



were channelled through an interaction between Israeli sociopolitical culture, highly sensitive to casualties and hesitant to authorize large-scale manoeuvring operations, and its military culture, that is deeply-rooted in the offensive.

The IDF decision to establish the BDA, and the way it conceptualizes and operates its mission, embody the IDF adaptation. The latter responds to the said constraints by preventing border incidents that could escalate into wider confrontations requiring large-scale ground operations, and backs up its offensive doctrine by freeing manoeuvring formations from the burden of “current security” mission to focus on manoeuvre training for effective use in time of war.

To provide an adequate basis for reconstructing the developments of Israeli military doctrine and the role it assigns to border defence, this article employs primary sources, particularly official statements, IDF publications, press reports and semi-structured interviews with retired senior Israeli military and civilian officials.<sup>5</sup> My argument will proceed in four sections. The first section reviews the Israel border mission within the traditional IDF doctrine and organization. The second section identifies continuity and change in the new IDF doctrine and explains the change it has undergone – adopting a minor defensive doctrine alongside the main offensive one. The third section discusses the border mission within the new IDF doctrine and organization. The fourth section concludes.

## **The Border Mission in Traditional IDF Doctrine and Organization**

Military doctrine, understood as the “*fundamental principles by which the military forces guide their actions in support of objectives*”,<sup>6</sup> involves identifying the potential threat, designing a relevant military strategy, and planning to implement this designed strategy, including organizational structure, operational plans, force build-up and training. Offensive doctrines “*aim to disarm the adversary – to destroy his armed forces*”,<sup>7</sup> advocating “*taking the initiative in launching a war (be it expansionist, preventive or pre-emptive), and conducting the war on (or transferring it to) enemy territory*”.<sup>8</sup> Defensive doctrines “*aim to deny an adversary the objective that he seeks*”,<sup>9</sup> “*rul[ing] out any initiation of hostilities and strictly confines one’s combat to the defence of one’s own territory*”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> These interviews were conducted with Major General (ret.) Gershon Hacoheh, former Commander of the IDF National Security College (Tel Aviv, May 10, 2017), Dr. Eado Hecht, Defense Analyst at the Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies (BESA Centre), Bar-Ilan University, and Dr. Eitan Shamir (formerly in charge of the National Security Doctrine Department at the Ministry of Strategic Affairs, Office of the Prime Minister), Senior Research Associate at the BESA Center (Ramat Gan, June 19, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> “AAP-06 NATO Glossary of Terms & Definitions, 2018 Edition”. Available for consultation online at : <https://nso.nato.int/natoterm/content/nato/pages/home.html?lg=en>.

<sup>7</sup> Barry R. Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1984, p.14.

<sup>8</sup> Ariel Levite, *Offense and Defense in Israeli Military Doctrine*, Tel Aviv, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1989, p.61.

<sup>9</sup> Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, p.14.

<sup>10</sup> Levite, *Offense and Defense*, p.61.

Border security is essentially a defensive mission.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it was only natural that it occupied a marginal role in the IDF well-known offensive doctrine. The latter was designed to meet the threat to *bitachon yisodi* (“basic security”) in regular warfare – high-intensity conflicts mostly against State actors that confront Israel with their conventional armed forces. This doctrine – applied by the IDF in the wars of 1956, 1967, 1973 and, to a lesser extent, 1982 and 2006 – involves using a highly-mobile strike force, and focuses on the Air Force and Armoured Corps (designed to engage in aggressive manoeuvre warfare) to swiftly penetrate into the enemy’s rear and achieving battlefield decision. By the latter is meant “*the ability to end the fighting on enemy territory, following significant destruction of enemy forces*”,<sup>12</sup> in order to restore deterrence and prolong the lulls between wars,<sup>13</sup> and thus round out the three-pillar concept – early warning, battlefield decision, and deterrence.

This offensive doctrine was discussed in 1947 but was only approved in 1953. In 1947-1953, Israel had a defensive-offensive doctrine that envisaged the first stage in the war to be a surprise Arab attack. For this, the IDF regular force, as well as Territorial Defence units (*hagmar*, which consisted of trained personnel from amongst each border settlement residents) and Fighting Pioneer Youth (*nahal*) paramilitary units, would conduct a defensive operation to delay the advance of the enemy until the IDF was fully mobilized to launch a counter-offensive.<sup>14</sup>

The border mission was more elaborate in the IDF effort to meet the threat to *bitachon shotef* (“current security”), that is, low-intensity conflict mostly with non-State actors that aim to weaken the resilience of civilian society by means of guerilla attacks, infiltrations, explosives, and attacks on the civilian population – irregular warfare.<sup>15</sup> Operational current security missions (or *batash* in the Hebrew acronym) involved a response combining defence (fences, patrols, observation points, ambushes and the territorial defence array) and offence (raids and targeted operations to damage the forces planning attacks against Israel). In the 1950s, *batash* was strongly linked with *hagmar* whose mission was to defend against infiltrators/ attacks and called for the help of the IDF which had a prepared force to arrive on site.

However, this method moved to the offensive in 1953 with the adoption of “reprisal operations”, not against the villages that sent infiltrators or from which the attackers came,

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, M. Taylor Fravel, “Securing Borders: China’s Doctrine and Force Structure for Frontier Defense,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol.30, n°4-5, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Chuck D. Freilich, “Why Can’t Israel Win Wars Any More ?,” *Survival*, vol.57, n°2, 2015, p.80.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Amiram Oren, Oren Barak & Assaf Shapira, “‘How the Mouse Got His Roar’: The Shift to an ‘Offensive-Defensive’ Military Strategy in Israel in 1953 and its Implications,” *International History Review*, vol.35, n°2, 2013, p.359.

