Terrorism under a Nuclear Umbrella: Threat and Response

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The central questions regarding military force for a democratic nation state are: can war be expected, does military force deter a war, and should a war erupt, can the state endure it and emerge victorious. Force buildup derives from the operational response to the threat. The problem that states and militaries face today is that there is no generic formula for force application and force buildup relevant to a threat that combines large scale − even global − terrorism and conventional capabilities, all under the threat of a nuclear umbrella.

The central questions can be divided into several sub-questions. What meta-strategy should the state adopt to build its military force? What war scenarios should it prepare for? What approach should the state and the military adopt with relation to the issue of deterrence, with particular emphasis on deterring terrorist organizations such as Hizbollah and Hamas and failed states such as Lebanon, and what are the ramifications for force application and force buildup? What are the ramifications of force buildup and operational readiness for the response to a threat that combines nuclear, conventional, and terrorist threats all at the same time? What is the dilemma in this context? Finally, in the case of a combined threat, should the state maintain and improve a large conventional force, or should it construct, maintain, and improve a force suited only to fight terrorism and guerilla? This would entail a qualitatively different program, for example, regarding large scale infantry and special forces.

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Threat

The threat of terrorism under the auspices of established or failed nation states undermines the historical rules and principles of the response. One of the results is a blurring of the lines separating the reference threat one needs to prepare for. A threat that combines conventional capabilities and terrorism is liable to be confusing. The example of Iran, a state developing a military nuclear capability while at the same time acting against Israel through a buildup and application of terrorism, is liable to complicate the understanding of such a joint threat and make preparation of the response even more difficult.

What has changed in the world of threats against nation states? The main thrust of the change lies in the combination between the threat of terrorism and the conventional threat. The difficulty in identifying unusual events, the limited ability to forecast, and the blindness inherent in random events bring the 9/11 attack and an expected or unexpected conventional attack against Israel to similar levels of uncertainty.

What has changed in the realm of force buildup and the response to the threat? The heart of the developing change is the difficulty in matching the required operational criteria of the response to the combined terrorist-conventional threat operating under nuclear protection. This difficulty is expressed in the doctrine of force buildup at various levels; in staff and command capabilities from tactics to strategy at the various levels of command; in matching the arsenal of weapons to the operational needs of the response; and in organizing the operational and professional system to the response. The response to the nuclear threat is familiar and may be found in the realm of the Cold War. The combination between a state operating terrorism on the one hand and nuclear capabilities serving as its defensive shield on the other is a new combination in the world of threats against nation states.

The Development of the Response to a Changing World: Israel 1953-2006

In September 1953, on the eve of his resignation as prime minister and minister of defense, David Ben-Gurion decided he would take a break from politics. When he returned, he presented an overview of the era's current problems to the government. Ben-Gurion had examined the IDF and met with its commanders, after which he wrote a document

entitled "Army and State."[1] This strategy document, which defined a comprehensive response to the security problems of the State of Israel at that time and expressed Ben-Gurion's security philosophy, was accepted by the government on October 18, 1953.[2] "Security depends not only on the military," wrote Ben-Gurion. "Non-military elements are no less decisive than military ones: the nation's market and financial capabilities, the professionalism of craftsmen, industry, and agriculture." He went on to specify other civilian elements,[3] yet clearly Ben-Gurion began with the operational military capability as the basis for the response to the threat.

The War of Independence and the Yom Kippur War embedded the existential threat stemming from conventional weapons in the consciousness of Israel's military leadership as a top priority, hence driving the overall response. However, one year after the Six Day War marked the development of terrorism as a new threat in the region. The most significant development in this sense was Fatah's entrenchment in Jordan and the substantial growth of its operational military capabilities. The operational potential of Fatah was evident in the blood-drenched war in the Jordan Valley. These were the years of euphoria after the Six Day War and most of the people in Israel did not even know where in the Jordan Valley the battles were taking place.

Israel's warfare against terrorism involved a series of confrontations and operations before Operation Peace for the Galilee in 1982, when the IDF embarked on a war on terrorism against Israel from Lebanon. The scale of the operation, in terms of the use of ground and aerial forces, was that of a comprehensive war, and later in the war the IDF fought against the Syrian army in Lebanon. That is to say, the response to terrorism from Lebanon that was formulated in the years leading up to Operation Peace for the Galilee was a conventional response – a ground maneuver war.

