



INSS Insight No. 733, August 16, 2015

**Revising the National Security Concept:
The Need for a Strategy of Multidisciplinary Impact**
Udi Dekel and Omer Einav

Israel's national security concept shapes the course toward realization of the national vision defined in the Declaration of Independence: Israel is to constitute a national home for the Jewish people, and ensure its existence and prosperity. The broader aspects of national security include: (a) internal and external security; (b) Israel's foreign relations and international status; (c) economic growth and resources; (d) effective governance – the ability to make decisions and implement them; and (e) unity and resilience in civil society.

Since it was founded, Israel has faced grave security challenges, which made security and a military response to external threats a central concern. Although the strategic environment has changed, it appears that Israel is still a captive of the traditional concept, whose principles – deterrence, early warning, and decisive outcome – were promulgated by David Ben Gurion during Israel's first decade. A fourth pillar – defense – was officially added a decade ago.

Along with adherence to basic values, the national security concept must be adjusted to trends and processes marking Israel's external and internal environments. The Israeli government has not yet found the right way to revise the traditional concept, which is affected by the significant decline in military threats, and adapt it to current and future challenges. The objective of the revised strategy for promoting Israel's interests and political-security goals is to generate influence in areas beyond the state's borders, through policy based on multidisciplinary efforts. Internal issues, such as unity around a goal and social and economic resilience, constitute an essential basis for the concept, but they are beyond the scope of this article.

Changes in the Basic Assumptions

Two independent basic assumptions underlie the realization that a revised concept must be formulated; the combined assumptions paint a different reality than of the past. The first is the absence of an existential military threat to Israel, a result of the consolidation

of Israel's military power and deterrence against its neighbors. The perceived existential military threat to Israel, which was embodied in the pan-Arab coalition of regular armies against Israel, was at the basis of Israel's national security concept. After 25 years of warfare (1948-1973), however, a gradual process began, whose results are reflected in the broad regional recognition of Israel's existence – whether official, as in the treaties with Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), or de facto, as on the part of most Arab countries. The second assumption is the result of the upheaval sweeping the Middle East, marked primarily by the dramatic weakening of the existing nation state-based order, combined with the rise of “other actors” emerging out of the religious, ethnic, and community struggles that have changed the rules of the game in the region.

These two assumptions have made Israel a secondary element in the current power struggles in the Middle East. At the same time, on the internal level, the separatist trends among the Israeli public have grown, fed by the futility of the attempts to conduct normal relations with the countries in the region, the repeated failure to achieve a permanent agreement with the Palestinians, and the close affiliation with the Western world. These trends are reflected in the increasing prominence of the socioeconomic agenda in Israel.

In view of the change in the basic assumptions, it appears that the familiar elements of the traditional security concept no longer suffice to provide a comprehensive and effective response to the developing threats and challenges.

- a. *Deterrence*. The objective of deterrence is to postpone the next round of conflict, and establish rules of the game below and above the belligerency threshold. In a world of non-state actors, however, it is increasingly difficult to identify centers of gravity in order to attack enemies and threaten them in the long term, as well as assess the point at which deterrence ceases to be effective, thereby requiring action to restore it.
- b. *Early Warning*. Over the years, the demands of intelligence have become broader and more diverse than warning of war. Today, strategic intelligence warning about a change in the regional trend is required (including opportunities for peaceful relations and cooperation). At the same time, there is a continuing need for operational intelligence to build force readiness and enable the operational force to cope with all varieties of threat – conventional, non-conventional, and terrorist threats.
- c. *Decisive Outcome*. If we are forced into a situation of conflict or war against non-state actors, as opposed to regular armies, the strategic objective is not to achieve decisive outcome, because these players cannot be denied their desire and ability to harm Israel. Even when a conflict develops, as has happened four times over the past decade, the enemies cannot be defeated through exclusively military means, whether due to the minimalist definition of political aim, or as a result of

constraints in using force by international law and the lack of international legitimacy for using military force in a civilian environment, combined with concern that Israel will be held responsible for the wellbeing of the other side's population.

- d. *Defense.* Defense has become an element of growing importance in current conflicts in which the home front becomes the principal front, due to the enemy's focus on attacking the civilian population and the strategic depth with various types of high trajectory weapons and terrorist attacks. The thicker and more effective the defense layers are, the more flexible decision making can be – whether and when to launch a military response – and the more functional continuity of vital systems in the home front and strategic depth can be maintained, ensuring a rapid return to routine daily life.

