

A NEW SECURITY DOCTRINE FOR ISRAEL

From Decisive Victory and Cumulative Deterrence
to a Proactive Geopolitical-Power Framework
Backed by Strategic Force Buildup

Prof. Eviatar Matania



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The Misgav Institute for National Security & Zionist Strategy is an independent and non-partisan think tank that advances pragmatic and realistic approaches in Israeli foreign and defense policy, grounded in the values of Zionism. It seeks to strengthen Israel as a Jewish, democratic, united, strong, secure, and thriving state.

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Introduction

The art of war is of vital importance to the State. It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. Hence it is a subject of inquiry which can on no account be neglected.

Sun Tzu

National security is of utmost importance for any state, and the study here deals precisely with that, the national security of Israel. It was written following the events of October 7, 2023, and is now presented in English.

This study focuses on the core of Israel's security strategy, examines its historical doctrine, and proposes a new, updated doctrine. Perhaps for the first time since the establishment of the state, a comprehensive security doctrine is being proposed; a strategy not derived from the historical doctrine or its adaptations, but rather from a contemporary analysis of the foundational assumptions themselves, followed by a logical, methodological, and unbiased derivation to form a complete doctrine.

This study reviews Israel's strengths and vulnerabilities, and the regional and global geopolitical landscape, with the understanding that maximum flexibility and rapid adaptation are necessary given the fast-changing developments we are witnessing and will continue to witness in the future.

The English version of this article is being published after Israel's successful campaign against Iran in June 2025. The reader will easily identify how core elements written in this article were reflected in that historic campaign. It is sufficient to point out two key principles in this context. The first is the principle of prevention – preventing the development of existential or strategic threats to the state. The article's author, Professor Matania, has long promoted this principle, and it has been adopted as one of the core components of the Nagel Committee. The entire campaign was launched for the purpose of preventing the nuclear threat to Israel. The second key principle is strategic reliance on the U.S.

Some of the principles outlined here already are being successfully implemented in practice in certain areas, in light of the events of October 7th. Nevertheless, it is important to document these ideas and encourage a thorough methodical discussion. Writing and open discourse are essential both for developing the most suitable doctrine and for implementing it across all systems and arenas to achieve optimal results.

I trust that this important study will contribute to a safer and better future for Israel and the world.

Meir Ben Shabbat
Chairman, The Misgav Institute

A New Security Doctrine for Israel

From Decisive Victory and Cumulative Deterrence to a Proactive Geopolitical-Power Framework Backed by Strategic Force Buildup

Eviatar Matania¹

Abstract

This article addresses the question of what security doctrine is appropriate for the State of Israel at this time, particularly in light of the events of October 7 and the multi-front war that erupted thereafter. The article seeks to answer this question from a mountaintop perspective, through a comprehensive overview, rather than within the specific context of a particular arena and its current circumstances. To tackle this challenge, the article employs a methodology that delves into the roots of Israel's historical security doctrine — commonly known as the “Three Pillars” doctrine — which remains dominant to this day. It examines the doctrine's foundational assumptions and the strategic environment in which it was originally shaped, assesses which of these elements are still relevant today, and identifies the changes they have undergone. Based on this analysis, a new doctrine is developed from a “Tabula Rasa” standpoint, tailored to the current strategic environment and based upon updated fundamental assumptions.

The newly proposed security doctrine presented here differs from the traditional doctrine in several aspects:

- Strategic geopolitical-power perspective. The proposed doctrine leverages the strengths and capabilities that Israel has developed over the years. These assets allow for a shift from a threat-centric, force-driven approach to one that focuses on the application of power from a strategic perspective. This perspective emphasizes regional competition and Israel's role within the complex framework of the Middle East.
- Strategic technological perspective. Factoring in the global strategic technological environment, as this environment is reshaping international relations. Therefore, the tech environment influences the very formulation of the proposed security doctrine.

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- Arena differentiation. To best address the complexity and diversity of contemporary security threats, the new proposal advocates differentiated implementation tailored specifically to each arena and strategic front. This differs from the conventional unified model that was developed primarily to counter immediate neighboring threats.

The proposed doctrine is composed of ten core principles: five conceptual and five regarding Israel's strategic force buildup. These ten core principles complement each other and function in mutual interdependence to create the new doctrine.

Five core conceptual principles:

1. Prevention of adversaries' strategic threat buildup.
2. Assertive and disproportionate Coercion through constant oscillation between Deterrence and Enforcement.
3. Geopolitical-power approach for managing regional relationships and struggles.
4. Rapid decisive victory in the event of war, while retaining the capacity to sustain a longer war if necessary.
5. Strategic reliance on the United States.

Five core principles of strategic force-buildup:

6. Extensive mandatory military service, alongside high-quality standing army, and reserve duty that is limited to essential training, emergencies, and wartime.
7. Munitions independence.
8. Technological and operational superiority.
9. Redundancy of essential systems and infrastructure.
10. Survivability of essential assets and critical infrastructure.

A. Background and Methodology

For several years, even prior to the October 7th massacre and the subsequent war, numerous voices within Israel's security establishment have argued that the country's traditional Security Doctrine is not necessarily suited to the challenges and threats of the 21st century.² Calls for a shift in the doctrine—accompanied by various proposals for new directions—have grown louder since October 7, 2023. Accordingly, over the past months since then, some have already proposed changes or specific emphases to this doctrine,³ while others contend that no change in the doctrine itself is necessary, but rather a revision in its implementation.⁴

The article presents a completely new Security Doctrine, developed from a “Tabula Rasa” perspective that aligns with the currently valid assumptions and the present strategic environment

The following article approaches this issue through a different methodological lens. Nearly all previous proposals have been rooted in the conventional doctrine associated with David Ben-Gurion (one of Israel's “founding fathers” and its first PM) alongside the various iterations and adjustments it underwent over the years, offering additions, modifications, updates, or different emphases.

In contrast, this article adopts a different path. To determine the most suitable Security Doctrine for the State of Israel in the current era, the article delves into the foundations of the historical doctrine, examining its core assumptions and the strategic environment in which it was developed. It critically evaluates these assumptions, questioning which of them remain valid and identifying changes in the strategic environment that could impact the doctrine. Based on this analysis, the article presents a completely new Security Doctrine, developed from a “Tabula Rasa” perspective that aligns with the currently valid assumptions and the present strategic environment.

The result is a new Security Doctrine that differs on several levels from the conventional historical doctrine and the layers that were built upon it. First, the article proposes two complementary sets of ten core principles: five conceptual principles and five principles concerning strategic force-buildup. Second, the new doctrine is anchored in the strengths and capabilities Israel developed over the years. These capabilities allow for a shift from

2 For example (in chronological order): Shabtai, S. (2010), "Israel's National Security Concept – New Basic Terms in the Military-Security Phase", *Strategic Assessment - A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security*, 13(2), pp. 7–18; Dekel, U. and Einav, O. (2015), "Revising the National Security Concept: The Need for a Strategy of Multidisciplinary Impact", *INSS Insight 733*, The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS); Shai, S. and Mintz, A. (2016), "An Updated Security Doctrine for Israel: Components, Arenas, and Constraints," *IDC Herzliya*, (Hebrew); Freilich, C. (2018), "Israeli National Security: A New Strategy for an Era of Change", Oxford University Press, NY; Eisenkot, G. and Siboni, G. (2019), "Guidelines for Israel's National Security Strategy", *Policy Focus 160*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

3 For example, Bar-Yosef, A. (2024), "Beyond the Iron Wall – What is Missing in Israel's Security Doctrine", *Kinneret Zmora Dvir Publishing*, Israel, (Hebrew).

4 For example, Hecht, A. (2024), "Israel's National Security Doctrine: Insights from the “Iron Swords” War", *Middle Eastern Security Studies*, 208, Bar-Ilan University, BESA, (Hebrew). Shai, H. (2024), "The Revolution in National Defense Policy That Led to the IDF's Defeat on October 7", *Misgav Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy*, (Hebrew).

a threat-driven, force-oriented approach to one focused on leveraging strategic power. It adopts a perspective rooted in regional competition and Israel's position within the complex framework of the Middle East. Third, the new doctrine incorporates consideration of the global strategic-technological environment, which is transforming the foundations of international relations.⁵ This environment influences the very formulation of the Security Doctrine, not just its implementation. Finally, it argues that distinct emphases are required for implementing the doctrine in different arenas, in contrast to the traditional approach, which was designed primarily to confront neighboring adversary states and did not fundamentally differentiate between theaters.

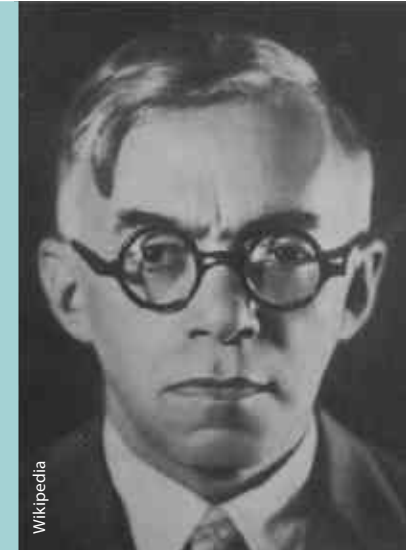
It is important to note that the proposed doctrine focuses exclusively on the core security domain. It does not address aspects of economic or social resilience, nor elements related to maintaining an open and advanced society, academia, or similar areas. Therefore, it does not claim to be a comprehensive national security doctrine but rather—as mentioned—a security doctrine only. However, where relevant, the article touches upon issues situated within the broader national security sphere, such as technological considerations or the impact of the high-tech economy on security policy. Similarly, the proposed doctrine does not aim to delve into the specifics of military force build up, integration, balancing weapon systems, platforms, etc.

The article begins with a concise presentation of Israel's historical Security Doctrine as it was shaped upon the establishment of the state. It reviews its foundational assumptions, the strategic environment in which it was formed, and the major shifts and changes that occurred in this doctrine over the years. From there, the article proceeds to analyze whether, and what, changes have taken place in (1) the foundational assumptions of the Security Doctrine, (2) the evolving threats to Israel, and (3) the shifting of the strategic environment shaping the Security Doctrine, including the global, regional, and technological environments. From this analysis, the article derives the core principles for the proposed new Security Doctrine outlined later in the text.

