling; and five, occupation of the Gaza Strip with ongoing retention of Israel's military freedom of action (akin to the West Bank model after Operation Defensive Shield), possibly in conjunction with allowing the PLO to attempt to regain control of Gaza.

Each one of these political arrangements calls for a different type of force application, unique to that arrangement, as well as a different type of non-military support for the military efforts. Four of the possible alternatives are charted in table 1.

Indeed, ground maneuver would be applied very differently in order to realize the various directives. If the goal is deterrence, the maneuver would resemble a large scale raid; it would not reach any point of stabilization and would not involve a transition to static defense, but would entail a relatively quick, unilateral in-and-out. If, however, the goal is an agreement with Hamas, the ground maneuver would have to be more like a siege, gradually closing in on the governing center of gravity in Gaza City. If the goal is the occupation of the Philadelphi axis, the ground maneuver would have to be directed towards this zone.

Table 1. Alternative End States for Operation Cast Lead

	Deterrence	An agreement with Hamas	A tangible change in reality	An agreement with Egypt
Defining the directive	Deterring Hamas from continuing to fire rockets at Israel	A ceasefire agreement and prevention of arms smuggling	Unilateral stopping of arms smuggling	A mechanism preventing arms smuggling in Egyptian territory with international involvement
A possible campaign theme	Massive damage to Hamas' military, governmental, and economic assets	Gradually escalating pressure on Hamas, ending with a credible threat to topple its regime	Permanent occupation of the Philadelphi axis	Demonstrating the instability of the situation to the international community and Egypt
Duration of the fighting	Brief	Extended	Brief stage of high intensity, waning to low intensity security maintenance	Extended
Termination mechanism	Unilateral ending of the operation	Withdrawal in agreement with Hamas	Waning of fighting and transition to permanent occupation of the zone	Unilateral exit (with regard to Hamas) after an agreement with Egypt
Importance of the diplomatic channel	Low	High	Negative (need to neutralize international intervention)	High
Credibility and stability of arrangement	Moderate	Moderate-low	High	Moderate-low

The political-military discourse did not explore and illuminate these questions at the proper time or place. In hindsight, one may describe the campaign as having exerted "general" pressure to exhaust Hamas and make it pay a price, which ended – without any direct connection to any particular military line of operation – with an arrangement with Egypt on combating the smuggling of arms via and on Egyptian soil. In fact, a change in the Egyptian behavior and its enhanced effort to stop the smuggling was not a foreseeable or self-understood outcome of any

military line of operation, and it was not declared at the outset as an objective of the military action. It is hard to point to an engineered cause-and-effect relationship between a maneuver that encircles Gaza City and increased Egyptian enforcement on its side of the border. To a great extent, the change in Egypt's behavior was a welcome surprise rather than the outcome of any plan of action.

Operation Cast Lead did not produce a clear, reality-altering military end state: there was no decision against the military wing of Hamas and the rocket threat was not removed. On the contrary, despite the increased efforts to curtail smuggling, Hamas continues to rehabilitate its forces and the threat increases with time. The operation also did not produce a reality-altering political end state: Hamas remains in charge of Gaza, and the PLO's influence there has not grown. Hamas did not abandon its armed struggle and did not become a partner to peace. While the IDF retreated to the international border at the end of the operation, it is hard to bestow on this local retreat the honor of "exit strategy" from the conflict with Hamas or the theater of war as a whole. In fact, the IDF and Israel remain engaged in the struggle against Hamas.

In that case, why was the operation perceived as a success? Over time it became clear that exacting a price of Hamas dulled the Gazan drive for violent confrontation, but this effect is contextual and temporary. It may well be that in the near future circumstances will change, or the memory of Cast Lead will fade and violence will break out anew. Therefore, such temporary and partial pacification is not worthy of the "end state" title as it did not terminate an existing situation and create a new, stable reality.