<sup>15</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, Michael J. Eisenstadt & Andrew J. Bacevich, *Knives, Tanks & Missiles: Israel’s Security Revolution*, Washington, DC, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1999), p.71 ; Eitan Shamir, “Change vs. Continuity in Israel Security Doctrine : Conceptual Examination under a Changing Environment”, in Ephraim Inbar (ed.), *The IDF’s Small Wars* (Hebrew) (Ramat Gan, BESA, Middle East Security and Policy Studies n°128, 2017), p.14.

but against the States (especially Egypt and Jordan) which supported the attacks.<sup>16</sup> Israel continued “reprisal operations” up until 1967, when the occupation of territories – significantly expanding the borders – required a different approach. In what Eado Hecht calls “suppression and reprisal” policy, a fence was built to prevent infiltrators and if Israel were attacked, the IDF would initiate reprisals in response. The first-ever border fence to be erected was the one on the Jordanian border in 1968-69, *gader ha-maarechet* (“the system fence”). The latter included a fence and patrols supported by *nahal* Kibbutzim, and its operation went in parallel with the pursuit operations in the Jordan valley in the late 1960s. This pattern, with nuances, was repeated later: in the 1970s during the time of the PLO presence in Lebanon until the 1982 invasion, and during the IDF occupation of southern Lebanon and Gaza, as in both cases a fence was built, and if Israel were attacked, the IDF would retaliate; and after the eruption of the Second Intifada in 2000, when Israel started building the separation fence.<sup>17</sup>

Bearing the brunt of *batash* were usually reserve-force territorial formations, each of which, unlike a manoeuvring formation, is assigned to a specific geographical Area of Responsibility (AoR).<sup>18</sup> Territorial brigades are as old as the IDF itself, but territorial divisions were established in the late 1970s where “under each division worked territorial brigades that turned into the centre of knowledge for and control over the different forces in the region”.<sup>19</sup> The mission of a territorial division in its AoR includes conducting *batash*, dealing with territorial defence and commanding the integration of larger-than-brigade forces in both defence and offence.<sup>20</sup>

## Offence and Defence in IDF Doctrine – Continuity vs. Change

The *IDF Strategy* reflects continuity since it has explicitly verified the thus far unwritten tenets of Israel’s security conception, particularly reliance on an offensive concept: “the basic assumption is that the enemy cannot be defeated through a defensive posture. Therefore, it is necessary to use force in an offensive posture to achieve clear-cut military results.”<sup>21</sup> In this, the document states, “the IDF’s order of priorities in principle will continue to be to develop **offensive capabilities** [manoeuvre, firepower and in-depth attacks] before defensive capabilities despite the centrality of defence and overcoming threats to the home front”.<sup>22</sup> This offensive focus was demonstrated primarily in the Multi-Year Plan (MYP) *Gideon* for the IDF force build-up (2015-2020). MYP *Gideon* coined the principle of “differential competence”, that is “clear prioritization for the strengthening of

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Hecht, interview with author.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Oren Abman, “The Territorial Brigade as the Core Formation in the War on Terror” (Hebrew), *Maarachot*, n°402 (Aug. 2005), p.58.

<sup>19</sup> Dani Asher, “A Force Multiplier that Changed Direction: the Divisional Commands” (Hebrew), *Maarachot*, n°471 (May 2017), p.42.

<sup>20</sup> Amos Ben-Avraham & Hadas Minka Brand, “The Added Value of the Territorial Division in Limited Conflict” (Hebrew), *Maarachot*, n°393 (Feb. 2004), p.13.

<sup>21</sup> *IDF Strategy*, p.9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27; bold in the original.

*battlefield-decision formations over field and territorial formations*".<sup>23</sup> Other notable demonstrations include the establishment of the new 89<sup>th</sup> Commando Brigade (unifying the four Special Forces units *Rimon*, *Egoz*, *Maglan* and *Duvdevan*), and the intensification of offensive weapons systems procurement, notably the F-35 stealth fighter-bomber.

The document also reflects change because, in recognition of the fluidity of today's warfare, it ended the arbitrary "basic security"/"current security" division, replacing it with the subtle continuum of three functional situations: Routine (including "campaign between wars" – *mabam*, Hebrew acronym for *maaracha bein hamilchamot*), Emergency and War. In Routine, the objective "is to maintain security, deter the enemy from actions against Israel and delay the next conflict as much as possible by covert and overt operations", served by "an ongoing effort to protect Israel to allow its population to lead a normal life (current security operations, border and cyber defense)".<sup>24</sup> According to Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot, the IDF Chief of Staff (2015-2019), *mabam* "is a highly significant task that carries a price tag with regards to the manner in which you utilize the resources and allocate them", for the benefit of "current security".<sup>25</sup>

The document also sanctioned the addition of "protection" as the fourth pillar in Israel's security conception and added the term "defence" – the former refers to defending the home front and the latter refers to defending the forces and front lines – making "protection and defence" a key principle for deploying the IDF force in all four dimensions (land, sea, air and cyber).<sup>26</sup> This is a significant change because, even though the IDF's traditional over-focus on the offensive has been criticized ever since the failures of the 1973 War, it was not until the 1980s that the offence-defence debate re-surfaced between the offence-oriented "traditionalists" and the defence-oriented "reformers".<sup>27</sup> The first "defensive" term to formally enter Israel's doctrinal lexicon, *hitgonenut* ("protection") – as the fourth pillar in Israel's security concept – was suggested by the government-appointed Meridor Commission in 2006 for the growing threat of ballistic missiles and the need to prepare adequate defence against an attack on the home front. The Commission's report, however, was never endorsed by the government.

The document divided the IDF's required core capabilities between offence, defence-offence (in cyberspace) and defence of the borders in the three functional

<sup>23</sup> Gadi Eizenkot, "Multi-Year Plan 'Gideon': Why and How?" (Hebrew), *Maarachot*, n°471 (May 2017), p.9.