5 See, for example, Matania, E., & Sommer, U. (2023). "Tech Titans, Cyber Commons and the War in Ukraine: An Incipient Shift in International Relations". *International Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178231211500>

B. The Historical Security Doctrine: The “Three Pillars” in a Nutshell

1. The Iron Wall and the Catastrophic Asymmetry: Basic Assumptions and the Principles of Decisive Victory and Cumulative Deterrence



The Jews are not welcome, to say the least, in the Middle Eastern setting. Therefore, it is essential to establish an "Iron Wall"—both conceptual and physical

Israel’s historical Security Doctrine is based on two fundamental assumptions. The first assumption, as articulated in Jabotinsky’s formative 1923 article “The Iron Wall”,⁶ posits that the Jews are not welcome, to say the least, in the Middle Eastern setting. Therefore, it is essential to establish an “Iron Wall”—both conceptual and physical—between the future sovereign Jewish state and the local Arab population, who oppose its existence.

The second assumption, which underpinned Ben-Gurion’s insights when formulating Israel’s approach to military force-buildup vis-à-vis the Arab states, centers on the existence of catastrophic asymmetry. This asymmetry—regarding territory, population, and resources—favors the Arab states and works to Israel’s disadvantage. This imbalance led to a Security Doctrine asserting that Israel is incapable of achieving an absolute victory over its enemies or conquering them in totality.⁷ Therefore, it will never be able to impose a profound cultural transformation upon its adversaries, one akin to what the Allies achieved with Germany at the end of World War II.

These two fundamental assumptions led to the adoption of the principles of localized decisive victory and cumulative deterrence. First, Israel would develop the capability to decisively defeat its enemies when they attempted to invade or harm it. However, this defeat would be limited to the specific event—it would be constrained in time and place—rather than an absolute victory, which, as noted earlier, is unattainable given the balance of power and the regional geopolitics. As Ben-Gurion stated, “Despite all the efforts we must make, there is no way we can assume that one war will solve the problem.”⁸

6 Jabotinsky’s article “The Iron Wall (We and the Arabs)” was first published in Russian in the *Rassviet* newspaper on November 4, 1923. Hebrew and English versions can be found on the Jabotinsky Institute website. An excellent analysis of Jabotinsky’s article through the lens of a 100-year perspective can be found in Siboni, G., & Bazak, Y. (2023). “A Prophet in His Own City – Jabotinsky’s ‘Iron Wall’ Over Time”, Jabotinsky Institute – Research Center (Hebrew).

7 Ben-Gurion’s statements from 1948, as featured in Yitzhak Ben-Israel’s excellent book on Israel’s Security Doctrine: Ben-Israel, Y. (2013). “The Security Doctrine of Israel”, Modan Publishing and the Ministry of Defense Publishing House, Israel, p. 30. (Hebrew).

8 Ibid.

Repeated defeats of the state's enemies, Jabotinsky and Ben-Gurion believed, or the repeated failure of attempts to destroy the State of Israel, might eventually lead some of Israel's adversaries to despair. This would diminish their hope of achieving Israel's destruction. As Jabotinsky explained, "A living nation compromises on critical, existential issues of great importance only when it has no hope left, when no cracks are visible in the Iron Wall."⁹ In other words, when Israel's enemies experience repeated failures in their attempts to annihilate it, coupled with heavy costs, they may become dissuaded from trying again. Over time, this could create deterrence against continuing efforts to destroy Israel—what is referred to as "cumulative deterrence".

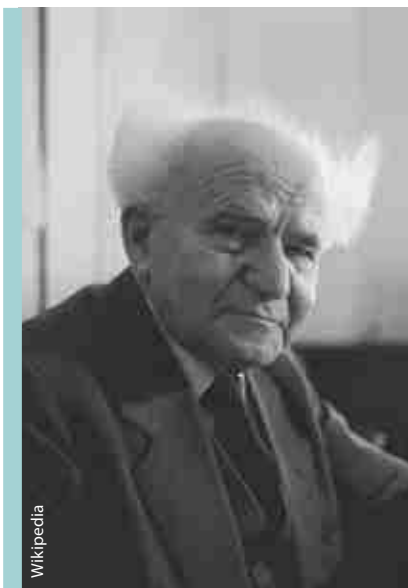
It is important to emphasize that this cumulative deterrence, as formulated in its early stages, was not the classical form of deterrence. That is, it did not rely on the threat of a disproportionately painful retaliatory strike. Instead, it was more akin to deterrence by denial: This form of deterrence undermines the enemy's ability to continue attacking due to repeated localized defeats and the heavy price exacted for such attacks. Thus, cumulative deterrence emerges only after several failed attempts to annihilate Israel. Accordingly, this historical doctrine should be understood as one focused on the application of force for localized decisive defeats, which over time leads to cumulative deterrence. This explanation differs from how some interpreters tend to describe the historical doctrine as one centered on deterrence. Deterrence could evolve into a central concept in the doctrine only after several decisive victories, which then may lead to cumulative deterrence.

To successfully achieve decisive victories against its enemies, **Israel needed to narrow the quantitative gap** resulting from the catastrophic asymmetry in population size and bring as large a force as possible to the battlefield. To this end, **a military service model was developed, based on mandatory conscription ("the people's army" or militia), from which only a small number remain in the standing army.** The standing army serves as the backbone, leading the military and facilitating the integration of reservists, who constitute the majority of conscripts. These reservists are civilians who, after completing their regular service, remain in the reserves until an advanced age. They undergo periodic training and serve as the military's primary striking force during times of war.

Additionally, due to Israel's small size and geographic configuration—factors that result in the constant threat to its population centers, military bases, and infrastructure from enemy forces—**this model incorporated the necessity of immediately transferring the war to enemy territory.** To achieve this, the entire military was required to be prepared to engage in combat immediately upon the outbreak of war. This immediate engagement required the rapid mobilization of the reserve forces, which constituted the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) primary striking force ("Our war power relies... primarily on reserves", wrote Ben-Gurion).¹⁰ These insights underscored the need for significant investment in intelligence capabilities

9 From "The Iron Wall" by Jabotinsky, p 198 in the Hebrew version available on the Jabotinsky Institute website.

10 From Ben-Gurion's review to the government, known as the "18 Points Document." The review is presented in the 1981 issue of "Ma'arachot" – the Israel Defense Forces bulletin: Ben-Gurion, D. (1981), "Army and State, Ma'arachot – The IDF bulletin for military and national security issues, 279–280, pp. 2–11. (Hebrew).



to provide sufficient **early warning** of war to enable the swift mobilization of all reserved forces.¹¹

The combination of these three principles: Decisive Victory, Early War Warning, and Cumulative Deterrence, formed Israel's security doctrine, known as the "**Three Pillars Doctrine**." Although it **was** never formally adopted as a government resolution, it became established through Ben-Gurion's writings and speeches,¹² as well as numerous subsequent works.¹³

However, it is important to emphasize a key distinction between these three principles. The principles of Decisive Victory and Cumulative Deterrence are foundational elements of the security doctrine. In contrast, the principle of Early Warning pertains specifically to the implementation method of the doctrine; therefore, being on the lower military-strategic level.

The combination of these three principles: Decisive Victory, Early War Warning, and Cumulative Deterrence, formed Israel's security doctrine, known as the "Three Pillars Doctrine"

2. Complementary Military and Political Components

The historical doctrine incorporates several significant complementary elements. From a political standpoint, the doctrine has been augmented by the following two key elements: (a) **Reliance on a global superpower, specifically the United States** (from 1967 to the present day), and (b) **Efforts to reach situational understandings and agreements with some Middle Eastern parties**, as part of an attempt to "drive a wedge" between adversaries. Such efforts included alliances with Turkey and Iran against Arab states, and with the Kurds to weaken Iraq. In recent years, this strategy has shifted toward collaboration with moderate Sunni Arab states against the Iran-led Shiite axis. The establishment of long-term peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan has been a key element as well.

In addition to the political elements, two key military components complement the doctrine: (a) Exceptional investment in the Air Force, and (b) Exceptional investment in Intelligence. **Exceptional investment in the Air Force** was driven by three main reasons. The first reason is the Air Force's ability to act almost immediately, even without prior war warning, which may not always be available on time. This was notably expressed by IDF Chief of Staff during the

11 Ben-Gurion emphasized the critical requirement for the rapid mobilization of reserves due to the proximity of Israel's central region to its borders, highlighting it as an important point for implementation (Point 6, Ibid.).

12 Ibid

13 For example (in chronological order): Ben-Israel, Y. (2013), "Israel's Security Doctrine", Modan Publishing and Ministry of Defense, Publishing Division, Israel, (Hebrew); Freilich, C. (2018), "Israeli National Security: A New Strategy for an Era of Change", Oxford University Press, NY. Chapter 1; Amidror, Y. (2020), "The National Security Doctrine of the State of Israel", Dado Center Journal for Operational Art (DCJ) - Between the Extremes (in Hebrew: Beyn Haktavim), 28-30, pp. 19-34. (Hebrew).

1973 Yom Kippur War, who referred to the second day of the war, as “the day of the Air Force”.¹⁴ The second reason lies in the Air Force’s highly technological nature, which provides Israel with an opportunity to establish superiority over its adversaries. Lastly, the Air Force serves as a strategic “pillar” for conducting intensive strikes over long distances—a critical capability for Israel, as some of its enemies are geographically distant. As David Ben-Gurion stated: “Our dominance in the air ensures our victory more than any other factor, and vice versa”.¹⁵ **Exceptional investment in intelligence** was driven by the critical need for early warning.

3. The Major Changes in the Security Doctrine Over the Years

It is possible to identify several changes that have occurred over the years in the traditional security doctrine—some stemming from newly formulated doctrines, and others resulting from de facto practice.

The first change is the successful pursuit of military-technological superiority as a significant tool for overcoming quantitative asymmetry—both as a concept and in practice. It is important to note that as early as the era of Ben-Gurion and the other founding fathers, the qualitative advantage was perceived as a critical response to the quantitative asymmetry between Israel and its adversaries. The use of science and technology during World War II had a profound influence on Ben-Gurion, leading him to embed this approach both conceptually and practically. This was evident in his writings, in enlisting leading scientists from Israeli academia for the national security effort, and in the establishment of the Science Corp (in Hebrew: HEMED) in the newly-formed IDF—the first of its kind worldwide—to promote independent research and development (R&D) for security needs. Over time, HEMED evolved into Rafael, one of Israel’s leading defensive industries today.¹⁶

Nevertheless, in its early years, Israel’s technological capabilities were not ranked highly among the world’s nations.¹⁷ Hence, during the first decades of the state’s existence, much of the “quality” discourse revolved around the quality of human resources—soldiers and commanders—a crucial component in the IDF’s advantages to this day. However, following the Yom Kippur War (1973), and especially



14 Golan, S. (2013), “The Yom Kippur War – Decision-Making in the High Command during the Yom Kippur War”, Modan Publishing, Ministry of Defense – Publishing House, and Ma’arachot – The IDF bulletin for military and national security issues, Israel, p. 356. (Hebrew).