Clearly, then, the ongoing threat of terrorism along Israel's borders did not upset the balance in priorities in the construction of the operational response, and the conventional reference threat still topped the list of priorities of the response. The first significant addition to Israel's traditional conventional reference threat emerged in full force from 1987 to 2002: a popular uprising ripened into a terrorist threat in 1996 in the Gaza Strip, and led to Operation Defensive Shield in Judea and Samaria in 2002.[4] This was the first time that the overall operational response

to the threat changed and the threat of terrorism became the IDF's top priority.

One of the correct conclusions reached by the IDF in this context was a major expansion of its infantry. The change in the operational response in those years was expressed in alterations in the IDF's training components, weapons development and equipment, and IDF organization – a change, in fact, in every component of force buildup. The IDF changed its priorities, in particular in the reserves deployment, while assuming risks with regard to the conventional threat. At the same time, in 2000-6, following the IDF withdrawal from southern Lebanon, the Hizbollah threat developed to an extent that the terrorist organization became a full military system, thanks to the direct investment by Iran in every force construction component of the organization.

In the Second Lebanon War, the IDF's conventional response was lacking, while its response to terrorism was quite proficient: the assumption was that the conventional threat had ebbed substantially and it was therefore possible to cut back on the IDF's conventional warfare capabilities. The error was in assuming that conventional capabilities would not be needed for an operational response to a terrorist threat. The IDF used conventional force against Hizbollah in the Second Lebanon War, and conventional force was ultimately responsible for the operational results. Increasing the number of infantry units proved essential, but when it became necessary to use conventional force, whose basic battle components are joint use of firepower and ground maneuvers requiring training, doctrine, command skills, and highly skilled staff work at the command centers, alongside high degree inter-branch integration, the IDF found itself far from the requisite basic level of performance.

After the Second Lebanon War, the term "missed opportunity" was used for the first time in IDF analyses. The missed opportunity referred to the potential use of force in the conventional operational response, i.e., the capability of using considerable force quickly and effectively. The necessary correction to the response came in the form of restoring the conventional capabilities to a high level, while at the same time maintaining the capabilities required to fight terrorism. My conclusion is that in order to allow a reasonable operational response to terrorism in the form of an organization such as Hizbollah or other groups, the

military must acquire quality conventional capabilities and add to them the special components required to respond to terrorism.

Grand Strategy and Force Buildup

Israel's grand strategy must aim at continual maintaining and strengthening of the components of national security through effective deterrence. In the context of using the state's security force (military and other), this strategy defines an ongoing campaign against terrorist and nuclear threats in the periods between wars.

Should a direct war be forced on the State of Israel by a joint threat – terrorism and conventional under nuclear protection – Israel's strategy must aim at operating in two parallel campaigns towards the same objective: strengthening the national security of the State of Israel. One campaign is to attain the goals of the war in a short period of time (a few weeks) by concentrating and combining the military and security forces, expecting major damage to physical and human infrastructures behind the direct terrorist and conventional threats. The second effort involves continuing the campaign in place before the war against non-conventional capabilities, attacking the components of nuclear capability construction, while clearly separating this campaign from the one against terrorism and conventional threats. Both campaigns must, simultaneously and through mutual support (in fitness and readiness), aim at maximum achievements in the direct war.

The purpose of the action derived from this strategy is the ability to reach a decision in the current campaign, such that the decision made will deter the potential threat in the long run. What is needed, then, is a short, intensive campaign, both in its offense and its defense. Combining the IDF's offense capabilities and an optimal deployment to defend the civilian front is the necessary product of this strategy. Experience from the recent past – the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead – shows that a military blow of great force, along with high damage expectancy to the terrorism and conventional threats, is an important component in deterring terrorist activity.

