Principles of the Israeli Political-Military Discourse Based on the Recent IDF Strategy Document

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Relations between the military and political echelons in Israel are complex and multifaceted, both in theory and in practice. The problems resulting from the interface between the two have at times resulted in ineffective military deployment or a crisis of expectations. Moreover, as the positions of the political echelon are never unanimous, its directives to the military have not always been aligned with the government's position, and sometimes even have been nebulous.

In August 2015, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) released a document entitled the "IDF Strategy" directly addressing the issue. Signed by the chief of staff, the document is notable in part for its proposal to adjust the discourse between the military and political echelons as well as to clarify the role of the chief of staff and his functional autonomy. In this document, the chief of staff suggests to the political echelon how it should formulate directives to the military so that military action will match the political objective in question, and thereby prevent a crisis of expectations. According to the document, the IDF sees its role of achieving "victory," which does not necessarily mean defeating the enemy; the political echelon together with the chief of staff must define the concept of victory before the military is deployed. The publication of the "IDF Strategy," unprecedented in Israel's civil-military relations, also highlights the chief of staff's sensitivity to Israeli public opinion.

Keywords: IDF, civil-military relations, strategy, discourse space, learning, civil control

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Introduction

In democratic states, the political echelon controls the military echelon. The notion, however, that the lines of responsibility between the two can be demarcated is fundamentally erroneous. In practice, the relations between the political and military echelons are fraught with tensions, which has been keenly felt in Israel since its establishment. Shortcomings in the discourse between the two were apparent in most of the wars and large-scale operations; at times, the tensions between them even have been scrutinized by commissions of inquiry, such as the Agranat Commission after the Yom Kippur War and the Winograd Commission after the Second Lebanon War.

In August 2015, Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot released the "IDF Strategy" to the public.[1] It is a non-classified version of a document that discusses military strategy, formulated during the preparation of the Gideon multi-year plan for which the chief of staff sought approval and funding (it was, in fact, approved in April 2016). The chief of staff is the only signatory to the document, but it is safe to assume that the defense minister and prime minister do not object to it.[2] The document presents the options of operation and the security outputs that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) can provide on a given budget. In addition, it proposes to the political echelon how it should formulate directives to the military in order to attain the goals and objectives sought, and calls for discussions between the two before these directives are issued. The goals of the discussions are to mutually clarify the situation as both sides see it, elucidating to the chief of staff the goals and constraints of the political echelon, and informing the political echelon of the IDF's capabilities. The fact that the chief of staff felt the need to invite the military and political echelons to engage in a discourse – and to do so in a public document – is evidence of the gap in this sphere, which has persisted, as already noted, since the early days of Israel's statehood.

This essay deals with the discourse between the political and military echelons in Israel, and focuses on the principles and patterns that the chief of staff would like to use to shape this discourse, as well as the way these principles and patterns deviate from the commonly accepted theories in this field and from the past relations between the two echelons. The essay is divided into two parts. The first part covers theory on relations between political and military echelons in general and presents an overview of the obvious problems in the discourse between the two in Israel as revealed

by various events. The second part presents the chief of staff's position on the relations between the two echelons as reflected by the "IDF Strategy" document, followed by our analysis of that position, the implications, and recommendations.

Theoretical Background: Relations Between the Political and Military Echelons

Relations between the military and political echelons are part of a broader relationship between the civil sector and the military. Complex and multifaceted, these relations are a motherlode for academic research and legislation in Israel and elsewhere.[3] A fundamental convention in a democracy is that the political echelon is in charge of the use of force. It does so by controlling the military through a mechanism of civilian control and guidance. The theory in this field deals with the essence of civilian control of the military in democratic nations and, concretely, with questions such as: To what extent should the political echelon be involved in the work of the military? What is the division of responsibility between the two echelons? Is some of that responsibility shared? How should the discourse between them be conducted? What kind of relationship should the two echelons have?