15 From Ben-Gurion’s review to the government in what is known as the “18 Points Document”. See above, Note 10.

16 Bar-El, A. (2009), “The Leader, the Scientists, and the War: David Ben-Gurion and the Establishment of the Science Corps”, Israel, 15, pp. 67–92. (Hebrew); Mardor, M. (1981), “RAFAEL – On the Paths of Research and Development for Israel’s Security”, Ministry of Defense – Publishing House, p. 81. (Hebrew).

17 According to Mardor (Ibid., p. 75), Ernst Bergmann, one of the founders of Israel’s scientific-defense infrastructure, recounted in 1973 that in a conversation with Prof. Chaim Weizmann, Israel’s first president and a world-renowned scientist in his own right, Weizmann argued that “the level of work conducted by HEMED at that stage was not high enough for a scientific institute”. Bergmann later retrospectively agreed with this assessment.

Global technological advancements created a significant gap between Israel's military capabilities and those of its adversaries

from the 1980s onward, the early investments in technological defense R&D began to bear fruit, reflected in the capabilities of Israel's defense industry. Consequently, Israel allocated

increasing resources to building military-technological superiority.¹⁸ To some extent, the acceleration of technological development can be attributed to the "lessons" of the Yom Kippur War, during which Israel lacked clear technological superiority.¹⁹

Additionally, global technological advancements, particularly in computing, played a crucial role. This superiority created a significant gap between Israel's military capabilities and those of its adversaries, especially in conventional army-to-army warfare.²⁰

The second significant shift in Israel's historical Security Doctrine has been the consistent effort to prevent nuclear weapons acquisition by enemy states. This change began as a practical countermeasure—diplomatic and covert—against Iraq's nuclear program. It culminated in a military airstrike on the Osirak reactor near Baghdad on June 7, 1981. This operation evolved into a doctrine known as the "Begin Doctrine," named after Israeli PM Menachem Begin, who led the decision on this precedential strike. The Begin Doctrine was subsequently applied in other arenas with varying degrees of success, such as a major success in Syria or partial success in Iran.

Over the years, the doctrine has occasionally extended to contexts beyond nuclear threats. These were cases where the potential harm to Israel was exceptionally high, while the cost of prevention was relatively low and deemed worth the risk of escalating into war—for instance, Hezbollah tunnels along the northern border. Most recently, this doctrine has been proposed as an additional foundation within Israel's broader Security Doctrine.²¹

18 The shift in emphasis on quality from a focus on the soldier to a focus on technology is discussed in detail by Finkel, M., and Friedman, Y. (2016), "Seven Decades of the IDF's Qualitative Edge: Changes in the Perception of the Nature of the IDF's Qualitative Advantage over Its Adversaries, the Evolution of the Actual Qualitative Edge, and Future Directions", *Dado Center Journal for Operational Art (DCJ) - Between the Extremes* (in Hebrew: *Beyn Haktavim*), 9, pp. 43–66. (Hebrew).

19 The role of the Yom Kippur War in accelerating investments in military technology as a response to asymmetry and challenges in achieving decisive victory is explored in-depth by Matania, E. and Seri-Levy, E. (2023), "October 12, 1973: An Analysis of Strategic Decision-Making Deliberations", *Strategic Assessment - A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security*, 26(3), pp. 5-27.

20 The spiral development of military technological advancements and its transformation into a cornerstone of the IDF's military superiority is analyzed by Matania, E. (2022), "Behind Mandatory Service in Israel: From the Rationale of the Militia to the Rationale of Military-Technological Superiority", *Strategic Assessment - A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security*, 25(2), pp 3-23.

21 A detailed study about prevention as a core building stone in Israel's security doctrine can be found in Matania, E., Bachrach, M. (2023), "Strategic Prevention as the 'Fifth Pillar' in Israel's National Security Doctrine", *Strategic Assessment - A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security – Special Research Publication*, (Hebrew).

Publications advocating prevention with a particular focus on preventing nuclearization in the Middle East, but also in other contexts, have been proposed by researchers such as Shabtai, S. (2010), "Israel's National Security Concept: New Basic Terms in the Military-Security Sphere", *Strategic Assessment - A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security*, 13(2), pp. 7–18, and Shay, S. (2018), "Prevention, Interdiction, and Preemptive Strikes as Core Components of Israel's Security Doctrine", *Background Paper for the 18th Herzliya Conference*, (Hebrew).

Following October 7, this approach has been re-suggested by additional researchers, for instance: Guterman, A., Asa, H., Eisenberg, R., and D.V.D. (2024), "Prevention through Operational Versatility as a Response to Iran's Religious Terror Armies", *Dado Center Journal for Operational Art (DCJ) - Between the Extremes* (in Hebrew: *Beyn Haktavim*), 41, pp. 79–93. (Hebrew).

A trend that has taken root over the past two decades—operating alongside Israel’s Security Doctrine without directly altering it, serving as a sort of “sister approach” for less severe situations—is **the strategy of containment**. In Israel’s early decades, the response to almost any attack was relatively harsh. This was intended to ensure Israel was not perceived as weak and to build cumulative deterrence. However, in recent decades, a new approach has solidified in practice (even without a formal strategic decision, but rather through repeated decision-making processes). This approach focuses on containing the damage, responding proportionally and locally, and avoiding escalation into war.²² The phenomenon of “rounds” of conflict with Hamas is a prominent example of this pattern. This trend has been shaped by the convergence of several factors: (a) A sense of strength and an image of being a deterrent actor in the region, reducing the necessity for aggressive responses; (b) A strategic inertia in adhering to the “rounds” concept, which prioritizes achieving the longest possible pauses between wars; (c) The development of Israel’s economy and other similar transformations that have turned Israel into an advanced state where wars pose greater harm than in the past, prompting efforts to avoid or at least limit them to defined rounds; and (d) Adjusting Israeli policy to align with U.S. policy in the region.



Finally, Israel gradually replaced cumulative deterrence (deterrence achieved through repeated decisive actions) with **deterrence based on the threat of punishment**. This latter form of deterrence relies on Israel’s military-technological strength, various successful special operations and the threats accompanying them. Like all types of deterrence, this form is exceptionally difficult to evaluate. It is impossible to determine whether the enemy refrains from attacking because it is deterred, because it lacks a genuine interest in attacking, or because it is in the midst of preparations for a significant offensive.

Nonetheless, Israel’s political-security establishment “fell in love” with its deterrent image. This image was grounded partially in reality, but partially less so—as became evident after October 7, 2023. Relying on this image, the establishment began interpreting the strategic reality through this lens. In doing so, the deterrent image transformed into a kind of foundational assumption—a concept.²³

Another significant element that penetrated Israel’s strategic-operational outlook—not as a foundational principle of the doctrine but rather as an underlying assumption for military preparation—was **the belief that the era of large-scale conventional wars had come to an end**. This assumption, which remained unchallenged even after the outbreak of the Russia-

22 Further discussion on the gradual adoption of a containment strategy can be found in Aran, A. (2012). “Containment and territorial transnational actors: Israel, Hezbollah and Hamas”, *International Affairs*, 88(4), pp. 835-855 and in Inbar, E., and Bachrach, M. (2024). “Containment – A Troubling Component in Israel’s Security Behavior,” *Dado Center Journal for Operational Art (DCJ) - Between the Extremes* (in Hebrew: Beyn Haktavim), 41, pp. 43–58. (Hebrew).

23 The researcher Amir Lupovici argued that Israel constructed for itself the image of a deterring actor and began interpreting the entire strategic reality through this image, effectively turning it into a conception. See Lupovici, A. (2024), “Israeli Deterrence and the October 7 Attack”, *Strategic Assessment - A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security*, 27(1), pp. 60–80.

Ukraine war, became prevalent throughout the military's thinking. In particular, the IDF reduced its ground forces and ammunition stockpiles, transforming into what could be described as a "special operations army." This shift left the military unprepared: lacking sufficient reserves to manage high-intensity warfare across multiple fronts simultaneously and, most critically, without an adequate supply of munitions. This deficit extended to all the political-security dimensions associated with effective war management.

In conclusion, while no significant formal change has occurred in the core principles of Israel's historical (or "Ben-Gurionist") Security Doctrine—neither through official decisions nor within the prevailing mindset of the Israeli political-security establishment—and although the principle of Decisive Victory has retained its respected position (along with all the components associated with it, such as the conscription model, early war warning, technological superiority as a key element, and more), a "behavioral" shift has nonetheless taken place in Israel's political-security conduct. This shift occurred against the backdrop of the post-Cold War unipolar "American" world order that emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rapid development of Israel, and the absence of any substantial military threat against it. **As a result, the notion of Decisive Victory was effectively "shelved" (until its resurgence on October 7) as the political-security establishment embraced the belief that Israel had evolved into a long-term deterrent actor** (possibly achieving Cumulative Deterrence). Consequently, it was assumed that acts of aggression against Israel would remain limited and manageable.

C. A Contemporary Examination of the Historical Security Doctrine

1. Examining the Core Assumptions from a Contemporary Perspective

An examination of the core assumptions underlying the “Three Pillars” doctrine reveals that almost all of them remain valid today, with just one notable exception: The surrounding environment still opposes the existence of Israel as a sovereign Jewish state (as articulated by Jabotinsky), and there persists a catastrophic asymmetry between Israel and its adversaries (as noted by Ben-Gurion) in terms of population, territory, and the number of countries opposing Israel (relevant, for example, in UN voting patterns).

However, in one significant area, a major transformation has occurred: unlike in the past, Israel today is a strong, Western-style economy – even amidst the disruptions it occasionally experiences. Its GDP surpasses that of any individual country in the region, except for Saudi Arabia and Turkey.²⁴ Consequently, Israel is now able to allocate considerable budgets to security – as a function of policy decisions and prioritization – much more than it could in the past, provided it exercises the necessary caution to avoid economic stagnation.

