Applied Strategy:
The Challenges of Applying Force in a Changing Middle East

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Israel's strategic environment of mid 2012 differs significantly from that of a few years ago.[1] In the current environment, the military force application that Israel is liable to need differs in purpose, constraints, and the accompanying military-political interface from the force application of the past. The purpose of this article is to discuss some of the particular characteristics of force application in this contemporary environment.

One of the main parameters requiring a change in thinking is that in the emerging multi-sided strategic system, using military force against a particular enemy can have important political and strategic consequences for relations with third parties – some enemies, some allies, and some with vacillating positions. Clearly this constraint existed in the past as well, but it has now become weightier. The number of relevant third parties is increasing; the ties between the actors are more complex and often less predictable; and the political and strategic effects on third parties can sometimes be more significant than the direct result of force application against the enemy.

For Israel, this is true of two current challenges. The first part of the article deals with the challenges of using force in the context of the most critical security issue today – the Iranian nuclear program. A possible attack against Iran is intended to have a significant effect on the policy of the relevant actors, not only on Iran's nuclear and physical capabilities. Thus the debate focusing exclusively on the length of time Iran will need to repair

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the damage caused by an attack indicates a lack of understanding of the objective and strategic meaning of an attack.

To an extent, the purpose of an attack is, inter alia, to influence the policy of the US, an ally, and not merely the enemy's policy. This fact should be a consideration underlying the design of an operational plan. Thus, it is possible that the covert campaign by intelligence agencies against the nuclear program does more harm than good. Even if the covert campaign yields immediate benefit with regard to Iran's nuclear and physical capabilities, its effect in the political and strategic sphere is negative. The reasons for this will be discussed at length below.

The second part of the article deals with the challenges involving the application of force in Israel's other potential main theaters of confrontation, led by Gaza and Lebanon.

Internal instability in Egypt and Jordan and internal developments in Turkey cause these countries to vacillate in two ways. First, the emerging policies in Egypt and Turkey are equivocal: theses states may be either allies or potential challengers. Second, Israel's use of military force in theaters like Gaza and Lebanon is liable to have a negative impact on internal developments in Egypt and Jordan.

Indeed, a large scale military campaign in Gaza, Lebanon, or any other bordering theater area is liable to prove politically and strategically costly in Israel's relations with the vacillating countries. Stronger interdependencies and linkages between theaters mean that the price that Israel might pay in its relations with Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey is liable to outweigh any direct military gains against the enemy. And even if the decision makers in these Sunni states assess that they could benefit from an engagement between Israel and a Shiite entity such as Hizbollah, challenges might surface by the increasingly important factor of popular Sunni Arab sentiment following an attack against Lebanon and its government.

In recent decades, Israel's enemies have tried to restrict its freedom of action and military effectiveness in a variety of ways, including the use of sub-state organizations and intentional blurred distinctions between the civilian and military worlds as well as between war and lull. The next stage in restricting Israel's freedom of military action could result from exploitation by Israel's enemies of the vacillating states, whether in the diplomatic arena or through hostile operations from their territory or in the vicinity of their military assets.

Part I: The Iranian Nuclear Challenge

The Rationale for an Attack against Iran

The argument that an attack against Iran will be ineffective because it would cause only limited and reparable damage to Iran's nuclear program has surfaced again in recent months. This focus on the physical result of an attack omits its essential goal and its political nature. As Clausewitz said, the main importance of force application lies in its influence on policy, not just the specific physical damage that it inflicts.

The goal of Iran's policy is to obtain nuclear weapons. The goal of Israel's policy is to change Iran's policy. Iran is determined to obtain a nuclear capability, and any damage to its nuclear capability, whether limited or extensive, military or covert, will only delay the implementation of Iran's policy by the time required for reconstruction. It therefore follows that in order to carry out its policy, Israel must influence not only Iran's nuclear capabilities (which can be rebuilt), but mainly its policy. Damaging nuclear capabilities may buy limited time, but it is doubtful whether by itself it can change policy. Israel may find it more challenging to directly affect Iran's policy, but the US is capable of it.

