Israel's National Security Concept: New Basic Terms in the Military-Security Sphere

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Introduction

In Israel, the term "national security concept" has gained a foothold in the context of a (partial) discussion of national security strategy that lacks any deep engagement with the definition of national objectives on the one hand, and the formulation of general principles of doctrine and policy in the field of national security on the other. This situation is a product of Israel's problematic reality: Israel has never defined agreed-upon national objectives in writing since the time of David Ben-Gurion, and there is no coherent, systematic, and significant discussion of security doctrine and policy.

This essay defines a framework for the discussion of national security by differentiating the political-strategic circle (in many ways "the security strategy") from the military-security circle (in many ways "the security doctrine"), which is the focus of this essay. In the first part, the essay briefly surveys developments in security doctrine in the state's first sixty years. In the second part, the essay proposes to base the military-security discourse on a change in the fundamental terms in use today, largely by adding new terms as a basis for altering modes of functioning given the expanded challenges Israel faces.

The proposal calls for applying the existing terms "decision" and "deterrence" to the struggle with states and semi-sovereign terrorist organizations in the first tier, to drop the term "early warning," and to recast what is known as "defense" or "civil defense" as "resilience."

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Furthermore, five additional basic terms should be appended to the security doctrine discourse, with the appropriate conclusions drawn from them: "disruption" (or "prevention"); "elimination"; "paralysis"; "approval"; and "security cooperation." These eight basic terms, separately and in their interface, will serve as a more timely, relevant basis for discussing and revising the components of security policy: force buildup, use of force, and regulation of inter-organizational cooperation.

The First Thirty Years, the Second Thirty Years

During the first three decades of Israel's existence, the country's primary strategic-security challenges focused on the threat of an all-out war against a coalition of armed forces from first tier states assisted by forces of second tier states. This threat, at least in part, was actualized about once every ten years. At the same time, Israel fought Palestinian nationalist-secular terrorism, undertaken mainly by the PLO, which operated with the support of Arab states (Egypt, Syria and others). This type of combat ("routine security") was virtually unceasing but did not develop into broad military campaigns against terrorist elements.

Israel's security strategy, as formulated in the writings and deeds of David Ben-Gurion (e.g., the government decision regarding the national defense policy of October 1953), contained five principles: a qualitative edge in conventional means of warfare; a nuclear deterrence image; special relations with a superpower (France, the United States); technological and economic superiority; and national resilience based in part on Jewish immigration and the connection with the Jewish people in the diaspora.

Israel strove for extended periods of calm and for the longest possible postponement of the next military conflict, and when the situation demanded, for a quick decision in the military campaign. Within the military-security circle, this approach was reflected in two central principles: "national service" (mandatory military draft and reserve duty) and "the security triangle," composed of "deterrence," "early warning," and "decision." In many ways, the Sinai Campaign in 1956 and the Six Day War in 1967 were the successful realization of these principles.

Israel's strategic situation underwent a profound transformation in early 1979, the start of the nation's second thirty years of existence. On March 26, 1979, Prime Minister Begin, President Sadat, and President

Carter signed a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, putting an end to the era of wars between the two states. At the same time Iran also experienced a fundamental change, when in early February 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini landed in Tehran, starting the process of entrenching an Islamic regime.

From being an ally of Israel, Iran became its enemy, both in thought and in deed. In order to promote its objectives, Iran also established Hizbollah in Lebanon. Somewhat related to the upheaval in Iran and the radicalization of the Shiite denomination was the acceleration of Sunni terrorism in the late 1970s. These transformations were accompanied by another disturbing dimension: the enhanced effort among primarily second and third tier states to acquire surface-to-surface missiles and nuclear weapons.

