

The Challenges Facing the Israel Defense Forces, 2015–2016

Gadi Eisenkot

The challenges facing the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the foreseeable future are composed of three main factors. The first is Israel's rapidly changing strategic environment. The nuclear deal between Iran and the superpowers and the subsequent lifting of the sanctions against Iran constitute a strategic turning point for the major threat that the IDF had confronted over the past decade. The crumbling of the old order in the Middle East, existing since the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, as well as the weakening of the state framework over the past four to five years, illustrates the region's instability, which will continue to characterize it for many years to come. In addition, the phenomenon of the Islamic State and global jihad has become a major moving force in the Middle East. The IDF General Staff began discussing this challenge in late 2013 and early 2014.

The conflict in our region between Sunnis and Shi'ites, which has found expression recently in the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, joined the historic struggle among the superpowers for influence in the Middle East. The Soviet Union was involved with the Arab states that surround Israel until the Yom Kippur War. The United States operated for a brief time in Lebanon in 1958 and again in 1983. Currently, both superpowers are active in the region as part of an ongoing operation to defeat the Islamic State - an event of great significance for the State of Israel and for the IDF.

The second factor that influences the IDF's capabilities and the use of force over the short term is the operative environment in which it works. Over the past decade, we have learned from experience how tactical incidents develop into battle and even into war. The events in Syria; the explosives

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that Hezbollah plants along the road on Mount Dov; the explosives used against the IDF in the Gaza Strip; and the wave of terrorism of recent months make us realize all the more how narrow the space is between tactics and strategy, and how tactical incidents are liable to develop into events that have strategic significance for the State of Israel. After a decade-long lull in suicide terrorism, which until 2005 claimed the lives of 1,178 civilians and soldiers and wounded more than 15,000 people, we have been facing a renewed escalation of terror over the past several months.

The IDF's mission in this context is to build up its strength and adapt, given that the IDF could be put to the test within a very brief time frame, and that the challenges it will encounter in another decade will be even more complex than the already difficult ones of today. Still, the considerable dangers contain opportunities as well.

The third factor is the internal social environment in the State of Israel and the wish to change national priorities. The phenomenon, which began in the summer of 2011 with the slogan "The people demand social justice," expressed a desire to direct resources to needs other than security. Israelis have expressed this wish daily in discussions about the cost of security within the financial pages of every national newspaper, as well as in a number of violent instances. This wish was also manifested by the establishment of a committee to examine how priorities could be changed and the costs of security reduced.

One consequence of this phenomenon is that the IDF operates without a multi-year plan. It is difficult to optimize security and the military without a well-organized and well-reasoned plan, which facilitates the development of the IDF's strength, existence, preparedness, human resources, and other components of the army's work. The past four years were characterized by a defense budget that had a shortfall of five to eight billion shekels between the base budget and the actual expenditure at the end of the year. This situation harmed the IDF's ability to optimize security, stay within the planned budget, and gain the public's trust. Fortunately, this did not occur this year, to the benefit of the State of Israel and its security.

The Strategic Changes

The major threat that forms the IDF's main mission since late 2005 has been Iran. The nuclear deal between Iran and the West is definitely a strategic turning point. It constitutes a significant change in the vector along which

Iran has moved and has changed the way the IDF views the Iranian threat. The nuclear agreement harbors many risks, but it also presents opportunities.

The role of the IDF and its Chief of General Staff is, naturally, to look at the spectrum of risks and opportunities and judge the situation accordingly. Still, we must do so not by assuming the worst-case scenario, as making decisions according to such a scenario is just as dangerous as basing them on overly optimistic scenarios. The IDF undertakes and studies a comprehensive situation assessment in light of the strategic watershed marked by the nuclear agreement with Iran, and its consequences for force buildup and its employment.

We must deal with this issue in two different time frames. The first time frame is the next five years, with the assumption that during this period, Iran will make great efforts to fulfill its part of the deal in order to benefit from the advantages inherent in the agreement. The second time frame is the next fifteen years, during which Iran must be made a high priority; it must be made a target for tracking and monitoring to see whether it works through secret channels in order to fulfill its vision of acquiring nuclear weapons. These years must also be used to formulate how to grapple with Iran with no breakout time until it attains a nuclear capability. The prevailing understanding and assumption in the IDF, as well as in other places, is that the agreement marks a turning point and significant change, even though Iran has not shelved its aspirations to acquire nuclear capability in order to realize its self-perception as a regional power.