Iran portrays itself as a regional and even a global power, but this portrayal masks profound structural, economic, and military weaknesses. One out of every seven Iranians is illiterate, its gross national product is roughly equal to that of Argentina, and at least some of its key weaponry dates back to the 1960s and 1970s. Iran suffered critical damage and sacrificed almost an entire generation in the eight-year war against Iraq and its army, an army that the US defeated within a few days. It can be assumed that in any direct confrontation between the Iranian military and an advanced Western military, the latter will prevail.

Why then is the US unsuccessful in forcing its political will on Iran? What works in Iran's favor is the asymmetry in the seriousness and determination in the respective Iranian and US attitudes toward the Iranian nuclear program. From Iran's perspective, the nuclear program is a supreme goal, and it is willing to incur major risks and pay high prices to achieve it – or at least it is posturing in such a way.[2] Indeed, Iran is succeeding in deterring its enemies and positioning itself as ready for any confrontation – even though its profound weakness presumably means

that it does not seek a direct military confrontation with the West, and would probably not withstand one.

The US does not appear as determined as Iran. It balances a large number of considerations, among them a rise in the price of oil and potential damage to its economy, the November 2012 elections, and the need for an international coalition. In addition, it is still traumatized by its wounds in Iraq and Afghanistan, and hesitates to take risks and pay the accompanying prices. Another factor working against the US is that in recent years, due to the way it dealt with a number of regional challenges (including Iraq, Bahrain, and Lebanon), it has been perceived as indecisive and inclined to recoil from strategic commitments.[3] If, however, circumstances prompt the US to attribute the same importance and urgency to the nuclear question as Iran does, it can be assumed that the world's only superpower would have the upper hand.

Iran wishes to gain time in order to advance its nuclear program. The US seeks to avoid or at least postpone high risk and potentially costly decisions, and it therefore continues to delay the moment of truth of its declared policy. At this stage, Israel is also deterred by the price that will be exacted from it by Iran's proxies and the international community if it acts alone against Iran's nuclear program. Consequently, for now, it too is not expediting the moment of truth. Furthermore, it is possible that some of the measures being employed by the US – a series of visits to Israel by senior officials, the meetings with Iran, sanctions, and movement of forces in the Persian Gulf – are designed not to influence Iran, but to persuade Israel to bide its time. A fundamental equilibrium point of the political-strategic system is thereby emerging, whereby all three parties allow time to pass.

The risk exists, however, that Iran and the US administration share additional strategic equilibrium points. The first point is a possible common interest of Iran and the US in creating a perception that the nuclearization threat is not immediate and the diplomatic dialogue has not yet been thoroughly explored, which lends them justification for allowing time to pass. The second potential common interest between Iran and the US is creating an impression that military action would be useless, allegedly due to both the redundancy of the nuclear program and Iran's expected response. The third and most important risk is that Iran and the US may develop a common interest in a quantum leap from the stage of "there is more time for diplomacy" to a stage of "it's too late for military action,"

without passing through a stage in which only military action may still change Iran's policy.

These points of equilibrium are unacceptable to Israel, which must expedite the emergence of a strategic moment of truth in which all parties put their ultimate cards on the table. A variable that might upset these equilibrium points would be Israel's immediate willingness to pay the prices and take the necessary risks for carrying out its policy. Such a new situation is designed to force a change in the risk-benefit analyses of the other two vertices of the triangle. In other words, the goal of a military strike by Israel will not be to cause any particular damage to Iran's nuclear assets, but to resist the existing strategic and political equilibrium points and generate a different political-strategic reality, in which Iran's desire to obtain nuclear weapons is tested at a moment of truth, when the three parties are equally committed to the test.

In order to influence the political considerations of the parties, it may not be necessary for an Israeli military strike to target the entire nuclear program, and instead it can also target other high quality strategic targets in Iran. The required achievement is not damage to a given number of centrifuges, rather, it is the persistence of the military action against Iran until the goal is achieved. The IDF must preserve its force during the attacks, so that Israel can deliver a credible political message that it will simply not accept the old equilibrium points, and can pursue a viable military strategy for as long as necessary. Therefore, in this specific case, the principles of force protection and security are more important than the selection of targets for attack. Attacking specific targets that lead to major losses for the attacking force will impact negatively on the ability to persist in the required military strategy, and are therefore liable to impede the military force from executing the chosen policy. The force buildup and the operational concept must be aimed mainly at developing operational endurance.