Moreover, Israel’s economic strength is closely tied to its advancements in science and technology. This includes its cutting-edge scientific and technological research (relative to its size and, in certain areas, even in absolute terms) and its tech industry, which serves as the economic engine of the nation. Currently, this sector accounts for more than half of Israel’s exports.²⁵ This represents an asymmetrical advantage for Israel within the regional system.

This shift in the asymmetry assumption—specifically, the facts that the economic disparity between Israel and its adversaries is not as pronounced as it is in other dimensions, and that the economy is increasingly based on high technology—have two highly significant implications for Israel’s Security Doctrine. **First, a tech-based economy enables the acceleration of Israel’s technological military advantage over its adversaries.** The focus on technological quality as a response to quantitative asymmetry, which has been intensifying over the years, is grounded in Israel’s strengthening economic-technological power. This dynamic not only permits but also justifies continued investment in this path to create a stable, absolute strategic advantage over time.

The surrounding environment still opposes the existence of Israel as a sovereign Jewish state and there persists a catastrophic asymmetry between Israel and its adversaries

24 According to Statista.com, the GDP of Turkey and Saudi Arabia in 2023 were approximately \$1.35 trillion and \$1.1 trillion respectively, whereas Israel’s GDP was a little above \$500 billion (20 largest GDP 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268173/countries-with-the-largest-gross-domestic-product-gdp/>; MENA GDP 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/804761/gdp-of-the-mena-countries/>).

25 According to Israel Export Institute’s 2023/2024 report <https://export.gov.il/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/iei-report-2023.pdf>.

Second, and no less important, from a comprehensive national security perspective, Israel can leverage its tech economy for political-security purposes both regionally and globally.

Regionally, this can take the form of promoting cooperation and partnerships driven by technology, as technology serves as a growth engine in every country, particularly in the nations of the region. Furthermore, in fields where Israel possesses absolute strength—that is,

areas where its capabilities are not only superior on a per-capita basis, but also in absolute numbers and on an international level, such as defense industries, the cyber industry, and, in the future, emerging industries like artificial intelligence and defense technology (Defense-Tech)—Israel can capitalize on its global dominance. This leverage can enhance its international standing and stability in its relations with numerous countries worldwide.

Leveraging its technological dominance enables the exertion of a geopolitical-power approach by fostering partnerships based on Israel's technological strength, thus bolstering its standing on the global stage

However, it is important to recognize that Israel's economy, which, as noted, is advanced and global in nature, is more vulnerable to severe damage during war than the underdeveloped economies of some of its adversaries. In the event of total war, Israel must exercise heightened caution—not only due to the cost in lives and property, but also because of the significant threat such wars pose to its advanced infrastructure and economy, which serve as a cornerstone of its national security. This necessary caution carries with it a security cost.

In conclusion, a shift in the fundamental assumption regarding the asymmetry of resources affecting the State of Israel carries significant implications for its Security Doctrine — particularly in light of Israel's technology-oriented economy. This intensifying trend positions

Israel as a global leader in certain domains. First, Israel can increasingly rely on technology as a key component in establishing its military advantage. Second, leveraging its technological dominance enables the exertion of a geopolitical-power approach by fostering partnerships based on Israel's technological strength, thus bolstering its standing on the global stage.

2. Changes in the Map of Threats

An examination of the current map of external security and political threats facing the State of Israel reveals that these threats are both evolving and multiplying. Indeed, the wars fought by Israel during the first decades of its existence adhered to its historical Security Doctrine, which can be deemed successful in creating cumulative deterrence against the Arab states—both those bordering Israel and those supporting them. This cumulative deterrence contributed, among other things, to the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan. However, the threats have not ceased. Instead of the continuous threat posed by the neighboring Arab armies—now reduced compared to the past but still capable of reemerging—several other major threats to Israel have emerged, either alongside or in place of this traditional threat.

The first threat is the escalating terrorism within the West Bank and Gaza, which requires a fundamentally different approach compared to the methods used against conventional Arab armies. Addressing this threat necessitates distinct military—perhaps even broader security—concepts. This threat is rooted in the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians, which, during Israel's early years, remained secondary as the West Bank and Gaza Strip were under Jordanian and Egyptian control.

The second threat is the increasing transformation of regional states—some of which share borders with Israel—into “failed states” (examples include Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority). In these states, semi-state organizations emerge, leveraging state resources to their advantage. These entities are not merely guerrilla groups operating within state boundaries but, to varying degrees, control portions of state territories or participate in governance. Such organizations, such as Hezbollah and the Houthis, are far more formidable than non-territorial terrorist groups and are highly hostile toward Israel.

The third one is Iran's aspiration to annihilate the State of Israel, pursued through the development of nuclear capabilities and the establishment of power and resilience. This includes advancing military R&D, acquiring long-range weapons, and investing in proxies across the Middle East and around Israel. In this regard, the Iranian threat is interconnected with the other two threats, functioning both independently and as part of a broader hostile landscape.

Another threat, global in nature, is the growing phenomenon of delegitimization aimed at Israel as a whole and/or its actions. This narrative, which evolves over time and shifts according to specific circumstances, has intensified over the years. It tends to flare up prominently during periods when Israel conducts high-intensity operations against its adversaries—Operation “Sword of Iron” serves as a contemporary example. This delegitimization stems from a mix of factors, with varying degrees of influence, including the Palestinian victimhood narrative, modern antisemitism, the association of Israel with colonialism, the prevalence of Muslim-majority countries and their allies hostile to Israel, and their influence within the United Nations. This delegitimization has gained traction in increasingly diverse and expanding circles. Consequently, it exerts influence on decision-makers in states and organizations worldwide, even on those who are fundamentally allies or partners of Israel. Such decision-makers impose restrictions on Israel's actions, diminishing the legitimacy of its operations and responses. This phenomenon has immediate implications during wartime, such as constraints on arms supplies, diplomatic actions against Israel, and other areas. However, its impact is not limited to wartime alone. In peacetime, this delegitimization undermines Israel's ability to take preventive measures against its adversaries, weakens its deterrence capabilities, and, in the long term, negatively affects its economic and diplomatic relationships.

3. Changes in the Global and Regional Strategic Environments and Their Implications

An examination of the global and regional strategic environments reveals significant changes that impact the Security Doctrine.

The global environment, which was characterized by a bipolar structure until 1990 (dominated by the U.S. and the Soviet Union) and subsequently evolved into a unipolar structure (dominated by the U.S.), is undergoing significant transformation. The previous global landscape greatly bolstered Israel's regional strength as the protégé of the leading superpower, which resulted in relatively few substantial challenges to its position. Today—and likely for the coming decades—**the global environment is tri-polar, with the United States, China, and Russia as the key players**. This environment is marked, and expected to remain marked, by a fierce competition between the U.S., which seeks to maintain its dominance, and China, which aspires to become the world's leading superpower. Additionally, the European Union, although not a single state, should not be overlooked. On certain issues, it tends to act collectively as a unified entity. Furthermore, the economic rise of India deserves attention. Within approximately two decades, India is expected to emerge as a global power, projecting not only economic but also political and military strength.

The decline of unchallenged American unipolar hegemony toward a tri-polar power struggle unquestionably represents a loss of strategic advantage for Israel, which has historically been a junior ally of the United States. However, in this tri-polar world, where regional powers are rising, and other global powers are actively interfering in the region, Israel's fundamental values and its democratic nature clearly position it as part of the Western democratic-liberal alliance, led by the United States. This alignment carries positive implications but also imposes certain limitations on Israel. These restrictions stem from the global interests of the United States within this power struggle and from the broader Western approach to such conflicts. On the other hand, Russia and China are seizing the opportunity to support and strengthen some of Israel's adversaries as part of their challenge to American global dominance. This dynamic provides these adversaries with greater political and security backing, as well as expanded freedom of action in the region, especially when compared to previous eras.

The regional environment is also undergoing significant changes. Two non-Arab Muslim states, Iran and Turkey, which were once allies of Israel in its struggle against Arab countries, have over the years become hostile to it—albeit in different ways—and both are actively seeking to establish regional dominance. Iran poses a substantial existential threat to Israel, both through its declared intentions and its actions. Turkey, on the other hand, engages in its conflict with Israel through alternative means, which are no less dangerous in the long term. Addressing Turkey requires Israel to employ a different set of policies and tools, primarily in the domain of strategic competition and conflict management combined with deterrence.

Alongside these dynamics, Saudi Arabia—whose population is only a third of these countries but whose GDP is similar to that of Turkey—is advancing bold steps toward substantial economic and social reforms, moving in a more liberal direction. Time will tell how successful this transformation will be. Meanwhile, Egypt, which was once a regional power, remains so in terms of its military capabilities; however, it suffers from severe economic challenges and appears to be losing its leadership role in the Sunni Arab world to Saudi Arabia.

The regional environment, therefore, presents Israel with risks and competition, alongside opportunities for alliances, agreements, and sophisticated conflict management. In the past, Israel aligned itself with Muslim states like Iran and Turkey against Arab countries. Today, however, some Arab states are the ones forming various types of connections with Israel. Regional relationships and rivalries are likely to continue evolving, requiring Israel to adapt its policies in response to these shifting dynamics. This adaptation must also consider the interests of the West, particularly those of the United States.

Alongside the emerging competition for regional hegemony, we are witnessing an intensification of the process by which states in the region are becoming Failed States – those where central authority has significantly weakened. This is currently the situation in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon, with some concerns also existing regarding Jordan’s future. Failed states provide fertile ground for the rise of extremist forces that gain access to state resources, both physical and diplomatic. Some of these forces are intensely hostile toward Israel and are particularly challenging to deter using traditional state-detering mechanisms. This phenomenon is especially true for extreme religious factions.

To this, one must add the conflict with the Palestinians and the existence of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank as a quasi-failed semi-state entity, as well as Hamas’s rule in the Gaza Strip, which functions as a similar quasi-failed semi-state entity. These are threatening factors that did not exist at the time of Israel’s founding, when the original historical Security Doctrine was formulated.

In conclusion, the complex environment presents Israel with an opportunity to adopt a new approach—a kind of “muscle” it is not accustomed to using: acting as a regional geopolitical-power. This would involve forging alliances, signing cooperation agreements, assisting others, cultivating proxies, and engaging in regional conflicts far more comprehensively than it has done in the past. Accordingly, Israel must develop various assets that it can leverage in regional and global negotiations, both as part of regional struggles and from a global perspective. However, such an approach requires Israel to continue rebuilding its security posture—which was somewhat shaken on October 7 and has been undergoing a recovery process over the past year. This posture must be superior to its surroundings, attractive, and serve as a genuine pillar of support for its partners or the organizations it backs.

