

The Fundamental Concept of Human Resources in the Structure of the IDF

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Background

This article considers the fundamental concept of IDF structure from the perspective of a former head of the IDF Planning Directorate. In this context, it is important to differentiate between the Planning Directorate, which is responsible for human resources planning in the IDF, and the Manpower Directorate, which is responsible for implementation. More broadly, the Planning Directorate of the IDF is responsible for managing the resources at the army's disposal, including budget, infrastructure, and human resources. This article will therefore deal with the issue from the point of view of human resources planning, discussing four subjects: a) an examination of the current model, which I regard as a necessity; b) human resources planning by the army; c) universal conscription; and d) the question: to whom does this human resource belong? Does it belong to the IDF, which chooses whom it wants and whom it does not want, or does it belong to another social or political entity? Or perhaps it is primarily the domain of the IDF, but is also supposed to serve other national needs?

Before starting such a discussion, we must first define the human resource in question and understand the operative premise within the IDF regarding this subject. This issue consists of two principles. The first is that, as a rule, everyone is drafted; the reason for non-conscription is incompatibility, but the point of departure is that the army has the option to draft everyone. The second, and equally important, principle is that manpower formation is undertaken through simultaneous consideration of the use of the human resource during regular service and the needs of the reserve system. This approach can be explained by the operational need: approximately every five

years the IDF conducts a renewed situation assessment regarding concepts, needs, and priorities. This process facilitates a fundamental examination of the force structure of the IDF – the size and makeup of its ORBAT (order of battle). For this purpose, simulations are conducted to examine the number of divisions the army needs and whether, for example, a reduction in the number of divisions can be compensated by other means. Substitutions can potentially be made between the different components, although not in all cases and contexts. For example, substitutions can be made between fighter planes and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or drones, as they are commonly known), or between fighter planes and tanks. Different combinations can be created but must be based on considered scenarios that the State of Israel could encounter on its different fronts while taking into consideration the different types of conflict possible. Only then is it possible to determine the minimal necessary ORBAT for the worst case scenario. These simulations enable planners to reach conclusions regarding the minimum fighting force necessary at sea, in the air, and on the ground, in relation to their exact structure, scope, and the means required to support them, with an emphasis on the inventory of munitions and spare parts.

Regular Service

When the army examines its different tasks, it becomes evident that the regular army's human resources are insufficient to accommodate some of them. That is to say, those in favor of doing away with the reserve army or the model of the people's army and support the model of conscription on a volunteer basis, disregard the minimum size necessary for the IDF. As of today, the army's minimum necessary size dictates conscription of all those whom the IDF truly regards as suitable for conscription for regular service, based on consideration of the needs of the reserve force that this framework must support. At least in terms of ground forces, the optimal ratio is 1:3 or 1:4, or one regular brigade for every three or four reserve brigades. This structure is based on maximum efficiency, which ensures that a soldier engaged in regular service will not need to undergo special training in order to perform his service in the reserves.

The guideline, then, can be broken down into two components: determination of the minimum fighting force necessary and, in accordance with this, determination of the best combination of regular army forces and reserve army forces. The most efficient system, it should be emphasized, is

the IDF reserve division. There is absolutely no more efficient model from a cost-benefit perspective. From the perspective of benefit, in wartime, it is capable of doing exactly what a division in the regular army, or any other division in the world can do. The cost of maintaining a reserve division according to the IDF model is minimal, due to the fact that its primary mass – 90-95 percent of those serving in its ranks – consists of reserve soldiers who are not paid when not on active duty. The cost, then, is for a small core regular force that serves to maintain the framework and equipment of the entire division.

There are, therefore, two reasons for the model of the people's army. The first, explained above, has to do with the minimal size of the required ORBAT and achieving the optimal flow of forces from the regular army to the reserves. The second reason is qualitative. The IDF's major advantage lies in its capability to choose: that is, to determine whom it will and will not enlist and how these soldiers will be distributed. This freedom of choice is significant and facilitates opportunities for creating quality levels that do not exist in other armies in the world, such as the US army in Afghanistan or the French forces in Mali, and other instances of professional armies. Despite the experience and professionalism of the soldiers serving in these armies, there are evident problems in the quality of their junior command.