The Covert Campaign: More Harm than Good

According to various press reports, Western intelligence agencies are conducting a covert campaign to disrupt Iran's nuclear program, via attacks against individuals, equipment sabotage, and cyber attacks. According to the strategic rationale outlined above, however, the covert campaign may well yield more harm than good. If we accept the rationale that we seek to

move the political-strategic equilibrium points in the Iran-US-Israel triangle and change the respective attitudes towards time, risks, and costs, this is the criterion by which the covert campaign's effectiveness must be judged.

The covert campaign involves relatively few risks. It is ambiguous with respect to the responsibility for operations and the question of whether specific events are the result of a deliberate action, malfunction, or accident. Operations in this campaign can be disavowed, and the price that the actor instigating the campaign must pay is lower than that of the overt military alternative[4] (this obviously refers to the costs and risks incurred by the dispatching state, not the operational unit, whose risks are liable to be high). The covert campaign is therefore to a great extent the recourse of a party seeking to avoid risks.

When a covert campaign is the principal line of action selected, the underlying message communicated is that the actor fears an overt and direct military confrontation because of the attending costs and risks. A negative strategic dynamic is thereby created, owing to the difference between the rival parties in their attitude towards risks. Iran is posturing as a tough, risk-accepting actor. Israel and the US choose risk-hedging means, such as the covert campaign, cyber attacks, sanctions, and diplomatic negotiations, and are therefore perceived as risk-averse actors who seek to limit their exposure to the price they will have to pay in the moment of truth.

So while Iran is seen as determined and willing to take risks, Israel and the US are seen as receding, without either of them having to show their cards. The winner in each round is determined by the fact that the US and Israel are unwilling to call the bet, not by how strong their cards are. The underlying truth is that Iran does not want a direct military confrontation, and would probably be badly defeated in a situation in which all three parties put their cards on the table. The dynamic that has emerged, however, enables Iran to adopt a strategy based on a projection of power, even though this is not backed up by real capabilities, and on the assumption that the US and Israel will be the first to fold.

The exceptions that prove the rule are the rare cases in which Iran's rivals showed determination, laid their cards on the table, and demonstrated credibility in their willingness to take risks; Iran retreated in these cases. An example of this is Iran's capitulation in January 2012, after threatening to blockade the Strait of Hormuz in the event of the US returning its ships to the Persian Gulf.[5]

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As the covert campaign progresses, however, and more and more dubious events occur, it is gradually emerging that the behavior of the US and Israel is consistently limited in risk. This consistent behavior pattern makes it easy for Iran to formulate its strategy: a poker player who knows how high his opponent will bet can always push him into folding by raising his bet above his opponent's risk threshold. Under this dynamic, almost all the red lines presented by Israel and the West in recent years have been crossed.[6] Nuclear installations have been operated and uranium enriched in large quantities, while the real power of the parties has never been put to the test.

Judging by the results, therefore, the covert campaign is not succeeding in upsetting the equilibrium points in the Iran-US-Israel triangle. Despite the physical damage, Iran is not altering its policy. Any covert damage to the nuclear program (if it occurs at all) only requires Iran to repair the damage, or to adjust and execute a tactical maneuver. Eventually, it returns to its strategic path and its nuclear ambitions. Furthermore, the covert campaign gives the political leaderships of Israel and the US a soothing feeling that "they are doing something," thereby seemingly justifying postponement of the moment of truth and the fact that critical time is allowed to pass. For this reason as well, the covert campaign maintains – rather than challenges – the basic equilibrium point.