At the same time, the process that has been taking place over the last few years in the countries surrounding the State of Israel is expected to continue – an increase in the risks resulting from Iran's efforts to gain influence and hegemony in the region. Iran is conducting a war against Israel by proxy, led by Hezbollah, which constitutes the gravest threat to the State of Israel. Hezbollah is a terrorist organization that has been equipped, funded, trained, and guided by the Iranians since the 1990s. Iran's involvement is also evident in Syria, where it provides not only financial and political support, but also practical military support; Iranian commanding officers are waging battles in Syria with the participation of Iranian soldiers and Shi'ite militias. Iran is paying in blood for this involvement, as more than one hundred Iranians so far have been killed in battle in Syria, and hundreds more have been wounded.

In addition to supporting Syria and Hezbollah, Iran is investing substantial efforts in the Gaza Strip, as well as in attempts to influence Israeli Arabs. The

assessment is that within one to two years, Iran will allocate a considerable budget for use against Israel directly. Iran has significant capabilities, together with an advanced and developed military industry. So far, the Iranians have transferred between 800 million and one billion dollars per year to Hezbollah, and tens of millions of dollars annually to Hamas. It is estimated that as Iran's economic situation improves due to the lifting of the sanctions, Iran will direct greater resources towards the Middle East. Iran also works to transfer weapons to Hezbollah and Hamas, as was proved roughly a year ago when the IDF seized the cargo ship Klos-C, which was carrying an arms shipment on its way to the Gaza Strip.

Syria has undergone a highly significant change in recent years. Approximately five years ago, I completed my term as head of the Northern Command, during which I saw battalions, divisions, brigades, and line regiments, forming a constant picture of the enemy who had logic and an obvious state target. When we walk around on the Golan Heights today and move from the area where Israel's borders meet with Jordan and Syria from the south toward the Hermon region in the north, in the first few kilometers you can see, on the right, outposts of the Islamic State, which is known there as Shuhada al-Yarmuk. A deployment of the global jihad movement is visible further on. Farther north, in the Quneitra region, one can see Shi'ite militias, and in the northern Golan Heights one can see the Syrian army and Hezbollah troops. The situation along the Israeli-Syrian border has become, therefore, highly complex, and it changes frequently.

Over the past two years, a group that had never been on the IDF's agenda has taken over Syria – the Islamic State. It is a military organization of sorts that has been joined by thousands of Arab Muslims from the Middle East, but also by thousands of people from Western countries, including six hundred from Belgium and close to a thousand from France, as well as supporters from Britain, Australia, and even Israel. They undergo three to four weeks of basic training, after which they go out to fight against regular armies and even make meaningful gains. Despite the significant coalitions that are working against this phenomenon, the element in the area that showed the most effective gains in 2014 and 2015 was the Islamic State, even though it is not a military force in the conventional sense and, unlike regular armies, does not operate airborne, naval, and ground forces and does not carry out organized attacks. Because of these characteristics, the Islamic State may be seen more as a phenomenon than as an organization.

In recent months, we have seen a significant change in Syria. The success of the groups operating against Bashar Assad's regime has ceased and even has been rolled back, thanks to the enlistment by Iran, Hezbollah, and primarily Russia in support of Assad. Still, it seems that the fight over Syria, which is also a struggle between the Shi'ites and the Sunnis, will continue for many years to come. Despite the involvement of the two superpowers, which are the key to military victory over the Islamic State and the attainment of any agreement in the Syrian crisis, it is extremely difficult to gain military accomplishments in battle and a political arrangement. We can learn from Israel's experience in battle in the Gaza Strip and in Judea and Samaria that it takes a great deal of time to reach a situation in which it can be said that the war has been won, particularly when it is a war of terror. Israel began dealing with suicide terrorism in 2000, and it was only towards 2004 that Israel was able to establish that it had defeated terrorism and won. Achieving this goal required control over territory and population, excellent intelligence, and a great many troops on the ground. It looks as though the incidents and the fighting in Syria will continue for a long period of time, making a sustainable solution to the situation difficult to achieve. Even if the Islamic State and the global jihad movement should suffer a severe blow in Syria, we should assume that the fight against Salafist groups will continue for many more years. As a rule, it will be very difficult to find an entity that will be able to effectively control Syria's territory and population.