In contrast, it is this aspect – the quality of its junior command – that constitutes a major strength of the IDF, as reflected in the following account of the IDF's approach to the issue. Out of every one hundred people drafted into the Golani Brigade, the best thirty become squad commanders, and out of these thirty recruits, the best ten will most likely end up in officers' training school. Only seven of these ten will finish the program, again, representing the best of the lot. Of these seven, four will return to serve as platoon commanders, and the best of those four will most likely end up serving as company commanders. This state of affairs in which, at least in theory, the company commander represents the best out of one hundred, allows the IDF to attain an extremely high level of quality in its regular army forces and, subsequently, in its reserves.

In short, the current IDF model facilitates an ability to choose that does not exist in other armies. The ability to enlist the best individuals and to place them on tracks that will ultimately make them officers stems from the fact that they are compelled to enlist. After all, a large portion of these outstanding officers would have never enlisted in the first place had they not

been compelled to do so. The current system enlists the best and compels them to begin these tracks, and any transition to a professional army along the lines of those typical of Western countries would require foregoing this major advantage.

As for the planning processes within the IDF, the last 10-15 years have witnessed efforts to set in motion new processes in both the regular and the standing army that have enjoyed partial success. In the realm of compulsory service, the army is interested in conscripting candidates for service not only according to the principle of equality in sharing the burden but also based on other considerations, such as the resources at its disposal. After all, the army has a great need for combat soldiers, a smaller need for combat support personnel, and an ever smaller need for administrative personnel. To a certain extent, the numbers of available soldiers represent a different numerical breakdown, and perhaps even the opposite. Therefore, a need exists to transfer as many recruits as possible from administrative roles to combat support roles and from combat support roles to combat roles. The more combat frameworks there are in the regular army to serve as the “teeth” of the IDF, the more powerful the army will be and the stronger the regular army will be. Then, there will to some extent be a possibility of easing the burden on the reserve soldiers, if not by disbanding the reserve system altogether or lowering the age of discharge from reserve duty, at least in the sense of more economical operational duty.

Over the past 10-15 years, the army has attempted to start processes in this realm, partially through the service of women in the IDF – a source of personnel that for many years was not maximized. As an increasing number of positions in the realm of combat support have opened up to female soldiers, resulting in a flow of combat support personnel to replace combat soldiers, a situation has emerged that allows the military to reduce the number of days of reserve duty for combat soldiers. This is a process, although it is progressing too slowly. The Planning Directorate set targets for this process in the past, but for various reasons, they have met with only limited success. For example, the ease with which soldiers today can be released from combat duty for medical reasons that do not always justify their release has made it more difficult for the IDF to meet these goals. Still, the primary aim in the utilization of manpower in compulsory service remains unchanged: to move the maximum number of soldiers into more meaningful roles and to make optimal use of manpower that has traditionally not been utilized.

Standing Service

In the area of human resource planning in the Planning Directorate, standing service is not a problem of human resources since the IDF has a wide variety of people at its disposal. It is a problem of finance. The Planning Directorate attempts to identify the optimal combination from among five kinds of manpower: a) pure standing army personnel; b) primary standing army personnel; c) civilian employees of the IDF; d) reserve soldiers; and e) outside consultants (outsourcing). The point of departure for planning the optimal combination of these kinds of human resources from a financial perspective is that the most expensive population is the pure standing service personnel. Therefore, an ongoing effort is underway to reduce the inventory of pure standing service personnel and to convert their positions into other types of work force.

In many ways, the IDF works in a better and more suitable and efficient manner than other civilian systems in Israel. In part, this is the result of systemic planning, which finds expression in the human resource management model for standing army service. This model has existed since Major General Shlomo Yanai's tenure as head of the Planning Directorate. When dealing with manpower planning we can clearly distinguish between three concepts: a) peak manpower; b) standard positions; and c) staffing. The concept of "peak manpower" reflects the maximum number of people belonging to a given group (for example, all those holding a certain rank) who can be paid a salary. For example, if it is decided that the air force will have a maximum of 100 lieutenant colonels, the air force is authorized to pay a salary to 100 or fewer lieutenant colonels. All that is important from the perspective of the Planning Directorate is that the average manpower inventory is less than or equal to the peak manpower. Of these 100 lieutenant colonels, at least 80 are filling standard positions, such as squadron commanders or branch heads. It is a question, for example, of 80 individuals, as opposed to 100, because there are always some away on study leave, in the midst of overlap training, or on sick leave, whereas others hold individual ranks, and, for one reason or another, some standard positions are simply not filled. It is therefore important not to standardize all 100 percent, because this will result in a deviation from the peak, which in turn will result in a deviation from the budget.