The covert campaign is therefore not the way of bringing the game to its moment of truth; it is a behavior pattern from which the enemy learns that it need not fear high risk measures that exceed the price range it has already taken into account, and that despite the physical-tactical damage to its assets, the enemy can continue marching toward its political-strategic goals. Thus in order to achieve its goals, Israel cannot continue to maintain a policy of low and measured risks. Israel must bring the game to a point at which bets are almost unlimited, in which no player folds, and all of them must show their cards. Israel can achieve this if it initiates and maintains a higher level of risk in the game. The cost and the risk are the entry ticket to the strategic game; willingness to pay the price and incur the risk is the strategy to resist the existing equilibrium points; and persistence under circumstances of risk and cost is the main theme of the campaign.

Attacking the Enemy's Strategy

Extending the spectrum of discussion and considering the need to attack Iran's strategy raises additional considerations in favor of a military attack and against a covert campaign. A successful strategy is one that presents the enemy with dilemmas – when every option selected by the enemy gives one an advantage. In this spirit, a military attack by Israel will present Iran with several strategic dilemmas:

a. Should Iran respond with wide scale action against American interests, or should it confine its response to Israel and try to avoid involving the US?

b. Should Iran continue its current effective approach of expanding its capabilities and remaining at the nuclear threshold, or should it stage a breakout to developing nuclear weapons?

With respect to the first dilemma, if Iran responds against vital interests of the US (action in the Strait of Hormuz, for example), it will by itself bring the moment of truth in the strategic game closer. On the other hand, if Iran confines its response mainly to Israel through its proxy Hizbollah, at least the next confrontation with Hizbollah will be for a worthy strategic cause. Israel should assume that it will face Hizbollah sooner or later, for one reason or another, and it is preferable for the next round to result from the Iranian nuclear program rather than circumstances with no benefit for Israel, such as an internal Lebanese crisis, a miscalculation, or an event like the local border incident at Milestone 105 (the cause of the Second Lebanon War).

Incidentally, an Israeli attack against Iran will also present Hizbollah with difficult dilemmas, because the organization will have to decide whether or not to behave as an Iranian proxy, which would entangle Lebanon in a war from which it will suffer large scale damage for the sake of an issue that does not concern Lebanon's national interests. In any case, Iran's response will expose the limitations of its power, and Iran currently has greater deterrent capability than it would have after trying to carry out its threats. Subsequent to actual Iranian application of force, as opposed to its current successful posturing, the strategic dynamics and calculations may considerably differ from the current ones.

With respect to the second dilemma, if Iran stages a breakout by developing nuclear weapons, it will again promote the arrival of the moment of truth. If Iran continues its current approach of expanding its

infrastructure and remaining at the nuclear threshold, but with reduced capabilities as a result of the attack, it will reinforce Israel's contention that the nuclear program can still be rolled back by violent means.

For these reasons, only an open military attack, not a covert campaign, also constitutes an attack against Iran's strategy.

Part II: The Use of Force in the Main Theaters of Confrontation

The Vacillating States

Three key states – Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan – were partners of Israel and made a substantive contribution to its strategic freedom of action. Significant changes are underway in all three of these states, and their great importance to Israel makes it necessary to discuss them prior to a discussion of Israel's enemies.

The Turkish military (which is, or at least was, secular) was a key player in Turkish politics. For many years, Israel regarded it as a partner in containing pan Arabism, the Soviet Union/Russia's Middle Eastern tentacles, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, and in the war against sub-state organizations. This approach was expressed in close military and intelligence coordination, reinvigorated in the mid-1990s. Political backing from a regional Muslim power also provided Israel with useful freedom of action.

The 2002 elections, however, initiated a dramatic change in Turkish politics, with the gradual exclusion of the Turkish military from the political power centers and the military's becoming less secular. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan shifted Turkish policies to a confrontational stance towards the US, Europe, and Israel. The first signs of friction between Israel and Turkey appeared during the Second Lebanon War; Operation Cast Lead provided Erdoğan with an opportunity to ignite a crisis, and the flotilla to Gaza orchestrated by the Turkish organization IHH led to a profound rift. Another point of friction that has drawn insufficient attention is the Eastern Mediterranean gas fields, which were divided in an agreement between Israel and Greek Cyprus. Turkey does not recognize Greek Cyprus, and Turkey and Lebanon do not recognize the agreement on division of the gas fields.

Turkey is not Israel's enemy, and should not be treated as such, but Turkey's emerging policy has several consequences. First of all, at this stage Turkey is no longer Israel's partner in the regional balance of power.