Preparing for which Scenarios of War

The State of Israel must prepare its military force for joint war scenarios: war on terrorism based on high trajectory fire against the Israeli public

operating out of densely populated civilian areas, with the serious possibility of deterioration into a conventional war. If Iran attains nuclear weapons, a scenario such as this is liable to occur under the umbrellas of Iranian nuclear deterrence.

However, history cautions that states that attained nuclear capabilities exited the circle of conventional warfare against their neighbors. On the other hand, in the Iranian case it may be that attaining nuclear capability is liable to improve its capability to fight Israel on the battlefield of terrorism and conventional warfare. The reason is Iran's desire on the one hand to attack Israel through proxies and on the other hand to deter Israel from engaging it directly in a war.

The Iranian example is one that demonstrates a state constructing nuclear operational capabilities by means of ballistic missiles while conducting a parallel campaign of direct terrorism via terrorist organizations. Iran's construction of nuclear force is aimed at allowing it strategic freedom of movement for its primary effort, terrorism against Israel, in addition to internal and regional motives.

Iran operates through specific force buildup and work with organizations such as Hizbollah and Hamas in all aspects: assistance with doctrine and training, weapons and military equipment, organization on the ground and managing the military organization by means of military and political advisors, physical and communications infrastructures – in practice, everything a military organization needs for continuous, effective activity. Iran presents a model of terrorism and conventional threats combined with the model of nuclear deterrence. Such a situation is liable to deter nations under attack by this threat from taking direct action against the terrorist organizations for fear that taking action will set off a comprehensive war that might deteriorate into a war with nuclear missiles.

This situation represents a threat that extremist states in the world like Iran, North Korea, or Pakistan are liable to adopt as standard operating methods. Pakistan, for example, a state with nuclear capabilities whose stability is threatened by terrorist organizations, may in a certain scenario become a state controlled by terrorist organizations operating from under the umbrella of that nuclear threat. The deterrence achieved by nuclear weapons would allow a state with these capabilities, if sufficiently motivated, to operate all of its other military components, which could

then evolve into a threat to global stability. This is the practical meaning of a state having nuclear capabilities that simultaneously projects a significant terrorist threat. The nuclear capabilities are maintained by the nation while direct terrorism is carried out through the nation's proxy organizations.

Therefore, in the Iranian context – and this may even seem paradoxical – it is necessary to examine the idea of focusing the main effort against the conventional and terrorist threats rather than against the nuclear capabilities, because although the former seem less threatening, they are standard components of warfare against which it is possible to operate military force in a conventional war. As the threat from terrorism/conventional means is reduced to tolerable levels, the nuclear threat will become isolated and remain in the realm of cold war, where it is possible to handle it using other tools related to cold war and special operations.

An effort must be made at all times to separate the different threats and prevent their integration, the way that in practice Iran has succeeded in doing and the way that states such as North Korea and Pakistan are liable to do in future. The attempt to grasp all by acting directly against all three threats simultaneously acts in Iran's favor by joining together in a single campaign its entire operational capabilities: terrorism, conventional, and nuclear. However, it behooves us to remember that nuclear weapons cannot be operated without assuming the second-strike risk and total destruction within the nation using it and in the region in general. Israel must create the rules that will allow it to fight in a conventional war against threats to its existence without bringing the entire region to the brink of nuclear war.

Force Buildup

Force buildup and operational preparedness to respond to a threat that includes nuclear, conventional, and terrorist threats necessitates a military force with high intelligence capabilities[5] that can deploy quickly from its bases to the battlegrounds, has high firepower capabilities towards both short and long range targets, and has high ground maneuver capabilities in densely populated urban civilian areas.

Most of the deterrence against terrorism and conventional threats must be created in areas near Israel's border. A severe blow if not complete destruction of direct war efforts against Israel, high trajectory

fire terrorism, and the established terrorism organizations as well as the armed forces of the conflict states will create the major deterrence when action against Israel is considered in the future. Therefore, the primary effort of the strategy must aim at land and aerial capabilities at the front and in the heart of the near circle threatening the state's borders. This strategy aims to achieve a military decision in a campaign of direct war and to deter potential systems from attempting war in the future. The force buildup must be derived from this strategy and force application must be aimed at a short, intensive war, preferable from Israel's perspective to a long, drawn-out war with the features of a war of attrition.

