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Strategy as a Learning Process: Israel and the United States Against Islamic Terrorism

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Islamic terrorism poses a novel challenge that disrupts the ability of western statesmen and military commanders to design a coherent and relevant grand strategy because of the complexity of the phenomenon; the military and the statesmen are required to conduct complex learning and diagnostic processes to properly interpret the operational environment, analyze the relevance of political goals and military courses of action and adjust them accordingly, to design a strategy. This article develops the concept of Discourse Space (open and closed), identifying the correlation between strategic learning and the Open Discourse Space and identifying the conditions required to create it.

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Introduction

The term, 'Islamic terrorism', refers to terrorist attacks conducted by Islamic Jihad Organizations who wish to replace the nation-state based regional and world order and its currently accepted borders with the unitary Islamic state. Beginning, in the Levant, they wish to expand throughout the Middle East, then Europe and farther afield. Therefore, the spread of Islamic terror through the Middle East destabilizes the moderate Arab states and the Western Democracies currently fighting it.

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To achieve political goals, strategy must achieve an optimal matching of the military effort to them. However, Islamic terrorism poses a novel challenge that disrupts the ability of Western Statesmen and Military Commanders to design a coherent and relevant grand-strategy because of the complexity of the phenomenon; its intellectual and cultural riddle is as yet not sufficiently comprehensible to them. Thus, statesmen are struggling to define political goals commensurate with the challenge and the commanders are struggling to define appropriate military action that will achieve those goals.[i] The resulting maladjustment between the two can lead to a crisis of expectations and then to a crisis of confidence between the political leadership and the military leadership.

The complexity of the Islamist terrorist challenge[ii] requires both the military and the statesmen to conduct complex learning and diagnostic processes to properly interpret the operational environment, analyze the relevance of political goals and military courses of action and adjust them accordingly to design a strategy. Ensuring such a learning process requires a distinct discourse space,[iii] an 'Open Discourse Space' that removes the hierarchic boundaries between statesmen and commanders, thus creating an intellectual partnership.

The copious existing literature on learning discusses individual learning, organizational learning and the specific learning methods of a military organization, but does not sufficiently discuss learning processes joining hierarchic levels. This learning across hierarchic boundaries is unique in that it is not individual, nor organizational, nor military.

Another problem is the limited understanding of the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism. Despite its unique characteristics vis-à-vis other forms of terrorism and the fact that it has become a major challenge to regional and global stability and to the industrialized democracies, it is still an unsolved phenomenon. An important testimony to the extent of this gap and its strategic ramifications can be found in the comprehensive RAND study of the American-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.[iv] After 13 years of war, the West has not yet developed an effective strategy to terminally defeat Islamic terrorism.

The concept of a Discourse Space joining statesmen and

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commanders can help to bridge these gaps. This article develops the original concept[v] by characterizing two types of Discourse Space (open and closed), identifying the correlation between strategic learning and the Open Discourse Space and identifying the conditions required to create it.

Israel has been fighting terror attacks since its establishment and over the past two decades it too has been fighting Islamic terrorism. Therefore, Israel's experience can be used as a unique case study for studying this subject.

This article will attempt to answer three main questions:

1. How does Islamic terror challenge the ability of the statesman and the commander to identify the strategy best suited to achieve the political goal?
2. What type of discourse between the levels can ensure the greatest compatibility between the strategy and the political goal?
3. What are the conditions for creating the relevant Discourse Space and what are the barriers limiting its creation?