Civil control of the military is essentially the mechanism that regulates relations between the civilian and military echelons in a democracy. Some would describe civil control as being quite broad and absolute. Richard Kohn claims that the authority of the civilian echelon should be absolute and comprehensive and that it should be responsible for directing the military in every field and on every subject, including questions of force construction and force deployment. According to Kohn's definition, any functional autonomy of the military is the result of the political echelon's decision to grant the army authority that may be withdrawn at any moment.[4] Less rigid definitions exist, however, and some even replace the concept of "civil control" with the idea of "civil guidance."[5] In this essay, we shall define civil control as the responsibility of the political echelon to ensure that the military action adheres to the political objectives.[6]

Samuel Huntington's 1959 work *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*[7]was most influential in the field for a long time. Huntington developed the principle of "objective civilian control" in a democracy, whose implementation is supposed to ensure harmony between the political and military echelons and prevent the interference of the latter

in the political sphere. Objective civilian control is based on a very clear distinction between the military and civilian spheres and on maintaining the military's functional autonomy (force construction and deployment), according to the military's professional principles. Morris Janowitz, who together with Huntington was one of the founding fathers of this discipline, presented a contradictory position in his book *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait,*[8] in which he expresses reservations on the clear distinction between the military and civilian spheres. His position derives from the fact that modern armies are increasingly assuming constabulary functions and liable to alienate the military from the society as the separation between the spheres grows. According to Janowitz, any effective civilian control mechanism must be based on the officer class being well exposed to society and educated to internalize social values in order to ensure that military officers apply military force only for objectives that society deems worthy and appropriate.

The tension between the two approaches, as developed by the founding fathers of the discipline, and their criticism led to the development of a theoretical foundation of the field of civilian-military relations. Unlike Janowitz's sociological approach, Huntington's theory reflected a political science approach and dominated the field until the late 1980s. At that time, some competing theories emerged, as part of the critique of the Huntingtonian approach.[9] Three prominent theories are relevant to this essay's discussion about the mutual relationship and discourse between the political and military echelons.

Douglas Bland's theory of shared responsibility[10] emphasizes the distinction between the legal, normative authority of the political echelon and the obligation of consensual division of responsibility between the political and military echelons. The two share responsibility for formulating national security strategy from the military perspective and the manner in which the military should implement it, subject to the instructions of the political echelon. Maj. Gen. (res.) Gershon Hacohen, former commander of the IDF National Security College, adopted Bland's concept of shared responsibility. In his opinion, "shared responsibility is not manifested in the question of where the source of authority comes from, because the source of authority is always, and asymmetrically, in the hands of the political echelon, but rather in the question of how did the idea come into being, who initiated it, and who is the architect. There is room for both to express themselves in generating an idea and both are in this field with

shared responsibility."[11] Hacohen is vehemently opposed to the approach that views the defense establishment, including the military echelon, as being merely a tool in the hands of the political echelon. He distinguishes between the constitutional-institutional aspect and the cognitive one, which is connected to processes of knowledge development of civil-military relations:

> When delving into strategic questions, the military as architect isn't merely a broker between the entrepreneur and the construction workers, but functions in a much greater capacity. Hence it is necessary to address the working relations between the architect and the entrepreneur, the civilian echelon being a type of entrepreneur in this metaphor. I would expect the military leadership and the heads of the defense establishment to act like the good kind of architect. This relationship is complex.[12]

Rebecca Schiff's concordance theory also includes citizenry in the equation of civil-military relations.[13] This theory posits that the essence of civilian control depends on the cultural context and is the result of an agreement among three players – the political echelon, the military, and society – regarding the military's autonomous space and its conduct vis-à-vis the political echelon. Schiff criticized the American ethnocentric point of view in previous research on civil-military relations, which led to a universal notion about the essence of civilian control in democratic nations; Schiff examined India and Israel where she found different models of civilian control.

Schiff developed the targeted partnership theory based on the concordance theory and analysis of the American experience in Iraq and Afghanistan.[14] This theory stresses the importance of a discourse between the political and military echelons. According to Schiff, the political-military discourse during Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's term in office was characterized by his contempt for military officers, rigidity, formality, and by efforts to demarcate the military and the political spheres. The result was a failed US strategy; the political echelon was kept out of the military echelon's loop of knowledge, and the military ignored its obligation to voice its professional opinion, choosing instead to fully obey the political echelon even though it was clear that the politicians' objectives and directives were problematic and at times even irrelevant to the emergent reality. Unlike during Rumsfeld's tenure, the discourse between the echelons during the

tenures of Secretary of Defense Gates and General Petraeus as commander of the US forces in Iraq was characterized by great openness and sharing between military and civilian experts. This discourse helped the political echelon understand the complexity of the environments as well as the military's capabilities and limitations; therefore, the strategy formulated was more relevant than it had been previously and the results were better.