<sup>24</sup> *IDF Strategy*, p.19.

<sup>25</sup> *Israel Defense*, "In the cyber field we hold a noteworthy global position" (Oct. 2013), p.13. *Mabam* is defined "an ongoing campaign with a unified logic that knits together diffused employments of limited force of varying magnitude over time and space. It consists of series of special operations against an opponent's valuable military assets and of forceful prevention of acquisition of advanced capabilities. These attacks take place routinely in-between major clashes (that is, 'deterrence operations') (...); [the goal] is to constantly preserve the balance of regional trends in Israel's favor"; Dima Adamsky, "From Israel with Deterrence: Strategic Culture, Intra-War Coercion and Brute Force", *Security Studies*, vol.26, n°1, 2017, p.170.

<sup>26</sup> *IDF Strategy*, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution of Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2010, pp.96-97. See also, for example, Ariel Levite's call for an integrated Israeli defensive-offensive doctrine: Levite, *Offense and Defense*, pp.63-73.

situations, and defence against high-trajectory weapons.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the establishment of the BDA, a clear indication of a defensive doctrine is also “*expressed in the creation of a growing series of obstacles on the ground, air and sea*”.<sup>29</sup> The expansion of the multi-layer missile defence system (fully operational in April 2017), which gives the mission a defensive (Iron Dome, Arrow and David Sling systems) rather than an offensive slant (i.e., the Air Force attacking the missile launching sites), represents “*a real revolutionary change*”.<sup>30</sup>

### Explaining the Doctrinal Change

Existing literature, consistent with the dominant explanation of military doctrine choice based on the balance-of-power theory,<sup>31</sup> has attributed the 1953 IDF doctrinal change – moving from “defensive-offensive” to “offensive-defensive” doctrine – exclusively to structural factors. The latter meant Arab hostility creating “existential threat”, asymmetry in resources and lack of strategic depth. Nevertheless, this scholarly consensus has recently been challenged by archival research showing that the change in 1953, though influenced by the above-noted structural factors, was shaped by other factors as well: cultural (the personal and collective experience of the IDF officers who fought in the 1948 War and shaped the new doctrine) and organizational (as the IDF subsequently increased its influence in Israeli decision-making).<sup>32</sup> The 2015 IDF doctrinal change – adopting a minor defensive doctrine alongside the main offensive one – is no less revealing.

In the case at hand, the change in security environment, the weakening of Arab State actors and the rising asymmetrical threats, especially missile threat, terrorism and cyber, from sub-State actors has been imperative.<sup>33</sup> The *IDF Strategy* clearly identifies the changing characteristics of the operational environment as causes of the change:

In recent years there has been a change in the threat against the State of Israel. Previously, the enemy sought to advance a vision stressing Arab nationalism and aspired mainly to defeat Israel using regular armies, while today the enemy carries a local, ethnic and religious banner and has switched to actions that combine military activities, guerrilla actions, terror, and “soft” warfare.<sup>34</sup>

The document adds, in its April 2018 version, that “*in the last few years and with a view to the coming years, Israel’s strategic position is well-established, with a favourable*

<sup>28</sup> *IDF Strategy*, p. 22.

<sup>29</sup> Oren Barak, “On Military Strategy and Political Idleness” (Hebrew), *Forum for Regional Thinking*, May 10, 2016, <http://www.regthink.org/articles/על-אסטרטגיה-צבאית-ובטלנות-מדינית>

<sup>30</sup> Dr. Shamir, interview with author.

<sup>31</sup> “*Balance of power theory predicts greater heterogeneity in military doctrine, dependent on reasonable appraisals by each State of its political, technological, economic and geographical problems and possibilities in the international political system*”: Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, p.59.

<sup>32</sup> Oren *et al.*, “How the Mouse Got His Roar”, p.371.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Dan Meridor & Alex Altshuler, “IDF Strategy in Light of Security Concept Challenges,” in Meir Elran, Gabi Siboni & Kobi Michael (eds.), *IDF Strategy in the Perspective of National Security* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, INSS, 2016, pp.29-32.

<sup>34</sup> *IDF Strategy*, p.11.

balance [of power] over all its enemies in the region”.<sup>35</sup> As the balance-of-power theory would anticipate, Israel has made a reasonable appraisal of the changing security environment. This appraisal concluded that the Israeli war machine – built to destroy conventional armies – is irrelevant for the new challenges, and therefore moved to a new paradigm that includes periodic large-scale “deterrence operations,” *mabam* and the increased role of defence.<sup>36</sup> The inclusion of defence appears to be typical for Israel as a *status quo* power in whose favour the balance is shifting at a time when technology (especially intelligence and fire systems) makes this option attractive: more effectiveness with less risks to soldiers’ lives.<sup>37</sup>

However, these structural changes are necessary but not sufficient to cause the doctrinal shift. The Arab Spring did crystalize – not create – the changes in the security environment, which have been there for decades. In particular, the Arab uprisings caused a decline in Arab States’ ability to control their territories which could be used by sub-State actors hostile to Israel. Nevertheless, the fading threat of conventional armies and the rising asymmetrical one has already been recognized since the early 1980s when the offence-defence debate re-surfaced in Israel between the offense-oriented “traditionalists” and the defence-oriented “reformers”.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, nothing about the change in security environment necessarily required the switch to adopting a minor defensive doctrine; the IDF had an elaborate offensive orientation since the 1950s, and this could have continued solely.