The gains in the war against the Islamic State increase the likelihood that its operatives eventually will aim the barrels of their guns at Israel and Jordan too. This is both because of the strategic logic that guides their actions, according to which Israel and Jordan are linked together, and because the forces of the Islamic State and the global jihad movement are deployed in the border area between Israel and Jordan. So far, these forces have been maintaining their routine and have refrained from attacking the State of Israel.

If there is a place in the circle of countries around the State of Israel where a quick defeat of the Islamic State is possible, it is in the Sinai Desert. A group affiliated with the Islamic State, known as Sinai Province, is operating in the Sinai Peninsula and numbers between six hundred and a thousand fighters. The Egyptian army controls the territory and the population in that area, making it very likely that the Egyptian army will make substantial gains against the group within a short period of time.

A highly disturbing and worrying phenomenon is the support in the Palestinian arena for the Islamic State. Groups of Salafists in the Gaza Strip have carried out all of the rocket launches aimed at Israel over the past year and also tried to plant explosives to detonate against IDF troops in the area. These groups pose a challenge to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which have not fired even a single rocket at Israel since Operation Protective Edge, and want to use rocket fire aimed at Israel to heat up the atmosphere. Support for ideas of the Islamic State has also spread to Judea and Samaria. Recently published polls indicate that 13 to 16 percent of those polled in Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip back the Islamic State – a worrying statistic.

The Threats to Israel

The major threat currently facing the IDF is Hezbollah. This is a terrorist organization, which over several decades has built a simple strategic idea that challenges the superiority of the IDF's intelligence, as well as its aerial and ground warfare. They have deployed in 240 Shi'ite villages, cities, and towns throughout southern Lebanon and have established defense systems, high-trajectory and anti-tank fire, and command and control systems in each community in preparation for the day of reckoning. Hezbollah's main efforts at this time are to achieve precision-rocket capability, which has increased over the past decade from 10,000 to close to 100,000 rockets and missiles. Still, the primary goal of Hezbollah and its head, Hassan Nasrallah, is to achieve Shi'ite hegemony in Lebanon.

This preparation by Hezbollah, and especially the fact that its troops are deployed within a civilian environment, is a significant challenge for the IDF since it limits the IDF's freedom of action. In addition, such deployment has been a restraining factor for Hezbollah and a major reason why the border between Israel and Lebanon has been quiet for the past decade, especially since Hezbollah is well aware of what a military escalation in southern Lebanon means for the area's inhabitants.

The balance of power in the northern arena has also changed given our capabilities. Both the IDF's operational capability and, in particular, its intelligence capability has improved since 2006. Despite the bragging of Hezbollah's leaders in their weekly speeches, they know perfectly well that Israeli intelligence has infiltrated Hezbollah, and they are also aware of Israel's capability and power. Hezbollah perceives the IDF as a very strong and unpredictable army, and this fact also explains the quiet that has prevailed in the region over the past decade. Still, the capability

that Hezbollah has acquired is disturbing, since it includes not only high-trajectory weapons, but also the ability to deploy ground forces. Through its involvement in the fighting in Syria over the past two years, Hezbollah has gained experience in much larger operations than the ones it took part in and initiated in the past. While roughly 1,300 Hezbollah operatives have been killed and close to 5,000 wounded in these battles, it has still increased its regular order of battle to roughly 20,000 combat troops and another 25,000 combat troops in reserve. This order of battle and the number of losses have raised quite a few questions in Lebanon itself about Hezbollah's status and role there.

The Palestinian arena is the most disturbing one in the short term. After a decade of relative quiet in Judea and Samaria, unrest in Israel's south, and three rounds of fighting in the Gaza Strip, a new wave of violence began in October 2015, with different characteristics than in the past. Young men and women who do not belong to any organization have set out without warning to carry out stabbing attacks, which, at times, claim a heavy death toll. These attacks are inspired and nourished by what these young people see and hear in their immediate environment, including the new media outlets, where they absorb ideas of the Islamic State and other elements of radical Islam.

The first tendency is to deal with the new acts of violence by casting them into molds from the past. But we must realize that this is a new situation, and in order to deal with it, we need to understand the currents at work within Palestinian society. Armies and intelligence organizations usually advance along two axes: one axis includes the enemy's decision-makers and command systems, and the other axis – its capabilities. It is difficult for us to understand the deep currents at work on the other side, yet these are actually the most disturbing.