However, perhaps the primary reason the operation was seen as successful was the tactical excellence attributed to it. While the enemy was weak and avoided any type of noteworthy resistance, even as an exercise (sans enemy) a relatively large and complex maneuver was carried out successfully in an urban setting, accurately and with a great deal of operational discipline. Intensive tactical intelligence gathering and massive, precise firepower accompanied the maneuver. The IAF operated with great success in carrying out its missions in every kind of weather and introduced new ways of integrating with the ground units. Even if Israel failed through influence operations to relay its narrative successfully (as evidenced, for example, by the Goldstone Report), the IDF managed to project a sense of military effectiveness and complete

domination of the battle space. The IDF without a doubt could have occupied the entire Gaza Strip and threatened the Hamas regime, had it chosen to so do. The maneuver within Gaza City demonstrated Israel's ability to limit Hamas' strategic freedom of action to continue fighting. History is full of tactical successes on the battlefield that failed to generate strategic gains and of mediocre tactical performances that generated impressive strategic successes. However, in this case, tactical dominance and success in the execution of missions – even if they did not directly contribute to a predefined desired political end state – affect the projection of national power and the perception of success.

If so, the military achievement of Operation Cast Lead was little more than wide ranging pressure on Hamas, a demonstration of tactical competence and the demonstration of the capacity to create a strategic threat (without realizing the strategic threat in practice and translating it into a military end state). The political achievement was a partial, temporary effect on the Gazan drive to engage in armed confrontation and the Egyptian desire to fight the arms smuggling (these do not constitute a political end state).[12] Operation Cast Lead did not generate "a better peace" (à la Liddell Hart), did not impose Israel's political will (à la Clausewitz), and did not produce an exit strategy. However, in its own non-ambitious way, the operation was something of a small success. Is this an example of "the modest campaign"?

The Statesman: Client or Conductor?

The military and political worlds are vastly different, but an effective interface is needed between them to ensure that the application of military force is optimally directed towards realizing the political goal. In Israel, the United States, and other Western states, militaries have recently attempted to extend the doctrine and methods of senior command staffs onto the political realm. Based on doctrines such as the Israeli "Operational Concept" and the American JP 3-0 ("Doctrine for Joint Operations"), the military world attempts to build bridges to the political world and "educate" it to act on the basis of an organized methodology and clear directives, to articulate end states from the outset, and so on. This approach has yet to reap a great deal of success, partly because of the political echelon's unwillingness to act on the basis of binding working methods, make unequivocal statements, operate on the basis of the

military planning cycle, and adopt other such defined rules of conduct. At times, the political directive to the military reflects a compromise between different political forces (e.g., a coalition between political parties or between states), and ambiguity of formulation is essential to the compromise itself. At other times, the formulation is purposely vague so that the political echelon can keep its options open rather than have to commit to a particular course of action. These difficulties in the military-political interface often contribute to the inability to clarify the required objective and subsequently to the failure to achieve it.

However, at times the military-political interface works well and military force, successfully orchestrated with the political effort, serves that effort. Examples include the Egyptian attack against Israel in 1973, North Vietnam's efforts against the United States, Mao Zedong's wars, Kennedy's handling of the Cuban missile crisis, and some of Israel's armed conflicts in the Ben-Gurion era. Common to those cases is the fact that the burden of synchronization between the political and military realms was not placed on the military's shoulders but remained in the hands of the statesmen. It was not the military that built bridges to the political world using military-like methods, but the political echelon that built bridges to the military world and closely steered it according to the dynamics of the political realm.

War is above all a political rather than a military phenomenon (at least in the limited war and armed dialogue, as opposed to wars of total annihlation). Military force is merely another tool in hands of statesman. The statesman, like an orchestra conductor, must use the instruments at his disposal (such as armed force, diplomacy, the media, and others) in order to create synergy, a "symphony" that is more than the sum of its parts, and achieve the desired political outcome. The military is incapable of conducting a war on its own, just as the brass instruments are incapable of playing Beethoven's Fifth without the orchestra's other instruments, a score, or a conductor.

In 2006, the Olmert government to a large extent behaved like a client of the military. It ordered a certain product and waited for the IDF to deliver. Prime Minister Olmert did not view himself as a statesman-commander-in-chief managing the war (the term "statesman-commander-in-chief" implies his sense of his role, and is not a comment on his personal record). On several occasions, Olmert noted that he

authorized every move that the military proposed. This remark describes someone who does not view his role as one that is required to be actively engaged in the design and management of the war. Indeed, it is hard to point to any main political idea for realization of the desired political objective of the Second Lebanon War (excluding the negative directives to avoid attacking the Lebanese government and its assets or starting a war with Syria). The Olmert government directed the military to create "a better reality" without clarifying what political move would produce such an outcome, without explaining how a military move could support or assist the political one, and without leading or even participating in a joint military-political strategy.

