Review Essay

Israel’s National Security Doctrine: An Appraisal of the Past and a Vision of the Future

DAVID RODMAN


The basic national security interests of all states include the defence of their territorial integrity, the furtherance of their economic prosperity, and the preservation of their unique values, symbols and institutions – that is, the preservation of their unique identities. To protect these national security interests, all states employ a wide variety of means. They establish diplomatic ties with other states in order to advance their political agendas. They enter into trade agreements with other states in order to promote their economic goals. And, of course, they build armies to protect their physical and cultural assets. Many also choose to join alliances or form patron-client relationships in order to boost their internal military capabilities by supplementing them with those of allies, patrons or clients.

Not all states, of course, are equally concerned about their national security interests. States that enjoy a placid existence, not surprisingly, are generally less obsessed about these interests than states that are burdened
with a turbulent existence. To put it another way, states that are largely free of grave internal or external threats – for example, Norway or Denmark – can afford to be less wary about their national security interests than states that routinely face such threats – for example, India or Pakistan.

Though Israel has never been plagued by serious internal threats, it has certainly wrestled with severe external threats throughout its entire history. It has fought no less than six full-scale wars with its Arab neighbours: the 1948–49 War of Independence; the 1956 Sinai Campaign; the 1967 Six-Day War; the 1969–70 War of Attrition; the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the 1982 Lebanon War. Israel has also been involved in almost constant low-intensity conflict with both Arab states and non-state actors, like the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Hizbullah, throughout its lifetime. Moreover, particularly during the past two decades, it has had to come to grips with the fact that a number of its enemies possess weapons of mass destruction.

Israel has known, too, that Arab (and radical Islamist) warfare has historically been intended not only to damage its specific national security interests in the short run, but also to destroy the state itself in the long run. Indeed, it is probably the only state in the international system whose most basic right – its right to exist – has traditionally been disputed by its enemies. For this reason, it is not hard to understand why Israel has always been extremely concerned about its national security interests.

Israel, however, has not articulated an official national security doctrine. Unlike the United States, the Jewish State has never formulated a systematic and coherent ‘theory’ of national security. Still, Israel’s answer to its security dilemma has certainly not been haphazard. Rather, its answer has consistently been based upon a set of fundamental concepts whose ‘operationalization’, to be sure, has evolved over the years to accord with the state’s changing environment and experiences. For the sake of analysis, these concepts can be labelled as follows: deterrence, geography, manpower, quantity versus quality, offensive manoeuvre warfare, conventional versus unconventional threats, self-reliance, great power patronage and regional partnerships.

Three recent contributions to the literature about Israel’s national security doctrine address these concepts, though in decidedly different ways. *Knives, Tanks, and Missiles* concentrates primarily on how the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) as an institution has developed over the course of the state’s history, especially during the last two decades. To this end, Cohen, Eisenstadt and Bacevich examine such topics as the IDF’s operational doctrine, its force structure and its organizational culture. *Continuity and Change in Israeli Security Policy* takes a somewhat broader look at Israel’s national security dilemma. Heller focuses mainly on how changes in the state’s domestic and foreign environments have affected its
ISRAEL'S NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE

approach to national security. Finally, the chapters in Israel’s National Security Towards the 21st Century tackle specific aspects of Israel’s national security doctrine in depth, especially those associated with manpower, quantity versus quality and conventional versus unconventional threats. Collectively, despite their dissimilar foci, all three works deliver the same underlying message: the national security threats faced by the Israel of today are more diverse than those faced by the Israel of yesteryear.

DETERRENCE

Like most states in the international system, Israel has preferred to protect its national security interests through peaceful means. It has sought, in other words, to deter its Arab (and Islamist) enemies rather than to fight them. Moreover, deterrence has been the preferred option in the realms of both conventional and unconventional warfare. To avoid the use of force, Israel has employed what has been called ‘general’ and ‘specific’ deterrence.  

Historically speaking, Israeli deterrence has concentrated first and foremost on the prevention of full-scale conventional war. The state’s general deterrent posture, as Cohen et al. note, has been to project an image of overwhelming strength. Indeed, Israeli officials have often been quoted as saying that, though its enemies could choose to initiate a war, Israel would determine its scope and intensity. The message to its enemies has been perfectly transparent: the IDF would inflict a defeat of such magnitude that the costs of going to war would outweigh any potential benefits that they could hope to reap through this course of action.

Israel’s specific deterrent posture has been built around the notion of unambiguous ‘red lines’ that, if crossed, would elicit a firm military response. Israel has long made it known, to take one example, that the movement of a foreign army into Jordan would be cause for war – an idea, incidentally, that now has legal sanction as a result of the 1994 Israeli–Jordanian peace treaty. Israel has also long made it known, to take another, that a blockade of its sea lanes would trigger war. The Arab violation of both of these red lines in 1967 explains in part Israel’s decision to launch the Six-Day War.

Israel’s deterrent posture with respect to low-intensity conflict and weapons of mass destruction warfare, to the contrary, has been less precisely formulated. Perhaps the idea of ‘massive retaliation’ captures best its deterrent posture in the arena of unconventional warfare. To deter low-intensity conflict, Israel has consistently promised to retaliate disproportionately against terrorist organizations. To deter the use of weapons of mass destruction, Yiftah Shapir asserts, it has just as consistently promised to do the same to any state that used such arms
against it. To make its threat of retaliation more credible in this sphere, he indicates, Israel has slowly but surely made its capability to wage nuclear warfare more ‘transparent’.

Israel’s warfare-ridden history would seem to suggest, at first glance, that its deterrent posture has not really deterred its enemies – a contention that can be supported with evidence. Israeli deterrence, after all, failed before the 1967, 1969–70, 1973, 1982 and 1991 wars. Furthermore, Israeli deterrence of low-intensity conflict, which has included the execution of prior threats of massive retaliation, has not provided a long-term cure for this chronic irritant. And, yet, the claim that Israeli deterrence has been a myth is far too simplistic. Because it is possible only to discern when deterrence fails – but never when it succeeds – Israel’s efforts in this regard can easily be portrayed as an abject failure.

When one takes into account, however, that the ultimate objective of Israel’s enemies has been – and still is – its complete destruction, and that neither enemy states nor terrorist organizations have ever shown the slightest compunctions about employing whatever violence is necessary to advance this exterminatory agenda, its experience with deterrence starts to appear quite a bit better. Although Israel has averaged more than one major war per decade of existence, one could argue that this actually signals a reasonably effective deterrent posture when one measures this record against the ultimate goal of its enemies. Additionally, no Arab state has initiated a major war against Israel since 1973. Finally, Cohen et al. rightly conclude that enemy states have increasingly emphasized their unconventional warfare capabilities for the simple reason that they have recognized that they do not have a viable conventional warfare option against Israel.

Israel’s deterrent posture against weapons of mass destruction may also be judged as rather effective. Simply put, its enemies have thus far not dared to use weapons of mass destruction against it. During the Gulf War, Iraq did fire ballistic missiles against Israel, but it did not arm them with chemical or biological warheads, despite a capacity to do so. Israel’s threat of nuclear retaliation, it may safely be assumed (even if it cannot be proven), deterred Iraq from equipping its missiles with these kinds of warheads. Furthermore, Shapir describes a number of active and passive measures that Israel has taken over the last decade to defend itself against weapons of mass destruction, including the fielding of a missile system capable of destroying ballistic missiles and the provision of self-defence kits to the general populace, all of which should strengthen the state’s deterrent posture in this area.