Operation Protective Edge, which lasted for fifty-one days, caused damage to both sides, and mainly to the Palestinian one. Since that operation, relative calm has reigned in southern Israel. While Hamas has made great efforts to regain its capabilities, including its rocket capabilities, and continues to dig attack tunnels toward Israel, 2015 was still the calmest of many years. Not one soldier suffered a scratch, and not one civilian was harmed. The twenty-four rockets that were fired from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory fell in uninhabited areas and did not cause any injury. Yet this region, too, is potentially highly volatile, particularly given Hamas' considerable intelligence-operational-engineering efforts (for tunnel

building) and Iranian aid, amounting to tens of millions of dollars, only some of which is invested in reconstruction, while the other share is used for building up Hamas' military capabilities against the State of Israel.

In the short term, two of the threats to the State of Israel are expected to increase. It is anticipated that the sub-conventional and sub-state threats of Hezbollah, Hamas, the global jihad movement, and the Islamic State will grow. These organizations will continue their efforts to develop high-trajectory and precise weapons, dig improved attack tunnels, and dispatch terrorist and guerrilla cells. They will glean others' ideas in order to perpetrate resounding terror attacks and sow fear and terror, and in doing so, will make political gains. The second threat expected to intensify is the cybernetic threat. The inherent danger in this threat is that it can be exercised from afar and yield impressive gains. The challenges in this sphere are many, and the IDF is working to strengthen its response to them.

We estimate that the two threats of conventional and nonconventional warfare will soon diminish. The conventional threat from the air forces, navies, divisions, and brigades of the enemy states is declining, although the IDF is built and prepared to withstand such a threat in the future. The nonconventional threat is expected to decline over the next three to five years for two reasons. First, the nuclear agreement between Iran and the West rolls back Iran's nuclear potential by dismantling Iran's existing capabilities and increasing the supervision of its nuclear program. In addition, it seems that Iran will have a strong interest to maintain this agreement in its first few years in order to enjoy the benefits it provides. Second, in the context of the removal of Syria's chemical weapons, the chemical threat against Israel in effect no longer exists. At the same time, there is a worrying possibility that a residual capability remains in Syria, which can serve nonconventional terrorist purposes.

The Use of Force against the Threats

The IDF recently published and made available to the Israeli public the strategy it formulated. It did so out of a desire to explain its mission of protecting the State of Israel, ensuring its existence, and defeating its enemies should war break out. The document was based on work that was conducted in previous years, and more intensively over the past year. The IDF has a classified version of the strategy document.

When we survey the capabilities and power of the IDF in relation to the capabilities of other armies in the Middle East or in the world, we note with

satisfaction that it possesses a high level of capability. The IDF has aerial, intelligence, and naval superiority, as well as cybernetic superiority. In addition, its ground capabilities are highly complex. The superiority of the IDF versus enemy armies is reduced when facing sub-state organizations that are located in inhabited areas where they are protected by defensive positions and by the civilian population, and are able to develop underground capabilities. This situation has implications not only for the IDF, but also for other armed forces that deal with terrorism.

The question that arises is how deterrence can be created vis-à-vis terrorist groups that do not have any commitment to any particular state or ethic. If the IDF had to provide a deterrent vis-à-vis the armies of the past, today the demands are for high-level intelligence of sub-state groups. The IDF has the privilege of equipping itself with highly advanced weapons systems that enable it to deal with many threats; defending itself against the threats of terrorism on the ground, by sea and by air, as well as cybernetic terrorism, however, has become more complex than in the past. While the duty in past wars was to be victorious against regular armies, today it is the decisive defeat of groups that situate themselves among civilian populations while we take into consideration elements of time and the significance of this kind of combat for a democratic, law-abiding country such as the State of Israel. All these things have made combat much more complex. The IDF's challenge is to adapt the intelligence and operational response to the ground and to the changing threats, and provide a sense of security without excuses.