The complex environment presents Israel with an opportunity to adopt a new approach—a kind of "muscle" it is not accustomed to using: acting as a regional geopolitical-power

4. The Shift in the Global Technological Environment and Its Implications

Comprehensive advancements in technology, particularly those relevant to military operations, now enable extensive and precise targeting of numerous objectives. For a country like Israel—characterized by its very small geographic size and relatively limited number of critical infrastructures—this represents a destructive capability that was unprecedented in the state's early decades. When considering the vast quantities of these capabilities and the fact that they are accessible not only to superpowers but also to smaller organizations, we are faced with a previously unknown level of risk.

Therefore, it is appropriate to prioritize the principle of preventing the development of high-damage capabilities (not limited to nuclear capabilities) as a paramount objective. This means Israel must endeavor—across all arenas—to preventively obstruct the enemy's force build up through diplomatic, economic, covert, and military means. Naturally, this must be executed while carefully weighing the costs of action (from both military and political perspectives) and considering both internal and external legitimacy for various possible actions, against the potential harm posed by such hostile force buildup if realized.²⁶ Additionally, it is advisable to aim to deter the state's adversaries from employing such weapons by establishing a capacity to inflict significantly greater damage in response. This form of deterrence is primarily relevant when facing states, rather than terrorist organizations. Regardless, it demands substantial force augmentation.

Are technological advancements solely a disadvantage to us? Quite the opposite. The new technological possibilities present numerous advantages for a technology-oriented state such as Israel, enabling it to develop new types of capabilities. However, to leverage the technological opportunities more effectively than its adversaries, Israel's defense establishment must adjust certain aspects of its R&D and production processes. Israel's defense establishment—like most institutionalized military-technological establishments, and particularly when compared to the parallel establishments of Israel's adversaries, foremost Iran—is relatively slow and somewhat expensive. At times, it focuses on procuring high-quality, costly equipment in limited quantities, rather than opting for large-scale procurement of less advanced but cheaper equipment. Consequently, and similar to many other institutionalized militaries, the IDF is exposed to the challenge of attaining a sufficient “quantity of quality.”

Therefore, to fully realize and exploit Israel's inherent technological advantage, it is necessary to enhance and expand the military-technological component. This involves ensuring the integration of doctrines suited to new technologies and implementing changes in force buildup processes to enable faster management. Such adjustments are crucial for maintaining effectiveness in an era of extremely rapid technological advancement.

In this context, new types of capabilities must be established. It is essential to increase “quantity of quality” procurement, meaning the establishment of a significant stockpile of high-quality munitions to fully leverage the technological advantage during wartime. It is also critical to

26 A basic model for evaluating the feasibility of prevention and decision-making regarding it was developed in a document by Matania, E., Bachrach, M. (2023), “Strategic Prevention as the ‘Fifth Pillar’ in Israel's National Security Doctrine”, Strategic Assessment - A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security – Special Research Publication, (Hebrew).

develop innovative technologies to build the capability to conduct a fundamentally different type of warfare—potentially at great distances of thousands of kilometers—not limited to isolated operations. Additionally, **capabilities for the “mass utilization” of inexpensive and miniature systems must be developed**, systems that are poised to revolutionize the battlefield. This can be achieved by “importing” advanced civilian digital technologies that can be quickly and cost-effectively adapted for military purposes.²⁷ Finally, there must be the ability to rapidly adapt existing technologies to emerging needs in a “quick and dirty” manner.



27 “Mass utilization” refers to the deployment of a very large quantity of munitions or means, where the sheer volume itself creates the desired military effect. For instance, the mass utilization of drones to control an entire area, where the individual drone or its loss holds no significance but rather their overwhelming quantity does. For a deeper exploration of digital weaponry that is set to transform the battlefield, see Matania, E. and Berkman, A. (2024), “Digital Weapons: How Global Digital Platforms May Potentially Disrupt the Modern Battlefield”, *Aerospace & Defense*, 1, pp. 85–98.

D. A New Security Doctrine for Israel

1. The Five Conceptual Core Principles

The following are the five core conceptual principles underlying the newly proposed security doctrine. These principles arise from a combination of factors: changes in the foundational assumptions of Israel's Security Doctrine (specifically, Israel's technology-based economic empowerment), shifts in the global and regional strategic environments that underpin the evolving threats and their nature, as well as transformations in the global technological landscape. Together, these factors not only enable but also compel Israel to operate by leveraging the mechanisms of power it has developed over the years in addition to its military force. Each of the following principles stands independently, and collectively they form a unified and comprehensive framework.

The five conceptual core principles start with **Prevention** (Conceptual Principle – C.P. 1). Prevention is a core principle focused on preventing the emergence of threats. *Prevention* is then followed by **Dynamic Coercion** (C.P. 2) – a core principle characterized by constant movement between deterrence and enforcement. These first two principles are aimed at threat removal, aligning with the concept of “turning away from evil.” After them comes the principle of applying a **Geopolitical-Power Strategy** (C.P. 3). This principle focuses on consolidating strategic advantages through the establishment of alliances and the strategic management of conflicts, as part of regional competition and leveraging Israel's unique strengths. If these principles fail to achieve their objectives and Israel is forced into war, it requires the capability for rapid **Decisive Victory** (C.P. 4) as well as the ability to sustain a prolonged conflict. (5) Finally, encompassing all four principles and functioning in reciprocity with them is **Reliance on a Superpower** (C.P. 5), specifically the United States. In today's world, no state can endure without being a superpower itself or being part of an alliance – particularly a state situated in a hostile environment. And now, to a detailed elaboration of these points.

Prevention is not equivalent to pre-emptive strikes or preventive wars (Pre-emption). The intent of prevention is not to strike the enemy before it attacks but rather to act far in advance to hinder the development of its threatening capabilities

Conceptual Principle 1: Prevention – Preventing Adversaries from Strategic Threat Buildup

The first core conceptual principle of the new doctrine is the prevention of force buildup that could pose a significant threat to the State of Israel, including nuclear capabilities and high-damage potential conventional means. This principle arises primarily from the evolving technological environment and the increased destructive capacities of quasi-state organizations backed by revisionist regional powers. It also stems from the understanding that deterrence is ineffective against some of these organizations and their counterparts. Accordingly, preventing such dangerous force buildup is a fundamental principle of the security doctrine, as it must be addressed well before these threats materialize. It is important to emphasize that **prevention is not equivalent to pre-emptive strikes or preventive wars (Pre-emption)**. The intent of prevention is not to strike the enemy before it attacks but rather to act far in advance to hinder the development of its threatening capabilities.

It should be added that the aforementioned prevention also pertains to strategic threats that are not necessarily military in nature. These threats may include political threats, particularly those involving consistent delegitimization of Israel through international and other mechanisms, as well as reputational threats. For example, in a scenario where a Turkish ship attempts to breach the blockade on the Gaza Strip, it is preferable to prevent its arrival altogether rather than deal with it when it reaches Israel's borders.

Prevention involves using a variety of tools, ranging from diplomatic, economic, legal, and covert measures to military ones, as needed. The decision to implement prevention should be based on the "cost" of its use, the legitimacy to employ it, the potential damage the emerging threat might cause, and the likelihood of that threat materializing. Unfortunately, prevention cannot always be applied, nor is it always feasible or advisable.²⁸

This proposal does not disregard the various interpretations of the UN Charter, other treaties, or customary international law in the context of preemptive strikes and prevention as part of "self-defense." Self-defense is a natural right that allows any state to use force to prevent an armed attack against it ("until the Security Council has taken the necessary measures to maintain peace," as stated in Article 51 of the UN Charter). Interpretations of Article 51 of the UN Charter (as well as other treaties and customary international law) range from legitimizing self-defense only against aggression once it is underway or imminent, to preemptively striking the aggressor during its preparatory stages, and even to neutralizing its capabilities before they have fully developed. How early a strike can occur, and whether the focus is on preventing the initial stages of force build up or targeting only the imminent capability, remains a critical and complex question.



Therefore, it should be noted that the earlier a preventive action is taken, the greater the tension it creates with customary international law and the legitimacy of such actions.²⁹ This is particularly true when Israel is the actor, not major powers or alliances like NATO.

However, it is important to emphasize that such prevention is not impossible, as Israel has demonstrated in several cases.³⁰ Notably, the American response to the 9/11 attacks serves as a significant example, illustrating how the United States interpreted the principle of prevention as an additional cornerstone alongside deterrence and defense. This interpretation was

28 As previously mentioned, for further exploration of the Matania, E., Bachrach, M. (2023), "Strategic Prevention as the 'Fifth Pillar' in Israel's National Security Doctrine", Strategic Assessment - A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security – Special Research Publication (Hebrew).

29 For a deeper understanding of the subject, it is recommended to read the excellent article by Odumobo, A. S. (2013), "New Security Threats, Unilateral Use of Force, and the International Legal Order", Military and Strategy, 5(3), pp. 95–110 (Hebrew).

30 Some of the cases were analyzed, as noted, by Matania, E., Bachrach, M. (2023), "Strategic Prevention as the 'Fifth Pillar' in Israel's National Security Doctrine", Strategic Assessment - A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security – Special Research Publication, (Hebrew).

reflected both in articles and in the U.S. National Security Doctrine itself.³¹ It framed prevention not merely as permissible but as imperative, fundamentally altering many of the prevailing norms on the matter. To conclude, any force applied against the enemy's threat build-up must consider the degree of justification and legitimacy afforded to such action.

Conceptual Principle 2: Dynamic Coercion - "Nervous" and Disproportionate Coercion through Constant Oscillation between Deterrence and Compellence

Deterrence represents the ultimate vision – a concept aimed at preventing wars altogether by instilling paralyzing fear in the enemy of our response. Nuclear deterrence was developed primarily to prevent nuclear wars, and numerous theories and related behaviors have been constructed around it, including second-strike capability, survivability of systems, mutually assured destruction, and more. However, conventional deterrence, especially when dealing with persistent adversaries (particularly fundamentalists) who do not fear harm or are convinced of their eventual victory, is far more elusive. Both global history and Israel's own historical experience repeatedly demonstrate this reality.

In light of this reality, there is a need to shift from a deterrence-based approach to one rooted in coercion. Coercion consists of two components: Deterrence, which seeks to prevent hostile behavior through threat and readiness to impose punishment ("do not act"),³² and Compellence (or enforcement), which involves acting against the enemy to force the cessation of hostile behavior ("stop acting"). Together, Deterrence and Compellence form the foundation of coercion, which aims to prevent war by threatening to exact a heavy price (Deterrence) or by restoring deterrence through the implementation of that heavy cost (Compellence). This approach inherently operates through a dynamic and continuous movement between these two components.