Only in the realm of low-intensity conflict does Israel’s deterrent posture seem to have grown more problematic over time. Israel, to be sure, has always been plagued by terrorism and guerrilla warfare; however, its ability to deter this type of warfare has declined noticeably,
especially over the past decade. Its ability to ‘deter by punishment’ – that is, to deter its enemies by inflicting pain and suffering on them – did not work as well in Lebanon during the 1990s as it had in past decades. Despite Operations Grapes of Wrath and Accountability, not to mention constant small-scale incursions, the IDF proved unable to bring Hizbullah attacks under control to the extent that it had been able to limit PLO attacks in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Similarly, Israel’s ability to ‘deter by denial’ – that is, to deter its enemies by physically preventing them from undertaking certain actions – has been heavily undermined by the Oslo Accords, which have permitted the Palestinians to encamp a terrorist army in land formally under the tight supervision of the IDF. The death and destruction inflicted upon Israeli society by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and PLO attacks emanating from Judea, Samaria and Gaza since the early 1990s, particularly since late 2000, serves as a poignant testament to this trend. Israel’s only solace in this regard is that, while terrorism and guerrilla warfare have been quite painful, they do not constitute an existential threat to the state.

GEOGRAPHY

Israel’s national security doctrine has always been heavily influenced by the state’s geographical situation. Though it had been triumphant in the War of Independence, actually acquiring considerably more territory than originally allotted to it under the 1947 United Nations Partition Resolution, Israel nevertheless emerged from the war with troublesome borders. Quite long and largely flat, they could not be adequately defended by the IDF, as shown by the routine ease with which even untrained Arab infiltrators slipped into Israeli territory to inflict mayhem during the early years of statehood. Moreover, Israel had no strategic depth. At its narrow waist, as Cohen et al. emphasize, its width was no more than a mere 14 kilometres; and even in the north and south, its width never exceeded more than a few score kilometres. All of its major population centres, industrial assets and military bases, then, were potentially within easy reach of Arab armies.

Curiously, Heller does not comment on the impact that this geographical situation had on Israel’s early defence planners. Cohen et al. correctly claim, however, that it quickly led them to conclude that Israel could not afford to ‘host’ either a full-scale war or a sustained low-intensity conflict on its territory. A sustained low-intensity conflict, they reasoned, would inevitably result in extensive damage to Israeli society, not only in terms of physical destruction, but also in terms of psychological unease. And full-scale war, they further reasoned, could undermine the very survival of the state. This thinking gave birth to the idea that fighting must be transferred to Arab territory to the greatest
extent possible as soon as possible, certainly in the case of full-scale war.

This idea, in turn, had profound implications for the IDF’s operational and tactical principles, its force structure and its organizational culture (to be discussed under the heading of Offensive Manoeuvre Warfare). Suffice it here to say, as Cohen et al. astutely remark, that Israel’s territorial situation from 1949 to 1967 forms part of the explanation for its emphasis on preventive and pre-emptive war during these years. In contrast to many other states, which have borders that either make it possible for them to prevent invaders from penetrating into their interiors (e.g., Switzerland), or the territorial depth for their own armies to fall back, regroup and eventually expel invaders from their interiors (e.g., Russia), Israel inside its pre-1967 borders possessed neither of these luxuries. Therefore, it fought a preventive war in 1956 and a pre-emptive war in 1967.6

With respect to low-intensity conflict, Israel’s geographical situation from 1949 to 1967 prompted its emphasis on retaliation. The IDF had neither the manpower nor the material resources to mount an effective perimeter defence – that is, to seal the state’s borders against infiltrators bent on murder, sabotage and theft. Thus, Israeli defence planners decided that Israel needed the ‘cooperation’ of its Arab neighbours to achieve and maintain quiet along its borders. Hence, Israel attempted to compel the Arab states to stem the tide of infiltration by inflicting costs on their societies and armies through retaliatory raids.

The outcome of the Six-Day War radically altered the territorial status quo in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Not only had Israel completely pulverized the Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian armies, but it had also captured large chunks of Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian territory. It conquered the Sinai and Gaza from Egypt, Judea and Samaria from Jordan and the Golan from Syria. These territorial acquisitions provided Israel with a measure of strategic depth for the first time in its history. Its major population centres, industrial assets and military bases no longer remained within easy reach of Arab armies or terrorist organizations. Furthermore, despite the extent of Israel’s territorial conquests, it now had defensible borders. Not only did these borders follow militarily impressive topographical obstacles, such as the Suez Canal and the Jordan River, and not only did they incorporate militarily significant high ground, such as the Judean and Samarian highlands, but the total length of the borders had also been shortened.

Cohen et al. rightly comment on the fact that the post-1967 territorial status quo did not fundamentally alter the IDF’s operational or tactical principles. Yet, the new status quo did affect the state’s national security doctrine. Two of the three full-scale wars that Israel has fought in the post-1967 era have been initiated by Arab states, while Israel initiated two of
the three full-scale wars fought in the pre-1967 era. Indeed, the lone
Israeli-initiated war since the Six-Day War occurred across the only border
– the border with Lebanon – where Israel lacked strategic depth, the only
border where its citizens were routinely exposed to terrorist incursions
and artillery bombardment. Israel’s decisions to initiate (or refrain from
initiating) war, of course, have never been made solely on the basis of
military considerations; however, it does appear that the acquisition of
defensible borders and strategic depth in the post-1967 era has curbed, to
a certain extent, Israel’s propensity to engage in preventive and pre-
emptive war.

Israel’s approach to low-intensity conflict, on the other hand, does not
seem to have changed appreciably as a result of shifting borders.
Retaliation as a means of influencing enemy conduct has remained a
central tool for countering low-intensity conflict in the post-1967 era.
And, as far as the proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical warfare
threats to Israel over the past quarter century is concerned, defensible
borders and strategic depth do not confer any particular advantage on the
state, especially given the concomitant proliferation of ballistic missiles in
Arab and Iranian hands. All three volumes reach this latter conclusion,
either explicitly or implicitly.

The primary contribution of the post-1967 borders to Israel’s national
security is that they have insulated the state against a catastrophic reversal
in a full-scale conventional war. In the words of Cohen et al., they have
allowed Israel to ‘trade space for time’. In the Yom Kippur War, the
defensibility and depth provided by the Sinai and Golan ‘buffers’ gave the
IDF the room and the time that it needed to recover from its early surprise
and setbacks. Because the IDF’s regular forces were able to relinquish
some ground, particularly in the Sinai, instead of having to make a ‘life-
or-death’ stand along the frontiers themselves, these forces were able to
wage an effective mobile defence in the north and south until reserve units
could be mobilized and deployed to the fronts. These blocking battles
stabilized the situation on both fronts, and later allowed the IDF to launch
successful counterattacks on both fronts, bringing Israel eventual victory
in the war.

But control of the Sinai, Gaza, Judea, Samaria and the Golan has also
created problems for Israel. For starters, Israel’s conquest of the Sinai and
Golan served as the basis of Arab decisions to initiate the War of Attrition
and the Yom Kippur War. Moreover, mass Palestinian violence from the
late 1980s to the present, as well as terrorism and guerrilla warfare in the
South Lebanon security zone from 1985 to 2000, has called into question
the degree of strategic advantage derived by dominating territory that
contains a hostile population.