If we take the Palestinian arena as an example, the change that has occurred in the fight against suicide terror in comparison to the situation a decade ago stands out prominently. What helped the IDF cope with Palestinian terrorism in the past was the preventive approach, which relied on intelligence superiority and the ability to prevent terror attacks before they happened. This approach was based on excellent intelligence of the Israel Security Agency, the Military Intelligence Directorate, and other agencies. The current phenomenon of stabbing attacks eludes the most effective component of combating terror: advance warning. Today, terror attacks take place without any warning; the terrorist pulls out a knife and runs toward the target, be it a soldier or a civilian. For all practical purposes, since the stabbing incidents began, we have been unable to provide advanced warnings. A stabbing incident usually lasts seconds from the moment the terrorist pulls out the knife until launching an attack, and its prevention

relies, for the most part, on the operational capabilities of the soldiers in the area. Eight percent of the stabbing attacks took place in front of soldiers who stood between the terrorist and civilians. In places where the security forces arrived a few seconds late, or were not in proximity to a civilian who was stabbed, loss of life was in some instances the price paid.

There are 161 communities in Judea and Samaria, inhabited by 400,000 Israelis who live among approximately two million Palestinians. These two populations are interspersed with one another, creating a significant operational challenge. The IDF's duty is to provide security, so that the inhabitants of Judea and Samaria are secure and feel a sense of security. At the same time, the IDF follows an expansive civilian policy toward the Palestinian population, making a clear distinction between those involved in terror and the rest of the population. Within this framework, it allows 120,000 Palestinians to go out to work in Israeli cities and in the industrial zones in Judea and Samaria; these workers support 600,000 to 700,000 family members. This distinction serves as a restraining factor, and is a common interest of both the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, like the mutual security coordination between them.

Terrorism in Judea and Samaria has occurred for many years, and one does not need to be a strategist or intelligence official to understand that it will continue for many more years. Looking back fifteen to sixteen years, we can see that not a year passed without people killed or wounded in terror attacks: in the worst year, 453 people were killed and 3,000 were wounded, and in the year with the fewest number of attacks, six people were killed and 253 were wounded. The IDF's challenge then is to squash terrorism and defeat it everywhere possible, fulfill its responsibility to provide security and a sense of security, and allow the political echelon the freedom to make decisions from a position of strength and not under pressure of events.

Regarding the other fronts facing the IDF, if in the past it was customary to quote the statement attributed to Clausewitz that an army was in one of two states – that of preparing for war or that of war – in this new reality is another situation. The wars of today are based first and foremost on very high intelligence capability and on covert and overt capabilities. Their objective is to harm and weaken the enemies between wars, to prevent them from growing stronger and from gaining advanced capabilities, and to do so in a manner that will not lead to a broad escalation.

In parallel with the use of force throughout the year out of sight and by covert means, the IDF is making great efforts to improve its preparedness. The IDF has learned lessons during the past decade when its main effort was combating terrorism, and it was not overly strict about maintaining a methodical and intensive training system. As a result, the price paid was very high. The IDF realizes now that it must be prepared for outbreaks of war within a short period of time, and that it must make preparedness a priority among its other tasks. For all practical purposes, preparedness is the IDF's top priority.

If we are to fulfill the IDF's responsibility, we can no longer base ourselves on the "Precious Time" program that was used in the past, whose main principle was that the army would begin improving its fitness, organization, and preparation for a military operation when it faced a state of escalation. The current understanding is that the IDF must be prepared in advance and within a very brief amount of time in order to deal with violent outbreaks so that it can do its job and fulfill its purpose. One of the lessons learned was that it is impossible to base oneself on the elusive concept known as "deterrence." While deterrence is holding its own in southern Lebanon, its effectiveness could change at any time. For that reason, the IDF's test must be and is that of capability.

The Gideon Multi-Year Plan

Together with carrying out the policy on the use of force, over the past year the IDF has begun drawing up a new multi-year plan. This process is extremely significant. The previous multi-year plan was drawn up in 2007. While it strengthened the IDF's capabilities, no new multi-year plan has been approved since. The new multi-year plan, named Gideon, was put into use in early 2016. It was based on the idea of reducing the IDF's size and having it focus on its core missions, strengthening its key components, improving its preparedness, instruction, training and inventory, and putting these fields above all other tasks. At the same time, the fight against terrorism must continue, while wisely managing the risks. Still, it would be a mistake to direct all the IDF's resources and capabilities towards the war against terrorism; when a broader pattern of activity and operations is necessary, requiring brigades and divisions, district-wide regiments and commands, and even the General Staff, the IDF will be marked by the lack of fitness that it had in the past and should not wish to experience again.