There must be, therefore, other factors that pushed in the direction of change. For this, cultural theory suggests a few answers. I argue that the changes in the security environment were channelled through an interaction between Israeli political and military cultures. The regional turmoil offered, in the words of Lt.Gen. Eizenkot, “*a strategic window of opportunity, time-span, allowing [the IDF] risk-taking to make the necessary adjustments in its structure and capabilities*”.<sup>39</sup> As such, the Arab Spring has constituted what Michael Desch calls an “*indeterminate structural environment*”, where States have many optimal strategic options, and culture, and other domestic variables, may have a greater independent role in explaining State behaviour.<sup>40</sup>

Cultural theory, developed by Elizabeth Kier, focuses on aspects of political and military organization’s culture, where culture is defined as “*the set of basic assumptions and values that shape shared understandings*”.<sup>41</sup> It predicts the interaction between a State’s political and military cultures to shape the choice between offensive and defensive

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<sup>35</sup> IDF Strategy (2018), p.13.

<sup>36</sup> Adamsky, “From Israel with Deterrence”, pp.167-171.

<sup>37</sup> Dr. Shamir, interview with author.

<sup>38</sup> Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>39</sup> Eizenkot, “Multi-Year Plan ‘Gideon’”, p.7.

<sup>40</sup> Michael C. Desch, “Culture Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies”, *International Security*, vol.23, n°1, 1998, p.169.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Kier, “Culture and Military Doctrine: France between the Wars,” *International Security*, vol.19, n°4, 1995, p.69.

doctrines.<sup>42</sup> In Kier's view, the civilian policymakers hold beliefs about the military's role in society which guide their decisions about the organizational form of the military. These decisions, in turn, establish constraints to which the military responds according to its own organizational culture. Examining France before World War II, Kier has proposed that constraints established by French domestic political culture (the concern that a professional army would turn against the Republic) interacted with the military organizational culture (the impossibility of a conscript army to conduct offensive operations), leading the country to adopt a defensive doctrine.<sup>43</sup> In the next lines, I apply this cultural theory to Israel after the Arab Spring.

On the one hand, the IDF has long developed its own "cult of the offensive," accounted for not only by the above-mentioned factors (lack of strategic depth and organizational imperatives), but also by an ethos emphasizing initiative and improvisation.<sup>44</sup> Deeply-rooted in the offensive, the IDF would not imagine a victory without a battlefield-decision against the enemy. IDF commanders constantly stress the link between ground manoeuvre and victory. In his testimony before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Lt.Gen. Eizenkot stressed that in each campaign "*ground manoeuvring with maximum force and minimum time is necessary to achieve any battlefield-decision and victory*".<sup>45</sup> Similarly, in an interview with *Maariv*, Maj. Gen. Yaakov Barak, CO of the Ground Forces, emphasized that there is no alternative to ground manoeuvre for defeating the enemy, and expected that in the next war the manoeuvre will be conducted swiftly on a large scale.<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, the IDF had to face the following dilemma : offensive, manoeuvre warfare involves a high risk of soldier casualties. Absent "no choice war", however, such casualties cannot be justified to the highly casualty-sensitive Israeli public. The Israeli public's "casualty phobia", itself part of a broader cultural change, has raised the casualty sensitivity of Israeli military commanders and politicians, leading the latter to adopt more casualty-aversion strategies.<sup>47</sup> Maj. Gen. (ret.) Elazar Stern, CO of Human Resources Branch during the 2006 War, asserts that "*excessive sensitivity to human casualties cost the IDF part of the failures in the war in Lebanon. They reported to the chief of staff on every killed soldier and it is hard to conduct a war this way (...) for one or three casualties they would stop a whole battle*". Similarly, according to Brig.Gen. Meir Finkel, Commander of the Dado Centre for Military Studies, "*Israeli society's expectation*

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.67-68.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.71-77.

<sup>44</sup> Shimon Naveh, "The Cult of the Offensive, Preemption and Future Challenges for Israeli Operational Thought", *Israel Affairs*, vol.2, n°1, 1995; Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation*, pp.115-118; Levite, *Offense and Defense*, pp.44-45.

<sup>45</sup> Yoav Zeiton & Itamar Eichner, "The Chief of Staff : Hezbollah suffers from a morale crisis" (Hebrew), *Ynet*, Feb. 22, 2017, <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4926163,00.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Ben Caspit, "Ground Forces Commander : 'A picture of victory? To find them and kill them'" (Hebrew), *Maariv*, Oct. 8, 2017: <http://www.maariv.co.il/journalists/Article-601865>.

<sup>47</sup> Yagil Levy & Kobi Michael, "Conceptualizing Extra-Institutional Control of the Military: Israel as a Case Study," *Res Militaris*, vol.1, n°2, 2011.

of a war without casualties has heavily influenced the IDF combat doctrine (...). It was expressed both in the campaign strategy and in the way the force was deployed, starting from the General Staff level down to the junior tactical level”.<sup>48</sup>

More recently, the Israeli society’s “casualty phobia” was compounded by the evolution of the politicians’ military background and their hawkish agenda; such political leadership is usually better equipped to rein in the IDF in crisis situations.<sup>49</sup> This was the case in the 2012 Operation *Pillar of Defence* and the 2014 *Protective Edge* in Gaza under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (right-wing Likud leader) and Minister of Defence Ehud Barak (a former IDF chief of staff), torn between hawkish goals and an established sceptical and risk-averse outlook.<sup>50</sup> Throughout the 2006-2014 period, the political echelon was repeatedly less able to formulate and provide clear directives to the IDF command.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, a gap evolved between the political and military echelons. According to Col. Avi Dahan, Deputy Commander of the 877<sup>th</sup> “Ayosh” Territorial Division, many IDF commanders who fought in the 2006 War and the 2014 Operation *Protective Edge* estimate that the political echelon’s “fear” to authorize manoeuvre, out of concern about soldier casualties, played a key role in the IDF’s inability in either campaign to achieve battlefield-decision against the enemy.<sup>52</sup> That the IDF command suffers from a lack of clarity in political direction is corroborated by the *IDF Strategy* statement that “when the political echelon decides to use force, it should make clear the goals and strategic conditions necessary to end the conflict”.<sup>53</sup>