Consequently, Israeli national security doctrine, as all three volumes
observe, has steadily moved in the direction of exchanging territory for
formal peace treaties (e.g., with Egypt and Jordan) or informal understandings (e.g., with Lebanon) that are accompanied by acceptable security guarantees, including international monitoring, demilitarized zones, early warning stations, bilateral security coordination and so forth. The decreased emphasis on control of territory as a national security asset also means that, should Israel fight a full-scale war in the future, its aims are unlikely to include territorial conquest, at least long-term conquest. Rather, the IDF is likely to concentrate on the destruction of Arab armies and, perhaps, on the destruction of the economic and political infrastructures of Arab states as a more effective approach to ensuring Israel’s national security interests. Cohen et al. arrive at this conclusion explicitly, while Kober seems to argue the same in talking about Israel’s ‘negative war objectives’ – that is, its probable focus on denying the enemy any gains at its expense instead of making ‘positive’ gains at their expense.9

MANPOWER

In 1948, Israel had a Jewish population of 600–650 thousand people. Collectively, the neighbouring Arab states had a population that numbered into the many millions. From a military perspective, this extreme demographic imbalance, which even mass Jewish immigration would not be able to redress, meant that the Arab states could maintain sizeable professional armies. Israel, on the other hand, could not hope to do so, for an attempt to maintain a large professional army of its own would drastically inhibit the state’s economic development.10

In the wake of the War of Independence, Israeli defence planners decided to overcome this demographic obstacle by opting to turn the IDF into a militia-like army. During peacetime – that is, in the absence of full-scale war – the IDF would consist of a small number of professional soldiers, supplemented by a larger pool of conscripts performing their mandatory military service. These professionals and conscripts would be joined by a limited number of reservists, each of whom would be liable for one to several months of military duty every year, depending on his or her speciality.11 Unless he or she joined up as a professional soldier, each Israeli who had been drafted into the IDF would become a reservist after the completion of his or her mandatory service. Indeed, Israelis once fondly quipped that they were a nation of soldiers on leave for 11 months of the year. Cohen et al. and Heller employ the familiar Israeli phrase of a ‘nation in arms’ to describe this militia-like structure. Whatever label one prefers to attach to this structure, the idea behind it has been to keep to a minimum the number of soldiers in the peacetime IDF so as not to disrupt the state’s economic and social progress.

The soldiers of the peacetime IDF, Cohen et al. relate, have had two basic functions. First, they have been in charge of Israel’s day-to-day, or
current, security. Responsibility for day-to-day security, in the main, has meant dealing with low-intensity conflict, whether border skirmishing with an Arab army or counterinsurgency tasks against a terrorist organization or mob insurrection. Second, they have had to prepare for full-scale war – or, to put it another way, to ensure Israel’s basic security. To this end, they have had to make sure that reserve units, which have always constituted the bulk of the IDF’s warfighting potential, could be quickly and smoothly organized and deployed for battle. Maintaining an efficient mobilization system has been crucial to this endeavour. Readiness for full-scale war has also entailed such tasks as training conscripts and reservists, keeping equipment in usable condition and updating operational and tactical plans.

By and large, a militia-like IDF has served Israel’s national security well. Not only has it done an admirable job of defending the state in both low-intensity conflicts and full-scale wars, but it has also done so without causing long-term economic and social disruption. Still, this elegant solution to Israel’s manpower problem has carried with it a military and diplomatic price tag. Militarily speaking, the IDF experienced a near disaster at the outset of the Yom Kippur War, because its standing forces were too small to stop the attacking Egyptian and Syrian armies at the borders. Diplomatically speaking, once mobilized for war, the IDF must either be unleashed or demobilized in short order. Israel’s economy simply cannot survive an indefinite mobilization, waiting for the often slow wheels of diplomacy to turn. Israel has never had the luxury of time in a crisis.

Though Israel remains committed to a militia-like IDF, signs of change in this regard have been in the air since at least the early 1990s. Senior officers have frequently voiced the opinion that the IDF ought to become a ‘slimmer and smarter’ organization. The precise meaning of this phrase with respect to future manpower requirements is not yet absolutely clear, but it seems to indicate a desire to rely more on professional soldiers and less on conscripts and reservists.¹²

Three major reasons account for the preference for a more professional army. Two are internal to the IDF; the third is external to it. First, as a consequence of both natural growth and mass immigration, Israel’s Jewish population has passed the five million mark. The state, according to senior officers, now has a surplus of military manpower, which suggests to them that the IDF should eventually be able to do without universal conscription. Many officers, as a matter of fact, already profess no longer to be interested in trying to integrate problematic groups in Israeli society, especially ultra-Orthodox Jewish students, into the IDF.

Second, as warfare has become an increasingly high technology affair, it has become increasingly difficult for part-time soldiers to operate and maintain state-of-the-art hardware and software. Although they retain significant reservist elements, several branches of the IDF, particularly the
air force, navy and military intelligence, as Cohen et al. illustrate, have long relied principally on professional soldiers, specifically because of the ultra-sophisticated hardware and software with which they fight. Likewise, the IDF’s special operations units are more professional than in the past, reflecting the more demanding and politically delicate role that they now play in Israel’s defence.

Cohen et al. are correct to conclude that the trend towards an increasingly technology-oriented force structure and organizational culture will accelerate the process of professionalization within the IDF. Demchak agrees with Cohen et al. about the direction in which the IDF is moving, but she is critical of this trend. She argues that, as the IDF moves further and further away from the ideal of mass conscription, it will lose out more and more on the services of a lot of very high quality manpower, which she feels is its most important asset. She is by no means against a slimmer and smarter IDF – she even offers her own model for a revamped organization – she just thinks that it may slim down too speedily and too much for its own good.

Third, the evolving nature of Israeli society has interacted with these changes. While it would be wrong to argue that Israeli society has sunk into a morass of ‘post-Zionist’ self-indulgence and aimlessness, many contemporary Israelis have not been quite as ready as their parents to set aside their own self-interests and personal aspirations on behalf of the community’s welfare, as eloquently attested to by Cohen et al. and Heller. (The latter author, incidentally, sees this greater concern with ‘self-actualization’ as part of a broader tendency in Israeli society towards a more ‘internationalist’ worldview). For the past decade or so, at least until the outbreak of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in late 2000, this attitude had manifested itself in an increasing unwillingness to serve in the IDF on the part of influential segments of Israel’s youth. Aware of this attitude and believing it to be a long-term trend, the IDF has decided to move that much closer towards becoming a professional army that relies largely on volunteers.

Still, one should not exaggerate the rate at which the IDF is shedding its militia-like force structure and organizational culture. Unquestionably, the IDF will retain and rely upon a large cadre of reservists for the foreseeable future – it would still need them if a full-scale war were to erupt. Moreover, the general trend towards individual self-fulfilment notwithstanding, most Israeli youth continue to see army service as an important right of passage into society. Social pressure alone, therefore, would suggest that the idea of mass conscription is not currently in danger of being swept aside. Nevertheless, as high technology ‘force multipliers’, including advanced electronic systems and precision-guided munitions (PGMs) proliferate in the Israeli arsenal, the IDF will probably become somewhat more selective about who it conscripts.
QUANTITY VERSUS QUALITY

The Arab–Israeli conflict has traditionally been characterized by an imbalance of military resources, certainly in the realm of conventional warfare. Simply put, Israel has had – and will continue to have – fewer soldiers and arms than its Arab (and Islamist) enemies. To address the problem of the ‘few against the many’, as Cohen et al. and Heller note, the IDF has consistently sought to achieve qualitative superiority with regard to both soldiers and arms.

