Planning Force Deployment in the IDF General Staff

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Introduction

IDF General Staff planning processes relate to two primary areas: force buildup and force deployment. The fundamentals of military doctrine of any army, and particularly the IDF, necessitate full synchronization between the two, and the element that underlies all planning processes is what is needed for force deployment. Upon the establishment of the IDF, these processes were assigned to a single framework: the General Staff Branch.[1] However, more than sixty years later, planning in the General Staff today has been decentralized among various bodies in a way that complicates effective processes.

Of the significant difficulties posed by this situation, three should be singled out. The first is the weakness of planning for force deployment, which ostensibly is the responsibility of the IDF Operations Branch.[2] However, such planning concerns itself with operational aspects of operations planning. The strategic component of planning, on the other hand, is under the authority of the Planning Branch. This situation occasionally results in the lack of a common language as well as built-in difficulties and friction in preliminary planning processes for operational plans, both in times of routine and in real time war situations.

The second difficulty concerns weak planning for force buildup, which must be based on force deployment needs. In practice, the body responsible for force buildup planning in the IDF is the Planning Branch; the Operations Branch has less influence on the process. This separation

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between the branch in charge of force deployment and the branch in charge of force buildup causes inherent friction and difficulties in the process.

The third difficulty is the absence of synchronization in the planning processes. There is no officer in the General Staff aside from the chief of staff who has authority over the overall operational process. Given the attention demanded of him in his daily affairs, the chief of staff is hard pressed to synchronize force buildup and force deployment processes. This difficulty positions the deputy chief of staff as the natural candidate for synchronizing between the Planning Branch and the Operations Branch. However his work as coordinator and synchronizer is not efficient, due to the fact that he operates through the heads of two branches who, as far as they are concerned, deal with multiple areas rather than the operations process alone. This results in a situation where the operations process is prone to receive inferior and insufficient attention.

The State Comptroller's 2001 Report 52A, which dedicates a sizable section to the Planning Branch at the General Staff, remains valid to this day. In the report, the State Comptroller details an array of failures stemming from the decentralization of the operations planning process and its division between the Operations and Planning Branches. According to the report, the Planning Branch's strategic division, the body meant to supply the strategic operational framework for force deployment planning, has deepened its activity in the strategic-political area rather than focusing on the strategic-operational process. The report states: "The State Comptroller's Office observes that as long as there is no integrative state planning body that bears full responsibility for political-strategic planning or serves as the primary source for this purpose and instead the IDF is charged with this task, the IDF must make certain that the correct balance between investing in what must be done regarding military planning and the requisite contribution in the area of political planning is not violated."[3] The anomaly in IDF operations planning has not changed since, charted in the extensive analysis of these processes in an article in *Maarachot* by Nurit Gal.[4]

This article seeks to examine operational planning within the IDF command in three ways. The first avenue of approach describes the evolution of operational planning and its implementation in the IDF over the years; the second analyzes the principles of operational planning and the limitations of the current situation in the IDF; and the third presents a

possible model that could obviate some of the anomalies that exist today in the IDF. The scope of this article dictates a focus on the General Staff's operational planning for force deployment. The limitations involved in planning processes related to force buildup should be discussed in a separate framework.

How the General Staff Acted until Now

The establishment of the IDF General Staff began in mid-1947 prior to the expected war with Arab countries and continued during the War of Independence. Ben-Gurion's concept of civil-military relations generated a unique command structure: the chief of staff was supreme commander of IDF forces and at the same time subordinate to the authority of the government. The government cannot directly activate military forces but must do so through the chief of staff as military commander. During the War of Independence, several branches of the General Staff were formed to work alongside the chief of staff. The central branch, which oversaw operational activity, was the Operations Branch, which included departments for planning, intelligence, support, engineering, and communications. Furthermore, as specified in the General Staff establishment order of 1948,[5] it had command over the front headquarters as well as those of force deployment bodies such as the air force, artillery corps, and navy. In practice, the Operations Branch under the leadership of Yigael Yadin guided the General Staff in a broad variety of matters, while PM and Defense Minister Ben-Gurion was in direct contact with the heads of the General Staff Branches. This state of affairs continued until the appointment of Mordechai Maklef as Deputy Chief of Staff in October 1949 and his appointment by Yigael Yadin one month later to head the General Staff Branch.[6] This appointment entrenched – for decades – the role of deputy chief of staff as bearing the duties (in addition to his other duties) of head of the IDF General Staff Branch.