These developments generated three primary changes in Israel's security and strategic environment:

a. Sources of relative regional stability (the Cold War, the power monopoly of regimes) were undermined and the complexity of Israel's strategic problems increased, which made both analysis and response more difficult. A broad spectrum of opportunities in the region became part of the political process, but at the same time the threats expanded to encompass more distant circles and became more complex − each threat in and of itself and in the synergy between them.

b. A limited military campaign on an average of every three to four years became the norm.

c. The composition of the threat against Israel changed. The conventional military threat lost its centrality, while the threats of terrorism and non-conventional weapons became a mainstay of security and strategic consideration.

At the same time, changes occurred in the attitude of Israeli society to political and security challenges, affecting ideas on appropriate responses in national security (e.g., the public debate on the "the just war").

Nonetheless, these changes did not prompt a shift in the fundamentals of the national security concept. In the wake of the trauma of the Yom Kippur War, until the early 1990s the security establishment's mode remained preparedness for a comprehensive war. From the early 1990s, several attempts were made to reexamine the security concept, but there

were no substantial changes in the security strategy because the need to update it was not yet seen as critical. Indeed, the structural and essential difficulties in effecting a reexamination of these issues outweighed the necessity of the debate.

The most recent effort was undertaken by the committee headed by Dan Meridor to review the security concept, which delivered its report in early 2006. The political and public deliberation of the report was in effect put on hold after the Second Lebanon War, ironically when the results of the campaign indicated just how much a profound rethinking of Israel's national security was needed. The adjustment made to the "security triangle" included the detailing of its principles, such that they would be relevant to the full spectrum of possible confrontations and challenges:

a. In terms of deterrence: The primary effort was to create relevant deterrence in the fight against terrorism. However, deterrence at its core is designed to affect decision makers of state entities to reject the decision to embark on a confrontation; thus its relevance to terrorist organizations is deemed limited. The discussion about deterring terrorism delayed consideration of systematic attacks against terrorism infrastructures ("the swamp rather than the mosquitoes"), which was the effort that in fact lowered the number of terrorist attacks.

b. In terms of early warning: Warning was initially intended to identify intentions and preparations of states for broad military moves against Israel. It was then expanded to deal with all types of possible threats, from the development of a military nuclear program to the intentions of a single terrorist to carry out an attack. This definition turned the concept of early warning into a total one, so that security elements lost a significant range of their flexibility.

c. The most problematic discussion was the expansion of the concept of decision. The term was coined in the inter-state context: through military force, one state imposes agreement to a preferred policy on another state and in the Israeli context promotes the preference for political dialogue over the use of military means. On this level, Israel earned a decision against states in the region at the end of the Yom Kippur War. For a host of reasons, the drive to apply the term "decision" in clear non-conventional military contexts is not feasible.

In recent years, particularly in light of the deliberations of the Meridor committee, a fourth concept was added to the security triangle, namely "civil defense," or to use a somewhat broader term, "defense." The State of Israel invests a significant portion of its security budget in passive self-defense. Those who would expand the notion of defense add some specific offensive tools to self-defense, tools designed to foil high trajectory fire and terrorist attacks under the threshold of broad escalation. In practice, this entails a response in which a significant monetary investment partially replaces a discussion of strategic and political dilemmas.

Therefore, the central feature of "defense" is its tendency to expand to additional areas and budgets and to include response components that cannot be defined by other concepts. The contents and limitations of the concept of "civil defense" or "defense" are unclear, and in any case the term contradicts the traditional security strategy principles to the extent that it may not be possible to add it to the other three without a reexamination of the latter (e.g., the effect of extensive investment in "defense" on Israel's capacity to realize its economic superiority).

The failure to update the national security strategy and doctrine in the last three decades has cost Israel dearly at the strategic level, at the operational level, and in the ability to affect the time dimension (i.e., undertaking preplanned political and security moves to reduce the time span between military campaigns).

In the military-security circle Israel failed to identify an important aspect of the change in its enemies' doctrine in a timely manner. By clinging to the old concept and its principles, Israel lost initiative and became reactive in the face of the new challenges (e.g., entering into the first intifada without a broad security response to civilian violent disorder or the lack of a well thought-out policy to the kidnappings issue). As a result, Israel lagged behind in some instances of the technological and conceptual arms race, and had to develop a response to the enemy while under attack and under time pressure (e.g., surface-to-surface missile attacks preceded the operability of the ABM Homa project; the suicide bombings preceded the defense

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barrier in the West Bank; the Qassam preceded the R&D of the Iron Dome system). Only thanks to technological and operational excellence did Israel manage in the end to preserve clear superiority over the enemy.