For Coercion to be effective, it is essential to simultaneously develop both the threat of punishment and the capacity—and full intent—to implement that punishment. The punishment must also be directed at the enemy's "soft underbelly," meaning those assets or values most important to the enemy, those they are unwilling to risk. As we know, what might deter one adversary does not necessarily deter another. Furthermore, what deterred a specific adversary at one point in time may no longer be effective at a different time. Therefore, the entire coercive strategy must be regularly adapted to the specific enemy and the prevailing circumstances.

Based on research and accumulated experience in the Middle East, we propose that the second core conceptual principle of Israel's Security Doctrine should be assertive ("nervous") and disproportionate coercion. In other words, Israel should shift from being a threatening-yet-restrained actor to one that responds harshly to even the smallest provocation.

31 Bush, G. W. (2002), "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America", The White House, September 17, 2002.

32 Deterrence can be achieved through Deterrence by Punishment or Deterrence by Denial (prevention/defense). Our approach aims to combine both methods, though we primarily focus on the former for simplicity.

Assertiveness is important because, in many cases, when deterrence “breaks,” it does not immediately collapse into a state of war but rather begins with the execution of a small, measured threat. Sometimes, the adversary seeks to test the boundaries of the opposing side or establish a new status quo in the absence of a response. At other times, the adversary takes steps that are part of a larger threat being gradually constructed, whether as deterrence or as a means of “accustoming” the other side. Immediate coercion counters all of this and more: it prevents “accustoming” to an altered reality or a change in the status quo. This does not mean that a response is always mandatory. At times, it is possible to convey a threat about future action. However, it is critical to follow through on such a threat with punishment, without undue delay and without exhibiting restraint.

Israel should shift from being a threatening-yet-restrained actor to one that responds harshly to even the smallest provocation

Why not proportional? The term “proportional” contradicts the very essence of coercion. Coercion loses its relevance if the adversary knows they will face a measured, roughly equivalent response when acting in a calculated manner. In such a scenario, coercion becomes meaningless and could even escalate the situation unpredictably. Only a genuine fear that even the smallest execution of a threat will be met with a disproportionate response can reinforce deterrence effectively.

By its very nature, coercion addresses a reality where the adversary already possesses the capability to act against one (meaning Conceptual Core Principle 1 has failed as it did not prevent the enemy’s threat buildup). At times, coercion employs tools similar to those used in prevention, but it does so with a different intent.

Conceptual Principle 3: Geopolitical-Power Strategy - Managing Regional Struggles and Competition from a Geopolitical-Power Perspective

While the first two core conceptual principles focus on preventing the existence of a threat (Core Conceptual Principle 1) or preventing its realization (Core Conceptual Principle 2), the third principle is aimed at preserving Israel’s strategic advantage in the region—through a geopolitical-power (regional) approach. The essence of this principle lies in leveraging Israel’s regional power to maintain its strategic superiority over its competitors. This is achieved both through temporary and localized alliances, as well as through eroding the ability of its competitors to strengthen themselves and pose a threat. All of this is done while avoiding war.

Israel has taken steps in such directions in the past—primarily through agreements, such as the Abraham Accords. However, Israel has never formulated a comprehensive strategy for acting on all fronts as a local power. This includes leveraging its strength to build diverse coalitions, deploying proxies, delivering messages and regional signals, and similar actions.

Israel’s economic, military, and technological growth enable such a conceptual shift: the establishment of a significant pillar dedicated to projecting power, creating political and security assets, and leveraging them through both “give-and-take” dynamics. This political pillar includes forming various partnerships, managing distant conflicts, aligning with adversaries’ enemies, and providing military support based on circumstances. Naturally, all

these actions must be conducted with a comprehensive vision and from both a global and regional perspective. Such integration is particularly essential when dealing with regional powers, each of which has its own “soft underbelly” in areas such as economy, diplomacy, and occasionally even military vulnerabilities.

Conceptual Principle 4: Military Decisive Victory

The first three core conceptual principles outlined thus far stem from the evolving regional environment and the global technological landscape. They are grounded in the strengths Israel has developed over the years. These principles aim to reduce the likelihood of a full-scale war (actions that contribute to deterrence through coercion are generally intended to remain

below the threshold of full-scale conflict) and to reinforce Israel’s position of power and stability in the region. **The fourth principle addresses the scenario in which, despite all of the above, the enemy initiates a war. In such a case, a powerful military is required—one capable of swiftly defeating any enemy force, engaging in prolonged combat if necessary, and exacting a painful cost from the enemy** to restore deterrence. We will now elaborate on the four focal components of this core principle.

A powerful military is required—one capable of swiftly defeating any enemy force, engaging in prolonged combat if necessary, and exacting a painful cost from the enemy

(a) Military Power – The military forces must be built and maintained even during prolonged periods of peace, ensuring their readiness for times when maximum-intensity combat may be required in any theater and at any distance, enabling them to decisively defeat any enemy. To ensure the military is prepared for decisive action across all arenas—both along the borders and in areas thousands of kilometers away—significant force buildup is needed in various

domains, including ground forces, large-scale long-range weaponry, special forces, and more.

(b) Rapid Decisive Victory – The military forces must possess the capability to swiftly neutralize and defeat all enemy threats in a manner that inflicts long-term incapacitation (requiring years of recovery). Whenever possible—depending on the specific enemy and the circumstances—they should aim to compel the adversary to seek a ceasefire, leaving them unable to resume military operations.

(c) Prolonged Warfare – In certain arenas, conventional decisive victory may not suffice, necessitating the additional capability for sustained combat (attrition). This requirement is particularly relevant in conflicts against quasi-state adversaries or terrorist organizations that possess an anti-fragile posture—meaning their ability to recover is rapid, often resulting in capabilities superior to those they originally had, due to continuously advancing technology. Efforts must be made to prevent the emergence of an even more formidable force against Israel. This requirement significantly impacts the structure of the IDF’s force buildup and the actions of the political echelon to ensure that such a war of attrition does not exact a heavy toll on the state.

In this context, it should be noted that this article proposes a deviation from the historically dominant approach and the strategic culture prevalent within the political-security

establishment, which revolves around cycles of conflict followed by periods of calm (aside from routine security operations). **The need for a strategy of attrition** following a decisive victory arises, as mentioned, from the emergence of terrorist organizations and quasi-state entities as significant threats to Israel. Israel's ability to exhaust these adversaries after achieving a decisive victory stems from the strength it has developed over recent decades. This decisive victory enables Israel to engage in limited wars of attrition, provided they remain at the lower spectrum of conflict, particularly against adversaries that are significantly smaller than Israel in both size and capabilities. These adversaries differ fundamentally from the large Arab states, which Israel has historically been unable—and remains unable—to defeat in a total and absolute victory. Thus, against such larger states, Israel still requires adherence to the classical Ben-Gurionist doctrine of localized decisive victory, combined with preparation and anticipation for the next round of conflict.

(d) Imposing a Painful Cost – Finally, there is the element of imposing a painful cost, which Israel must exact from its adversaries to restore its deterrence. Israel must adopt different forms of decisive measures tailored to the nature of each adversary and the types of costs they cannot bear. Some of Israel's adversaries are particularly sensitive to the loss of military capabilities, while others are more concerned with scenarios in which their territory is turned into a security buffer zone. There are also those who are vulnerable to economic fluctuations or to the instability of their regimes. These sensitivities vary over time and across different arenas, necessitating a dynamic and adaptable approach.

Conceptual Principle 5: Strategic Reliance on a Superpower – The United States

The fifth core conceptual principle of the proposed Security Doctrine is reliance on the United States. This principle is particularly vital for a country like Israel—one that is not part of a natural alliance (such as the European Union), is not a medium-sized power, and is situated in a hostile environment with multiple actors and regional powers.

Each of the states aspiring to be regional powers in Israel's vicinity is significantly larger than Israel, both in terms of territory and population.³³ Furthermore, Israel is not a "favorite" on the global stage and occasionally requires the use of a veto at the United Nations Security Council. In other words, Israel cannot operate as an isolated entity ("dwelling alone") and requires strong superpower backing, particularly in the political sphere. This need becomes even more pronounced given the intensifying frictions in the global arena and the unfavorable regional environment in which Israel exists. The natural choice—both in terms of shared values and relations—is the United States.

Reliance on a superpower is a core principle that complements the first four principles. Israel requires reliance on the United States in different aspects of each of these principles: for legitimacy and assistance in prevention and coercion (Principles 1–2); for successfully managing competition (Principle 3), as part of Israel's strength stems from its relationship with

33 The territory of Turkey is 40 times larger than that of Israel, Iran's is 80 times larger, and Saudi Arabia's is 100 times larger. Saudi Arabia's population is 4 times that of Israel, Iran and Turkey each have populations 8 times greater, and Egypt's population is 11 times greater.

Israel requires reliance on the United States. However, as Israel reduces its dependency on the U.S. (such as through independent armament capabilities) and strengthens its assets and power, such diversification will render the relationship with the U.S. healthier, more enabling, and resilient to administrative and societal changes occurring within the U.S. itself.

the U.S.; and for support and legitimacy during a decisive military campaign (Principle 4).

However, as Israel reduces its dependency on the U.S. (such as through independent armament capabilities) and strengthens its assets and power—primarily through a technology-based economic strength and the development of deep political, security, and economic ties with additional countries worldwide—not to replace but rather to supplement and to support the relationship with the superpower, such diversification will render the relationship with the U.S. healthier, more enabling, and resilient to administrative and societal changes occurring within the U.S. itself.

2. Conceptual Principles That Should Be Removed from the Historical Doctrine

We have thus far outlined five core conceptual principles that collectively construct the new proposed doctrine. At the same time, it is necessary to remove certain foundational principles that served in the historical Security Doctrine. As will be clarified, this does not imply the complete elimination of these principles. Rather, it means positioning them appropriately—as part of a military strategy, rather than as core principles of the doctrine.

A foundational principle to be removed: Early War Warning

As explained at the beginning of our discussion, Early War Warning is one of the foundational principles of Israel's historical security doctrine. It represents a conceptual pillar arising from the necessity of rapidly mobilizing reserve soldiers—who constitute the primary striking force of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF)—before the outbreak of war. This swift mobilization is vital to ensure that the war is conducted on enemy territory rather than within Israel's borders, because of the country's small size and the proximity of its population centers and infrastructure to its borders.