THE ESSENCE OF ISLAMIC TERRORISM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE COMPLEXITY OF STATESMEN-COMMANDER RELATIONS

The Al-Qaeda attacks against the USA in Tanzania, on the American destroyer 'Cole' in Yemen and of course the Twin Towers on 11th September 2001 were significant milestones in the evolution of Islamic terrorism. When President Bush declared the 'Global War on Terror' and ordered American forces to invade Afghanistan and Iraq he was actually declaring Islamic terror the official enemy of the USA and the West. Despite some operational successes against Islamist forces and the killing of Al-Qaeda's founder and leader, Osama bin-Laden, the organization continues to sustain its global activity. In fact, that specific organization was weakened more by an internal rift, caused by ideological and personal disagreements that prompted some groups to leave it, than by the Western Alliance's attacks. The breaking away of ISIS from Al-Qaeda and the fervor it aroused, is a significant milestone in the spreading of the Islamic terror phenomenon throughout the Middle East and its penetration into Europe and North America.

The breaking away of ISIS from Al-Qaeda and the fervor it aroused, is a significant milestone in the spreading of the Islamic terror phenomenon

Al-Qaeda, ISIS and other organizations conquered territories while erasing international borders and inflaming the passions of many, including young Moslem citizens throughout the world. These young men and women volunteered to serve in ISIS and some returned to their homelands as trained, ideologically motivated terrorists, establishing an infrastructure for terror cells in their home-countries and posing an internal

threat to these countries. The Western democracies now face a complex two-front threat – one in the Middle East and the other gradually evolving at home.

Islamic terrorism has certain unique characteristics compared to traditional terrorism. The first, most important distinction is that Islamic terrorism is transnational and global. It is a network of organizations, cooperating in various ways, aimed to nullify the existing regional orders, erasing existing state borders and replacing them with a unified Islamic state and then extending this state globally. Islamic terror organizations are especially murderous and cruel, uniquely exploiting both the traditional and the new medias and social networks to promulgate their message and amplify the awe they inspire. They have access to a wide variety of weapons, including weapons of state-armies and in some cases chemical weapons. After conquering territory they are undergoing a process of formalization in order to establish a governmental infrastructure for the Islamic State. They are, therefore, undergoing an accelerated transformation from the non-state terror organizations we have seen in the past to semi-state players.

Westerners struggle to understand the attraction of the phenomenon and try, unsuccessfully, to assess it with Western paradigms

The unique attributes of Islamic terrorism make it no less of a unique cultural and intellectual challenge. Westerners struggle to understand the attraction of the phenomenon and try, unsuccessfully, to assess it with Western paradigms – note Raymond Ibrahim's criticism of CIA chief Brennan's explanation of the motivation of the volunteers to ISIS:

"When Brennan, Harf et al insist that jihadis are really not motivated by religion but rather are products of political, economic, and social forces, is this total dismissal of the "other" and his peculiar motivations (in favor of familiar, Western paradigms) not the epitome of cultural arrogance?"[vi]

Already, during the Great Arab Rebellion of the First World War, Lawrence of Arabia discerned the uniqueness of Irregular Warfare when he determined that:

"Irregular war was far more intellectual than a bayonet charge, far more exhausting than service in the comfortable imitative obedience of an ordered army."[vii]

Identifying the phenomenon as abstract, involving a philosophy and theory mainly regarding the metaphysical aspect, required him to develop a relevant theory.[viii]

Islamic terrorism is a form of irregular warfare several times more complex because of two unique characteristics: emergence and speed. It is not sufficiently crystallized or clear enough and yet it emerges rapidly, with frequent radical changes, it spreads quickly to other geographical arenas and its consequences are multi-dimensional. The

strategic theory or paradigm needed to defeat this complex challenge does not yet exist.

In the Israeli case, the complexity of the challenge stems from the wide variety of groups in areas geographically adjacent to Israel. *"I think our area of assessment is problematic and needs to change dramatically. It must now cope with Al-Qaeda and ISIS, Salafists in Sinai, changes in Lebanon where now there is not only Hizbullah but also ISIS and Jubhat al-Nusra"*[ix] said a former Israeli Deputy Chief of Staff. Israeli Knesseth Member Ofer Shelakh commented that: *"It is an enormous intellectual challenge. But we are not changing our concepts... We continue to adhere to things that are past, we are not designing a policy or an army really built to deal with what is facing them"*. [x]