The RAND Corporation's report on the thirteen years of US military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan also validate the importance of an open, ongoing discourse between the echelons.[15] Out of seven lessons presented in the RAND Corporation's far-reaching study was that "the blurry line between policy and strategy requires both civilians and the military to engage in a dynamic, iterative dialogue to make successful strategy, but that often failed to occur ...The ends, ways, and means did not align, whether because the policy objectives were too ambitious, the ways of achieving them ineffective, or the means applied inadequate." The RAND report, which, as noted, stresses the importance of an interactive dialogue between the sides, criticizes the current situation in the United States:

> The current process does not routinely produce effective strategy...Civilian policymakers require an active dialogue with the military and other sources of information to inform the diagnosis of the situation, as well as to develop realistic policy objectives. That iterative process must continue through the development of options...Formulating strategy is further inhibited because there is no established integrated civilian-military process that would rigorously identify assumptions, risks, possible outcomes, and second-order effects ...The lack of such a process inhibited timely adaptations of strategy in response to the evolution of understanding and events.[16]

The relationship between the political and military echelons, shaped by preserving a hierarchic, conservative model that demands absolute separation between the political and military spheres, reduces the room for discourse between them. With limited discourse between the two, the political echelon will find it hard to realize civilian control over the military in terms of coordinating the military action with the political objective.[17] For example, when there is no discussion between the sides about the objective of the use of force, it is easy to imagine a scenario in which military force is overused in order to resolve political problems or when the military takes unnecessary risks. When the political echelon reveals its strategic

intentions to the military, however, the military echelon can present its own assessment of the situation, based on the knowledge developed as well as relevant military options.[18]

An open discourse usually enables information and preexisting assumptions to be challenged by means of renewed thinking about conceptual forms. It enables decision makers to develop suitable terminology and a foundation for a system of interpretation that may facilitate a new understanding of the situation, the objectives, and the means of achieving them.[19] At the same time, an open discourse allows for the expression of other opinions and criticism that are not easily expressed in a (closed) discourse of directives.[20] The political echelon's need to learn is critical as it lacks the experience and knowledge about the complexity of military strategy and operational planning, and thus is liable to err about the costs and risks involved in deploying the military. The targeted partnership model provides greater space to military experts to demonstrate their expertise, and enables the political echelon to formulate objectives for the military that are aligned with the chances and risks it is willing to take.

The two approaches – the functional autonomy of the chief of staff and the joint responsibility between the military and the political echelons– have their advantages and drawbacks, and it is therefore likely that in extreme scenarios, tensions will develop between them, especially when one tries to apply the joint responsibility approach through an open discourse, which is inherently anti-hierarchic. In such a case, government ministers will summon the chief of staff, the military leadership, and assorted military experts and demand that they render their opinions. In such an encounter, the government or the cabinet may accept majority-based decisions that are not necessarily aligned with the chief of staff's position or the work of the General Staff (the highest commanding forum in the military); they may even align with the prime minister's own objectives. Alternately, the rigid adoption of functional autonomy, meaning an exclusive connection between the political echelon and the chief of staff, would prevent the civilian sector from receiving first-hand exposure to additional information and other opinions prevalent in the military.

In order to analyze the "IDF Strategy" document, we will distinguish between two types of discourse that take place between the political and military echelons: a learning discourse and a discourse of clarifications and directives.

A learning discourse refers to a broad, deep, and ongoing discussion over fundamental – albeit not necessarily concrete – issues, designed to exchange information and points of view for the sake of shaping policy, strategy, planning, periodic situation assessments, and updates. In such a discourse, the political echelon learns security threats and military capabilities in depth, while the military echelon examines the objectives of the political ranks in order to provide them with an appropriate military response. Together, the military and political echelons create strategic outputs that are coherent and valuable to both.[21] A learning discourse can only develop in a climate of openness in civil-military relations and when the political echelon is willing to acknowledge the gaps between the policy objectives and the military's capabilities. Such a discourse has the potential to change the political aims or increase the resources to enhance the capabilities of the military.

A discourse of clarification and directives refers to a concrete and focused discourse designed to assess the situation and clarify positions before the political echelon makes certain strategic decisions, such as embarking on a military operation or changing the direction of an operation already under way. This discourse may address the military efforts needed to achieve the political objectives; the means to attain those military achievements; the contextual risks, and so on. Following this discourse, the chief of staff can jumpstart learning processes within the military that may lead to formulating strategy and plans. A discourse of clarification and directives is more effective if it is preceded by a learning discourse between the political and military echelons.