Israeli manpower has always been more physically fit, more highly educated and more strongly motivated than its Arab counterparts. Israeli defence planners, who have been aware of this advantage since the birth of the state, have always sought to cultivate Israel’s manpower asset. The IDF has capitalized on this asset in several ways. First, the IDF has long been known for its very realistic and rigorous training, particularly of combat soldiers. The training of pilots in the IAF, to cite just one example, has been judged to be more demanding than the training of pilots in any other air force in the world, not to mention any Arab air force. Second, the IDF has historically placed great emphasis on the selection and training of its combat officers. The meticulousness of the selection process and training regimen of these officers is probably unsurpassed anywhere else in the world. Third, the IDF early on adopted a mode of warfare at the operational and tactical levels (to be discussed under the heading of Offensive Maneouvre Warfare) specifically intended to maximize its manpower advantage.

Arms superiority, on the other hand, is a more recent phenomenon. The ultra-sophisticated arms with which the IDF of today is equipped frequently obscures the fact that, before the Six-Day War, Israeli weapons were generally not superior to – and were often inferior to – those in Arab hands. While the Arabs received rather up-to-date Soviet arms, Israel usually had to make do with secondhand Western weapons. Only in the quality of the arms in its air force, tank and intelligence units could the IDF’s arsenal be said to match those of the Arab states in qualitative terms.

The IDF achieved technological superiority in the air only after the Six-Day War, when the United States began to supply the Israel Air Force (IAF) with America’s frontline combat aircraft. Similarly, the IDF gained technological superiority on the water only after 1967, when the Israel Navy (IN) incorporated the then novel fast missile boat, equipped with an indigenously developed ship-to-ship missile, into its order of battle. In the arena of land warfare, technological superiority would only be achieved in the wake of the Yom Kippur War, largely through local production of arms (to be discussed under the heading of Self-Reliance).

The result of Israel’s persistent quest to achieve and maintain qualitative superiority has been readily evident on the battlefield. Despite
suffering reverses in both full-scale wars and low-intensity conflicts, the IDF has never been bested by any Arab military force. It has been the undisputed battlefield winner in every full-scale war, with the exception of the War of Attrition, which ended in a stalemate along the Suez Canal.\(^{17}\) It has also performed well in defending Israel during periods of low-intensity conflict, even though it has never been able to deliver knock-out blows to Arab terrorist organizations or mobs.

Today, the IDF remains absolutely committed to the notion of qualitative superiority in soldiers and arms. Its vigorous efforts in this area are extensively chronicled by Cohen et al., who refer to this overall trend as ‘Israel’s security revolution’. Arguments to the effect that the quality of its soldiers has declined over recent decades notwithstanding, the IDF’s manpower seems to be as well prepared for war as ever.\(^{18}\) And, technologically speaking, the IDF is perhaps more committed than ever to the idea of maintaining its ‘qualitative edge’ over Arab armies.

This emphasis on quality, however, should not conceal the fact that the IDF’s attitude towards quantity changed after the Yom Kippur War. Its traumatic experience in that war, especially during the first few days, when it incurred heavy losses in men and machines, convinced the IDF that ‘quantity has a quality all its own’. Over the past quarter century, the IDF has grown significantly in size, to the point where its arsenal now contains approximately 800 combat aircraft, 4,000 tanks and 2,000 artillery pieces.\(^{19}\) These figures make its arsenal among the largest in the world. Nevertheless, the commitment to a slimmer and smarter IDF should lead to a reduction in the quantity of arms over time.

**OFFENSIVE MANOEUVRE WARFARE**

It may seem paradoxical that Israel, a state that has never deliberately sought to expand its territory at the expense of its Arab neighbours, has been committed to offensive manoeuvre warfare.\(^{20}\) But the IDF’s embrace of this type of warfare at the operational and tactical levels has been quite sensible.\(^{21}\) To understand why this is the case, it is necessary to see that territorial, economic, manpower, diplomatic and quantitative versus qualitative considerations have all blended together to favour this kind of warfare.\(^{22}\)

Not only has Israel sought to wage wars on Arab territory for the aforementioned reasons (discussed under the heading of Geography), but it has also sought to wage short wars. Its preference for short wars, like its preference for wars on Arab territory, is not hard to fathom. Short wars, needless to say, cause less economic disruption than long wars. Because its economy has been particularly sensitive to the dislocating effects of war, Israel has had a powerful incentive to terminate wars as quickly as possible. Furthermore, the Jewish people’s tragic past, as well as Israel’s
small population, has furnished an equally powerful incentive to end wars quickly so as to keep their human costs to a minimum. Finally, Israel has concluded that terminating wars sooner rather than later reduces the prospect of foreign military and diplomatic intervention on behalf of the Arab world.

Not only has offensive manoeuvre warfare offered an elegant solution to Israel’s territorial, economic, human and diplomatic constraints, but it has also played to the IDF’s military strength vis-à-vis Arab armies. This type of warfare, after all, puts a premium on quality. Based as it is on rapid movement, offensive manoeuvre warfare advantages the combatant whose forces are better trained, better motivated and better commanded. Sheer numbers, on the other hand, have much less of an impact on the outcome of this type of warfare than on attrition warfare.

The IDF’s actual battlefield experience has repeatedly reinforced its commitment to offensive manoeuvre warfare.23 During the last stage of the War of Independence, the IDF routed the Egyptian army, driving it out of the Negev, in an offensive manoeuvre campaign. In its early years, therefore, the IDF built itself around mechanized infantry units of the kind that had defeated the Egyptian army. In the Sinai Campaign, during which Israeli forces again routed the Egyptian army, capturing the whole of the Sinai in just a few days, the IDF’s air and tank units played a conspicuously impressive part. Thus, after the war, offensive manoeuvre warfare in the IDF became synonymous with the primacy of aircraft and tanks.

The spectacular victories of its air and armoured units in the Six-Day War simply reinforced the IDF’s commitment to offensive manoeuvre warfare at the operational and tactical levels. Israel’s acquisition of defensible borders and strategic depth did little to temper the IDF’s resolute focus on this kind of warfare.24 Nor did the reverses suffered by its air and tank forces at the hands of Arab anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons in the opening days of the Yom Kippur War undermine the IDF’s basic devotion to this type of warfare.

To the present day, the IDF continues to advocate strongly offensive manoeuvre warfare; however, it has modified its operational and tactical models in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. One of the more significant changes involves the shift to a more balanced mix of forces – that is, giving previously neglected branches of the army, especially artillery, infantry and engineers, a more prominent role in the IDF’s operational and tactical designs. The IDF, in other words, has reverted to a more conventional and inclusive approach to ‘combined arms warfare’.25 Another of the more significant changes involves a considerably greater reliance on firepower to accomplish military objectives than in the past – a point that both Cohen et al. and Kober confirm. Signs of this new emphasis on firepower became unmistakable by the outbreak of the
Lebanon War. But only in the 1990s, as it digested the lessons of the 1991 Gulf War, did the IDF acknowledge explicitly (if rather quietly) that mobility alone may no longer represent an ideal solution on the modern Middle Eastern battlefield.

Given the 'saturated' nature of this battlefield, where room for manoeuvre has been severely degraded by the vast numbers of weapons in Middle Eastern arsenals, the next war – should there be one – may well see the IDF defer offensive manoeuvre warfare until it has undertaken a brief but very intensive preparatory bombing campaign, using short- and long-range air-, sea- and ground-launched PGMs against Arab military, political and industrial targets. Regardless of who might begin the war, the IDF may first seek to weaken its enemy to such an extent that an offensive manoeuvre warfare campaign could be carried out at low cost to itself. If called upon to fight in the future, the IDF may try to re-fight the Gulf War. It has certainly equipped itself to do so (to be discussed under the heading of Self-Reliance).