The American experience also shows the challenge to be intellectual and conceptual – as described in the opening of the RAND study on the American experience in Afghanistan and Iraq: *"The U.S. military recognizes that a great deal of intellectual work remains to be done to learn from these experiences"*. [xi]

This situation transforms dealing with the Islamic terror phenomenon into a task that extends beyond the usual preventative military and intelligence operations. The task is complex for the political leadership, but seems to be much more complex for the military, operating as a mission-oriented organization according to a very specific and defined logic. Some of the logic needed for this struggle is typical and natural for the military organization and some is foreign to its nature. Furthermore, there are tensions and contradictions between the logic and an overall strategy must include and mediate between them. It is dialectic and difficult to apply. [xii]

Israel's Operation 'Protective Edge' suffered from inconsistencies between the political goals and the military action:

"I think there was a new policy and that the army did not adjust its plans, stores and 'state of mind' appropriately... If you want to dramatically change the operating concept of the army, you must first conduct formal discussions in the government, decide what are the consequences of this change and prepare accordingly, not be surprised by a 50 day war." [xiii]

Like other democracies, perhaps more than most, Israel must expend a significant effort to ensure that its policies and strategies are maximally suited to the challenges it faces. However, some argue that *"Israel has no strategy, political and military, to deal with its current enemies. To the north and to the south we are facing sub-state organizations, whose responsibility for the territory they occupy is not well-defined and that any arrangement with them is hard to reach"*. [xiv]

Creating an appropriate strategy while reducing the subjective dimensions of situation-assessment, requires a process of learning the unique characteristics of each situation and threat, interpreting these characteristics and creating a common terminology for describing them. [xv] The appropriate learning process is defined by Jack Levy as Complex-Diagnostic Learning. [xvi]

THE LEARNING PROCESS AS A PREREQUISITE FOR DESIGNING AN OVERALL STRATEGY RELEVANT TO THE CHALLENGE

Learning is extensively discussed in the literature of many disciplines. Jack Levy defined learning as a change in beliefs or the development of new beliefs, skills and procedures, resulting from observation and interpretation of experience. Levy regarded learning as an active process of acquiring knowledge and designing analytical constructs. He distinguished between causal learning – changing beliefs as a result of hypothesizing on cause and effect as they influence the results of actions, and diagnostic learning – changing beliefs as a result of defining situations or preferences, goals or relative capabilities of others. He also distinguished between two qualities of learning: simple learning – occurring when new information brings a change in means and courses of action, and complex learning – resulting from understanding the tension between values and causing a change in the definition of both goals and means. [xvii]

Simple causal learning can be defined as tactical learning – adjustment and adaptation, whereas complex diagnostic learning is strategic learning – reconstructing situational perception. In cognitive terms, tactical learning is the updating of existing cognitive structures, whereas strategic learning is the changing and expanding of these cognitive structures.

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Phillip Tetlock referred to learning as confronting cognitive complexity, with the individual developing more complex cognitive maps and structures of his surroundings and a greater willingness for self-criticism. [xviii] Tetlock tied the results of an individual's developing cognitive maps with the praxis of organizational learning. He argued that the essence of organizational learning is actually the learning process of the separate individuals in that organization, concluding that the assumption that organizations learn is not analytically founded. This understanding has unique significance in our discussion of the learning process in the discourse space between the political and military levels because that encounter is a more abstract and challenging form of the formal organizational structure.

The existing literature on learning does not discuss learning across organizational boundaries, such as the meeting between statesmen and commanders. It is assumed that in these unique profiles the lack of a formal organization makes the regulation of common cognitive structures more difficult in the informal discourse between the participants thus complicating the learning procedures. These conditions provide a certain advantage to the more developed knowledge of the military in the discourse with the statesmen. [xix]

Strategic learning is based on an abstract learning process.