Consolidating Israel's Regional Status

The situation described above presents Israel with serious questions about maintaining its regional status and preventing erosion of its power and deterrence capability. Large scale military conflicts between regular armies have become less relevant, due to changes in the battlefield and the balance of regional forces. It has become difficult not only to achieve political gains in military conflicts, but also to reduce the political and image-related damage resulting from the use of military force.

The questionable results of the rounds of fighting in the past decade against Hizbollah, Hamas, and terrorism in general, and the subsequent unintended consequences of these campaigns, have led Israel to develop a concept of a campaign between wars aimed at preserving the differences between Israel's power and that of its enemies and Israel's deterrence against them. The campaign between wars includes a toolbox designed to strengthen and maintain Israel's deterrence on three levels: thwarting or disrupting the enemy's force building efforts; highlighting Israel's military superiority through diverse, clandestine, and surprise operations; and preparing an operational infrastructure for when it is needed. In addition, Israel's readiness to take action is essential for reinforcing the credibility of its deterrence against its enemies. The campaign between wars provides some degree of response to the gap between Israel's interests and the strategic constraints under which it operates. It is based on Israel's tendency to prefer the military elements of its capabilities, in accordance with the concept that holds that the region in which we live understands only the language of force. In addition, in a military confrontation, the Israeli government believes that it has a professional system with proven operational capabilities and orderly processes of planning, operation, and learning.

The Multidisciplinary Approach: Creating Influence in the Strategic Environment

Israel's general recourse to military means does not provide a complete response to current needs. The primary conclusion stemming from an analysis of the emerging

situation is that a multidisciplinary, complex, and sophisticated approach is required, based on systemic method combining political, diplomatic, public diplomacy, strategic media, new media, information warfare, economic, legal, cyber, and other tools. Past experience, which showed failed attempts at “king making” in Lebanon or in Gaza, has led to intellectual stagnation, which translated into an unequivocal decision against intervention and any attempt to shape a better situation on the other side of the fence, other than by preventing imminent threats. This lesson is suitable for various periods and contexts. At the present time, however, which features the breakdown of old frameworks, there are opportunities for efforts to influence the formation of new structures. It is necessary to craft the right form of intervention, which on the one hand does not purport to bring about artificial processes with much damage potential, while on the other hand does not ignore the main trends in the arena.

Action should be taken to achieve maximum influence in the strategic environment through the use of diverse tools at various levels, including: (a) direct access to the enemy population through public diplomacy, with the help of the new media and humanitarian assistance up to the level of the local community; (b) instruments of soft power, such as information warfare, economic leverage, legal means, political subversion tools, water and energy arrangements, security and technological aid, and private market and civilian initiatives; (c) cooperation with actors having interests overlapping those of Israel – today prominently with regard to Jordan, Egypt, and the security apparatuses of the Palestinian Authority. The range can be extended to pragmatic Arab states by reaching understandings about common interests, including beyond the security sphere; (d) cyber warfare, in order to neutralize enemy capabilities and create influence; (e) construction of a legal and public relations apparatus aimed at reducing Israel’s isolation in the international arena, the damage to its legitimacy, and the restrictions and sanctions against it, mainly when it is necessary to use force for self-defense.

The multidisciplinary approach requires systemic-wide control, including effective planning, coordination, and synchronization of all efforts to enhance Israel’s influence in the area and constrict the threats, while building and strengthening opportunities. Systematic management will make it possible to use military means – with capabilities for significant precision strikes against the enemy – and soft means, wisely and in coordinated fashion. Systematic and multidisciplinary operations will help consolidate Israel’s status as a key element in the Middle East, without detracting from its deterrent image as a power capable of inflicting severe damage, and its positive image of regional builder, developer, and assistance provider.

The essential principles that should help shape the multidisciplinary approach are maintaining intellectual flexibility and improving learning processes in order to provide a response to frequent changes and emerging opportunities, while taking care to avoid

inflating the risks and threats that could undermine any political or civilian initiative. At the end of the day, thinking and performance in the multidisciplinary approach will contribute to the development of more practical responses to the emerging challenges. In order for the multidisciplinary approach to materialize, learning processes should be devised and introduced into institutions, suitable processes and organizational structures should be formulated, and a multidisciplinary systems manager (operator) who will be directly responsible to the Prime Minister should be appointed.

This article is based on the work of the INSS team dealing with Israel's security concept team.