The Next Thirty Years: New Directions for Israel's Security Doctrine and Security Policy

First of all, it is important to understand the imperative of developing and updating the approach to Israel's security strategy, security policy, and security doctrine. The next thirty years will likely be decisive to the security of the State of Israel, as central developments may well present difficult questions – for better and for worse – to the fundamentals of the strategy. One of the most prominent examples is the long term view of the special relationship with the United States.

As a result, the need to deal with these questions systematically will only grow stronger and will require a dynamic, ongoing process of analysis, which must be based on an effort at the national level to define the strategic goals, identify problems, suggest a range of creative ideas to solve them, and formulate revised foundations.

It is wrong to manage such a process by means of ad hoc committees and measures, as occurred in the last twenty years. It must be based on organized processes such as the periodic examination of the security strategy, security policy, and security doctrine of major Western states presented in policy reviews, usually published at set times. It also requires input from the decision makers who will have to direct the debate, take part in it, and assimilate its conclusions. It must entail long term thinking on the basis of possible scenarios and war games. There is no justification to the statement that Israel operates in a dynamic environment that does not make long term thinking possible. It can be easily demonstrated that Israel's surroundings do not change at a pace that is much faster than the global surroundings of the United States.

In the political-strategic circle, several fundamental changes come to mind. First, it is necessary to define this discourse within the broadest possible national context, going beyond familiar security establishment principles where action is restricted to the military-security circle. Next, it is necessary to formulate the context of the process to allow the setting of clear principles of national security strategy, taking full advantage of opportunities and tackling the risks.

In the military-security circle what is needed above all is a different set of basic terms. An examination of current concepts and the addition of new ones will remodel the fundamental building blocks of national security doctrine and policy, and offer many more responses and greater flexibility in the face of the growing range of challenges stemming from complex, rapidly changing strategic situations given the various types of confrontations and growing number of ways to use force. These concepts would be determined by fundamental terms, defined meticulously, researched thoroughly, and reexamined periodically according to an orderly process of review.

In this context, it is important to sharpen the definitions of the terms deterrence and decision. Somewhat surprisingly, it appears that at present Israel is indeed confronting entities with state-like features. Israel must maintain concrete deterrence against Syria and Iran to keep their leaderships from direct or indirect operations against Israel. At the same time, Israel maintains basic deterrence in its peaceful relations and partnerships with Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Adding to that the fact that Hizbollah and Hamas, the two terrorist organizations representing the major threat against Israel, are becoming semi-sovereign entities with increasingly established militaries allows us to apply the terms of deterrence and decision against them.

Consequently, "deterrence" is quite relevant with regard to many of the leaderships of the entities threatening Israel. It should focus on preventing or postponing the decision to enter into a conflict rather than on aspects of force buildup, including non-conventional weapons. As a result of a variety of reasons, deterrence is not relevant with regard to force expansion. For example, concealment and denial by one side makes it difficult to define − both internally and externally − what is being deterred. It is also important that the term "deterrence" would not be applicable to small, network-like terrorist organizations that are unconnected to state entities.

The "decision" principle − the imposition by military force of a desired policy on the opposing state entity's leadership − is also of major relevance. Israel can strive for a military campaign in which it would impose its policies on states and semi-sovereign terrorist organizations in the first tier. Three different objectives are possible: achieving a political dialogue about a peace treaty with conditions that favor Israel; achieving a decision

against a semi-sovereign terrorist organization such that the legitimate government is able to disarm it and fully realize its own sovereignty; or consolidating the two terms of decision and deterrence and attaining long term security, i.e., a decade or more, in order to improve the current situation of a limited military campaign every three to four years. At the same time, for many reasons the term "decision" cannot be applied to states in the second or third tiers, notably Iran.