Prominent Shortcomings in Civil-Military Relations in Israel

The Agranat Commission, the state commission of inquiry over the Yom Kippur War, placed full responsibility for the war on the military command, and refrained from addressing the culpability of the political echelon. The public rejected this position. Yitzhak Rabin, too, who was a minister in Golda Meir's government and later prime minister, dismissed several of the commission's recommendations. He stressed that each was accountable and emphasized that there was an inherent risk in allowing the political echelon to shrug off responsibility, as it would affect the willingness of the military rank to present its position clearly and honestly, be proactive, and take risks.[22]

The Agranat Commission, however, explicitly stated that "the absence of a definition of authority (in the triangle of the government – the defense minister – the chief of staff) in the current reality of the defense establishment – a field that is unsurpassed in terms of its crucial importance – hampers the effectiveness of action, reduces the focus of responsibility, and also causes the public to feel disconcerted and unclear."[23] As a result, in 1976 the Knesset passed the Basic Law: The Military, which regulates the hierarchy of authority and responsibility for the IDF. According to the law, "the military is subject to the authority of the government"; "the minister appointed by the government for military matters is the defense minister"; "the supreme commanding echelon in the military is the chief of the General Staff" and he "is subject to the authority of the government and subordinate to the defense minister." The prime minister is not mentioned in this law, and the political echelon's responsibility towards the military is not defined. In fact, the law failed to solve some of the problems, particularly that of regulating the direct responsibility of the prime minister, who is deeply involved in military matters on virtually a daily basis.[24]

The significance of the Basic Law: The Military is that the government is the supreme commander of the IDF and the chief of staff is subordinate to the government in two ways: by being accountable to the defense minister and by being subject to the government's authority. The government's authority overrides the subordination of the chief of staff to the defense minister. Consequently, the directives issued by the defense minister must have the government's backing and the chief of staff is supposed to be kept abreast of them, and not only via the defense minister. The discourse is liable to break down when either the chief of staff or the defense minister or both operate without the support of the government (whether intentionally or not); when either the government or the defense minister or both in conjunction direct the IDF through channels that bypass the chief of staff; or when either the defense minister or the chief of staff or both perform their roles improperly.

In the First Lebanon War, there was a wide gap between the objectives that were approved collectively by the government and the far-reaching objectives by which Defense Minister Ariel Sharon and Chief of Staff Raphael Eitan chose to lead the IDF.[25] Relations between the two echelons had become blurred as the defense minister functioned as the prevailing chief of staff while also having wide political latitude. Thus, an IDF investigation showed that on June 7, 1982, Sharon had instructed the commanding officer

of the Northern Command "to hurry up and move" towards the Syrian military without consulting the government,[26] which had been trying to prevent a military confrontation with the Syrians. The chief of staff obeyed the defense minister's directives even though these were not aligned with the government's position, thereby abusing his position as subordinate to the government; the move led to a significant expansion of the war's boundaries and dimensions. Later on, Lebanese President-elect Bashir Gemayel was assassinated, and Christian militias perpetrated a massacre in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, located in an area under IDF control. Unlike the Agranat Commission, which placed full responsibility on the military echelon alone, the Kahan Commission, which investigated the slaughter in the refugee camps, held the political echelon accountable, and, in particular, Defense Minister Sharon.

The first months of the Second Intifada, which erupted in 2000, revealed shortcomings in the relations between the political and military echelons. The political echelon failed to make sure its directives were realized by the military; later on, the political echelon gave the directive to evacuate Abu Sneina Hill in Hebron (in Area A) on the basis of an understanding that the Israeli government had reached with the Palestinian Authority; Chief of Staff Shaul Mofaz, however, thought an evacuation would be a mistake from a military standpoint and preferred to ignore the instructions issued by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Defense Minister Ben-Eliezer, who were on a state visit to Russia at the time.[27]

