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## **“The IDF Strategy”:** A Focused Action Approach

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The publication of the document “The IDF Strategy” – a milestone in the development of the relationship between the military and the civilian population – is unprecedented. It is impossible to overstate the importance of the transparency manifested by the very publication of the document, a most welcome occurrence. The document was not composed on the basis of a political directive or written national security doctrine, but reflects rather the unwritten doctrine that developed in Israel over the years and now provides a solid foundation for the formulation of strategy. Thus, the publication of the document provides an opportunity to examine the IDF’s current strategy in the light of the threats the security concept seeks to address. After a background discussion of Israel’s strategic environment, the document considers the IDF’s major components of activity: the use of force, the IDF’s command and control approach, and the principles of force buildup derived from the strategic environment and the elements of activity.

**The IDF objective in routine times:** The IDF is used to operating in routine times in what is called routine security, an activity that has mainly focused on defending the borders and policing territories where the IDF is sovereign. By contrast, the new strategy document stresses a broader definition of the IDF’s objective in routine times, and seeks an active, ongoing campaign designed to postpone war and allow the country as long a peaceful interim period as possible.

Four objectives were determined for the campaign between wars: to weaken the negative elements of power in the area, such as Hizbollah, Hamas, jihadi organizations, and others; to reduce enemy force buildup using preventive – at times violent – means so as to deny them strategic, equilibrium-breaking weapons liable to reduce significantly the IDF’s freedom of operation and increase potential risk to Israel; to create optimal conditions for winning a future war through actions that will improve the IDF’s capabilities; and to establish legitimacy for Israeli action and deny the enemy’s actions of legitimacy, for example, by exposing its rationale for the use of human shields. All of these are to be attained by covert and overt multidisciplinary operations that incorporate media, economic, legal, and political moves into the military activities.

**Confrontation:** In the last campaigns in Lebanon (2006) and the Gaza Strip (2009, 2011, 2014), the IDF took action according to the “erosion” principle: even if not articulated explicitly, the IDF used the idea of reducing the enemy’s force as its guiding principle. Thus, the IDF used increasingly larger amounts of firepower to target the enemy’s capabilities and operational infrastructures. This principle took a toll on the Israeli home front, manifested in an extended combat period, while the enemy continued to maintain its ability to fire rockets and missiles. The enemy, unconcerned about its own survival, could remain impervious to the scope of the destruction and damage wrought by the IDF.

The new IDF document presents an essentially different approach to action: in response to provocations, the IDF will attack the enemy using integrated capabilities, immediately and simultaneously. The ground maneuver is given importance in its updated role, which is to penetrate enemy territory rapidly in order to damage the survivability of the enemy’s governing bodies and destroy its military infrastructures. Fire will be used in tandem at thousands of predetermined and unplanned targets. These actions will be supported by special operations, cyber operations, high quality intelligence, and the most effective defenses possible against enemy fire. The immediate operation of the ground maneuver will be made possible through a hierarchical process of cumulative force. Initially, even if the maneuver is curtailed in scope because of ORBAT limitations, it will neutralize both Israeli domestic and international-Middle East diplomatic opposition aroused every previous time the IDF faced the necessity to insert ground troops into the fighting.

**Command and control:** “The IDF Strategy” devotes an entire chapter to the IDF’s command and control approach, and for good reason. Since the late 1990s, an IDF approach has developed that said the army had to unite operational problems sharing the same campaign rationale under a single commander. Furthermore, this approach presented a methodological outline for a situation assessment whose purpose was to formulate what was then called the “operational idea.” This outline differed from the IDF’s fundamental doctrine, which was unquestioned since the army’s establishment. The operational approach in question was based on the assertion that the art of operational command requires unique tools. The trickling of this idea through the IDF – and its most prominent manifestation, the Second Lebanon War – created confusion and friction. In many cases, the regional commanders saw themselves as commanders of the whole campaign in their regions and sought extensive authority for the use of force.

By contrast, in the new strategy document, the chief of staff cut the Gordian knot created by the operational approach and set forth clear formulations: the chief of staff is the only operational commander in the IDF and, through the general command, he commands all regional and other commands; the regional commands are charged with the obligation to develop operational knowledge in their fields of authority, while the operational resources are directly subordinate to the general command, which allocates them to the

regional and other commands based on the latter's missions. This statement is of vital significance: the focus of the commanders of the various commands is now solely on the missions with which they will be charged, a cornerstone in the IDF's updated approach to command. As for a situation assessment, the chief of staff determined that the procedural processes and battle management are to be united along the entire command echelon and will be based on the fundamental doctrine and a simple, clear, shared language. In this, the chief of staff chose to follow in the footsteps of General Patton, who said that if it won't be simple, it simply won't be. Understanding the importance of a shared language through all IDF ranks prompted the chief of staff to establish a central command and control school for all commands.

**Principles of force buildup:** For the purpose of this article, two of the many principles discussed in this context should be singled out, both of which reflect the main change in the IDF's strategy on the buildup of maneuver and fire capabilities. The first principle relates to the idea of ground force buildup, in particular the construction of ground maneuver capabilities. The IDF differentiates between two types of maneuver, to be used in concert: a concentrated maneuver toward the enemy's centers of gravity, and maneuver in the enemy's tactical area. Force buildup should make it possible to operate maneuvering capabilities immediately upon the outbreak of a conflict. The second principle of force buildup relates to the construction of firepower capabilities. The chief of staff states that it is necessary to build capabilities that will allow "precise, multidimensional firepower in the shortest amount of time possible with a large scope of targets." This demand, as well as the demand for the immediacy of the maneuver, is evidence that the IDF has abandoned the notion of degrees of escalation that was part and parcel of the army's doctrine for the last decade and on whose basis every confrontation conducted an ongoing and increasingly forceful kinetic dialogue with the enemy. The force buildup as currently described will allow for the combined and immediate operation of maneuver, firepower, special operations, and cyber operations.

This review of the IDF strategy document is far from complete, but it is already possible to identify the major changes it makes in the IDF's use of force. The formulation of these changes, which require long term realization, is a fundamental building block in this much needed process to be implemented in the coming years. Naturally, the development of the process will be closely linked to the budget allocated for the sake of undertaking the changes and ensuring the ability of IDF commanders to implement them. The experience of the past has demonstrated that undertaking far reaching changes, as formulated in the IDF strategy document, requires uncompromising determination.