As stated, the Gideon multi-year plan seeks to adapt the IDF to its proper size and reduce the size of the regular army, the career army, and the reserve army. The hope is to cultivate strong, well-trained, and sustainable units while reducing the size of the IDF, which is still very large compared to other armies in the area. The IDF has made significant decisions to establish a cyber corps to deal with developments in this sphere; merge the ground forces with components of the logistics corps; organize the special units into a single brigade and to incorporate the depth corps within it; make the 98th division into a regular depth corps division; and solidify auxiliary capabilities, which rest upon cyber connectivity or “jointness.” The purpose of all this is to reach a higher level of operational effectiveness.

The State of Israel has noteworthy capabilities in industry and science, rendering the question of where the IDF should direct its strength into a constant subject of debate. The IDF is in a large-scale process of acquisition, after having decided that in order to entrench its strengths, it needs to place emphasis on augmenting its unique powers instead of developing new capabilities. In addition, the project of moving the IDF to the Negev continues, and as part of that project, some of the army’s capabilities will be transferred there during the next decade; this is a process requiring many resources, including vacating the army’s camps in central Israel. Emphasis is also being placed on strengthening the IDF’s status as a national army – a people’s army – and we will undertake significant measures that will affect Israel’s society and economy, as well as the relationship between the army and Israeli society.

The Challenges of the Future

The first challenge that the IDF faces is to maintain regional deterrence, help defeat the Islamic State, and increase the security calm as much as possible. The IDF seeks to do this while preserving the peace treaty and Israel’s special relationships with Egypt and Jordan, as well as dealing with the volatility of the Palestinian arena. This is no simple challenge amid the upheaval in the region.

The second challenge is to strengthen the IDF’s multi-dimensional capability for aerial, naval, and ground defense and maneuvering. For this purpose, the IDF has been allocated tremendous resources, enabling it to protect the State of Israel both during ordinary times and in time of war. This refers, among other things, to active defense of multiple layers, giving Israel the most advanced defensive response in the world. This challenge

includes fortifying naval defense by purchasing ships for defense, as well as strengthening the cybernetic dimension. Overall, this means reinforcing intelligence, aerial, naval, and cybernetic capabilities opposite the ground capability of our enemies in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip and the challenges they present. In addition, this challenge includes the necessity to create synergy between all the military systems and increase the jointness between the Mossad, the Israel Security Agency, and the other security agencies, which constitutes a power multiplier for the IDF and the State of Israel.

It is a serious task to maintain the situation in the Gaza Strip and to prevent attempts to violate Israel's sovereignty below ground. The highest priority in this sphere is the formulation of a defensive and offensive response to the tunnels. Another priority is strengthening the security and sense of safety in Judea and Samaria in light of the current wave of escalation of terror. On the one hand, this means combating terrorism effectively, professionally, and with a great deal of operational initiative and intelligence, which will provide a response to the terror attacks by individuals and to the shooting attacks by organized cells. On the other hand, it means providing hope and allowing the Palestinian population to live their lives and support their families. It would be a grave mistake to impose closures and restrictions on the Palestinian communities, since such punishment will also work against Israel's interests in the end.

We must continue to maintain deterrence in the northern arena vis-à-vis the global jihad movement, the Islamic State, the Iranian forces that operate Shi'ite militias in Syria, and particularly Hezbollah. In addition to deterrence, we must also uphold the IDF's justifiable image and its capability as an unpredictable adversary that is able to provide a sharp response.

The IDF understands the situation as it is, makes courageous decisions, and even takes risks in order to adapt to the many challenges it faces. It does so out of its intention and effort to turn the vision into reality and be a first-rate army that is physically fit and able to defeat its foes, while concurrently developing its future capabilities. The IDF works to be the people's national army, composed of high-level, committed people who are devoted to their country; a modest army that is by and for the people; an army that is based on an effective organizational culture and has the public's trust. It is not to be taken for granted that the IDF receives the highest level of trust in polls that are conducted each year. It is a valuable asset that must be nurtured and preserved.

We are in a time where we are faced with risks and opportunities. We must preserve the State of Israel's standing in the region as a democratic country; an island of stability; and of military, scientific, and ethical power, even as we prepare for future risks and manage the current, familiar risks. Without wise risk management, it will be difficult for the IDF to leap ahead and be well prepared to face the challenges. The IDF is marching in that direction, and proof of that can be seen even now, both in the IDF's strategy and in the Gideon multi-year program.