The Second Lebanon War in 2006 also highlighted the problematic nature of civil-military relations in Israel. The Winograd Commission, appointed to investigate the war, defined the responsibility required of the political echelon as follows: "The political echelon must direct and steer the action of the professional echelon in the defense institutions and foreign policy, and control them; deepen the discourse between the political echelon and the heads of the intelligence institutions to understand needs and implement the assessments; and demand and guide the development of fundamental strategic documents on key topics and approve them, employing an integrative approach that may lead to a comprehensive political-security vision."[28] The Winograd Commission determined that both echelons bore responsibility for the war's outcome. In fact, both understood this even before the fighting had ended, as indicated by a conversation between Defense Minister Amir Peretz and Chief of Staff Dan Halutz on August 14, 2006, the last day of the war. The chief of staff, who was surprised

by Defense Minister Peretz's suggestion to establish a commission of inquiry, pointed out that "if there is anything that needs investigating it is the military-civilian interface." Later on in the conversation, the chief of staff asserted that "it is necessary to investigate the policy implemented in Israel for the last six years." The defense minister agreed, but made it clear that policy was not within the chief of staff's purview and that the political echelon was responsible for such an investigation. At the end of the conversation, the chief of staff added that it was necessary to investigate yet another matter, that of the "the discourse between the political echelon and military echelon, between you and me."[29]

Operation Cast Lead (late 2008 – early 2009) demonstrated the problematics of the relations between the political and military echelons, stemming from the political echelon's inability to formulate and provide clear directives. The first condition necessary for providing the military with directives is the formulation of a cohesive position by the political echelon. This was not achieved because of a disagreement among Prime Minister Olmert, Defense Minister Barak, and Foreign Minister Livni (the so-called "trio"). At a conference on Operation Cast Lead held in 2012, Lt. Gen. (res.) Gabi Ashkenazi, who was chief of staff at the time of the operation, remarked that "a few days into the operation, the 'trio' fell apart; each went off in a different direction and this affected the decision-making process. These disagreements wasted precious time; you have to sit with your commanding officers and lead them in a way that is in line with what I understand they [in the political echelon] want."[30] At the same conference, Tzipi Livni, the foreign minister during the operation, said: "In the case of Operation Cast Lead, you had the prime minister, the defense minister, and me. There were disagreements before the operation, during it, and after it ...We started the operation without having decided to take the regulatory approach or the deterrence approach."[31]

Israel's attempt to confront the Iranian nuclear threat was also rife with disagreement, this time between the political echelon and the security establishment. According to the investigative journalism TV program *Uvda* ("fact" in Hebrew), in 2010 the leaders of the political echelon, Prime Minister Netanyahu and then Defense Minister Barak instructed the defense echelon, led then by Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi and Mossad Head Meir Dagan,[32] to be on alert in preparing the defense establishment for an attack on Iran.[33] This directive seems to have reflected the recognition that the Mossad's covert effort to foil Iran's nuclear program had been exhausted.

According to the show, Ashkenazi and Dagan disagreed with Netanyahu and Barak. The chief of staff said that "being on alert" would bring closer a war with Iran, and that was something that required a cabinet decision. By contrast, Barak told the interviewer of the TV show that the order given did not consist of going to war and therefore did not need a government or cabinet decision. According to the former minister of defense, "the chief of staff has to construct the operational ability and has to tell the political echelon if it is doable or not doable from a professional point of view. He may – in fact, he should – add his recommendation, but an operation can be carried out even against his recommendation."[34]

Operation Protective Edge in the summer of 2014 was also marred by functional imprecision at the political level, with Israel being dragged into a battle for which it had not prepared. This is reflected by former Deputy Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. (res.) Yair Naveh, in a statement as follows:

> I think there was a new political understanding to which the military failed to conform in its planning and reserves as well as its state of mind. What happened in practice was the opposite of how the military had prepared in the previous years. As the operation was under way, they said that we were actually entering a war of attrition ... If you want dramatically to change the doctrine of operating the military, you have to undertake orderly discussions in the government, decide what the implications and ramifications are, and prepare accordingly, not be taken by surprise by a fifty-day-long campaign.[35]

It is worth mentioning that a long war, contrary to the military's conception, is not necessarily a mishap, because the rationale of short wars is rooted in the need to defeat the regular armies by a general call-up of the reserves. But the gap between the pace dictated by the political echelon in Operation Protective Edge and the military's conception indicates that the ongoing discourse and shared learning between the two were insufficient and ineffective both before and during the campaign, despite the fact that twenty-seven discussions of the political-security cabinet were held during the operation alone.[36]

In addition to these failures, the ground offensive against Hamas' tunnels during the operation demonstrated the gaps between the military's rationale and that of the political echelon, and it was the political rationale that won out. For example, from a military standpoint, launching ground

combat in the tunnels was pointless, and the IDF was not prepared to do so.[37] Militarily, it would have made more sense first to seize control of the tunnels system and only then to destroy them or, alternately, not to make a ground offensive against the tunnels on Palestinian territory at all because it is relatively easy for them to rebuild that system.