In total contrast, President Sadat, as a statesman-commander-in-chief, had a political idea in 1973 how to realize his political goal. Sadat sought to undermine the trust between the Israeli public, its government, and the IDF. He also attempted to demonstrate to the Americans the costs and risks to the United States emanating from Israel's presence in the Sinai, thereby pushing America to pressure Israel to withdraw from the peninsula. One cannot say that Sadat engineered the effect on the United States and Soviet Union according to a preplanned program or that he calculated in advance the effect the superpowers would have on the ensuing vector, but he did have a main political idea for the war. Only in the context of this political idea is it possible to understand the military steps of the Egyptians and the reasons for their success (not in the tactical-operational sense but in the sense of their contribution to Egypt's realization of its political objective).

Thus, for example, after the IDF crossed the Suez Canal, the Egyptian chief of staff Saad al-Din Shazly saw a front that had lost its contiguity and was penetrated almost to its entire depth, with the mobile reserves in its rear decimated. Shazly, as a military commander, asked to withdraw units back to the Egyptian bank of the canal and re-stabilize the front, but Anwar Sadat, as a statesman, interpreted the situation on a completely different level. He understood that the growing tension between the United States and the Soviet Union was limiting Israel's political freedom of action to militarily exploit the breaches in the Egyptian field formation. Sadat sought to raise the stakes for the United States. He also understood that to undermine Israel's confidence and create the political follow-on trend desirable to Egypt, he had to maintain a strong grip over the Israeli

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bank of the canal, thereby rejecting the military-operational consideration while imposing a political-strategic one.[13] It did not occur to Sadat to use Olmert's assertion that, "I authorized every military proposal." Sadat used the military not only as an operational tool for offense and defense on the front, but also as a means of achieving a specific outcome affecting the Israeli public and the White House. The statesman, decisively and carefully, steered the military line of operation.

In contrast to its stance in the Second Lebanon War, the Olmert government was more involved in Operation Cast Lead, but this involvement was still misguided: the senior military echelon presented the government with various operational plans and demanded that it choose between them. The government served as a kind of supreme field commander, and no level bore the burden of strategic management. As in 2006, the government in 2008 again failed to clarify sufficiently the political idea for the war that would realize the political objective (which was also not defined); the government did not provide the military with a score or conductor's directions, and barely played any other instruments (as demonstrated by the government's failure with UN Security Council Resolution 1860).

Operation Cast Lead exposed the functional problems in the echelons above the field ranks. The government lacks the tools to manage wars and finds it difficult to enter into the heart of complex processes of organizational learning. Usually it exempts itself from in-depth staff processes and encounters the complex world of contents only in emergencies and crises (when it is too late and there is no time to study insights that have been formulated in years of staff work). Civilian staff institutions such as the National Security Council are weakened and have to fight for a seat at the table. In the meantime, the military is concerned with being seen as politicized or perceived by the public and media as not playing by the rules of democracy; and at times, it is hesitant to assume responsibility and take the blame for possible failure. Therefore, the military prefers to avoid responsibility for anything above the field level. It tends to ask the government for instructions in tactical language, and thus in many cases there is no clearly formulated campaign rationale, the strategy is unclear, and there is no articulated political idea of how to realize the goals of the war (if those have been defined at all). In short, there is no clear policy. This void is evident in the fact that today one

would be hard pressed to state clearly what Israel's policy is regarding Lebanon or the Gaza Strip, and we do not know exactly what the Israeli government is trying to achieve in those two conflict areas.

One can find similarities between Olmert's misguided involvement in Operation Cast Lead and the Johnson administration's involvement in the war in Vietnam. Although conventional wisdom holds that Johnson and McNamara were overly involved in overseeing war fighting, the problem was actually the type of involvement rather than its extent. On the one hand, it is usually incorrect for the senior political levels to be involved in authorizing particular targets for attack or other tactical actions. On the other hand, the Johnson administration did not function as it ought and define achievable goals of the war, formulate a political idea of how to win, or design a realistic political-military strategy corresponding to the prevailing circumstances. Like Olmert in 2006, Johnson mainly defined a negative political idea (limitations on operations in North Vietnam and neighboring countries, and on measures liable to draw in other superpowers), but avoided presenting a positive, relevant political-strategic concept.