This kind of thinking requires creativity and a wide holistic view. Over the past decade, the military has developed a literature and a knowledge infrastructure for this type of thinking as a necessary tool for improving the courses of action when facing the complex military challenges evolving in asymmetrical conflicts. This literature identifies abstract thinking as founded on the concept of 'design'; an architectural concept distinct from the engineering concept. The concept of 'design' treats the campaign as *gestalt*, enabling the design of the political concept followed by the designing of an operational concept as "a holistic whole of ideas and phases, even before beginning the planning process".[xx]

In contrast, the Israeli experience indicates the weakness and limitations of the political level in manufacturing knowledge. *"Observing Israeli governments over decades raises the concern that they were lacking and still are lacking the capability of learning... Israeli governments have not developed a relevant strategy in the fields of security, violent conflicts and war... A government that does not learn stays behind the regional changes"*. [xxi]

The army has a tradition of learning, expressed in the organizational structure, in procedures and organizational cultures that emphasize learning as inherent to military professionalism. The political level lacks these functions. This creates an asymmetry of knowledge in the army's favor, making its knowledge authoritative. The knowledge created and developed by the army becomes a significant element in the government's knowledge and decision-making process.[xxii] This gap can be reduced by a sophisticated discourse between the levels which serve as a significant arena for creating relevant knowledge. This new knowledge should enable re-examining of the political goals and the military courses of action in order to ensure their maximal compatibility – i.e. strategy.

One hurdle in elaborating the discourse is the army's tendency to focus on operational and tactical issues, based on the military debriefing processes between operations. This focus exists because the army's purpose is to discover the gaps between planning and implementation and to learn what changes are necessary in courses of action (i.e. simple learning – adjustment or adaptation). The military debriefing mechanism is not suitable for dealing with strategic issues and does not aid the developing of knowledge and thinking in these complex contexts (thus, for example, the lessons learned from the Second Lebanon War which were applied in Operation 'Cast Lead' and caused numerous Palestinian casualties in addition to the Goldstone Report). This phenomenon is also known by other armies, such as the American case described by Allen and Coates:

"The military leaders focused on tactical and operational problems not connected to achieving the strategic goals of the civilian leadership. Focus-ing on tactical problems that were not supportive of the strategic vision is an excellent example of EIII decisions by military leaders." [xxiii]

In a similar vein, a comprehensive RAND study found that the American military tends to learn operational and tactical lessons from its wars and attempts to adjust them for new

wars that require a wider strategic understanding and "out of the box" thinking beyond the implementation of past experience.[xxiv]

Therefore, learning from the military debriefing process is limited and does not sufficiently exploit the cognitive dimension in the context of fighting Islamic terrorism – a challenge that requires complex diagnostic learning. This type of learning is required every time, one must analyze strategic events because they are new and inherently different, so existing knowledge is not necessarily relevant to the new situation. It requires questioning and thinking critically. To ensure the appropriate learning environment the military must express its opinions, its expertise and the knowledge it has accumulated and the civilian leadership must listen to the army even when its advice contradicts the politicians' ideology.[xxv] Complex learning, defined in some places as system-oriented thinking, is not easy to digest. It undermines existing organizational structures, paradigms and discourse structures and arouses opposition. To think systemically, one cannot deal only with the data and principles (the descriptive level), one must also discuss the interpretation and critique and synthesize – thus creating a new understanding. Creating new knowledge is a circular process that begins with the existing system, moves to the evolving system, from there to the desired system and when that gradually becomes the existing system, one must start over.

This manner of strategic learning increases the probability of creating a concept of action that can be transferred from the abstract strategic environment to the concrete operational environment. These learning processes are similar in mode to those of the architect's creativity and design. They differ from the simpler learning process of the engineer, with its orientation on physical implementation. It is the difference between "problem setting" and "problem solving".

Strategy can be explained in terms of learning and described as the practice of systematic learning, thus enabling thoughtful navigation in a complex environment in order to identify what has changed, evolving aspects and potentials for more change. In a turbulent dynamic environment such as that of Islamic terrorism, the practice of learning becomes an endless journey of creating knowledge.