Cohen et al. and Demchak rightly contend, in short, that the IDF is currently in the process of re-inventing itself in light of the ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’ (RMA), a concept that places all of its faith in information technology and ultra-sophisticated firepower as the main instruments for waging war. Demchak, to reiterate, is worried that the IDF will go much too far in implementing the American version of the RMA, which she argues is inappropriate for a state that faces Israel’s geographical and resource constraints. Cohen et al., however, convincingly demonstrate that her concern is overdone. They correctly claim that the IDF has historically adhered to a programme of ‘conservative innovation’ – that is, it has not been eager to adopt unquestioningly every aspect of the latest fad in military affairs. A number of reasons, they aver, account for its cautious bent: an organizational reluctance to tinker with what has worked in the past until it proves unworkable; a suspicious attitude on the part of its officer corps towards radically new ideas; an organizational unwillingness to commit scarce resources to reforms that may not bear fruit and an organizational focus on day-to-day security, which leaves precious little time for long-term planning. Thus, while its doctrinal principles, its force structure and its organizational culture will surely continue to evolve in response to its changing domestic and foreign environments, the IDF of tomorrow, Cohen et al. imply, is not likely to become a carbon copy of the United States armed forces.

CONVENTIONAL VERSUS UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS

Israel has been plagued by the threat of both low-intensity conflict and full-scale war throughout its entire history. It has also faced the threat of
ISRAEL’S NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE

weapons of mass destruction warfare for much of its lifetime, ever since Egypt’s use of poison gas in Yemen during the early 1960s. Nevertheless, the relative impact of these threats on Israel’s national security doctrine has changed significantly over time. The most useful distinction to make in this connection is between the pre- and post-Yom Kippur War eras.

In the pre-Yom Kippur War period, Israel’s national security doctrine concentrated overwhelmingly on the threat of full-scale war. Israeli defence planners, to be sure, realised that low-intensity conflict in the form of border skirmishes with Arab states and Palestinian terrorism constituted a chronic threat, one that the IDF had to be prepared to counter. Given Egypt’s supply of chemical weapons, they also took the threat of weapons of mass destruction warfare seriously enough in the 1960s to mount a sabotage campaign against its efforts to build ballistic missiles to deliver these weapons. But, contrary to the threat posed by conventional war, they did not view these threats as representing genuine dangers to the survival of Israel.

The allocation of the state’s defence resources in the pre-Yom Kippur War period illustrates that Israeli defence planners viewed full-scale war as the gravest threat to Israel during these years. True, a small proportion was invested in perimeter defence, in the form of frontier outposts, border patrols, anti-terrorist units and minefields. And, true, a small proportion was invested in the development of nuclear arms (as a weapon of ‘last resort’) and in equipping the IDF with anti-chemical warfare gear. Still, the lion’s share of the resources was invested in the means necessary to wage conventional (offensive manoeuvre) warfare – that is, aircraft, tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery and so on.

In the post-Yom Kippur War era, Israeli defence planners have continued to view conventional war as the principal threat to the state’s survival. That the IDF presently maintains no less than 12 armoured divisions and 4 mechanized divisions is eloquent testimony to this fact. However, since the Yom Kippur War, as all three volumes readily acknowledge, low-intensity conflict and weapons of mass destruction warfare have come to be seen as much more serious threats to the state’s welfare than in the past. The former’s upgraded status initially grew out of the Palestinian intifada of 1987–93 and the rise of Hizbullah in the 1980s. The latter’s upgraded status derives from the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction throughout the Middle East during the past few decades. Indeed, so concerned was Israel by the threat of nuclear weapons as early as the late 1970s that it sent the IAF to destroy Iraq’s Osirak nuclear facility in spring 1981, because it feared that this plant would soon be able to produce weapons-grade material.

The rise of unconventional warfare threats at both ends of the violence spectrum has been reflected in Israel’s defence resource allocations since
the Yom Kippur War. While the state continues to invest the bulk of its resources in preparations for conventional war, more and more resources have been sunk into preparations for unconventional warfare, particularly from the 1980s forward. With the outbreak of the intifada in the late 1980s, the IDF created special operations units specifically dedicated to low-intensity conflict tasks.\textsuperscript{31} It formed Sayeret Shimshon and Sayeret Duvdevan, for instance, for the sole purpose of eliminating Palestinian death squads and terrorist leaders. These mista’arvim (or Arab-masquerader) units have recently seen action again in the latest intifada. Likewise, the IDF formed Sayeret Egoz specifically to wage a counterinsurgency battle against Hizbullah in South Lebanon. The role of IDF special operations units, Cohen \textit{et al.} suggest, is likely to expand even further in the future.

Even more impressive has been Israel’s answer to the threat of weapons of mass destruction warfare. To deter Arab states from employing such weapons, Israel appears to have acquired a large and versatile nuclear arsenal of its own.\textsuperscript{32} This arsenal reportedly incorporates – but may not be limited to – bombs that can be dropped from aircraft, warheads that can be delivered by ballistic missiles and warheads that can be delivered by submarine-launched cruise missiles.\textsuperscript{33} Israel, in other words, now seems to possess a secure ‘second strike’ capability.

With respect to active defence measures, Shapir describes the considerable range of weapons and intelligence-gathering systems (to be discussed, along with ballistic and cruise missile production, under the heading of Self-Reliance) that Israel has developed to defeat weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, since the late 1990s, if news reports are credible, the IDF has talked about building a ‘Strategic Command’, made up of intelligence, air force and special operations units, which would undertake missions far from Israel’s borders, to defend the state against weapons of mass destruction (and terrorism).\textsuperscript{34} Last but not least, passive defence measures have not been forgotten. Shapir describes the creation of the IDF’s Home Front Command after the Gulf War to assist Israel’s civilian population to protect itself against weapons of mass destruction. The rise of unconventional threats, to sum up, has made the IDF into a very different organization from the one that emerged from the Yom Kippur War.

\textbf{SELF-RELIANCE}

Partly in response to the anti-Semitic myth of the Jew as a cowardly weakening and partly in response to the need to defend the local Jewish community against hostile Arab elements, the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish community) stressed the urgency of self-reliance in military affairs. Armed Jews ready and able to use force to protect their lives, property and rights
materialized at the beginning of the Zionist effort. This emphasis on self-reliance would be inherited by Israel.

The concept of self-reliance may be divided into three distinct components: self-reliance in manpower, self-reliance in training and doctrine and self-reliance in arms. On only three occasions has Israel employed the services of foreign military manpower, and on only one of these occasions has this foreign manpower turned out to be important to the state’s fortunes in war. The first – and consequential – occasion occurred during the War of Independence, when Jewish and non-Jewish overseas volunteers, mostly from the United States and Europe, known collectively as Mahal, fought in the fledgling IDF. The volunteers made up a disproportionate percentage of the soldiers in IDF branches that required specialized technical knowledge and skills – branches like the air force and navy. It may be an overstatement to say that Mahal members had a decisive impact on Israel’s triumph in the war, but they certainly contributed out of proportion to their total numbers.

The second occasion occurred during the Sinai Campaign, when Israel requested that France station interceptor aircraft at IAF bases in order to prevent Egyptian air force bombers from hitting Israeli cities. The third occasion took place during the Gulf War, when Israel requested that American- and Dutch-manned Patriot missile batteries be dispatched to shoot down Iraqi ballistic missiles aimed at Israeli cities. The French aircraft proved to be unnecessary, as no Egyptian bombers appeared in Israeli skies. And the Patriot missile batteries provided little more than psychological comfort to the Israeli public, as they were not very effective in destroying Iraqi missiles. In terms of manpower, then, Israel has been almost totally self-reliant.