The Discourse Proposed by the Chief of Staff to the Political Echelon

The need for a discourse between the military and political echelons is explained in the "IDF Strategy" document as follows: "The directives of the political echelon demand an ongoing discourse and process of clarification between the senior military rank (the chief of staff) and the political echelon. The political directive forms the foundation for the processes of strategic thinking of the General Staff, but is also affected by these processes; the influence is mutual."[38] In addition, the document explicitly refers to the way in which the political echelon is supposed to direct the chief of staff, indicative of just how great the gap really is, as the chief of staff had identified. According to the document, the discourse is supposed to be based on the political echelon's recognition of the status of the chief of staff. The document defines the chief of staff solely as the senior military rank who debates with the political echelon and presents the military's position to the government.[39] He makes it clear that the chief of staff and his command center cannot be bypassed, stating that: "The only campaign commander in the IDF is – through the General Staff – the commander of all the operations the IDF carries out"; "This responsibility of the General Staff cannot be decentralized or transferred"; and "Every commanding officer is subordinate to one commander at every point in time. Orders will be given on the basis of the chain of command."[40]

When referring to "the objective of military action in the IDF's different functional states," the chief of staff suggests to the political echelon "several main political and strategic objectives for the use of force: a) postponing the next round of confrontation by routinely using force; b) preserving the strategic situation or improving it after the enemy has begun violent action, characterized by a change in patterns of action and intentions; c) changing the situation from the bottom up to the point of altering the strategic balance, manifested by the neutralization of players or a fundamental change in their capabilities or status."[41]

The document explains that three states of military functioning have been defined – routine, emergency and war – in order to create a common language. According to the document, "the definition of the military functioning is the chief of staff's definition of the kind of military operation that is needed. The definition is useful to express an understanding of the confrontation on the ground; it helps maintain a discourse with the political echelon; it defines the basic political situation; and it decides on mobilizing the state's resources." According to the document, "the routine state includes everyday security, the limited and ongoing confrontation, and the campaign between wars." The document defines an emergency state as referring to "limited campaigns and operations that are not carried out in the context of war"; and the third is, as noted, "a state of war."[42] The political echelon must be familiar with the three different military states. Central to the issue of discourse is the document's assertion as follows: "When it is necessary to deploy the military, the political echelon should formulate directives to the military as follows: a) what are the objectives and what are the strategically needed end-states; b) what is the military's function and how does it play a role in attaining the objectives; c) what are the constraints in using military force; d) definition of other efforts (political, economic, media, and social) and the IDF's role in those contexts."[43] These declarations and others made by the chief of staff and presented in the "IDF Strategy" document indicate a clear, methodological proposal for the way the political echelon is supposed to provide directives to the chief of staff and for the type of discourse that should take place between the two sides.

An Analysis of the Chief of Staff's Position

The document demonstrates that, according to the chief of staff, the political and military echelons are supposed to maintain an ongoing, constant discourse. The role of the political echelon in this discourse is to define the IDF's objectives, means, and constraints, whereas the role of the chief of staff in this discourse is to execute: build up the military and deploy it in accordance with the directives of the political echelon. In other words, the political echelon is supposed to allow the chief of staff to build appropriate military capabilities and command the IDF during states of routine, emergency, and war, in addition to – as the document infers – providing the military with the resources to carry out these tasks.

In the document, the chief of staff does not address the composition of the political echelon with which he seeks to maintain a discourse. In Israel,

the government stands at the head of the political echelon and the chief of staff is subordinate to it; as are the ministerial committee on national security, the prime minister, and the defense minister, to whom the chief of staff is directly subordinate on behalf of the government. It would seem that when the chief of staff refers to a discourse with the political echelon, he is referring not only to the defense minister, with whom he works closely, but also, at least, to the prime minister who represents the government.