The future military force must therefore continue to be based on all forms of high conventional capabilities, with emphasis on a large infantry order of battle. The construction of the force of the future must on the one hand allow warfare with a massive presence of infantry in the battlefield, complemented by concentrated precision fire into the heart of the battlefield.

Some words regarding force buildup in accordance with what is known as "lawfare." One of the primary reasons for enlarging the infantry's order of battle comes from a current trend that has recently become known as lawfare. As the presence of infantrymen on the battlefield increases, action through close contact will reduce the need to use standoff fire, i.e., less standoff fire and more direct, focused fighting and use of precision fire in close combat. Terrorist organizations such as Hizbollah, Hamas, al-Qaeda, and the Taliban attempt consistently, often through international institutions, to condemn the use of aerial weapons by presenting the non-combatant civilian casualties. In this context, see the example of Operation Cast Lead and many other operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The direct result of increasing the infantry's order of battle in warfare operations in urban or other populated areas is a better ability to distinguish the enemy from the civilian population and greater precision in using aerial and ground fire. This is not to say that civilian casualties can be totally eliminated. It does, however, mean that civilian casualties in particular and damage to the environment in general are reduced. Because lawfare[6] in its new definition is an important component in the comprehensive campaign against terrorism, there are many

ramifications for force application and buildup, and it demands thorough consideration.

At the same time, the strategy for force buildup in the face of a nuclear threat must aim at deterrence while using focused action capabilities inside the enemy's strategic depth. In any case this is a secondary effort. Thus, the future force is a combined force capable of providing a combined response.

The Security Dilemma with Regard to Force Buildup

The addition of the terrorist threat as a major component of the reference threat caused decreased effectiveness in the IDF's conventional response. For our purpose, the lesson is that the conventional operational response capabilities must be strengthened as the primary foundation of the IDF's response capabilities, while capabilities to respond to terrorism must be added. This lesson, which the IDF learned from experience, necessitates an in-depth look as we examine the addition of the Iranian nuclear threat to the reference threat. On the basis of experience and on the assumption that the reference threat in the near circle from states with which Israel shares a border and from the Gaza Strip will continue into the future, we may conclude that Israel's conventional capabilities must continue to be the primary foundation of the military response.

Iran's partnership in constructing the terrorist threat has not been a secret for quite some time and has been widely discussed in essays sponsored by the Institute for National Security Studies and in the press. The addition of the nuclear threat to the reference threat is liable to upset the priorities of the operational response. The combination between the nuclear threat on the one hand and the conventional and terrorist threats on the other is a combination between two types of war phenomena that are qualitatively different. Fighting terrorism and conventional warfare are closer to one another than either is to nuclear warfare. The reason is that the latter belongs to the category defined as cold war and the other two to the category of classical war, whose accepted principles remain those defined by Clausewitz. The addition of terrorism, especially since 9/11, left the concepts of military response in familiar places, based on soldiers waging war on a battlefield.

By contrast, the battlefield of the nuclear war is different. The response is different and is also much more expensive in economic

terms. It seems that in a case combining military capability of response to terrorism and conventional threats it would be possible to share components and achieve similar ends, whereas with the nuclear threat the force construction is distinctive and requires large budgets, not only for its construction but also for its maintenance.

Past experience has demonstrated that a cold war can be sustained only by superpowers, because the economic abilities of any ordinary state to construct and maintain nuclear capabilities necessarily affect other national issues. The change in recent years in the State of Israel, which is not an economic superpower, is the addition of a direct nuclear threat directed against it. Therefore, the balance in the response to a combined threat of this sort is of critical importance.

The dilemma posed is, what accounts for the most significant threat to the security of the State of Israel? Is it the terrorism and conventional threats of the family of classical threats, or is it the nuclear threat of the cold war family? A decision regarding this dilemma is one that will determine the balance defining the response and the priorities of force buildup.