As cultural theory would predict, the IDF internalized the constraints set by the society and politicians (high-sensitivity to soldier casualties), through its organizational culture (battlefield-decision victory through ground manoeuvre); the result was adaptation by leading the formulation of the new doctrine in the *IDF Strategy*. It is notable that in this military document, the chief of staff presented Israel’s national security concept, which is an essentially political-strategic issue, because the political echelon constantly avoided dealing with it.<sup>54</sup> The IDF’s ability to impose its view as such is due to Israel’s weak civilian control of the military. The latter is demonstrated in the lack of policy planning and formulation capabilities in civilian institutions (including the National Security

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<sup>48</sup> Cited in Stuart Cohen, “What Explains the Absence of Social Dimension in ‘IDF Strategy?’” in Elran *et al.*, *IDF Strategy*, pp.142-143.

<sup>49</sup> Yagil Levy, *Israel’s Death Hierarchy: Casualty Aversion in a Militarized Democracy*, New York, New York University Press, 2012, p.189.

<sup>50</sup> Dr. Shamir, interview with author.

<sup>51</sup> Kobi Michael & Shmuel Even, “Principles of the Israeli Political-Military Discourse Based on the Recent IDF Strategy Document”, *Military & Strategic Affairs*, vol.8, n°1, 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Avi Dahan, “The Courage to Maneuver” (Hebrew), *Maarachot*, n°470 (March 2017). For more examples on the IDF command’s lack of confidence in the political echelon, see Levy, *Israel’s Death Hierarchy*, p.196.

<sup>53</sup> *IDF Strategy*, p.10.

<sup>54</sup> Amos Harel, “The IDF estimates that the Palestinian arena has the highest probability of a conflagration” (Hebrew), *Haaretz*, Jan. 26, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/premium-1.5766825>.

Council that was established to tackle this problem),<sup>55</sup> as well as the expansion of a strong, informal “security network” made up of acting and former security personnel in State institutions who share common perceptions on Israel security and actively promote them.<sup>56</sup>

The adaptation is manifested in adopting a minor defensive doctrine alongside the main offensive one. Calls for the IDF to adopt a defensive doctrine, partly or wholly, have been voiced since 2012. Then, Col. Eran Ortal, head of the Thinking Team at the Dado Centre for Military Studies, advocated a combined defensive-offensive response to cope with what he described as the turning of the areas bordering Israel into no-man’s lands due to the regional upheaval.<sup>57</sup> Also in 2015, and following the measures the IDF took earlier as explained below, Lt. Col. Nir Yennai, at the IDF Planning Branch, explicitly called for adopting a defensive doctrine, whose elements had *already* been implemented by the IDF in recent years.<sup>58</sup>

The IDF partial shift to the defensive is reflected in the expansion of the multi-layer missile defence system, the building of a series of high-tech border fences, and enhancing border security within the new doctrine and organization. For the purpose of this article, a closer look at these last two aspects is in order.

## Border Fences

In addition to its hesitance to authorize large-scale ground manoeuvres in the wars against Hamas in Gaza, Israel’s political echelon under Prime Minister Netanyahu (incumbent 2009-present) has adopted a policy of “walling in” Israel by building sophisticated fences along the borders with Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. In February 2016, during a tour of the site of the construction of the fence along the border with Jordan, Netanyahu said: “*in the end, in the State of Israel, as I see it, there will be a fence that will encompass all of it (...). In the environment in which we live, we must protect ourselves from the beasts of prey*”.<sup>59</sup>

At the same time, rather than the sole effects of the change generated by the Arab Spring in the country’s security environment, the decision to build these sophisticated fences goes well beyond being a result of the change the Arab Spring inserted in security environment to being a product of Israel’s specific social order. Priority to border protection reflected the Israeli society’s historical concerns over maintaining the State’s Jewish majority, fear of terror attacks and of infiltrators. For instance, studying the barrier fence across the border with Egypt, Simon Falke found that these sociological factors were

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<sup>55</sup> Charles D. Freilich, “National Security Decision-Making in Israel: Processes, Pathologies, and Strengths”, *Middle East Journal*, vol.60, n°4, 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Gabriel Sheffer & Oren Barak, *Israel’s Security Networks: A Theoretical and Comparative Perspective* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Eran Ortal, “The return of Fatahland” (Hebrew), *Maarachot*, n°445 (Oct. 2012), p.7 ; this article was re-published in the inaugural volume of the IDF journal *Bein Haktavim* (Feb. 2014) that was dedicated to examining the emerging border challenge.

<sup>58</sup> Nir Yennai, “A Defensive Doctrine for Israel” (Hebrew), *Maarachot*, n°463 (Oct. 2015).

<sup>59</sup> Barak Ravid, “Netanyahu: we will surround ourselves with fences and obstacles to protect ourselves from the beasts of prey” (Hebrew), *Haaretz*, Feb. 2, 2015 : <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/1.2846684>.

more influential in explaining the wide support this project has received across the spectrum than any objective reality of problems illegal migrants could cause.<sup>60</sup>

Such political and societal consensus on border fences, however, could not have resulted in their incorporation into an integrated border defence system, had it not been channelled through the IDF culture. Not only has Israel's experience with border fence construction been a long one but also, and more importantly, the political echelon's suspicions have coincided with an IDF vision that is more concerned, as discussed below, about an unplanned escalation arising out of a border incident than about a neighbouring country deliberately initiating a war.<sup>61</sup>

Attesting to this nonlinear development is that work on the first of the sophisticated fences built along the borders – the one with Egypt – started in 2010 to prevent illegal African immigrants from entering Israel, though upon its completion in 2013 it turned out to be effective also in defending the borders against terrorism. Similarly, Carcal, the first among the co-ed battalions (later to be assigned to the BDA), was established in 2004 with the aim to integrate women into the IDF combat units ; it brought together a number of companies, the first of which had been established in 2000 by youth movements' volunteers, boys and girls.<sup>62</sup>

In the words of Maj. Gen. (ret.) Hacoheh, “*this is an example of developments on the ground that were initially unconnected, until the IDF command combined these all under a new concept. The fence cannot perform independently, regardless of how much technology it has. Instead, it has to be part of a system that provides patrols, observation and other components that make the whole system work*”.<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, when the decisions to build defensive fences were made, the organizational concept of BDA was probably not yet there, but the fences helped it come into being.