The perception of the chief of staff's functional autonomy vis-à-vis the political echelon is the starting point of the discourse. The chief of staff's understanding of his functional autonomy is manifested by his saying that the military will always be closely led by the chief of staff and the General Staff and not by any other commanding group. This is in contrast to the First Lebanon War, which was led by the Northern Command, with the involvement of Defense Minister Sharon, and the Yom Kippur War in which Defense Minister Moshe Dayan tried to bypass the government and the General Staff and gave orders directly to Commander of the Southern Front Israel Tal.[44]

This reading of the chief of staff's position and functional autonomy is consistent with Huntington's principles of objective civilian control of the military in a democracy. These principles stress the distinction between the military and civilian spheres and the functional autonomy that should be given to the military. The chief of staff's understanding of the discourse between the political and military echelons, however, also includes principles from the theories of shared responsibility and targeted partnership, both stressing the importance of the encounter and discourse between the political and military echelons in order to achieve harmonic, responsible relations that will help them better understand one another and improve the decision-making process. In other words, while the chief of staff presents a very rigid approach to his authority in the military and the autonomous space of the IDF – leaving no room for the involvement of the political echelon – he also requires an ongoing discourse with the political echelon, mainly for the sake of clarifying the latter's directives. It would thus seem that the chief of staff is seeking what he considers an appropriate balance.

The document provides additional dimensions to the chief of staff's formal standing as defined in the Basic Law: The Military. According to the document, any action taken by the political echelon that affects the military must be done in coordination with the chief of staff, and only after

discussion with the chief of staff, can the use of force be acted upon. This suggests that the government should not guide the IDF's force construction on the basis of recommendations made by external committees, such as the Locker Commission, without making sure that they are aligned with the strategy formulated by the chief of staff.

In addition, the "IDF Strategy" document does not refer at all to the concept of shared responsibility, and most likely this is intentional because the inclusion of the phrase could be interpreted as the military's partnership in a political act. Nonetheless, the chief of staff asks the political echelon to bear responsibility for the task of coordinating the military action with the political objectives, a task in which the chief of staff plays a major role. This is done in order to improve chances of success and to prevent the political echelon from shirking responsibility should an incident occur, by claiming that it was unaware of the IDF's capabilities and the scope of the threat.[45]

From the document, it can be inferred that updated rules of discourse between the political and military echelons are especially needed because the IDF's new strategy is essentially different from the traditional security doctrine,[46] given the radical changes that have taken place in the security environment. Consequently, deterrence does not prevent violent rounds of fighting; early warning is not needed for massive, urgent call-up of the reserves; and the exclusive objective of the military campaign is no longer defeating the enemy, but rather achieving victory. In order to gain victory, the political echelon must define it ahead of time, using terminology readily understood by both sides. The document makes it clear that a military defeat of an enemy does not necessarily have to be the objective, unless the political echelon explicitly directs the military to do so.

Given the new reality, the document also underscores that the chief of staff understands the limits on the use of military force and the importance of non-military aspects (political, economic, media, and social) in the current environment as significant in the discourse with the political echelon. Moreover, the document explicitly refers to a discourse of clarification and directives in the context of the use of force, but there is not any explicit reference to the concept of a learning discourse. Nonetheless, the document does infer the need for one, which, in certain cases, could become a precondition for holding an effective discourse of clarification and directives.

The timing of the distribution of the document in August 2015 was not incidental, and may be viewed as part of the discourse that the chief of staff

maintains with the public, including elected officials, administrators, and others who are not privy to sensitive materials, but have been exposed to criticism of the IDF. The timing of the document's release may have been affected by the vociferous altercation between the Defense Ministry and Finance Ministry over the defense budget and demands for far-reaching reforms in the IDF (subsequent to the findings of the Locker Commission), which did not adhere to the chief of staff's Gideon Plan that was subsequently approved by the cabinet. In the background is the despondence of many IDF commanders that the military's status in the society has been severely eroded, in part because of the public's harsh criticism of the military expenditures and disappointment with the IDF's capabilities to attain expected goals. In this sense, the document was probably meant to coordinate the public's expectations while sharing information about the threats, the types of possible military responses, and their implications. Distributing the document to the public at large – a first in Israel's history – could be an important contribution to the public discourse and to strengthening civilian control of the military.

Implications and Recommendations

The political echelon bears supreme responsibility for coordinating between the military action and the political objective. It must direct the military echelon and control it before and during the military action and allocate resources to achieve the objectives. Both the historical background and the fact that the military echelon turns to the political echelon for directives, as presented in the "IDF Strategy" document, indicates that there is a real gap between the two, which has yet to be closed. To do so, the political echelon – in various constellations – must have sufficient knowledge of military matters, which means preparation and study time. In addition, the political-security cabinet must discuss and adopt solutions to bridge the gap in the discourse between the political and military leadership, at least in the field of directives as the chief of staff requests.