"Early warning" should no longer be used as a principle that stands alone. The general efforts of the intelligence community – to identify the enemy's intentions and capabilities, indicate when and where the enemy intends to operate, generate intelligence that will render operations precise and effective, and examine the effect of the operations on the enemy – are much broader than what is contained in the concept of "early warning" and are deeply embedded in the other fundamental terms. It is therefore unnecessary to set these efforts apart under a separate term. Indeed, early intelligence warning is an integral part of the definition and application of other fundamental terms (e.g., it is part of decision, because it allows the call-up of the reserves in time, a move crucial to attaining decision; or it provides early warning about the erosion of deterrence). It is precisely by not specifically identifying intelligence gathering with "early warning" that it becomes easier to connect the principles of response with the work of the intelligence community (intelligence provides deterrence, decision, disruption, and so on).

"Resilience," which should replace "civil defense" or "defense," means the conscious decision to sustain the enemy's use of force over a defined period of time and minimize the damages through means of defensive systems and civilian defense and specifically targeted offensive capabilities. Adopting this as a fundamental concept alongside principles of disruption or prevention and elimination as defined below is likely to allow the State of Israel to control the timing of the military confrontations, attain the optimal military outcome in them, and lengthen the intervals between them. The ability to realize this principle depends on an open, engaging dialogue between decision makers and the public to enhance the much needed national resilience as a basic condition to successful "resilience."

The term "resilience" is central given two threats that are coming into clearer focus: the capability of all of Israel's enemies to attack the

greater Tel Aviv region such that it is a certain target in the campaigns of the future, and the growth in the enemies' capability to generate targeted damage such that it becomes imperative to defend Israel's strategic and military assets, which are the basis for attaining military success in a campaign and for quick return to normal life afterwards.

Some additional new fundamental terms must be adopted for a full formulation of Israel's national security doctrine. The fourth term (after decision, deterrence, and resilience) is "disruption" or "prevention," a preventive measure to keep the enemy from developing threat capabilities. This principle advances the definition and conduct of political and security efforts to prevent the enemy from acquiring advanced weapon systems and threatening technologies (e.g., the political effort to prevent the sale of the S300 aerial defense system to Iran; intercepting ships with weaponry cargoes) or to disrupt the enemy's ability to develop them.

The fifth term is "elimination": damaging a specific existing capability (non-conventional weapons, terrorism) in order to deprive the enemy's arsenal of its capabilities or have it become the basis for advancing a broad strategic enemy objective. All security and military activity designed to deny a capability from the enemy is included in this principle. Elimination can be expressed as a single move to destroy a capability (e.g., attacking the atomic reactor in Iraq), or as an extended campaign to suppress it (intercepting suicide bombers before embarking on their missions, preventing flotillas to Gaza by political and security means.

The sixth term is "paralysis," meaning a decision by the State of Israel to embark on a military confrontation against an enemy in order to deny it its main capabilities to harm Israel, in part by expanding deterrence, even if the campaign does not end in a decision. So, for example, defining the desired goals in the Second Lebanon War in terms of paralysis and resilience could have made it easier for the decision makers to define and realize the objectives of the war.

The seventh term is "approval," using the gamut of military-security efforts to obtain and preserve approval among key international and regional elements as to Israel's use of force. Realization of this goal is based on diplomacy, legal steps, and public diplomacy; and more important, the careful upholding of acceptable international law and Israeli law by the fighting forces and serious efforts to ease the situation of the civilian population. The term "approval" in the military-security

circle connects to the broader effort at the level of the political-strategic circle to improve Israel's international image.

The eighth term is "security cooperation," i.e., taking full advantage of the strategic opportunities emerging in part from the positive processes in the region by developing extensive security and military cooperation with states in the international and regional arenas in order to improve and enhance the response to threats. By connecting international and regional elements, it is possible to expand the military-security circle beyond the State of Israel's own capabilities. At the same time, this cooperation incurs costs in terms of limitations on operating force, stemming from the need to abide by the conditions laid down by the other side.