## **The Border Mission within the New IDF Doctrine and Organization Concept**

Enhancing border security has been systematically planned throughout; it trickles-down in the different IDF plans in the last few years, starting from the *IDF Strategy*, as noted earlier, to the *MYP Gideon*, an important component of which is the extension of the *batash* array, embodied in the establishment of the Arayot ha-Yarden battalion in 2015,<sup>64</sup> to the Ground Forces *Yabasha ba-Ofek* (“Land Ahead”) build-up plan.

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<sup>60</sup> Simon Falke, “Betrachtungen zur israelischen Sickerheitskultur am Beispiel der Sinai-Grenze”, in Hans-Jürgen Lange *et al.* (eds.), *Dimensionen der Sicherheitskultur*, Wiesbaden, Springer Fachmedien, 2014, pp.107-108.

<sup>61</sup> Amos Harel, “Israel is fencing off its borders, but even that won't be enough”, *Haaretz*, Sept. 15, 2015: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.675773>.

<sup>62</sup> *IDF Website*, “Carcal Battalion” (Hebrew), <https://www.idf.il/אתרים/גדוד-קרקל/>.

<sup>63</sup> Maj. Gen. (ret.) Hacoheh, interview with author.

<sup>64</sup> *IDF Website*, “All what you need to know about the IDF multi-year plan” (Hebrew), July 21, 2016, <https://www.mitgaisim.idf.il/כתבות/ראשי/כללי/תרש-גדעון/>.

The “Land Ahead” plan, according to Maj. Gen. Barak, includes establishing three main components : the “Gideon” Brigade-Combat Team (BCT) Manoeuvring in Depth, the “Yishuron” BCT Depth & Special Operations, and Border Defence. Following the merger of the Ground Forces Command and the Technology and Logistics Branch (September 2016–ongoing), the final structure would include four main arrays (each under the command of a brigadier general officer): the Border Defence Array (*batash*); the Combat Support Array (e.g., Artillery); the Manoeuvring Arrays (e.g., Armour) ; and the Administrative Support Array (e.g., Medical Service).<sup>65</sup>

Border defence in Routine, ostensibly a small component, occupies a central position in the new IDF doctrine. Based on the experience of the Second Lebanon War – triggered by an abduction operation by Hezbollah that took everyone by surprise, causing a war that ended with no battlefield-decision – the IDF command apparently drew two lessons.

The first lesson is that *the IDF should be given early warning on border incidents, in order to prevent war*. In the words of Lt. Gen. Eizenkot, “*early warning (...) is the need to identify strategic developments and changes, but mainly the need to provide tactical alerts. This is because in the present terminology, a tactical incident such as the abduction of a serviceman can lead to a strategic change within seconds*”.<sup>66</sup> It should come as no surprise, then, that the BDA includes in its organization the Combat Intelligence Force. The second lesson is that *if a border incident escalates to war, then the IDF should be ready to achieve battlefield-decision; for this mission, manoeuvring formations should be given the necessary time and resources*. According to Lt. Gen. Eizenkot, “*there is an understanding among commanders at all levels that it is the reasonable risk management of batash that will enable a significant breakthrough in the readiness for emergency and war*”.<sup>67</sup> The outcome was the MYP *Gideon* force structure:

The Army understood that in order to manoeuvre and achieve battlefield decision, the resources cannot be divided equally among all combat units. Therefore, there should be a prioritization : there will be “Spearhead” Divisions that will receive the majority of the budget in fortification, firepower, technologies and equipment. There will be Territorial Divisions to deal with in-depth defence and offence close to the borders, and there will be the General Staff reserves, and alongside all of this will be the Border Defence Array – small units that will function in routine times as border guard.<sup>68</sup>

That is to say that IDF adaptation was responsive to the political constraints (by preventing border incidents that could escalate into a wider confrontation leading to a

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<sup>65</sup> Maj. Gen. Yaakov Barak, CO of Ground Forces, “Ground Maneuvering and Where We Need to Go” (Hebrew), lecture presented at the Second International Conference for Ground Warfare and Logistics, May 16, 2017, Armored Corps Memorial, Latrun.

<sup>66</sup> *Israel Defense*, “In the cyber field we hold a noteworthy global position”, p.13.

<sup>67</sup> Eizenkot, “Multi-Year Plan ‘Gideon’”, pp.6 and 9.

<sup>68</sup> Alex Fishman, “A Military Revolution” (Hebrew), *Ynet*, July 28, 2016. Available online at : <http://www.yediot.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4834565,00.html>.

large-scale ground operation) and bolstered the IDF's offensive doctrine (by freeing manoeuvre formations from the burden of *batash* missions to focus on manoeuvre training for effective use in time of war).