Clarity in political objectives is a prerequisite for an effective discourse between the political and military echelons in Israel, in which the government, as a collective, is the military's supreme commander. The historical overview shows that a large part of the confusion in the discourse between the two sides results from internal disagreements within the political echelon itself, whether within the government as a whole or within the smaller group who represent the government to the military. Such, for example, were

the disagreements about the defense budget between the defense minister and the prime minister on the one hand, and all the other government ministers, on the other, as well as during Operation Cast Lead in which the top political leaders could not agree among themselves on the end objectives and military methods for achieving them.

In coalition agreements, obscurity sometimes serves as a tool for bridging gaps. When directives to the military echelon are at stake, however, this is not true. The IDF has neither the mandate nor the ability to deal with multiple opinions or uncertain positions of government and cabinet members. In such a reality, the military is liable to operate based on its own interpretation of the political echelon's intentions, and this might lead to results that are far removed from the political objectives. A joint discussion between the civilian and military leaderships will encourage the government to formulate its position and engage in a discourse with the military that will result in preparing a number of possible plans and deciding upon a course of action. The prime minister and defense minister are both responsible for presenting the government's position to the military, while the chief of staff has the task of preparing military plans of action after holding discussions with the political echelon.

Both the political and military echelons require not only a discourse of clarification and directives in the spirit of the "IDF Strategy" document, but also a learning discourse during which the two sides will learn which military moves are possible and what costs are needed to achieve various military and political objectives. This discourse will also allow the political echelon to study the military's capabilities in depth and the meaning of force construction and its use in various confrontation scenarios. It will require the political echelon to make decisions on the allocation of resources (the defense budget) and be responsible for the outcomes of these decisions. As part of a learning discourse, it behooves the government already to begin a discussion of the "IDF Strategy" document and adapt it to its political objectives as well as discuss the many issues not raised in the document.[47] All of these would improve the congruence between the political objectives and the military action, and they would reduce the probability of a crisis of expectations within both the political echelon and the public vis-à-vis the IDF's performance in the next round of fighting.

As for coordinating expectations of the IDF, based on possible confrontation scenarios and military responses to them as described in the "IDF Strategy" document, it should be understood that every method

of action has its risks and opportunities. Therefore, it seems unreasonable to instruct the IDF to embark on a limited campaign and expect an overall victory, as perhaps some segments of the public and their elected officials expected in the last rounds of fighting with Hamas. Although in the document the chief of staff asks for directives from the political echelon on deploying the military "when necessary," we do not think that the military should wait for the moment of truth, as was the case in the abductions that led to the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead. Rather, the military and political echelons need to prepare together in advance for responses to situations in which the IDF may find itself, many of which can already be anticipated: various terrorist attacks, unusual armament of the enemy, disaster scenarios, and so forth. Already now the cabinet should debate missions and objectives that the IDF will be asked to carry out and achieve in predictable scenarios, so that when the moment of truth arrives the relevant plans will already be in place. For its part, the political echelon will have the knowledge, be prepared to speak with the military, and be able to decide on one of the three basic states of military functioning as described in the "IDF Strategy" document.

When the chief of staff feels that a situation necessitates the deployment of the military, even though the political echelon does not ask for it, then it is the chief of staff's responsibility to initiate contact with the political echelon. During a conference about Operation Cast Lead, former Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi expressed to that effect that "strategic decisions must be made in a discourse between the political echelon and military echelon before the war. That is when you formulate the objectives. The military echelon and the chief of staff must be there, must be partners in the discourse, and if such a discourse does not exist they must generate it; that is their obligation. When such a discourse is created, the chance for error is reduced."[48]

The "IDF Strategy" document does not name those who should participate in the discussions between the military and the political echelon other than the chief of staff. Even though the connection between the two echelons runs through the chief of staff alone, it is recommended that many military officers should participate in the discussions with the political echelon and voice their opinions, even if they do not agree with the chief of staff. Furthermore, we suggest to include the deputy chief of staff, as number two in the senior military ranks, in all contact with the political echelon. We also propose expanding the presence of the military echelon in discussions with

the political echelon as part of the learning discourse while differentiating between professional military and political positions.

Notes

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