Learning and knowledge creation are essentially intellectual challenges[xxvi] requiring a partnership between the political and the military leaderships. The traditional distinction between the military and the political is not possible in this partnership because the challenge of Islamic terror creates a situation in which *"objectives of strategic value change frequently while operations are underway..."* [xxvii] so that the strategic purpose must be frequently adjusted in order to assure its relevancy.

CLOSED DISCOURSE, OPEN DISCOURSE, LEARNING PROCESSES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN DESIGNING AN OVERALL STRATEGY

American experience in Afghanistan and Iraq proves that every time the discourse between the levels was a closed discourse, the strategy decided upon was not relevant to the complex challenges in those arenas.

"... why things had gone so badly wrong with America's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan... Ours is the best-equipped fighting force in history, and it is incomparably the most expensive... Yet repeatedly this force has been defeated by less modern, worse-equipped, barely funded foes... At this point, it is incontrovertibly evident that the U.S. military failed to achieve any of its strategic goals in Iraq." [xxviii]

Only the strategies developed by instances of statesmen-commander partnerships, conducting open discourse lead, to improved results. Partnership and open discourse enabled the statesmen and the commanders to challenge existing concepts, to improve their knowledge and to interpret the operational environment more precisely, and this, in turn, enabled the reassessment of the relevance of the political goals, clarification of the political directive and the design of a more relevant overall strategy to achieve those goals.

The first and most important of the seven lessons identified by the RAND study regarding the American 13 year experience in Afghanistan and Iraq touched this very issue:

"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." [xxix]

Contemporary asymmetrical wars require thinking and planning patterns that are more holistic, complex and abstract

Contemporary asymmetrical wars require thinking and planning patterns ("cognitive designs") that are more holistic, complex and abstract. The difficulty of defining the problem and understanding its many dimensions makes defining the political goal and the relevant military achievements more difficult. A necessary prerequisite for dealing with this complex challenge is "an extensive open discourse, creating competition between different ideas and different viewpoints in order to integrate them". [xxx] When the participants fail to create relevant "cognitive designs", military conservatism and insufficient situational understanding of the political leadership might lead to irrelevant fighting methods.

"What we have is a combat method in which the relationship between the effort and its effectiveness is impossible. You enter a war without knowing its goals, and you fight in a manner which in a low intensity war will bring you to the red lines because of unrealistic planning, very conservative use of force, inexperience and professional problems." [xxxi]

Reducing the discourse space will deny the political leadership the ability to understand the complexity of the context because it does not fully exploit the military's base of knowledge of that context. Conversely, when the political leadership reveals its political intentions to the

military leadership, the latter can more fully explain the consequences, thus enabling the political leadership to analyze the relevance of its strategic intentions and to adjust them. [xxxii]

When discussing the 'discourse space', it is important to distinguish between a closed discourse process, characterized by discussions and presentation of alternatives in a permanently structured process, a ritual of sorts – which promotes only simple or tactical learning, and an open continuous discourse with ad-hoc structures and characteristics, formed by context and particular need. Open discourse challenges existing knowledge by testing new thinking on existing conceptual patterns and concepts, therefore creating strategic, diagnostic or complex learning. The challenge is created because the collision of existing logic enables synthesizing it into a new logic. It seems that this type of learning did not occur in Operation 'Protective Edge'. Despite the numerous (27 in total) political-security cabinet discussions, the impression is that the discussion between levels was closed with the traditional characteristics of structure and roles:

"Despite innumerable discussions, the cabinet apparently did not create new and worthwhile strategic insights during the operation... To advance learning requires presenting of products that encourage learning, not closed alternative operational plans from which one must be chosen." [xxxiii]