In practice, throughout the years the deputy chief of staff has worn two hats. The first was that of deputy, acting as second in command of the military and stand-in for the chief of staff when the latter was absent or unable to function. But in the IDF system of functions and daily performance, the role of deputy chief of staff is of limited significance, because the only and supreme authority as far as the IDF is concerned is

the chief of staff. Accordingly, the role of deputy chief of staff is to maintain his ability to assume the authorities of chief of staff if necessary.

The second hat worn by the deputy chief of staff was head of the IDF General Staff Branch. An order by the supreme command defined the duties of the deputy chief of staff as head of the General Staff Branch and determined that his main duties would include:

a. Directing and coordinating the General Staff branches and the officers of the professional staff in the General Staff; the air force HQ; the navy HQ; and the other bodies subordinate to the chief of staff.

b. Shaping the security doctrine of the IDF in accordance with government national security policy.

c. Preserving war-readiness, including the drafting of operational contingency plans and preparing the IDF HQ post for action.

d. Exercising responsibility for building, equipping, and ensuring the fitness of the IDF; ensuring IDF preparedness; and exercising responsibility for its doctrine and for its safety.

This state of affairs existed in the IDF for years, where the deputy chief of staff is assisted by an aide holding the rank of major general in order to fulfill his authority as head of the General Staff Branch. Naturally, the fact that the deputy chief of staff was the senior general of the General Staff usually helped him wield the authority needed to coordinate the other branches as per the activity of the General Staff Branch. This authority is reflected mainly in his ability to conduct formal operational discussions with elements in the General Staff, including the IDF Intelligence Branch, the Planning Branch, and others. In effect, the deputy chief of staff served as a link in the IDF's line of command, while engaging in coordination of operational activities, in parallel to his involvement in the process of force buildup.

This situation created a command anomaly. In all IDF headquarters, up to the level of the regional commands, an orderly command structure was maintained, including, in most cases, an operations staff to be coordinated by the General Staff officer (see for example the structure of the IDF regional command HQ or an IDF division HQ). The deputy commander (or the chief of the staff in the case of a regional command headquarters) was not part of the operational track but rather performed force buildup duties or his duties as deputy. However, the lines within the General Staff are tangled, as the deputy chief of staff took it upon himself

to be chief of the General Staff Branch, coordinating the operational track. This anomaly produced an odd command structure in which the chief of staff acts operationally through his deputy, while at the same time directs other staff branches directly.

The establishment of the Operations Branch in late 1999 plus its assumption of a portion of the General Staff Branch's roles (duplicating the job of deputy chief of staff, who continued as the head of the General Staff Branch) made it difficult for the General Staff Branch to fulfill its responsibilities. It wasn't clear who was the IDF General Branch officer; in fact, the General Staff acted without any party that assumed overall authority for matters included within the duties of the head of the General Staff. This situation worsened due to the insufficient authority of the head of the Operations Branch as compared with the other General Staff Branches, in part because Operations was the newest branch and hadn't yet positioned itself fully within the overall General Staff apparatus.

This phenomenon generated significant difficulty for the IDF operations processes. In 2005, recognition of these limitations led then-Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz to establish two fundamental principles of command. The first concerns the IDF's organizational and command concept. The chief of staff stipulated that the IDF would operate through two tracks: the force buildup track, under the deputy chief of staff, and the force deployment track, under the head of the Operations Branch. The second principle concerns the concept of the General Staff as the operational headquarters of the IDF. The chief of staff stipulated that the General Staff is not an executing body, rather an IDF headquarters body involved in resources allocation and review and coordination of force buildup and force deployment processes by executing bodies.