## Organization & Tactics

The BDA includes the four co-ed light infantry battalions (Carcal, Bardales, Arayot ha-Yarden and Lavie ha-Bik'a), the Combat Intelligence Force, scouts and observation units, the territorial defence array, the commands of regional defence divisions and brigades as well as the civilian forces for settlement defence. Unlike many militaries, the IDF would not employ the BDA as a field formation, but rather as a build-up force. BDA units would be under the operational command of the territorial divisions/ brigades, while the BDA command will be responsible for the build-up of these units. In the words of Maj. Gen. (res.) Hacoheh:

Territorial divisions/ brigades are the "use of force" type or performers, i.e., they are operational formations, while the new BDA is a "force build-up" type or planners, i.e., it is not responsible for commanding combat forces on the ground, but responsible only for their build-up, i.e., concept, budget, planning, training and maintenance. In this, the BDA will work with the territorial divisions/ brigades, not command them.<sup>69</sup>

Former BDA commander Brig.Gen. Mordechai Kahana asserted that BDA battalions "*will be principally responsible for Israel's eastern and southern borders with Jordan and Egypt, respectively*".<sup>70</sup> The "Paran" Territorial Brigade (est. 2018 under "Edom" Div.), including Carcal battalion and Bardales battalion (est. 2015), is responsible for the Egyptian border.<sup>71</sup> Arayot ha-Yarden (est. 2014 under the 417<sup>th</sup> "ha-Bik'a" Territorial Brigade/ Central Command) is responsible for northern Jordan Valley. Lavie ha-Bik'a (est. 2017 under the 417<sup>th</sup> "ha-Bik'a" Territorial Brigade/ Central Command) is responsible also for the southern Jordan Valley. "*By the end of 2018, the IDF aims to have 1,100 soldiers serving in co-ed combat battalions*".<sup>72</sup>

In practice, the IDF has recently completed the assignment of responsibility for all the border areas to territorial formations, with tactics intended to fulfil these purposes.<sup>73</sup> Behind this re-assignment, as assessed by the editor of *Israel Defence* Amir Rapaport in 2014, stands no less than a "conceptual revolution" that separates manoeuvring divisions,

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<sup>69</sup> Maj.Gen (ret.) Hacoheh, interview with author.

<sup>70</sup> Judah Ari Gross, "Co-ed battalions to get new home in Border Defense Force", *The Times of Israel*, Feb. 16, 2017.

<sup>71</sup> Anna Ahronheim, "New IDF brigade formed to protect Israel's borders with Egypt's Sinai", *Jerusalem Post*, Nov. 28, 2018.

<sup>72</sup> *IDF Website*, "The IDF announces its fourth coed combat unit", Feb. 16, 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Remarkable was the 2014 re-assignment of responsibility for the Golan Heights border from the 36<sup>th</sup> "Ga'ash" Division (that includes the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 188<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigades as well as the Golani infantry Brigade), to the newly established 210<sup>th</sup> "ha-Bashan" Territorial Division, that includes the territorial brigades "ha-Golan" and "ha-Hermon".

professionally oriented to all-out war, from territorial divisions, intended to take care of security in areas around the borders.<sup>74</sup>

In 2017, Brig. Gen. Kahana confirmed Rapaport's assessment: *"by setting up a separate Border Defence [Array], the Army hopes to free up additional resources that can be better allocated elsewhere"*. The idea is that the Army can move infantry brigades like Golani, Paratroopers and *nahal*, from the comparatively calm Jordanian and Egyptian borders to more potentially violent areas like the West Bank and Gaza border or the Syrian and Lebanese borders.<sup>75</sup>

Choosing co-ed battalions as the BDA boots on the ground appears to be for the same purpose – freeing resources of male soldiers who are more able to serve in combat units. In an interview with Brig. Gen. Eiran Niv, CO of the Human Resources Brigade in the Ground Forces Command, Amos Harel of *Haaretz* commented that *"giving preference to the spearhead units in the Ground Forces necessitates recruiting more soldiers from sectors that have been insufficiently integrated in the past; enlarging the recruitment of female soldiers, in the Border Defence Array, provided part of the solution"*. According to Brig. Gen. Nir, *"we went up from one to four co-ed battalions. The IDF is a State organization, not a feminist one, and the steps taken aimed at enabling us to fulfil the mission"*.<sup>76</sup>

New tactics were introduced for the BDA mission. The *Jerusalem Post* reported in 2015 that the Gaza Northern "ha-Gefen" Territorial Brigade (under the 143<sup>rd</sup> "Gaza" Territorial Division) *"is employing a new deployment form, based on the idea of territorial defence, rather than mere border patrols"*, including the deployment of infantry, armoured, artillery and intelligence units. These units conduct selective patrols, monitor the fence and operate systems that are designed to detect crossings and tunnels, with the aim *"to respond very rapidly to any surprise attack from Gaza, and gain control of the situation, thereby preventing Hamas cells from infiltrating Israeli communities"*.<sup>77</sup>

Similarly, on the northern front, the 300<sup>th</sup> "Bar'am" Territorial Brigade (under the 91<sup>st</sup> "ha-Galil" Territorial Division), according to the *Jerusalem Post*,

is acutely aware of how quickly a tactical border incident can snowball into war, and it is designed to be able to deal with the initial stages of that kind of escalation on its own, while the rest of the military deploys back-up forces. This readiness did not exist in 2006, when Hezbollah was able to abduct and kill two IDF soldiers during a cross-border raid.

<sup>74</sup> Amir Rapaport, "The objective: to separate between battle-field and current security divisions" (Hebrew), *Israel Defense*, Feb. 23, 2014, <http://www.israeldefense.co.il/he/content/המטרה-להפריד-בין-אוגדת-הכרעה-לאוגדת-בטש>.

<sup>75</sup> Judah Ari Gross, "Co-ed battalions to get new home in Border Defense Force", *The Times of Israel*, Feb. 16, 2017.

<sup>76</sup> Amos Harel, "The war over every soldier" (Hebrew), *Haaretz*, May 1, 2017, p.14.