WHY AN OPEN DISCOURSE SPACE? THE LOGIC AND THE THEORY TESTED BY EXPERIENCE

Open discourse enables travelling to imagined-worlds, which, in turn, enable the design of new cognitive structures necessary for a different and critical examination of existing knowledge. In the terminology of Phillip Tetlock, this is the process of learning. It enables the integration of political logic and military logic, leading to the development of new knowledge, which will enable the designing of an innovative, more relevant policy. RAND's study emphasizes the importance of an interactive discussion (what we call 'open discourse') between the levels to the process of strategic learning:

"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... 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 adaptation of strategy in response to the evolution of understanding and events." [xxxiv]

Conversely, military thinking is focused on threats: "without relating to a particular threat, real or imagined, armies do not have a basis for existing and acting". [xxxv] If the statesmen are not sufficiently aware of this characteristic, the security threat will generally be deemed more serious and

tangible than other threats (demographic, social, political) [xxxvi] so that the military's thoughts and courses of action will be prioritized to a level that can sometimes make them undisputable.[xxxvii]

Preventing this requires dealing with the political and military environments as one and necessitates joint critical thinking by both levels of the hierarchy.

The Israeli cabinet's difficulty during Operation 'Protective Edge' to develop innovative strategic insights stemmed from the lack of such an examination. Actually, this merely repeats the pattern of Israeli cabinet discussions since the Yom Kippur War as described by Giora Iland, former chief of the IDF's General Staff Planning Directorate and former Head of the National Security Council (NSC), who participated in many of them.[xxxviii] Iland claimed that *"the dependence of the ministers only on the information the Defence Minister and the Chief of Staff chose to present in formal meetings creates a dangerous situation of group-thinking and an exaggerated acceptance of existing conceptions"*. Most of the time spent in these meetings was allocated to presenting the intelligence summary and operational updates, whereas *"not enough time is spent debating what to do"*. At the strategic level *"elaborating the details of the situation creates a shallow debate"*. [xxxix] In fact, this is the type of discussion characterized above as closed and ritualistic. Opening the discourse *"requires, by definition, exposing the cabinet to people and organizations who have an opposing view and a different perspective than the security organizations"*. [xli]

Allogic similar to that of the open discourse space can be found in the 'Targeted Partnership' model developed by Rebecca Schiff. She presents as a positive example, General Petreus, who, unlike Defense Secretary Rumsfeld – whom she cites as a negative example, chose to listen to experts from various fields and of varied opinions so as to create a heated, deep debate on all the aspects of the insurgency in Iraq. [xlii] In fact, this model formalizes a process of creating relevant knowledge and a different decision making procedure – a more flexible structure or relationship between hierarchic levels creating open qualitative discourse between the levels, thus enabling the design of an overall strategy relevant to facing the challenge of Islamic terrorism.

Closed discourse quells the intellectual discussion required to respond to complex challenges such as Islamic terrorism. Whereas, open discourse between statesmen and commanders, serves as a bridge connecting the abstract political directive to the military praxis.

BARRIERS TO OPEN DISCOURSE, COMPLEX LEARNING AND THE CONDITIONS FOR CREATING A RELEVANT DISCOURSE ZONE

The challenge of the two hierarchic levels, the political and the military, is to merge the political logic with the logic of combat. The lack of this merger in the discourse between these levels explains the shallowness of strategy and the inconsistency of political and military efforts. The usual trend is to maintain stability, to cling to the known and familiar. A qualitative discourse between the levels should leverage the differences between them and exploit the tension between

political and military thinking.

The challenge of the two hierarchic levels, the political and the military, is to merge the political logic with the logic of combat.

A series of inherent tensions interfere with the creation of this discourse in Israel and most other democracies. These blocks can be divided into four main categories: essence, structural, procedural and cultural.

- Blocks of essence include the leadership skills of the political level, the constraints and limits of maneuver within which the politicians work and especially the difficulty of defining political goals and the need for internal and external legitimacy.
- Structural blocks are those of organizational structure and the functional aspects of governments, armies and the other professional bodies the government depends on.
- Procedural blocks include the conduct of encounter when the levels meet, the characteristics of that encounter/discourse and how these influence the learning process.
- Cultural blocks reflect the influence of organizational culture and political culture on the meeting of levels.