Early War Warning has failed the supreme tests it has faced, such as before the Yom Kippur War and the October 7th disaster, and it is reasonable to assume it might fail in the future as well. This is not because it is inherently impossible to issue a warning about an impending war, but because it is impossible to guarantee such a warning in the case of a surprise attack, especially when surprise is a central element of the enemy's planning. An enemy determined to achieve surprise can sometimes succeed, as surprise represents a discontinuity in assessment. By its very nature, it is almost impossible to predict in advance, though it is often explainable in hindsight.

Not only has reliance on Early War Warning not proven itself, but in hindsight, it has even worked to our disadvantage—primarily because the IDF based its defensive preparations on the assumption of receiving such warnings. Therefore, and especially to prevent a strategic

failure even greater than those caused by the past absence of warnings, it is necessary to operate under the assumption that a surprise attack may occur in the future in any domain: on land, in the air, at sea, or even in cyberspace, and across any arena of conflict. Accordingly, the IDF must be structured in a way that allows it to halt any enemy, even in the event of surprise, through three main tools: demilitarization, minimal readiness for defense, and innovative force buildup tailored for immediate response.³⁴ Such preparedness does not discount the importance of Early War Warning as a goal for Military Intelligence (AMAN); however, it removes Early War Warning from being the foundation of the military's force buildup and operational preparations. This approach is achievable.

We cautiously note that the notion of the inherent limitations of Early War Warning appears not to have escaped the attention of one of the founding figures of IDF intelligence, Yehoshafat Harkabi. He identified its fundamental constraints and, therefore, viewed the role of intelligence in the realm of forecasting as aiming to reduce the level of uncertainty for decision-makers, without any pretense of acting as a "prophecy service."³⁵ In other words, AMAN (Military Intelligence) can and should investigate the enemy's capabilities and intentions and strive to provide both strategic and operational warnings. However, **we must recognize the limitations of Early War Warning and avoid relying on it as the basis for the IDF's preparedness. Early War Warning should therefore serve merely as an auxiliary element to the doctrine's principles, and not as a core principle by itself.**



A Core Principle to Be Removed: Defensive Capabilities

Similar to Early War Warning, the "pillar" of defense is also part of a military strategy that has been "elevated" to become one of the core principles of the doctrine. It was introduced as a means to address the threat posed by missiles and rockets following the missile attacks on Israel during the First Gulf War and subsequently in other wars and conflicts, in which an increasing number of missiles and rockets were launched at Israeli civilian areas.³⁶ Indeed, air defense is a critically important capability, forming part of the firepower branch, which encompasses both offensive and defensive capabilities. For Israel, this capability is particularly significant for

34 This is not the place to delve into alternative organizational methods, but a few will be mentioned for the sake of discussion: organizing reserve forces partly based on residential areas to enable immediate mobilization; maintaining full personal equipment at the homes of reserve soldiers; integrating the capabilities of the Air Force with special forces kept on constant and immediate readiness to operate in any theater of combat with virtually no prior warning, and more.

35 Taken from Siman Tov, D. and Hershkowitz, S. (2013), "AMAN Comes to Light – The First Decade of the IDF Intelligence Directorate", Ma'arachot – The IDF bulletin for military and national security issues and AMAN – Intelligence Research Institute, Israel, (Hebrew).

36 Meridor, D., & Eldadi, R. (2018), "Israel's Security Doctrine – The Committee Report on Formulating the Security Doctrine (Meridor Committee) and Its Evaluation a Decade Later", Memorandum 182, The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), (Hebrew).

Defensive capabilities should not be regarded as a core principle of the doctrine. Instead, it should be viewed as a fundamental—indeed, even critical—component of the IDF strategic force buildup

various reasons, and the country has made notable advancements in this field compared to other nations. However, as stated, it should not be regarded as a core principle of the doctrine. Instead, it should be viewed as a fundamental—indeed, even critical—component of the IDF strategic force buildup.

3. Five Core Principles of Strategic Force Buildup

In addition to the five conceptual principles mentioned earlier, we propose that the new Security Doctrine include five core principles specifically to address strategic force buildup. These principles should serve as guiding lights for any future force buildup within the IDF and the entire security establishment. These principles are not tied to any specific technology or regional aspect but rather stem from Israel's strategic environment and its asymmetry—both

the disadvantages (such as population size, geographic scale, and layout) and the advantages (such as a technology-oriented economy).

The five principles are as follows: (1) Persistence in and continual updating of the service model, encompassing its three components—extended mandatory service, prestigious standing army service, and reserve duty reserved solely for emergencies, war, and training. (2) Munitions independence as a critical anchor, enabling greater operational flexibility during war while potentially serving as an economic force multiplier. (3) Ongoing and increasing investment in technological-operational superiority, leveraging and harnessing Israel's advanced technological capabilities for security purposes. (4) Strategic redundancy for essential infrastructures and systems, a necessity for a small state like Israel that lacks the natural physical and infrastructural depth to rely on inherent redundancy. (5) Finally, survivability of critical infrastructures, given advances in global technology that allow for precise and severe damage to assets, particularly in a state like Israel, where infrastructures are concentrated in a relatively narrow area near its borders.

And now, to the detailed elaboration.

Principle of Force Buildup 1: Persistence and Adaptation of the Model for Mandatory Service, Standing Army, and Reserves

The first core principle of force buildup emphasizes the persistence of the current service model comprised of Mandatory Service, Standing Army, and Reserves Duty, while adapting it to the nature of modern Israeli society. Emphasis must be placed on the necessity of prolonged mandatory service—both from a quantitative rationale (the militia concept), which has been the foundation of this model, and from a qualitative rationale (recruiting elite personnel for extended service). Over time, the qualitative aspect has become critical due to the increasing demand for exceptional officers in operational, technological, and especially techno-operational frameworks. Additionally, it is essential to ensure a limited and planned use of reserve forces while enhancing the prestige of the standing army service.

(a) **Mandatory Service.** At the establishment of the state, the quantitative aspect was the primary factor in shaping the initial mandatory recruitment model, designed primarily to build the backbone for the reserve force, as the IDF's striking power. However, today, prolonged mandatory service is critical for developing and maintaining excellence over time. This excellence is needed for preserving personnel-dependent high-quality combat arrays, particularly those bolstering and enhancing operational-technological superiority. This necessity arises because the numbers required by the IDF and other security organizations far exceed what could be naturally provided without such prolonged mandatory service and pre-military educational programs. A similar trend is also evident in civilian security organizations and the defense industry. Any shortening of mandatory service or attempts to make it differential would rapidly undermine the quality of the various combat arrays.³⁷

(b) **Reserve Service.** When citizens are called for reserve duty, the Israeli economy is impacted in two significant ways: reserve service imposes a substantial financial burden on the state and, in many cases, disrupts the operations of businesses or companies where these reservists are employed. The challenges associated with reserve service, combined with the aspiration of Israeli society to function as a predominantly civilian society and its sensitivity to inequality in service obligations, necessitate heightened caution in summoning reservists. Consequently, reserve service should be concentrated exclusively on wartime and emergency situations (and training for these scenarios) rather than for routine security tasks or force buildup. This approach can be achieved by expanding the standing army and the Border Police.

(c) **Standing Army Service.** The IDF must reestablish itself as a value-driven and an excellent military organization, where long-term service is regarded as prestigious and impactful. Only by achieving this aim can the IDF build itself into a professional, outstanding, and ultimately victorious organization. Salary conditions and accompanying benefits are complementary to this goal but cannot replace it. This issue is too broad to delve into fully within this framework, but at its core lies the argument that as the IDF competes with the civilian labor market over material benefits, it will generally fall behind—particularly when addressing high-quality individuals who have attractive alternatives in the civilian sector. This inevitably leads to a decline in the military's standards. The problem is not unique to the IDF. It extends to other government bodies, public services, and large security organizations (as opposed to small, specialized units). Only a combination of unique aspects inherent to the IDF—such as a sense of mission, assuming significant responsibility at a young age, rapid advancement, flexible career paths, and the ability to exit and re-enter roles—together with accommodating and supportive service conditions can enable the long-term resolution of the challenges surrounding retention in standing army service.



37 For further reading on this topic, see Matania, E. (2022), "Behind Mandatory Service in Israel: From the Rationale of the Militia to the Rationale of Military-Technological Superiority", *Strategic Assessment - A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security*, 25(2), pp. 3–23.

Munitions independence is fundamentally a strategic requirement, deriving from the need to reduce one of the main diplomatic pressure levers on Israel during wartime and to significantly enhance its operational freedom

Principle of Force Buildup 2: Munitions Independence

Munitions independence is fundamentally a strategic requirement, deriving from the need to reduce one of the main diplomatic pressure levers on Israel during wartime and to significantly enhance its operational freedom. Such independence is essential in the global environment, particularly in the Western context. As evidenced recently, many countries worldwide may restrict arms exports—both in general and specifically “offensive weapons”—to certain regions during particular periods. This is especially relevant to Israel (though not unique to it).

Such independence is particularly critical given the prevailing narrative of delegitimization toward Israel and its actions. This ongoing process is likely to intensify in the future, and Israel will have to coexist with it for many years. In any case, reliance on its reversal is ill-advised, as this is a long-term trend. Munitions independence should be considered a form of strategic “insurance policy.” Furthermore, such independence can also serve as an economic force multiplier.

Munitions independence is also crucial in the context of susceptibility to external pressure mechanisms, including the reduction or suspension of arms supplies by external suppliers. This is one of the more easily implemented forms of leverage, as it can be executed discreetly without public visibility. It can be applied partially through bureaucratic means and carries immediate consequences for Israel’s ability to engage in warfare.

It is important to emphasize that munitions independence is a broad concept encompassing components, spare parts, materials, fuels, and more. While it can never be fully absolute, it is certainly possible to approach a significant degree of independence.³⁸



38 In accordance with the minimal definition of such independence, for example: two independent weapon systems for each combat array, reliance solely on communal procurement, stockpiles sufficient to ensure protected independent production capabilities, and similar measures.