On the contrary: it seeks to hamper Israel and capitalize on crises with it. Second, Turkey is expanding its political and diplomatic penetration of the Arab world, and wishes to position itself as a regional patron. Third, Turkey is bolstering its physical presence in the theater, including the presence of military assets. These developments increase the potential friction between the countries, and are becoming part of Israel's tapestry of political, strategic, and operational considerations.

Certainly Israel should try to avoid deterioration in relations with this NATO-member state, yet it is difficult to assess under what circumstances friction between Turkey and Israel might increase, and how far such deterioration would go. Circumstances exist, however, that are liable to heighten the danger of worsening relations. If the IDF embarks on a large scale campaign in Gaza, Lebanon, or another bordering arena, Turkey may well attempt to fulfill its aspirations to regional leadership by backing its Arab allies. Israel's freedom of action can be restricted through political means, but the possibility of some Turkish physical presence in the theater cannot be ruled out. For example, Turkey might expedite humanitarian aid to the theater and use military forces to secure its delivery. An Israeli aerial or naval blockade on the theater, if imposed, could well become a point of friction between Israel and Turkey, and it should be carefully considered whether the complications of a blockade outweigh its advantages. Turkey's physical presence in a theater is itself liable to pose difficult operational dilemmas.

Egypt is the most important Arab state, and until the peace agreement with Israel, the Egyptian military constituted the principal challenge in each of Israel's wars. In the first two decades following the peace agreement between the two countries, a dual political reality existed. On the one hand, Israel benefited from greater freedom of action, secure in the knowledge that the border with Egypt was peaceful. Even during crises like the First Lebanon War and the first intifada, Israel was free of concern about the opening of another front in the south. On the other hand, Egypt remained politically hostile and acted against Israel on various issues, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the attempts to channel Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union to the US, as well as in regional political questions and at international diplomatic forums. In Egyptian jargon, it tried to "cut Israel down to its natural size."

In the first decade of the new millennium, however, Egypt gradually became a strategic partner of Israel against Iran and its proxies in the Arab world. The Israeli-Arab fault line was replaced by a fault line between Israel and the Sunnis on the one hand and the Shiites on the other (and their satellites, some of whom were Sunnis). This reversal in Egyptian policy expanded Israel's freedom of action, and strengthened it strategically, as significantly reflected in the bilateral, regional, and international backing Egypt gave Israel in the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead.

A new political reversal occurred in February 2011 – this time for the worse – when Egyptian President Husni Mubarak was ousted from power and Egypt embarked on a path that strengthened the Islamic movements at the expense of the seasoned military establishment. The question of where Egypt is headed is still open, and Egypt should certainly not be treated as an enemy. At the same time, the internal developments in Egypt have several consequences. First, the strengthening of the Islamic movements weakens Egypt's status as a stable ally of Israel against their common enemies, and it cannot be assumed that Egypt will back Israel's future military campaigns the way it did in recent years. Second, Israel's embarking on a large scale military campaign (in Gaza, for example) in and of itself is liable both to prove a factor in shaping internal Egyptian politics and to strengthen the factions that oppose peace with Israel.

Hamas has deep-rooted historic and personal ties with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Egypt, and the two are to a large extent sister movements. Indeed, given the removal of Mubarak and the crisis in Hamas-Iran relations concerning Iran's support for Syrian President Bashar Assad, a trend is emerging in which Hamas is weakening its ties with Iran and replacing them with ties to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The system in which Israel and Mubarak squared off against Iran and Hamas is liable to be replaced by a Hamas and Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood axis opposed to Israel. Moreover, Egyptian public opinion is more assertive than in the past, and even if policymakers in Egypt are willing to accept certain Israeli military measures, newly-empowered Egyptian public opinion is liable to reject them. These processes are generating a direct link between Israel's use of military force – primarily against Hamas – and the internal Egyptian dynamic and Israeli-Egyptian relations, one that clearly restricts Israel's freedom of action.