Chief of Staff Halutz further stipulated that the deputy chief of staff would be charged with three roles: deputy commander of the IDF – as second to the commander of the IDF and his stand-in when he is absent or prevented from functioning; head of staff of IDF headquarters – coordinating the work of the General Staff; and the coordinating authority in the IDF force buildup track. The head of the Operations Branch, directly subordinate to the chief of staff, received overall authority to coordinate IDF force deployment.

The Second Lebanon War interrupted the attempt to implement these changes, and when Gabi Ashkenazi assumed the position of chief of

staff in early 2007, the wheel was turned backwards. At the same time a process was launched to formulate an order of the supreme command that would seek to regulate the work of the General Staff and the various IDF headquarters.[7] One component of the process concerned the definition of the IDF general headquarters, and of the deputy chief of staff as chief of the IDF headquarters entrusted with coordinating and directing authorities for force deployment and buildup. Although the supreme command order improved the prior situation, it did not change the authorities of the various branches. Consequently, it did not actually remove the central anomaly of decentralized IDF planning processes between the Operations and Planning Branches.

Planning Force Deployment

The principles of military planning for IDF force deployment necessitate the existence of a methodical and well-ordered situation evaluation process, which allows the development of an operational plan. Operational contingency plans may be developed beforehand for various scenarios and formulated as operative orders, or alternatively, formulated as an operation order demanding actual execution. The command and control concept of any military organization, in this case the IDF, obliges the methodical arrangement of tasks separated into secondary tasks (some regular and some variable). In this way all objectives and tasks the IDF needs to achieve are fulfilled by the various headquarters and secondary bodies. These fundamentals coalesce in the IDF's principal operational headquarters, e.g., the regional commands.[8]

Figure 1 depicts the art of military planning for force deployment. The figure's outer frame plots the space of the task and the overall objectives to be attained. Dividing the space into secondary tasks makes possible a situation in which the entire task space is covered by the secondary efforts.[9] The art of military planning and command obliges avoiding a situation in which a task space is left without representation by any authority or responsibility.

The process of planning for force deployment is meant to serve one goal: force application when there is an actual call to arms. Therefore one must examine the full circle of command and control, which includes components of planning (battle procedure) and components of actual execution (battle management). These must be coordinated and
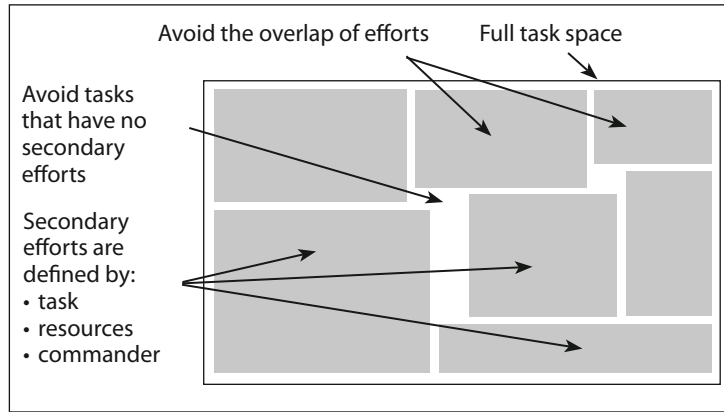
**Figure 1: The Art of Military Planning for Force Deployment**
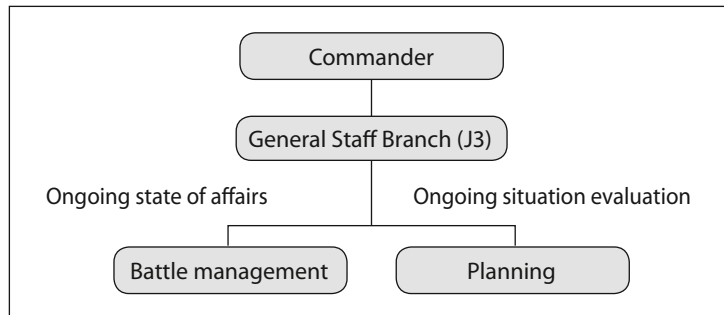
Figure 2: General Model for Planning and Battle Management

synchronized in an optimal manner and by a single body (the General Staff Branch), as shown in figure 2.