Deterrence

Deterring a state using terrorist organizations from acting is very hard, because such a state hides behind the identity of the terrorist organizations, and in Iran's case operates by means of proxies. Deterring a failed state (such as Lebanon) with regard to the activity of terrorist organizations operating within its borders against neighboring states is complex and problematic, while deterring the terrorist organizations from acting against a state seems well nigh impossible. If so, why has Hizbollah, supported by Iran in every possible way, not taken direct action against Israel since the Second Lebanon War? What is the reason for the relative calm on the Gaza Strip front since Operation Cast Lead? Because an index of success for deterrence is difficult to define, I suggest that we examine the following hypothesis: the effect and pressure of civilians in the state in which the terrorists operate on the organizations' leaders and operatives not to begin a war is the major restraint given the anticipation of great damage to the civilians' assets. The hypothesis is that the greater the expected damage, the greater the deterrence of going to war.

Another hypothesis is that constructing an apparatus of deterrence affects the civilians' feelings of loss from war. The Americans are using this approach in Iraq and Afghanistan. With the civilian population seen as terrorism's center of gravity, then investments in civilian infrastructures, the civilian fabric of life, and the quality of life of the population complement direct military operations attacking terrorist operatives and can generate a significant decrease in terrorism and deter it further. On the other hand, Afghanistan is an area where many empires have tried to impose order on the local population. Quality of life − a distinct feature of the West − is not necessarily a supreme value in Pashtun culture; at the very least, the indices of quality of life are radically different between the two cultures. The culture of war and struggle is more important to the Pashtuns than an organizational culture imported from the West. It would seem that the Pashtuns are a tribe that has historically opposed governability and they form the vast majority of the Taliban.

Conclusion

The threat of terrorism operated under the aegis of established or failed states and the construction of nuclear operational capabilities by these states as an umbrella for terrorism is a strategic situation upsetting the familiar equilibrium of the response. The experience gained by Israel and the United States in fighting terrorism since 2000 shows that the starting point for this force buildup is a conventional force whose infantry scope is larger than the traditional joint force structure.[7]

Separating the response to terrorism and conventional threats from the response to the nuclear one will strengthen deterrence. The lessons of the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead show that the greater the anticipated damage, the greater the deterrence of engaging in war. The conclusion is that the military response in a changing world must direct its primary effort against conventional capabilities and terrorism. This will isolate the nuclear threat and leave it in the realm of a cold war, managed by secondary efforts using cold war tools and special operations. Nuclear weapons cannot be used without assuming the risk of second strike retaliation and total destruction in the state using it and the entire surrounding region.

The State of Israel must create the rules that will allow it to fight a conventional war against threats to its existence and quality of life without bringing the entire region to the brink of a nuclear war.

Notes

1 David Ben-Gurion, "Army and State" *Maarachot* No. 279-280 (May-June 1981): 2-11.

2 In 1981, an attempt was made to compose a working document entitled "National Security" but this paper never achieved government approval.

3 Ben-Gurion, "Army and State" p. 2.

4 In September 2001, the free world became aware of the destructive potential of the global terrorist threat. On October 7, 2001, the coalition forces headed by the United States started a coordinated attack on Afghanistan. Operation Anaconda, one of the largest operations to catch Bin Laden in Afghanistan, took place in March 2002. Operation Defensive Shield took place in March 2002. The American war against Iraq started in March 2003. The Second Lebanon War started in July 2006. This essay does not deal with parallels between the phenomena in Israel and the world at large, but it is easy to see that they are there, obviously with regional relevance. In December 2009, President Obama decided on a significant expansion of American forces in Afghanistan in order to step up the war on terrorist organizations.

5 High capabilities are meant in the sense of a relative advantage over the capabilities of the threat. The product of force buildup is never optimal, and therefore I propose to eliminate from the discussion notions of "developing superiority." Such an approach fails again and again and risks the development of illusions with regard to the phenomenon of war. David struck Goliath by means of a sling and trickery, not by "developing superiority." Clearly, the relative advantage achieved through technology must be maintained.

6 Charles J. Dunlap, Jr., "Lawfare: A Decisive Element of 21st Century Conflicts," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2009): 34-39. At the time of writing, Brig. Gen. Dunlap was the deputy to the Chief Military Attorney of the United States Air Force.

7 Defined for the first time during World War II, on the basis of the principles of the combined ground battle.