A symbiotic relationship between Israel and the Jordanian royal house has existed for years. The Hashemite family suffers from profound weaknesses, particularly as it rules over a Palestinian majority. Furthermore, Jordan is situated at a crossroads between more powerful forces: Syria, Egypt, and Iraq. In face of these weaknesses, Israel has provided the Hashemite family with a protective umbrella by stating that a threat to the Jordanian royal house constitutes a casus belli for Israel. This situation has successfully withstood several tests, particularly in 1970. For its part, Israel has found the Hashemite family to be a partner in two important spheres. The Hashemite kingdom has become a de facto demilitarized zone with no enemy forces, and has usually prevented hostile use of its territory and long borders with Israel. In certain senses, Israel's strategic depth extends to eastern Jordan. In addition, an Israeli-Hashemite partnership, albeit limited, has emerged concerning the containment of Palestinian national aspirations and their direction to channels that relieve the threat to Israel and the Hashemite monarchy.

Jordan was too weak to seal its territory hermetically against terrorist action and expeditionary forces directed against Israel. Its weakness even infrequently obliged it to participate in Arab coalitions against Israel. Yet most of the time and on most issues it kept its part of the symbiotic bargain. Worthy of note is the warning provided by King Hussein to Israel about the Arab plans to launch the Yom Kippur War. The peace agreement signed by Israel and Jordan in 1994 was little more than a symbolic declaration of a strategic reality that in any case had already existed for decades.

Today, however, the Hashemite dynasty faces complex threats from a number of directions, and its future is unclear. The first threat – the internal agitation in Jordan – has reached a stage in which the legitimacy of the king is challenged openly. The second threat is that even the Bedouin tribes, who have been the mainstay of the monarchy, are beginning to take part in the agitation against the king.[7] The third threat is a result of the American withdrawal from Iraq, which has left room for Iranian influence in Mesopotamia, thereby bringing Iran to Jordan's back door. It may only be a question of time before Iran begins to intervene in Jordan. The fourth threat is the Hashemite dynasty's loss of the support provided by Mubarak; it is doubtful whether the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood would back the Hashemites against Islamic agitation. The fifth threat is the unpredictable

spillover effect on Jordan of a potential breakup or change of regime in Syria.

The challenges and increasing weakness of the Jordanian royal dynasty have two main consequences for the use of military force by Israel. The first is that a situation in which Israel conducts a large scale military campaign in some theater while the Israeli ambassador sits in Amman and the king sits idle is liable to pose a difficult internal challenge to the royal family. The challenge will be even more difficult than that posed by Operation Defensive Shield and Operation Cast Lead. The second is that if the Hashemite monarchy falls for any reason, Israel will lose an important asset that contributed greatly to its security and strategic power. Israel's longest border is liable to change its character. It therefore follows that where the Hashemite monarchy is concerned, Israel's freedom of action is narrowing.

A Major Military Campaign and the Vacillating States

The potential political and strategic benefit of a large scale campaign by Israel in one of the prime confrontation theaters is limited. Both southern Lebanon and Gaza are examples of this.

Hizbollah's rocket array, with its high redundancy, is now deployed with unprecedented depth. According to media reports, it is dispersed among the population in 160 civilian urban areas. Reaching a military decision against Hizbollah, in the sense of depriving it of the ability to operate high trajectory weapons against Israel, is impractical in a reasonable amount of time and at a reasonable price. Furthermore, any military campaign will have difficulty in addressing the fundamental problem of Lebanon: the country comprises ethnic minorities lacking state-like coherence, and its weak central government will have trouble enforcing its sovereignty in its own territory. It is possible to degrade Hizbollah, damage it, and affect its behavior for a while, but it is difficult to imagine a military campaign that could create a different fundamental political reality in Lebanon that would be better for Israel. In attempting to design a campaign in Lebanon, Israel can choose between a large scale campaign in which both sides will pay high prices and a smaller campaign that will exact limited prices from both sides. The optimal political result, however, will probably be similar in both alternatives, and will in any case be limited.