The art of military command compels the regular review of planned vs. actual performance in order to verify that performance achieves the defined objectives. Figure 3 depicts the full process that comprises both the planning (upper section) and performance (lower section) components. A gap (motley reduction) will always exist between planned and actual performance; therefore it is vital to close the circle and make adjustments following actual situation changes.

As a rule, at key operational headquarters, the officer responsible for coordinating and synchronizing the entire process is the General Staff officer. However, the General Staff Branch was abolished within IDF general headquarters, and its portion of the planning process is performed

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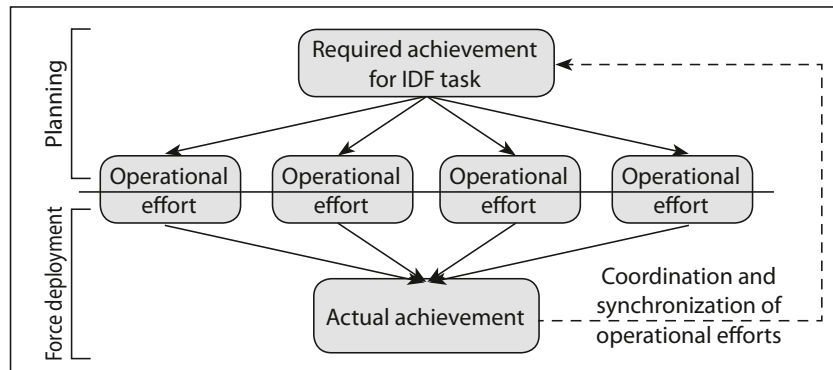
Figure 3: Planned and Actual Performance

outside of the Operations Branch. The State Comptroller's 2001 Report states: "Since the strategic planning division focused more and more on political-security facets at the expense of military strategy, it was also perceived by the IDF bodies that deal with military strategy (Operations Branch, and territorial arms and branches) as not being a partner in the process of developing operational military knowledge on those levels."[10]

The situation has not changed over the years. Nurit Gal, who served in the Planning Branch, writes:[11]

> During the Second Lebanon War, and today as well, the strategic-operational planning process is divided among three separate branches in the General Staff: intelligence evaluation is performed by the Intelligence Branch; strategic planning is done by the Planning Branch; and operational planning is performed by the Operations Branch. In order to produce integrated products, those three branches must cooperate. At times, cooperation is too limited; consequently vital intelligence and relevant strategic insights will not necessarily be expressed in operational plans and orders. On the other hand, operational limitations will not necessarily be expressed when defining strategic purpose. Thus this process exists in a form that is neither complete nor effective.

Such a state of affairs necessitates change. The following guidelines address the requisite change.

Action Proposals

The IDF approach to command and control supplies a whole response to the needs of force deployment. This exists in a reasonable form at the various main headquarters, but a serious disruption has occurred at IDF headquarters. Seemingly, the desired alternative is the "zero" alternative: bringing the system back to the starting point, i.e., reestablishing the IDF General Staff Branch while unifying the relevant branches (Intelligence, Operations Branch, Planning Branch) under one roof.[12] Or, alternatively, parts of the Operations Branch and Planning Branch could be united while adopting the existing model in the IDF through to the level of territorial command. Indeed, there is no doubt this alternative could supply a framework for developing and regulating a complete response for planning processes for both deploying and building force. However, we can assume there would be great difficulty in implementing this framework amid the existing state of affairs in the IDF.

One can also propose another alternative based on the principle of uniting all authorities for planning force deployment within the framework of the Operations Branch and adapting it to the new situation, with a clear division of its duties (synchronized by the head of the Operations Branch) between two working frameworks: the Planning Division and the Operations Division.