The same applies in the areas of training and doctrine. A few IDF officers have studied abroad at Western military academies, and a few IDF soldiers have trained abroad with Western armies, the latter primarily in order to learn how to operate foreign weapons systems that would soon be entering the Israeli arsenal. The IDF, however, has always justly prided itself on the fact that, unlike the armies of most post-Second World War states, it has never eagerly sought foreign guidance in the areas of training and doctrine. Everything that the IDF knows about low-intensity conflict, everything that it knows about full-scale war at the operational and tactical levels and everything that it knows about weapons of mass destruction warfare, it learned on its own, often through trial and error. Indeed, Cohen et al. chronicle in great depth how the IDF’s approach to matters of force structure, operational and tactical principles and organizational culture has been a product of its experiences rather than a foreign implant.

Self-reliance in arms, on the other hand, is a more complex story. Israel has always had an arms industry. The Yishuv, as a matter of fact,
manufactured a wide range of small arms and other equipment prior to
the birth of the state. And this arms industry has advanced steadily to the
point where, today, it is as sophisticated as any in the world. Yet, Israel
remains heavily dependent on foreign – that is, mainly American – arms
to ensure its national security. The reason why is to be found in Israel’s
evolving industrial strategy.

Israel has been subject to two damaging embargoes in its history: the
first during the War of Independence, when the United States and Great
Britain stopped the flow of weapons, and the second on the eve of the Six-
Day War, when France – the Jewish State’s main arms supplier in the late
1950s and early 1960s – cut off further deliveries to induce the Israeli
government to forgo military action. Psychologically speaking, these
embargoes reinforced Israel’s quest to achieve as much arms self-reliance
as possible.

From 1949 to 1967, Israel’s arms industry, though limited in scale,
registered some major accomplishments – perhaps none more significant
than the construction of two nuclear bombs immediately prior to the Six-
Day War. In the aftermath of this war, its arms industry made
considerable additional strides by manufacturing combat aircraft and
naval vessels, on top of the wide assortment of ammunition, small arms,
artillery, missiles and electronics that it had already developed.
Nevertheless, the truly explosive growth in the scale and sophistication
of the state’s arms industry would really occur after the Yom Kippur War.

In the three decades since this war, Israel’s arms industry has designed
and manufactured an enormous array of arms – an amazing
accomplishment for a state of its small size. In the arena of space-borne
systems, it has produced reconnaissance satellites and booster rockets. It
has also produced intermediate-range ballistic missiles (the Jericho series)
and submarine-launched cruise missiles, both of which are apparently
capable of carrying indigenously designed and manufactured nuclear
warheads. Moreover, as Shapir notes, Israel’s arms industry has produced
the Arrow anti-ballistic missile system, as well as its accompanying Green
Pine radar unit. Finally, he describes the arms industry’s ongoing efforts to
build even more exotic anti-ballistic missile systems, such as the MOAB
attack vehicle.

In the sphere of conventional weapons, Israel’s arms industry has
designed and manufactured all kinds of electronic systems, including
radar, communications gear, intelligence-gathering instruments, night
vision devices and targeting pods. A broad range of air-borne (e.g., Python
IV, Derby, Popeye, MSOV and Pyramid), ship-borne (e.g., Barak and
Gabriel) and land-borne (e.g., Lahat and Gill) PGMs are in production.
Furthermore, Israel’s arms industry is the acknowledged world leader in
the area of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), building variants for both
intelligence-gathering (e.g., Heron, Hermes and Searcher Mk II) and
attack (e.g., Harpy) missions. The arms industry also produces a broad range of land warfare systems, including tanks (e.g., the Merkava series), armoured fighting vehicles (e.g., Achzarit), artillery (e.g., rockets and mortars), small arms, ammunition and so forth. 39 Lastly, Israel’s arms industry has earned a well-deserved reputation as the world’s leader in upgrading existing weapons systems, everything from American aircraft to Soviet tanks.

Israel has had the resources to design and manufacture all of these products because of its conscious decision, taken in the 1980s, to rely on other states, principally the United States, for aircraft and naval vessels. The Lavi affair of the mid-1980s, when Israel ultimately could not come up with the money necessary to manufacture this locally designed aircraft, cemented this decision. The industrial strategy of eschewing the production of air and naval platforms, of course, is the source of its heavy dependence on foreign arms. Though the Israel of the twenty-first century has the technological knowledge, the industrial infrastructure and the funds required to produce aircraft and naval vessels, it has shown no inclination to do so. Israel seems to have reconciled itself to the notion that, even if it did design and produce aircraft and naval vessels, it could never afford to build the numbers that would free it entirely of dependence on foreign sources of supply.

GREAT POWER PATRONAGE

Perhaps aware that it could never be completely self-sufficient, the state’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, set forth what has become a cardinal principle of its national security doctrine: Israel should always have at least one great power patron. 40 A small state with limited resources, he wisely concluded, simply could not afford to allow itself to become isolated during wartime. To protect Israel's national security interests, he continued, the military, economic and diplomatic support of a great power, preferably the United States, would be absolutely vital.

Israel has always taken Ben-Gurion’s dictum to heart. In each of the three Arab-Israeli wars in which it fired the first shot – the Sinai Campaign, the Six-Day War and the Lebanon War – Israel received either the open or tacit consent of its patron beforehand. In 1956, Israel's patron at the time, France, actually joined it and Great Britain in an attack on Egypt. In 1967 and 1982, Israel secured prior American approval for its military plans. Indeed, great power support has been considered so important that, in the 1969–70 and 1973 wars, as Kober acknowledges, Israel’s military plans were subordinated to American foreign policy interests. The IDF’s use of force in wartime, then, has always been highly sensitive to the wishes of its patrons. 41 Consequently, it has had the
assistance of a great power patron in each Arab–Israeli war, except for the War of Independence.

As a corollary to his dictum about great power support during wartime, Ben-Gurion also advised that Israel never engage a great power in battle. For the most part, the state has followed his advice; however, on a few prominent occasions, it has felt that its national security interests dictated a different course of action. During the War of Independence, the IDF clashed with British forces, most notably near the end of the war, when five Royal Air Force planes were shot down by Israeli air and ground forces.\(^4\) In every Arab–Israeli war from the Six-Day War to the Lebanon War, the IDF engaged Soviet military forces.\(^5\) What is undoubtedly the most famous Soviet–Israeli encounter occurred near the end of the War of Attrition, when five Soviet Air Force planes were shot down in a brief dogfight with IAF aircraft. These exceptional cases, however, had no long-term strategic implications for Israel.

In the future, Israel’s fundamental attitude towards great power patronage is not likely to undergo a change. It will continue to view a strong patron–client relationship with the United States as crucial to its national security interests. Likewise, Israel’s essential attitude towards military confrontations with great powers is not likely to change. It will seek to avoid such encounters to the extent possible without threatening its core national security interests.

REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Israel has consistently sought to forge mutually beneficial relationships with non-Arabs throughout the Middle East. This quest has taken the form of relationships with non-Arab states, particularly Iran and Turkey, and non-state ethnic and religious groups, especially the Kurds of Iraq, Black Africans of the Sudan and Christians of Lebanon. The idea behind this conduct has been that ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’.