Principle of Force Buildup 3: Technological-Operational Superiority

Technological-Operational Superiority is the integration of advanced technology with a relevant military doctrine to achieve a substantial advantage on the battlefield. This integration, as a comprehensive concept, is critically important in the framework of the new Security Doctrine. First, it enables military superiority over the quantitative asymmetry between Israel and its hostile regional environment. Therefore, it allows for achieving decisive victory on the battlefield (Conceptual Principle 4). Additionally, this principle constitutes an essential operational component in deterrence capability (Conceptual Principle 1) and in fostering the image of Israel's power, which is crucial for applying the principle of coercion, and the management of geopolitical power struggles and collaborations (Conceptual Principles 2 and 3).

On a broader scale, in the context of national security, Israel's technological and scientific strength is among the most significant elements of its global strategic stability, if not the foremost one.

Technological-Operational Superiority comprises several components. It involves the ability to realize a technological advantage through a relevant military operational doctrine, both in a limited manner for special operations and on a broader scale for all forces. This is a complex challenge, as the era of rapid technological change necessitates constant procurement and integration. Therefore, to address this challenge without incurring exorbitant costs, a different approach to technological management is required compared to what has been traditionally practiced. Several aspects of such management can be identified: the ability to produce quality in quantity, meaning a substantial supply of advanced technology; the ability to maintain a technological edge of at least one "generation" over any adversary; the training of field forces in operating modern technologies and integrating them at rapid rates; and finally, strategic understanding and appropriate force buildup. In some of these aspects, Israel already excels, while in others, there is a need for improvement and further advancement.

On a broader scale, in the context of national security, Israel's technological and scientific strength is among the most significant elements of its global strategic stability, if not the foremost one.

Principle of Force Buildup 4: Strategic Redundancy

Strategic systems that are critical for wartime functionality—such as key Command and Control systems, advanced defense systems, unique intelligence systems, and the like—must possess strategic redundancy to ensure functionality in the face of uncertainty and adversaries during war. Redundancy involves the development of alternative, independent systems to replace primary ones or the creation of multiple systems that back each other up, similar to the redundancy implemented in aircraft systems.

However, redundancy in large-scale systems goes far beyond simply adding another technological system. It entails comprehensive pre-planning of all systems and the combat process to ensure that there is always at least partial backup for systems that might fail due to malfunction or attack. This requirement is generally applicable to all strategic systems, but its

importance is heightened during wartime, given the likelihood of these arrays to be targeted and the vital role they play in emergencies. The failure of such systems can have far-reaching consequences, as demonstrated on October 7 with the failure of certain systems.

Strategic Redundancy is fundamentally tied to Israel's nature as a small country, which inherently lacks the strategic, physical, and systemic depth that larger nations possess

Strategic Redundancy is fundamentally tied to Israel's nature as a small country, which inherently lacks the strategic, physical, and systemic depth that larger nations possess. Such depth allows larger countries to rely on their redundancies during emergencies—for example, the presence of multiple transportation networks, data storage facilities, airports, and so on. In Israel's case, this need for strategic redundancy extends to critical civilian systems upon which the IDF and the state's functionality rely during emergencies. For this reason, Israel should refrain from adopting a force buildup approach that sanctifies a single solution or absolute economic efficiency. Limitations of technology and the redundancy required within technological systems should always be considered. It is not routine circumstances that should determine the structure of systems, but rather preparation for emergencies, attacks, and the unpredictable.

Principle of Force Buildup 5: Ensuring the Survivability of Essential Assets and Critical Infrastructure through Tunneling, Fortification, and Decentralization

One of the implications of the current asymmetry between Israel and its adversaries is the growing risk of severe damage to critical infrastructure and essential systems, which serve as bottlenecks, due to the evolving technological environment. This damage can occur from a distance, both physically and virtually (through the cyber domain). The IDF in particular, and the broader defense establishment, were not originally designed to address extreme scenarios involving damage to the state's critical infrastructure, and especially to that of the IDF. However, the likelihood of such scenarios materializing is steadily increasing. These potential vulnerabilities could severely hinder the IDF's operational capabilities. For instance, damage to essential communication infrastructure, computing systems, command and control infrastructure, specialized assets storing valuable and unique weaponry, intelligence systems and more could have far-reaching consequences. The response to these challenges is threefold: tunneling, fortification, and decentralization of critical infrastructure and essential assets.

4. Adapting the Principles to the Circles of Hostility and the Regional Environment

The historical Security Doctrine did not differentiate between the various fronts, as it was directed more or less toward a singular type of adversary: hostile Arab states with large standing armies. However, today's environment is more complex, and while the core principles should still apply across all fronts, there is a need for specific adaptation of these principles to the unique characteristics of the different fronts and enemies.

On the Palestinian front in the West Bank, in the Gaza Strip against Hamas, and against organizations in failed states (e.g., Hezbollah), emphasis should be placed on prevention and decisive victory, accompanied by continuous attrition—rather than on deterrence or managing the broader regional conflict. Despite differences among these adversaries, they share a characteristic of being anti-fragile actors: they benefit more than Israel from the intervals between rounds of conflict, emerging stronger and more dangerous in subsequent confrontations. Accordingly, a persistent effort to prevent their force build up must be adopted. After achieving military decisiveness, continuous military and diplomatic attrition, tailored to the circumstances, should be employed to inhibit their ability to rebuild their strength—similar to the approach taken against terrorism in the West Bank since Operation Defensive Shield, sustained for nearly two decades.

On the front of neighboring states and against conventional armies, the focus should be on preventing the acquisition of nuclear weapons and on coercion with an emphasis on deterrence. If war becomes necessary, traditional decisive victory over the enemy's military—considered their central asset—should be pursued.

On the third circle front—distant hostile states with which Israel shares no borders—the emphasis should be placed on prevention, coercion, and conflict management. This should be accompanied by the development of capabilities for waging war thousands of kilometers away, beyond the scope of special operations alone. Such a war would not focus on traditional military decisive victory, as with neighboring states, but rather on destroying the adversary's ability to pose a long-range threat to Israel. This includes dismantling the force structure associated with this capability and inflicting severe damage on the regime's infrastructure and assets in the respective state.

E. Conclusion

This article proposes a new Security Doctrine for the State of Israel, tailored to address the challenges the country faces in its eighth decade of existence while highlighting its unique strengths and advantages. Unlike most other proposals, which build upon the existing “Three Pillars” historical doctrine by adding layers, improvements, and updates, this article takes a different approach. It directly examines the foundational assumptions underlying the historical doctrine and the strategic environments that shaped it. By re-evaluating these core assumptions and the changes they have undergone, the article presents a contemporary, “Tabula Rasa” Security Doctrine.

The article highlights a significant shift in one of the fundamental assumptions of Israel’s historical Security Doctrine: the cessation of the asymmetry in resources and economy that once disadvantaged Israel in comparison to its adversaries. This assumption was historically part of the broader premise of an overall asymmetry unfavorable to Israel across all parameters—population, territory, the number of opposing states, and resources. It fundamentally shaped Israel’s Security Doctrine from the time of Jabotinsky and Ben-Gurion. However, as elaborated within the article, the situation today is entirely different. Not only is Israel no longer at an economic disadvantage relative to its adversaries, but it also enjoys a distinct economic advantage over its environs. This is particularly due to its technology-driven economy, a factor that continues to grow and is expected to strengthen even further in the future.

The emergence of this reversed asymmetry, now favoring Israel, alongside the long-term development of its military strength, enables Israel to adopt an approach that extends beyond the mere application of force to neutralize threats as they materialize. It permits the embedding of a geopolitical-power framework into its strategic behavior. Accordingly, it is proposed that Israel incorporates several new conceptual principles into its Security Doctrine:

1. Strategic prevention of enemy force buildup before it materializes into a tangible threat.
2. Assertive and disproportionate coercion (a combination of deterrence and enforcement).
3. Conducting a geopolitical-power strategy through managing collaborations, alliances, support for proxies, conflict management via asset trading, and similar mechanisms.
4. When the first three principles fail (and only then), Israel should resort to exercising its traditional capability for decisive victory.
5. All these principles are underpinned by the continued support of the U.S. and the preservation of Israel’s value in the eyes of the U.S. administration.

The article also highlights significant changes in the global strategic environment. The world transitioned from a bipolar world (from the end of WWII), into a unipolar world (from 1990), to the current environment characterized by a tri-polar global struggle. Alongside these global shifts, the regional environment is undergoing substantial transformations as well. These transformations include the reemergence of non-Arab Muslim regional powers, such as Iran and Turkey, which harbor ambitions that extend beyond the region and currently oppose Israel, albeit in different ways. Simultaneously, failed states have emerged, characterized

by semi-state hostile organizations that exploit the state's resources for their growth and empowerment, without being accountable to the state.

Moreover, the article discusses changes in the global technological environment. These advances enable remote deployment of precise and highly destructive capabilities — both physical and virtual. Such developments pose unprecedented threats to Israel, exacerbated by its very small size, limited redundancy in essential assets, the proximity of its population centers to its borders, and the concentration of its population and critical infrastructure within a narrow geographic area.

All these developments present Israel with threats, challenges, and competition unprecedented in its history, necessitating a strategic force buildup doctrine to address these challenges over time. Therefore, the article identifies five core principles of strategic force buildup that should underpin Israel's future-oriented Security Doctrine (in addition to the conceptual principles mentioned earlier):

1. Sustaining and renewing the service model: This includes maintaining a long mandatory service, a prestigious standing army service, and reservist service restricted to emergency scenarios, war, and training.
2. Munitions independence: Establishing a self-reliance munitions supply as a critical anchor, thereby providing greater operational freedom in wartime decision-making. This independence, which is feasible today, could also serve as an economic force multiplier.
3. Continued and increasing investment in technological-operational superiority: Leveraging and exploiting advanced technology—an area of expertise for Israel—for security and defense purposes.
4. Strategic redundancy for essential infrastructure and systems: This is vital for a small state like Israel, which lacks natural redundancy derived from physical and infrastructural depth.
5. Survivability of critical infrastructure: Given global technological advancements that allow for precise and substantial damage to assets, ensuring the resilience of critical infrastructures is paramount. This is particularly relevant for a state with insufficient redundancies and infrastructures concentrated in a narrow space near its borders.

In our assessment, the proposed Security Doctrine could serve as a new “North Star,” tailored to our times and the challenges Israel will face in the coming decades. Adopting this new doctrine in its entirety will assist Israeli policymakers, the senior politico-military leadership, and the IDF's military strategists in making both security and military-strategic decisions, as well as decisions regarding the security-military force buildup and its implications for national security. This new doctrine will help secure Israel's future, ensure its safety, and foster its prosperity—for our benefit and for the benefit of future generations.

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