The Planning Division could supply a complete, overall response for force deployment planning in the General Staff, from the strategic level to the operational level and culminating in formulating and actually producing operation orders. The importance of creating a planning totality within one framework − starting from developing strategic ideas through to actual formulation of operation orders − is a cornerstone of IDF principles of command and control that exist at all levels, down to the level of territorial command. Command and control principles necessitate the existence of ongoing and permanent processes of situational awareness. Consequently, the proposed Planning Division would be required to carry out regular planning processes in which different alternatives would be drafted and proposed to the chief of staff. When the chief of staff chooses an alternative or decides on a different option, his instructions would be relayed to the Planning Division. Subsequently, the Planning Division would need to formulate them as an operation order to be carried out by key headquarters. The Operations Division would focus on control, synchronization, and

the management of actual operations, verifying that the operations of key headquarters are managed in view of plans and actual orders together with strategic goals that have been set.

Tables 1 and 2 chart the advantages and disadvantages of the two possible alternatives via two main indicators: the quality of the response to the presented problem, and the ability to be implemented under the current IDF situation.

Table 1. Unification of Branches – Establishment of the General Staff Branch

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Quality of the response	• The response matches the needs of the IDF from the aspects of planning for force buildup and force deployment. • Unifying the branches under one commander could produce significant synergy by reducing resources and making the planning process more efficient and focused.	• Over the years, the strategic force in the Planning Branch evolved to become also a staff arm of the political echelon as needed.[13] Establishing the General Staff Branch might dilute this capability, leaving the political echelon without capabilities for strategic-military analysis.
Ability to be organizationally implemented		• Difficulty in implementing the change due to decades-long organizational history. • Difficult to administer a change of this scale in tandem with the need to maintain military readiness and fitness in the face of threats.

Table 2. Unification of the Planning Authorities in the Operations Branch

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Quality of the response	• The response partially matches IDF needs from aspects of planning for force buildup as well as force deployment; however it supplies a significantly better response than exists in the current situation. • Separating the duties for the operational process in the Operations Branch into two frameworks, planning and operations, would enable the management, coordination, and synchronization of the entire operational process within one command framework.	• Supplies a response to force deployment needs but does not supply a full response to force buildup needs.
Ability to be organizationally implemented	• Implementation is relatively easy, transferring authorities of strategic-operative planning from the Planning Branch to the Operations Branch (in practice: defining the strategic purpose). • The Planning Branch would supply strategic insights to the operational body.	• No significant disadvantages.
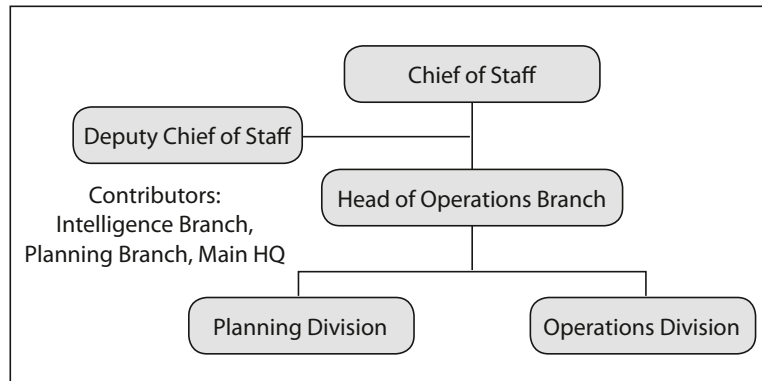
Figure 4: Planning in the Operations Branch

Clearly the preferred and more readily implemented alternative places all planning authorities in the Operations Branch, as depicted in figure 4.

Accordingly, the head of the Operations Branch can manage the entire operational process, from strategic planning to operational planning, formulating the command order and culminating in managing the operations of key operations HQ. Similar to the Intelligence Branch, which supplies intelligence for the purpose of portraying and evaluating the present situation, the Planning Branch would supply the Operations Branch with strategic insights formed within the Planning Branch.

This recommendation sits well with the recommendation of the State Comptroller in his 2001 Report.