This model has four advantages:

- a. It assures that there will be no budgetary deviation, as the number of standard positions is always less than the peak. This facilitates flexibility.
- b. In the realm of the relations between the General Staff and the different branches of the army, this model allows a decentralization of authority controlled by the General Staff through regular discussions that assess the peak state vis-à-vis the manpower inventory in practice. For example, according to this model, without receiving approval from the General Staff, the air force is authorized to standardize additional manpower and to increase the number of standard positions from 80 to 81, as long as it is able to increase efficiency and assure that there will be no deviation from the maximum, which remains 100.
- c. Another advantage has to do with long term planning. Consider, for example, a situation in which there is a maximum of 100 lieutenant colonels in the air force and a maximum of 100 lieutenant colonels in the ground forces. When a new multi-year plan is formulated and the Chief of General Staff seeks, for example, to give priority to the air force, it can be decided to facilitate a five-year linear decline in the ground forces from a maximum of 100 to a maximum of 90, while leaving the peak in the air force at 100.
- d. The model also provides an incentive for efficiency. If a certain branch has a maximum of 100 personnel of a certain rank, it is authorized to pay salaries to 100 people, and no more. In the event that the average inventory in practice is lower, the resulting savings in manpower expenses remains in the budget of that branch which can use it for other purposes.

Despite the advanced nature of this model, there are deficiencies when actually utilized. When considering the issue of increasing the efficiency of the army in the realm of standing army soldiers, we find challenging problems in distinctions, methodologies, and fundamental premises. The IDF's fundamental methodology may be correct, but it fails to increase its efficiency in a sufficient manner because it is fixed in certain set premises. For example, when we consider the structure of a division in the IDF, we observe that it is similar and equivalent to most divisions in most armies around the world. The structure of a ground division is characterized by two principles: a complete chain of command (division commander →brigade commander→regiment commander→company commander→platoon commander→squad commander) and a narrow span of control. For example,

a company commander has three platoon commanders, where each commands three squad commanders. This structure is justified and logical, and we therefore see it in armies throughout the world. However, the IDF has taken this effective division structure and applied it to all its home front commands as well. Thus, on the home front, for example, we see colonels with three lieutenant colonels in their command, and narrow spans of control. But the home front commands are larger in number and more expensive, and there is therefore no reason for the home front commands to adopt the model of the combat division. Indeed, in such contexts, application of the combat division model is simply not relevant.

Conclusion

The IDF's approach of universal conscription, reserve duty, and the optimal relationship between regular service and the reserves is the correct model. It is not only a fundamental question of principle, but an issue of the operational efficiency and effectiveness that can be achieved using a given budget. Any other model would be more costly. At the same time, however, there are a number of issues in which reconsideration and correction is in order. One is the fear of a mass conscription of ultra-Orthodox Jews, as this would likely create pressure on the army, for example, to create tracks of service with low benefits and high costs. If the army were to create special tracks for ultra-Orthodox recruits based on service in home front units without rotational duties or service on Saturdays (the Jewish Sabbath), and these recruits were all fathers with three children requiring commensurate salaries, the bottom line would be that the benefit to the military would be relatively low vis-à-vis the principle of universal conscription.

Another sensitive issue is the principle that everyone needs to serve and contribute – Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews included, if not in the army then through national service. In a democracy, however, it is problematic to take 18 year olds and compel them to work with the ill or the elderly. It is an inappropriate approach that is virtually nonexistent in other countries, as doing so would require applying stringent enforcement to individuals with no motivation to enlist and participate in civilian service. Furthermore, any compromise on this issue, whether in terms of conscription into the IDF or integration into the civilian service, will have a cost that is greater than its benefit. Such tracks would also preclude other individuals, who may be willing to perform these community services for low wages, from doing

so, as the positions would already be filled by national service participants. This, of course, is unjustified; if it is decided that it is important to decrease the number of yeshiva students in order to increase the number of Israelis serving in the army, this can be achieved using simpler methods than those that would lead to collision and ultimately result in nothing positive. The simplest way of doing this would be to limit the support provided to yeshiva students to three years (the same number of years for which men are obligated to serve in the Israeli army), which would compel yeshiva students to enter the work market. This model would lead more people to military service without creating confrontations, and presumably constitute a mechanism that is better suited for the State of Israel and the IDF alike.