Therefore, an open discourse that enables complex learning, characterized by an intellectual culture of openness, doubt, curiosity and study, cannot be taken for granted.

Open qualitative discourse between levels requires a cultural climate based on trust between the levels.

Another precondition for open discourse is the concept of 'shared responsibility' [xlii] of both levels, both in practice and backed by public legitimacy. Without the concept of shared responsibility, responsibility and authority separate and in cases of failure or even only partial success (such as Operation 'Protective Edge' in the view of part of the public, the media and political establishment) the military leadership might find itself exposed to criticism, examination and interrogation. The military leaders' fear of a lack of support from the politicians in the face of the Commissions of Inquiry on 'the day after', might constrain them to present to the political leaders only the alternatives they believe suit the politicians' agendas. This prevents the military from studying in depth the politicians' actual wishes and intentions and challenging them with the military's understanding of the actual situation.

ENSURING THE MILITARY OPERATION IS COMPATIBLE WITH THE POLITICAL GOAL AND 'TARGETED PARTNERSHIP'

How the statesman formulates his directives to the commander affects the ability of the commander to design

a military operation commensurate with the political goal. Therefore,

"The military must insist on knowing what the political goals are, which assumptions underlie these goals, what the means will be, and then insist on receiving them. And the country's political leadership and public must understand that it is their job, not the military's, to define victory and mobilize resources to achieve it – while holding the military responsible for winning on the battlefield." [xlili]

If we define the compatibility of the military action to the political goal as a variable dependent on the characteristics of the political directive and the discourse (independent variables), we will discover that the best compatibility between the military actions and the political goal is achieved when the political directive is clear and the discourse space between the levels is open, enabling qualitative diagnostic/strategic learning. Conversely, lack of compatibility between the military action and the political goal is created when the directive is blurred and the discourse is closed – conducted as limited simple/tactical learning. For the two other combinations, blurred directive and open discourse or a clear directive and closed discourse, the compatibility will be partial.

Conditions to Achieve Suitability

		Character of Directive	
		Clear directive	Blurred directive
Character of Discourse	Open discourse: complex strategic learning	Excellent compatibility between the military actions and the political goal	Reasonable compatibility between the military actions and the political goal
	Closed discourse: simple tactical learning	Limited compatibility between the military actions and the political goal	No compatibility between the military actions and the political goal

Sole Property of Professor Kobi Michael

Diagram 1: Conditions to Achieve Suitability

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The spread of Islamic terrorism through the Middle East has created a very complex challenge to the Western democracies combating this threat. This is a multi-dimensional challenge that cannot be met with a purely military response. As the conflict progresses there has evolved a growing inconsistency between the military actions and the political goals. This inconsistency results from the difficulty of the political leadership to define the political goal and the difficulty of the military to define the military achievement required to achieve that goal. This inconsistency weakens the essential political control of the military and is creating a crisis of expectations.

Designing military operations capable of achieving the political goals requires diagnostic/strategic learning and is possible only with an open inter-level discourse. This article has presented definitions of open and closed discourse and the characteristics required for an open discourse to occur and explained the connection between a strategic learning process and open discourse.

Viewing the American experience in Afghanistan and Iraq and the Israeli experience, especially impressions of the conduct of Operation 'Protective Edge', we conclude that a strategy leading to positive outcomes was designed only in those cases where the hierarchical levels succeeded in developing partnerships and shared responsibility and opening the discourse between them. The partnership and the discourse challenged existing understandings, improved knowledge and interpreted the operational environment more accurately. This strengthened the ability to define political goals, to formulate a clear, relevant political directive and ultimately, to design an overall relevant strategy that fully and properly merged the abstract political logic and the military practice.

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