> Seeing as the Operations Branch, which possesses operational knowledge within the General Staff Branch, has been defined in a directive of the Supreme Command as being responsible for developing the force deployment approach… and since, in the opinion of the Office of the State Comptroller, it is fitting to declare a single staff entity in the General Staff Branch as responsible for overseeing, synchronizing, and channeling the process for the development of strategic-military knowledge…it is fitting for the Operations Branch, which oversees the operations division, to be imposed with overall responsibility for this.[14]

Conclusion

Regulating a division of authority between the Operations Branch and the Planning Branch, in tandem with creating a planning framework in the Operations Branch and clearly dividing its duties with those of operations, could produce a new situation. It would enable a single, coordinating entity in the General Staff to focus on force deployment processes while afforded with a view of the entire operational picture. Such an arrangement would also assist in developing and coordinating a full and comprehensive military situation evaluation. This kind of situation evaluation obliges reliance on two informational components: intelligence information that includes a relevant intelligence picture, alongside information concerning fitness of IDF forces, quantitative evaluation of IDF resources and their quality, operational deployment, and limitations vis-à-vis force deployment. Only a reliance on these two informational components can make possible a complete military situation evaluation. Upon the regulation of the authority of the Operations Branch in relation to exercise of force, it will be possible to realize a full and ongoing IDF military situation evaluation.

The real test of this concept will be in its practical implementation. The command concept is a core component in the optimal functioning of a hierarchal body such as the IDF as well as in warfare success against the gamut of operational challenges. The IDF must make sure that the command concept of the coming years is based on its own command and control doctrine. At the same time it must understand that the realization of this concept constitutes a vastly greater challenge due to the persistent and continuing threat to its basic principles of command and control. Examples of this threat's materialization are woven into the operational history of the IDF, including in the Second Lebanon War. Suffice it to recall the war's operational burdens, which almost led to a paralysis and degeneration of IDF operational capability.

IDF commanders must remember that the goal of all command and control processes is to produce a maximal operational flow: in other words the ability to fulfill as many tasks as possible with a high quality response and within the shortest time possible. All bodies in the General Staff must internalize the fact that their supreme role is to enable the key operational headquarters to act at the highest possible level of effectiveness and efficiency.

Notes

1   This was the situation only from 1949 to 1953.

2   The Operations Branch of the IDF is similar in function to the J3 Branch of the US Army.

3   State Comptroller's Report 52A, 2001, p. 77.

4   Nurit Gal, "Where Have All the Senior Command and General Staff Branch Gone?" *Maarachot* 431, June 2010.

5   Brief, AGA / 0, MATKAL / AGA, guidance, June 27, 1948, IDF archives.

6   The General Staff Branch (AGAM) was appointed as the branch to coordinate all actions of the General Staff. In practice, no new branch was established; instead this was a formalized definition of the authorities and roles of the Deputy Chief of Staff.

7   Shir Cohen, "Thus the IDF Sees Itself," August. 4, 2008, http://www.shavuz. co.il/magazine/article.asp?artid=3067&secid=2026.

8   Despite this fundamental principle, in the past it was possible to note cases in which tasks were left directly for the General Staff, as directly responsible for activating operational forces. One must bear in mind that the General Staff is not a command agency but a headquarters agency. The sole command element in the General Staff is the chief of staff. Thus in many instances, the chief of staff found himself as direct commander of operational forces, simultaneous with the principal headquarters. Each command body in the military hierarchy is invariably given the authority to command through to the lowest rank; however, the actual fulfillment of this authority must be in extreme and extraordinary cases.

9   One must always make certain that there is no overlap of tasks among the efforts, because otherwise there would be tasks with more than one body that is authorized to perform them.

10 State Comptroller's Report, 52A, p. 88.

11 Gal, "Where Have All the Senior Command and General Staff Branch Gone?" p. 14.

12 Within the context of the discussion in principle, it can be said that occasionally one can obtain cooperation and synchronization, even between separate branches. Subordinating different bodies within one organizational framework must be done while examining the relative advantages and conflicts of interest in the shared work across the full extent of the work and tasks of the bodies. In this way one can identify the optimal organizational equilibrium point.

13 In this context, see the State Comptroller's Report 52A, section 4: "Realization of the roles of the Strategic Planning Division in matters of military strategy."

14 State Comptroller's Report 52A, p. 89.