It is hard to draw the exact line between political and military occupation, but when a statesman understands the upper (political) layer he is more likely to identify the line. Winston Churchill[14] viewed war as the sum of military and non-military pressures operating in a given time frame, and military lines of operation as having a rationale only in the broader context of the gamut of pressures. As such, a government cannot make do with directing the military to "defeat the enemy" and then sit idle and wait to see what transpires, but must orchestrate all of the pressures. So, for example, several generals failed to understand the military rationale of the series of scattered peripheral campaigns carried out by Great Britain and the United States in the Mediterranean and Italy in 1942-43. The picture became clear only once one understood Churchill's political desire to demonstrate to Stalin (who in those years bore the brunt of the fighting burden alone) that the Western allies were serious in their intention not to leave him fighting the war on his own, even though they were not yet prepared to invade France. The ultimate addressee of the peripheral operations in the Mediterranean was not the German or Italian (the enemy) military but Stalin (an ally). Churchill also intervened correctly when he dealt with the operational layer and the military staff

work, insisting that the fight against the German submarines in the Atlantic be defined as a separate campaign, handled by a specifically designated headquarters. He understood that this constituted an important political issue vis-à-vis the United States and an economic and strategic issue of the highest order, and was more than just another seaways security issue. He apparently went down one layer too many when he insisted on offensive operations against the German submarines, in contrast to the opinion of the military echelon, which wanted to concentrate efforts on defensive operations: escorting convoys.

Like the military commander, the political echelon is also liable to err or adopt incorrect policies from time to time. But while the military realm maintains a training system and individual and collective working and learning methods geared towards improving chances of success, the political system lacks virtually any organizational system of learning, instead relying highly on inborn skills of statesmen-leaders. The qualities that brought the politician to the top of the political pyramid are not necessarily the qualities required to manage a war. In other words, the political system, especially in a democracy, is not a relevant selection filter for identifying people capable of managing a war, and no training is available to the political echelon. Thus, while librarian Mao Zedong, cook Ho Chi Minh, and farmer David Ben-Gurion were endowed with natural talent, attorney Ehud Olmert and teacher Lyndon Johnson found the management of war to be overly challenging. Is the quality of a war's management dependent on luck? Can civilian staffs increase the statesman's chances in a war? Can a civilian doctrine for managing a war be maintained?

In Search of the Holy Grail

There is an inherent tension between the need to recognize the limitations of power and the boundaries of feasibility on the one hand, and on the other hand, the fact that the objective of the military action is almost always political. A military action that is not designed to produce a political gain lacks direction and may even lack purpose and justification. This tension cannot be resolved, and optimization between the poles, if it exists, depends on context.

David Ben-Gurion's security concept[15] held that the asymmetry between the Arabs and Israel in size and international support means that

Israel may perhaps be able to remove military threats, thereby preventing change by force, but is unable to impose a change by force. As such, the strategy of war is always defensive, though it may be that "preventive strategy" is a better term as it is possible that offensive approaches are necessary in order to prevent undesirable changes taking place on enemy or third party soil (e.g., closure of the Straits of Tiran to shipping, the entry of a foreign army into Jordan, or control by terrorist organizations over parts of Lebanon). Indeed, in most cases Israel avoided presenting ambitious, reality-altering political goals for its wars, and some wars even lacked sufficient definition of the political will[16] or adequate clarification of the relationship between the military and the political side.

The Ben-Gurion approach was correct when Israel was facing a coalition of conventional Arab forces, but over time it has been increasingly challenged. Israel's growing power and its struggles against sub-state enemies tempt us into trying to impose change using force. On the positive side, Operation Defensive Shield did not yield either a "better peace" on Israel's terms or an exit strategy, but it did change reality: it removed the threat of terrorism from the West Bank and created a lasting period of stability (at least militarily). However, at times the political leadership presents patently unrealistic objectives, such as the directive or expectation in 2006 that Hizbollah would stop being an armed player in the Lebanese system and that the Lebanese government would be pushed into imposing its authority in the south.

Today Israel faces reference threats not of invasions but of complex open-ended campaigns that combine terrorism, attrition by means of rockets and missiles, intentional involvement of both sides' civilians in war fighting (the enemy firing rockets from within its own civilian population onto Israeli civilian population), a struggle over legitimacy and narrative, and the gradual erosion of the lines demarcating the military, political, and public realms. In these reference scenarios, it is almost impossible to remove the threat using direct military means, and it is hard to define a pure, utterly military mission such as defending the borders of the state (which are not directly threatened) or reaching a military decision against the enemy's field formation (which never presents itself on the battlefield for battles of decision).