Application of Fundamental Concepts in Force Use, Force Buildup, and Inter-Organizational Cooperation

These eight fundamental security doctrine concepts provide the foundation for policy debate in the military-security circle regarding response to the central threats Israel faces. A combination of deterrence and decision against the Syrian army would continue to be dominant, but it is also possible to consider the alternative of paralysis (instead of decision), because denying capabilities, which is inherent in paralysis, can have a real effect on political developments the day after, and it can be achieved at lower military and civilian costs to Israel.

With regard to Hizbollah, it is possible to consider a move linking disruption to deterrence. If there is a decision to initiate a military campaign, the element of resilience can be added to paralysis. An alternative approach is to consider decision, i.e., the disarming of the organization by the Lebanese government or attaining a period of security lasting a decade or more. The very development of these alternatives may allow Israel to reduce Hizbollah's ability to affect the timing of a military campaign and its intensity and outcome.

As for Hamas, it is possible to combine disruption with resilience, and at a certain point transition to paralysis or decision, meaning the start of a process of restoring the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip. In a campaign against Hamas in the Palestinian arena, there is great importance to the term approval, as was evident in the flotilla incident. The principle of security cooperation comes into play in the security

dialogue with countries in the international arena and with Egypt to prevent Hamas's buildup based on external sources.

With regard to the PA, it is possible to combine security cooperation with the PA, independent elimination of terrorism, and attainment of approval with the PA regarding a military campaign against Hamas.

In the Iranian context, it is important to discuss the principle of security cooperation in the response. In the attempt to tackle the Iranian threat, it is impossible – and strategically incorrect – to talk about decision.

The eight new fundamental terms and the discussion they generate in the debate on Israel's security policy will affect not just the use of force but also its buildup. Basing the security policy on these concepts may help Israel define the construction of its military and security response and prioritize the alternatives in a way that would allow a profound discussion as a basis for determining where to strengthen the IDF and the security establishment.

Thus, for example, determining that the objective of a confrontation with Syria is paralysis rather than decision may steer force buildup towards defensive and offensive sufficiency, i.e., the necessary minimum of heavy platforms, with emphasis on fighter jets and tanks, and more precision firepower, stealth, and special operations capabilities. Such a change in the mix could serve construction of paralysis capabilities vis-à-vis terrorism and the elimination of non-conventional weapons threats. A decision regarding the proper response mix between decision, paralysis, and resilience vis-à-vis Syria, Hizbollah, and Hamas may sharpen the discussion on resources and the scope of investment necessary in defensive systems.

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A security policy based on these eight terms is a basis for defining the deeper feature of coordination of the actions required at every level – diplomatically, security-wise, and militarily. Through them, it is possible to improve inter-organizational coordination and to sharpen the responses to the challenges. For example, it is clear that the principles of resilience and approval require profound inter-organizational cooperation to define doctrinally and construct organizationally the joint capability of realizing

them. Similarly, achieving disruption with regard to Hamas requires deep cooperation between the IDF and the GSS, while resilience vis-à-vis Hamas requires a connection between the IDF's Home Front Command and the civilian systems.

Conclusion

The strategic changes in Israel's environment suggest two thirty-year periods. In the first, until 1979, the principles of the traditional national security strategy provided adequate response to the challenges. During the second thirty years, the discussion of national security led to certain modifications, but Israel largely became a reactive player responding to its enemies' evolution. The next thirty years are likely to be even more significant because Israel – for better and for worse – is entering a period that challenges the fundamentals of the nation's security strategy.

Given this situation, a profound transformation in the political-strategic circle is required on the basis of an extensive as well as intensive discussion. The State of Israel will pay dearly if such a process is not carried out – even calling into question its very own future. At the same time, revisions are required in the military-security circle – in the security doctrine and security policy – on the basis of a discussion of these eight fundamental terms.