With respect to non-Arab states, Israel has established intimate, if secretive, relationships with Iran, Ethiopia and Turkey at different points in its history.\(^6\) Up until the 1979 Islamic Revolution that toppled the Shah’s government and brought a militant Islamist regime to power, Israel and Iran quietly enjoyed a rather wide-ranging politico-military relationship. Israel supplied Iran with weapons and sent military advisors to train the Iranian army. For its part, Iran furnished Israel with oil, and may have partially funded certain research programmes carried out by the latter’s arms industry. Furthermore, the two exchanged intelligence on their common enemies, the Arab world and the Soviet Union. Israel, suffice it to say, derived numerous benefits from its relationship with Iran, and the demise of the relationship following the Khomeini regime’s seizure of power damaged its national security interests.
ISRAEL'S NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE

Much less is known about Israel's relationship with Ethiopia, though the Jewish State apparently managed to maintain ties to both the conservative government of Emperor Haile Selassie and the radical Marxist regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam that displaced it. Israel apparently supplied some arms to Ethiopia, and may have helped to train its army. The main benefit that Israel got from this relationship, at least until it began to show a genuine interest in the welfare of the Ethiopian Jewish community in the mid-1980s, resided in its access to intelligence-gathering facilities in the Horn of Africa, from which it could monitor Arab activities in the area.

The Israeli–Turkish relationship, which has been better documented than either Israeli–Iranian or Israeli–Ethiopian ties, has really blossomed only during the past decade. Before the 1990s, to be sure, Israel and Turkey did share intelligence; however, their politico-military relationship did not go much beyond this realm. In the 1990s, to the contrary, high-ranking Israeli and Turkish diplomats and officers have routinely met openly to discuss national security matters of mutual concern to both states. Israel has sold large quantities of ultra-sophisticated arms to Turkey, providing a much needed source of revenue for the Israeli arms industry. The IDF and the Turkish army have exercised together in both Israel and Turkey. And, it may safely be assumed, the intelligence-sharing relationship between them has tightened. With the blessing of the United States, in short, Israel and Turkey have entered into a de facto alliance, to the great consternation of the Arab world and Iran.

With regard to non-state actors, the results for Israel have been far less encouraging. In the past, Israel has provided both military and humanitarian assistance to the Kurds of Iraq, the Black Africans of Sudan and the Christians of Lebanon in their respective struggles against Arab regimes. Yet, it is difficult to conclude that this 'intervention' in intra-Arab affairs has produced any real benefits for Israel. During the time when Israel helped the Kurds, the latter were unable to threaten seriously the Iraqi government. Nor did the Kurds open a second front on behalf of Israel during the Yom Kippur War. The Black Africans of Sudan have always been far too weak to be of any possible assistance to Israel. And, in the case of Lebanon, Israel's links to the Christians seem to have done more harm than good to the state's national security interests.

Perhaps as a consequence of its past experiences with non-state actors, Israel has been extremely wary of involving itself in disputes within Arab states of late. It seems likely that this trend will continue in the future. On the other hand, as Cohen et al. remark, Israel shows no signs of abandoning its 'periphery' policy. To the contrary, the relationship with Turkey has become a pillar of Israeli national security policy. There are also signs that Israel and Ethiopia have established a solid, if low-key, relationship in the latter's post-Marxist era. And, if a non-Islamist regime
ever does come back to power in Iran, Israel will surely try to establish a relationship with it. Whether a moderate Iran would be open to such a relationship, of course, is another story.

CONCLUSION

Israel’s national security doctrine, as all three volumes attest, has been marked by both continuity and change over the state’s lifetime. On the one hand, Israel remains firmly committed to concepts like reinforcing deterrence through threats of massive retaliation, waging short wars on Arab territory, maintaining qualitative superiority in soldiers and arms, ensuring maximum feasible self-reliance in soldiers and arms, securing the support of a great power patron and establishing regional partnerships. But, on the other hand, Israel’s national security doctrine has also undergone evolutionary change over the course of its history. Although Israel has always expressed a willingness to trade land for peace, control of territory has become a somewhat less valuable national security asset in recent decades, especially as the costs of low-intensity conflict and the spectre of weapons of mass destruction warfare have grown apace. To a greater extent than ever before, Israel now seeks to achieve defensible borders and strategic depth through peace treaties that contain ironclad security guarantees rather than through control of territory.

Similarly, while the IDF is still built primarily to engage in offensive manoeuvre warfare, it has also equipped itself to wage alternative modes of combat, as is shown by its acquisition of an extensive range of ultra-sophisticated PGMs and state-of-the-art electronic systems. Moreover, as the immediate threat of full-scale conventional war has receded, it has devoted more and more resources to countering the rising threats posed by low-intensity conflict and weapons of mass destruction warfare. Cohen et al. aptly indicate that, as a consequence, special operations forces and strategic forces have lately come to occupy a much more prominent place in the IDF’s force structure, operational and tactical principles and organizational culture than they have in the past.

Israel in the twenty-first century may well be in the ‘post-heroic’ phase of its existence. The same may be said of its national security doctrine – a doctrine currently striving to come to grips with domestic and foreign trends quite different from those of past decades. The threats that this doctrine will be called upon to address in the future, as all of the authors strongly imply, may well require less glorious and more dispiriting solutions than in the past. The spectacular air and armoured battles of the previous century may no longer be the defining symbol of Israel’s warfare in this century. If the past is any guide to the future, however, Israel’s national security doctrine will contain solutions that prove up to the task of defending the state’s survival.
ISRAEL'S NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This review article represents a revised and expanded version of my earlier MERIA Journal article, 'Israel's National Security Doctrine: An Introductory Overview'. I would like to thank Stuart Cohen and Barry Rubin for their insightful comments on that earlier article. Any shortcomings in the present article, of course, are entirely my responsibility.

NOTES


2. The term ‘concepts’, it must be acknowledged, is rather vague in this context. In a communication with me, Stuart Cohen has suggested that Israel’s national security doctrine has actually consisted of a set of changing ‘responses’ to a set of changing ‘constraints’ imposed by the state’s evolving domestic and foreign environments. While Cohen’s terminology is clearly superior to mine in its degree of precision, I use the term ‘concepts’ for the sake of rhetorical simplicity.

A few words about the scope of this article are also in order here. First, as suggested by the labels of the headings, this article defines national security in a rather narrow sense. A state’s national security doctrine, in its widest sense, encompasses the totality of those diplomatic, economic, social and military policies that are explicitly intended to protect and promote the state’s national security interests. For the purpose of this article, however, the concept of national security is restricted essentially to the domain of national defence. This article, to put it differently, concentrates chiefly on Israel’s military doctrine. Second, despite the restricted scope of its inquiry, this article cannot claim to offer a comprehensive review of this doctrine. It can claim only to examine, more modestly, the basic concepts that have constituted the core of the doctrine.


4. Further examples of Israeli red lines may be found in Cohen et al., Knives, Tanks, and Missiles, pp.24–5.


6. The fundamental distinctions between preventive and pre-emptive war are those of timing and urgency. A preventive war is undertaken to impede a potential, long-range threat from developing into a tangible, immediate military threat. A pre-emptive war, on the other hand, is undertaken to counteract a tangible, immediate military threat.

While Israel had a number of reasons for going to war against Egypt in 1956, the Sinai Campaign constituted a preventive war in the sense that the Jewish State thereby sought to block the Egyptian army’s ability to upgrade its future combat capabilities. In 1955, it must be kept in mind, Egypt had signed an arms deal with the Soviet Union, using Czechoslovakia
as a convenient front, that provided the Egyptian army with large quantities of sophisticated Eastern bloc arms. Israel did not want these arms to be integrated into the Egyptian army’s order of battle. The Six-Day War, to the contrary, constituted a pre-emptive war in the sense that Israel struck its enemies in order to ward off an imminent military threat to its very survival. Its decision to attack was sparked by the Arab world’s mobilization for war, its intentions to annihilate Israel and the failure of international diplomacy to remove the threat to Israel.