In contrast to Hizbollah, it is possible to deprive Hamas of the ability to launch rockets against Israel, but this involves a takeover and comprehensive combing of the entire Gaza Strip. If the IDF occupies the Gaza Strip, the problem arises what to do with it afterwards. More important, it is difficult for a military campaign to address the fundamental problems of Gaza: a dense Palestinian population, which suffers from human, civilian, and economic underdevelopment and embodies a radical culture, and is situated in geographic proximity to Israel's heartland. The possible military achievement in Gaza may be better than what can be expected in Lebanon, but here too it is difficult to imagine a political end state that represents a stable and sustainable reality that is better for Israel.

The modest political and strategic achievements that can be obtained in a large scale military campaign in Gaza or Lebanon should be weighed against the potential complications in political and strategic relations with the vacillating states mentioned above. Were the expected gains against the enemy remarkable, it might be worthwhile to pay the price of worsening relations with the vacillating states. However, it is questionable whether there is any point in risking the upsetting of relations with the vacillating states and perhaps causing them internal shocks, merely for the sake of obtaining a limited and transient achievement against the enemy.

The change in the Arab world also provides a new context for the challenge of collateral damage to civilians. This is not only a question of media, the laws of war, or Israel's relations with international organizations. The increased weight of public opinion in the considerations of Arab decision makers means potential effective pressure on them when collateral damage is caused. In the emerging reality, some degree of legitimacy from Arab public opinion for an Israeli campaign is more than just valuable – and that creates a much higher hurdle for the use of force.

The obvious problem lies in the fact that Israel is not the only party deciding whether to conduct or refrain from a violent confrontation. The enemy also gets a vote. As Israel's freedom of action narrows, that of its enemies is expanding, or at least is seemingly expanding. Assessing Hizbollah's freedom of action in a changing environment is a complex question, since it derives from Iran's position and political considerations, internal shockwaves in Syria, inter-ethnic relations in Lebanon, the actions of the international court investigating the Harari murder, and so on. At the same time, in certain circumstances, Hizbollah's complex array of interests

is liable to generate motivation on its part for deliberate escalation with Israel.

An analysis of Hamas' freedom of action is also far from simple, and the movement must contend with various limitations.[8] In estimating possible courses of action by Hamas, however, the changing reality must be taken into account, including the increased weight of the Islamic movements in Egypt, the loosening of the Jerusalem-Cairo axis, the crisis in Iran-Hamas relations, and the undermining of Egyptian governability in Sinai. Hamas, or at least some elements in it, now has affiliations (to some extent conflicting) with Tehran, Cairo, and Ankara. The growing closeness between the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas entails two aspects: on the one hand, the constraints on the Egyptian leadership can be a restraining factor on Hamas (and this has been the case in recent months). The strengthening of Hamas' state-like characteristics as the ruler in Gaza also constitutes a restraining factor. On the other hand, the close relations between Hamas and Egypt are liable to imbue Hamas with the sense that it enjoys greater freedom of action against Israel. At some point, Hamas may seek to challenge what remains of Israeli-Egyptian relations by drawing Israel into a major military campaign in Gaza. In contrast to its behavior in recent months, it is liable to use its rocket arsenal in a way that will leave the Israeli government with little choice other than to embark upon a large scale military campaign in Gaza. In this case, the political trap set by Hamas should be understood and avoided wherever possible.

The realization that the possible political and strategic benefits of a campaign in Gaza or Lebanon are liable to be meager, and that the costs and potential entanglements in relations with the vacillating states are significant, can lead the Israeli military planners to several conclusions. First, under the currently prevailing circumstances, major campaigns liable to cause large scale collateral damage should be avoided whenever possible. When a violent event or miscalculation occurs, force should be applied in a way that facilitates a rapid exit from the cycle of violence and avoids undesirable escalation. Second, if the enemy deliberately chooses escalation and makes a large scale campaign unavoidable, the perspective should be widened and the military plan's political and strategic effect on the entire region should be considered, including public opinion in the vacillating states.