This is another source of tension that cannot be resolved: on the one hand, non-kinetic means, when operated by the military or at its behest

and for its purposes, have not proven themselves as credible, predictable tools that can be relied upon in a war plan. Time after time they fail to deliver the goods, and this disappointment has been shared by Israel, the United States, Great Britain, and other nations. On the other hand, the complexity and fluidity of war in our time and the blurring of the line between the military and the non-military are such that traditional means, like maneuver and firepower, are not enough to address the problem, remove the threat, and win – in the sense of promoting one's political will.

The resolution of that tension, if at all possible, depends on context, but it also often requires the setting of modest military and political goals. The minimal threshold that must be met can be summed up as follows: the military action must persuade the enemy to cease the current round of violence; we must again demonstrate tactical dominance (if for no other reason than to project national power); we must exact of the enemy so heavy a price that it and third parties lose their appetite for another round of violence; and the military campaign must contribute something to the political follow-on vector. Any more ambitious goal (such as a fundamental change of strategic reality, nation building, or complete military decision) requires a very heavy burden of proof. The holy grail of military strategy – a military campaign that ends with a final exit from the conflict and with a new, pre-designed, stable, and better reality from our perspective – remains as elusive as ever.

At the same time, the political echelon must take into consideration that it is not a client of the military, placing an order for goods and waiting for their delivery. Rather, it is the conductor of the orchestra of war. As a political phenomenon, war requires the statesman to provide the score, the conductor's cues, and the other instruments. No one can dispute the political echelon's supreme status as decision maker, but decisions must be made only at the end of an in-depth study process, a process not conducted enough by the Israeli government – any Israeli government, for that matter. The military of 2010 worries – sometimes justifiably – about being perceived as politicized, and therefore prefers to draw lines and arrows on maps and compile lists of targets, without rising to the strategic level, which interfaces with the political. The National Security Council is weak and has no entry ticket to the decision making forum. If that is the case, who in fact deals with strategy, and who designs the policy of war?

Notes

1   For more on realizing political goals as an index of military success in the Israeli context, see Ron Tira, "Does Israel Win Its Wars?" *Maarachot* 407, June 2006, pp. 4-9.

2   Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 86-87, 607.

3   B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd ed., rev. (First Meridian Publishing, 1991), p. 338.

4   Joint Publications 3-0, Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 2008.

5   However, as a result of their experience in Iraq, the Americans have begun to discuss the possibility of combining the military and non-military efforts, instead of treating the process as consisting of stages, i.e., first a military stage to be followed by a political one.

6   For more, see Ron Tira, *The Nature of War: Conflicting Paradigms and Israeli Military Effectiveness* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press and Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2010).

7   See Ron Tira, *Forming an Israeli Policy towards Syria* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot Press), 2000.

8   For sources and more reading, see, e.g., Kelly Robinson, *The Death of Information Operations: Making the Case for Non-Kinetic Operations*, USAF Air University, Alabama, 2005. American sources sometimes use the phrase "non-lethal operations." See, e.g., Joint Publications 3-13, February 2006.

9   See, e.g., *US Air Force Doctrine Document 2-5*, Information Operations, January 2005, and Eric V. Larson, Richard E. Darilek, Daniel Gibran, Brian Nichiporuk, Amy Richardson, Lowell H. Schwartz, Cathryn Quantic Thurston, *Foundations of Effective Influence Operations*, A *Framework for Enhancing Army Capabilities* (Arlington VA: Rand Corporation, 2009), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG654.

10 See, e.g., *Quadrennial Roles and Mission Review Report*, US Department of Defense, January 2009, pp. 31-36.

11 IDF Spokesperson on Operation Cast Lead, http://dover.idf.il/IDF/English/News/today/09/01/0301.htm.

12 At a deeper level, the operation demonstrated to Hamas that it is not a non-state organization, rather a de facto state that lacks the freedom of action available to Hizbollah, and therefore it cannot fight the way Hizbollah did.

13 See Saad Shazly, *The Crossing of the Suez* (San Francisco: American Mideast Research, 1980). See also Tira, *The Nature of War*.

14 Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002).

15 David Ben-Gurion, *Uniqueness and Destiny* (Tel Aviv: Maarachot Press, 1979), p. 219.

16 Tira, "Does Israel Win Its Wars?"