<sup>77</sup> Yaakov Lappin, "On border with Gaza, IDF quietly reconfigures itself", *Jerusalem Post*, Dec.13, 2015.

For this, the brigade, while focusing on defence, “also allows missions to manoeuvre deep into enemy territory, morphing into all-purpose war formations”.<sup>78</sup>

BDA battalions, according to a senior officer in the Ground Forces, are not expected to assume the central part of the IDF mission on the border, in the sense that “the heart of the regular army” brigades, i.e., Golani, Paratroops, *nahal* and others, will manoeuvre in the enemy’s territory in time of war.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, there are other indicators that the mission of the battalions could be larger than merely observing the borders. According to a senior officer in the Ground Forces Command, “for these four battalions there are already operations plans to fight in the enemy’s territory close to the borders”.<sup>80</sup> A special training of Lavie ha-Bik’a in November 2017 included rehearsing an occupation of positions on the Jordanian side of the border in case of escalation.<sup>81</sup> BDA battalions may also conduct armoured warfare. In December 2017, the first IDF female combat tank operators completed their training and would shortly be deployed within BDA co-ed battalions on the southern border.<sup>82</sup>

Together, the way the IDF conceptualizes and operates the BDA is characteristic of Kier’s argument that “defensive doctrines can also be very effective means of structuring the battlefield”.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, the tactics used are indicative of the return of the pre-1953 IDF defensive-offensive doctrine in two ways: (1) territorial formations play both the *batash* role, by their BDA battalions, and the “basic security” role of *hagmar* in repelling the enemy attack until the IDF is mobilized; and (2) “reprisal operations” target only the responsible sources and not the political entity governing the area.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

This article shows how the shift in Israel’s military doctrine is reflected in the military role of the border mission. It argues that the IDF decision in 2017 to establish the BDA fits within an overall organizational change. The latter, in turn, is the product of doctrinal change in the IDF, introducing a minor defensive doctrine alongside the main offensive doctrine, as expressed in the 2015 *IDF Strategy*, which added the element of “protection” to the established pillars of the Israeli security conception.

The article has reported two important findings. First, the Arab Spring, that crystallized the evolving change of security environment since the late 1980s in the fading

<sup>78</sup> Yaakov Lappin, “The IDF is ready for another conflict with Hezbollah at a moment’s notice,” *Jerusalem Post*, June 13, 2016.

<sup>79</sup> Or Heller, “Lines of the image of a new female fighter in the IDF” (Hebrew), *Israel Defense*, Feb. 17, 2017, <http://www.israeldefense.co.il/he/node/28587>.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *IDF Website*, “A glimpse into the special training of Lavie ha-Bik’a” (Hebrew), Nov. 14, 2017, [www.idf.il/אתרים/גדוד-לביא-הבקעה/תעלות-מוצבי-קו-המים/](http://www.idf.il/אתרים/גדוד-לביא-הבקעה/תעלות-מוצבי-קו-המים/).

<sup>82</sup> *IDF Website*, “For the first time, 13 Border Defense Array female combat tank operators completed their course” (Hebrew), Dec. 5, 2017, [www.idf.il/אתרים/חיל-השריון/טקס-לוחמות-טנקים/](http://www.idf.il/אתרים/חיל-השריון/טקס-לוחמות-טנקים/).

<sup>83</sup> Kier, “Culture and Military Doctrine”, p.88.

<sup>84</sup> Dr. Hecht, interview with author.

threat of Arab conventional armies, was imperative, as it offered a strategic “time span” window of opportunity. However, these structural changes were channelled through an interaction between Israel’s political and military cultures to result in the partial shift to the defensive. This finding supports the argument that the addition of domestic-level variables improves the accuracy of systemic explanations in indeterminate structural environments.<sup>85</sup> My argument does not exclude structural factors, which primarily influence the change, but rather explains the way this change is shaped by culture.

The IDF had to face the following dilemma: offensive, manoeuvre warfare requires taking high risks of soldier casualties, but these can be justified neither to the highly casualty-sensitive Israeli public nor to the political echelon hesitant to authorize large-scale manoeuvre. Responding to these constraints through its own culture, the IDF adapted in a way that responds to the political constraints (by preventing border incidents that could escalate to a wider confrontation requiring a large-scale ground operation) and backs its offensive doctrine (by freeing manoeuvring formations from the burden of *batash* mission to focus on manoeuvre training for effective use in time of war).

Second, border defence, rather than being a mere tactical change, occupies a central position in the new IDF doctrine. Based on the experience of the Second Lebanon War – triggered by Hezbollah’s abduction operation, an event that surprised Israel as a tactical incident with strategic implications, causing a war that ended with no battlefield decision – the IDF command apparently drew two lessons: (1) the IDF should be given early warning on such incidents, in order to prevent war ; and (2) if an incident escalates to war, then the IDF should be ready to achieve battlefield decision ; for this mission, the battlefield-decision formations should be given the necessary time and resources.

The ensuing organizational and tactical changes corresponded precisely to this political-military interaction. Systematically planned, enhancing border security trickled down in the IDF plans, starting from the *IDF Strategy*, to the *MYP Gideon*, to the Ground Forces “Land Ahead” build-up plan. The BDA, combining the co-ed light infantry battalions and the Combat Intelligence Force, would observe the borders, serving as the frontline of territorial brigades/divisions that have assumed responsibility for all border areas, relieving the manoeuvring formations of this burden to give them time and resources to prepare for manoeuvre in case of war. In turn, territorial formations would deal, in case of attack, with in-depth defence and offence close to the borders, until the manoeuvring formations take over. This finding suggests a return to the pre-1953 IDF defensive-offensive doctrine, both in the role of territorial formations and in “reprisal operations”, targeting only the responsible sources and not the political entity governing the area.

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<sup>85</sup> Desch, “Culture Clash”, *op.cit.*