These are seemingly the exact parameters for the IDF's consideration of essentially defensive strategic plans. The problem is that given the current war model of Hizbollah and Hamas, the question of what a defensive strategy means in this context needs to be clarified. When the enemy attacks deep within Israel's territory with high trajectory fire from deep within its own territory while remaining in a defensive disposition on the frontlines (a concept in IDF jargon known as "offensive-defense"), it is unclear what unique operational content can be given to an IDF defensive strategy. On the face of it, it is necessary to reach the enemy launchers with either firepower or by maneuver in order to affect them, but these launchers are deployed deep within enemy territory and are embedded in urban civilian areas. It is therefore necessary to consider whether this is indeed the only possible way of applying force in situations of both strategic defense and strategic offense (if it is at all possible to distinguish between them under these circumstances), or whether there are more effective ways of using force.

The military planner should search for ways to restrict the enemy's strategic freedom of action to continue fighting, and convince it to terminate the current cycle of violence, even without reaching a military decision against the enemy. It should be considered whether it is possible to operate in places and ways that can reduce friction with the enemy population, avoid a permanent seizure of territory, and maintain the legitimacy of using force. Because of the emergence of interdependence between theaters, it should also be considered whether it is correct to commit a campaign to a given theater of conflict, or whether it is more important to preserve the ability to switch rapidly between theaters. The military must add the legitimacy of the use of firepower and maneuvering as viewed by public opinion in Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey to its list of considerations (though not as the sole consideration). Achieving legitimacy is not restricted to the duration of the fighting, and intensive action in this direction should be taken both before and after force is used.

In the Six Day War, the opposing sides conducted a symmetrical battle on a smooth playing field, and Israel achieved a clear decision. Since 1967, the violent confrontations with Israel have featured efforts by its enemies to restrict its ability to realize its full military potential. This has been done in a number of ways: using non-state armed organizations, planting combatants among civilians and blurring the division between civilian

and military, blurring the distinction between war and lull, and creating intermediate low intensity confrontations in which Israel suffers attrition but does not embark on a major campaign. The next stage in restricting Israel's military freedom of action may consist of the use by Israel's enemies of the vacillating states on two levels. On the political and strategic level, Israel's considerations will include its relations with the vacillating states, and it will therefore restrain itself more than in the past. On the tactical and physical level, Israel's enemies can attempt to attain new degrees of freedom for themselves by operating from the territory of the vacillating states in close proximity to their assets, including military assets.

Conclusion: From an Isolated Campaign Theater to a Multi-sided War Theater

In recent decades, strong gravitational forces have pushed the various players into close strategic blocs, and have blurred the differences between them. Such gravitational forces were active in the conflict between blocs during the Cold War, for example, and starting in 1991, they have been manifested in the pro-American and anti-American Middle Eastern camps. Following the decline of American hegemony and other changes, however, these gravitational forces have weakened. Consequently, differences in interests among the various players have been highlighted, and the tapestry of affiliations among the players has become more complex.

In the emerging reality, the clear dichotomy between rival and ally has been replaced by a range of intermediate behavioral patterns. This phenomenon complicates Israel's use of force and the analysis of its influence on players who are not enemies, but who do not coordinate their actions with Israel – yet are active in the war theater and are relevant to the strategic dynamic. This phenomenon requires a stronger military-political interface than in the past.

This situation is relevant to the Iranian nuclear challenge, in which some of the most important effects of using force are not on the enemy, but on an ally – the US. This is also relevant to the bordering confrontation theaters. Since the 1980s, Israel has become accustomed to conducting wars with a single isolated campaign theater, and most of the crises it has faced have been bilateral. It appears that this reality no longer exists, and it is faced with a complex system of affiliations, some of which will emerge and be shaped only as a result of the fighting.

Notes

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3   Ron Tira, "The United States in the Middle East: An Exercise in Self-Defeat," *Strategic Assessment* 14, no. 1 (2011): 41-54.

4   Martin C. Libicki, "The Strategic Uses of Ambiguity in Cyberspace," *Military and Strategic Affairs* 3, no. 3 (2011): 3-10.

5   "Foreign Warships Will Need Iran's Permission to Pass through Strait of Hormuz," *Fars News Agency*, January 4, 2012.

6   Reza Kahlili, "Iran Nuclear Compromise No Longer Needed," *Washington Post*, April 9, 2012.

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8   Shlomo Brom, "The Storm within Hamas," *INSS Insight* No. 316, February 28, 2012.