7. The Lebanon War falls into the category of a preventive war in the sense that at least part of the rationale behind Israel’s invasion revolved around terminating Syrian and PLO hegemony there in an effort to reduce what was perceived to be a steadily growing threat to Israel’s northern border.

Admittedly, Israel most likely would have launched a pre-emptive strike at the outset of the Yom Kippur War if not for American diplomatic pressure against such a move. Still, part of Israel’s willingness to absorb an Arab attack stemmed from its belief that the IDF’s control of the Sinai and Golan put Israel in a strong position to defeat an Arab onslaught. Though the IDF General Staff itself favoured a pre-emptive strike, it had also assured the civilian government that Israel would not lose the war if the Arabs struck first. For Israel’s thinking about whether to launch a pre-emptive strike see, for example, Michael Brecher, Decisions in Crisis: Israel, 1967 and 1973, Berkeley, 1980.

8. This statement is not meant to imply that Israel bears responsibility for the outbreak of these wars. Quite the reverse is true. The Arabs began them in efforts to regain their lands without signing peace treaties with Israel, even though the latter had expressed a clear readiness to return most, if not all, of the conquered territories in exchange for formal peace. Additionally, it is quite possible that, in the absence of Israel’s conquests, the Arab world might have seized on some other pretext(s) to initiate wars.


10. A large professional army could also separate itself from civilian society, as has happened in other states around the world, a development that both Israel’s military and civilian leadership have sought to avoid. The IDF, in fact, has always been called upon to assist in the construction of civil society. It has helped, for example, to absorb new immigrants and to harvest crops. Over the decades, its role in building civil society has diminished somewhat, but it still exists to the present day. To get a sense of the IDF’s historical contributions to Israel’s civil society see Tom Bowden, Army in the Service of the State, Tel Aviv, 1976.

11. Unlike most armies around the world, the IDF has always drafted women. Traditionally, they have occupied non-combat support roles; but, today, female soldiers are permitted to serve in combat units. Several women have already begun to serve in elite units, making it into the air force as pilots or navigators and into the navy as combat swimmers.

12. For indications that the IDF does not intend to rely as heavily on reservists in the future as it has in the past see Ron Ben-Yishai, ‘Israel No Longer Relies Solely on the Reservists’, Yedioth Achronot, 13 January 1999 and Arieh O’Sullivan, ‘IDF Plan Calls for Greater Readiness’, The Jerusalem Post, 3 February 1999. These articles were taken from The Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com) and Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.mfa.gov.il) web sites.


14. Stuart Cohen has examined the connection between Israeli society and the IDF in more depth than any other analyst. For a taste of his perspective on this issue see, for example, Stuart A. Cohen, ‘Portrait of the New Israeli Soldier’, MERIA Journal, Vol.1, No.4 (1997).

15. It is not yet clear what impact the latest Palestinian terrorist campaign against Israel will have on this attitude; however, it could well partially or totally reverse this attitude, creating an extremely patriotic generation of Israeli youth.

16. For an exhaustive treatment of how the IDF has cultivated its manpower see Reuven Gal, A Portrait of the Israeli Soldier, Westport, CT, 1986. For a more critical view see Cohen, ‘Portrait of the New Israeli Soldier’.

17. An interesting attempt to quantify the superiority of Israeli manpower in the Six-Day, Yom Kippur and Lebanon wars appears in Trevor N. Dupuy, Understanding War: History and
ISRAEL'S NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE


19. The numbers and types of arms in Israel's arsenal can be found in Shai Feldman and Yiftah S. Shapir (eds), The Middle East Military Balance 2000–2001, Cambridge, MA, 2001. Israel is also reputed to have a considerable stock of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, though no reliable information about numbers is presently available in the public domain.

20. It is possible to distinguish between two broad types of warfare: manoeuvre and attrition. Manoeuvre warfare is characterized by a fast-moving campaign in which army A seeks to penetrate into the rear areas of army B in order to bring about the collapse of army B rather than its total destruction. Attrition warfare, on the contrary, is characterized by a static or slow-moving campaign in which army A seeks to whittle away army B to the point of total destruction. For a more detailed treatment of the distinction between manoeuvre and attrition warfare see John J. Mearsheimer, Conventional Deterrence, Ithaca, NY, 1983.

21. The operational level refers to the way an army arranges and employs its combat branches, such as its air force. The tactical level refers to the way an army arranges and employs its combat units, such as its air force squadrons. On the distinction between the operational and tactical levels of warfare see Edward N. Luttwak, Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace, Cambridge, MA, 1987.

22. The following is not intended to imply that the IDF has never waged any type of warfare other than offensive manoeuvre warfare. Out of necessity, the IDF has had to engage in defensive and attrition warfare at times. It waged both of these kinds of warfare, for instance, during the aptly named War of Attrition.

23. An overview of Israel's experience with offensive manoeuvre warfare can be found in Ariel Levite's Offense and Defense in Israeli Military Doctrine, Boulder, CO, 1989.

24. The IDF did tinker with the idea of static defensive warfare, particularly in the form of the 'Bar-Lev Line', a string of small fortresses built along the Suez Canal to prevent an Egyptian 'land grab' and to give Israeli soldiers stationed at the front a measure of protection. This line, which really had a greater political than military purpose, did not signal a weakening of the IDF's traditional commitment to offensive manoeuvre warfare, however.

25. For a thorough introduction to the concept of combined arms warfare as it was practised in the twentieth century see Jonathan M. House, Combined Arms Warfare in the Twentieth Century, Lawrence, KS, 2001.

26. This new emphasis on firepower, it should be said, has also affected the IDF's response to low-intensity conflict. From the 1978 incursion into South Lebanon, through its battles with Hizbullah in the 1980s and 1990s, down to the recent Palestinian-instigated violence in Israel, Judea, Samaria and Gaza, the IDF has often employed considerable firepower against guerrilla and terrorist targets.

27. Israel's foreign intelligence service, the MOSSAD, assassinated or intimidated a number of ex-Nazi scientists working for Egypt and damaged industrial facilities linked to that state's ballistic missile project.


31. Israel's special operations units, of course, have always played a major role in the state's counterinsurgency warfare efforts; nevertheless, until recently, Israeli special operations units were rarely set up for the explicit purpose of conducting low-intensity conflict operations. Their role in counterinsurgency warfare was traditionally viewed as secondary to their role in conventional wars. For in-depth information on many of Israel's declassified special operations units see the web site dedicated to them at www.isayeret.com.
32. Because Israel has never admitted to the possession of nuclear arms, all of the information regarding its arsenal currently in the public domain must be considered speculative.
33. For this last claim see the newspaper articles about Israel’s acquisition of German-built Dolphin-class submarines at www.dolphin.org.il, a web site dedicated to the IN’s submarine flotilla.
36. Israel has also been subjected to short-term American embargoes from time to time, generally when the United States has been upset with its conduct. But these embargoes have not been meant to harm Israel’s national security, and they have had only a modest effect on Israeli foreign policy.

The French embargo, it is worth saying, had the opposite effect of that intended, as it reinforced Israel’s decision to opt for war in spring 1967.
37. This claim is set forth in Cohen, Israel and the Bomb.
39. To get a sense of the full range of products offered by Israel’s arms industry see Feldman and Shapir, The Middle East Military Balance 2000–2001, pp.170–71. An additional testament to the quantity and quality of these products is the fact that, during the past five years alone, Israel has sold arms to no less than 46 states, including the United States, Germany, Great Britain and China. For a list of Israel’s clients and their purchases see pp.163–70.
40. Aaron S. Klieman, Israel and the World after 40 Years, Washington, DC, 1990 describes and evaluates the basic principles of Israel’s foreign policy, especially as they relate to its national security interests.