



ARGAMAN



Israel's Security Doctrine and Its Erosion Since the 1990s

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The Paradigm Project: A New Strategic Agenda for Israel

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Chapter 1

Israel's Security Doctrine and Its Erosion Since the 1990s

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Executive Summary

The conditions that led to the establishment of Iran's "Ring of Fire" around Israel and to the Hamas attack were not the result of a single point of failure, but rather stemmed from a shift away from the fundamental principles of Israel's security doctrine. The security doctrine formulated by Ben-Gurion, inspired by Ze'ev Jabotinsky's "Iron Wall" idea, functioned successfully until the 1990s. This doctrine emphasized several core principles: decisive victory—meaning that in every encounter with an enemy, Israel must strive for a clear and unequivocal outcome in its favor; deterrence, as an outcome of decisive victory. Willingness to launch preemptive strikes. Self-reliance, meaning that only IDF soldiers fight for Israel's security and not foreign forces, alongside the development of a nuclear capability. Securing the support of a global power. Jewish settlement of the land as an essential security component of the State of Israel. Militarily, this doctrine emphasized the rapid transfer of the battle into enemy territory through overwhelming ground and air maneuver.

However, the signing of peace agreements with Egypt, the PLO, and Jordan, together with changes in the nature of Israel's adversaries, opened the door to the adoption of new underlying assumptions, such as: the era of major wars has ended; conflicts would now be limited and against terror organizations rather than states; there is no longer a conventional military

1 This chapter represents a joint product of the project's research fellows and was written by Roi Tamir.

threat; cross-border terrorism can be contained; holding territory cannot be justified; and that “a political solution is preferable to a military one.” These changes reflected a value system that does not recognize the concept of an enemy, but rather only a rival, and a belief that any conflict can be resolved through negotiation and diplomacy.

Israel's Security Doctrine in Its Early Decades

Israel's security doctrine, as it developed from Ze'ev Jabotinsky's thought in the 1920s and through its reformulation by David Ben-Gurion around the War of Independence and the early 1950s, remained dominant throughout the first four decades of the State of Israel's existence. Beginning in the 1990s, however, a process of change emerged in the way Israel's security doctrine was expressed in policy and practice by successive Israeli governments and the defense establishment. Hamas' attack on Israeli territory on October 7—carried out by a force of approximately 6,000 fighters, involving the invasion and conquest of southern Israel surrounding the Gaza Strip for several hours, operational control of the area by the attackers, and unprecedented violence to Israeli civilians and IDF forces within a short time frame—requires an assessment of what went wrong with Israel's security doctrine.

A security doctrine, approach, or worldview (referred to in Hebrew as the *"konseptsia"*) is never merely a matter of how military force is built and employed. It is built on a perception of reality rooted first and foremost in values. A change in values—whether in their composition or in their prioritization—leads to a change in the perception of reality.

Ben-Gurion's Security Doctrine

The period prior to the establishment of the State of Israel and immediately thereafter was marked by a palpable

and acute sense of an existential threat to the Jews in the Land of Israel and their project to create a national homeland. This sense of existential danger reached its peak around the declaration of the State of Israel and the understanding that it would trigger an invasion by regular armies from Arab states into the territory of the newly established state. In 1947, Ben-Gurion referred to the supreme test for which preparations were required "for a bloody war with all the Arab states." Even after the end of the War of Independence, the sense of threat did not dissipate, and it served as a central factor in Ben-Gurion's thinking, as expressed in the article *"Army and State,"* written in 1953.

Ben-Gurion's article was the culmination of a process of deep reflection and presented eighteen foundational points to the government. To this day, it is regarded as a foundational text of Israel's security concept, even though it is not formulated as a formal doctrinal document. Already in the first part of the document, Ben-Gurion makes a statement at the level of national security, asserting that security does not depend on the military alone and is influenced no less by "non-military" factors, in his words, such as economic and productive capacity, industrial and agricultural capability, growth of the Jewish population (immigration), settlement in vulnerable border areas, the maintenance of reserves (food and raw materials), transportation routes, and above all, national cohesion and spirit.

A central feature of Israel's security environment that Ben-Gurion identifies is the quantitative asymmetry between the IDF and the Arab armies: "It is clear that in manpower we will never be equal to the Arabs, nor in the quantity of weapons..."² There is also a disparity in population size and economic capacity, and finally, he notes the small and narrow borders of the State of Israel. From each of these points flow implications that lie at the heart of the security doctrine as it was then formulated. Ben-Gurion determined that military asymmetry required continuous investment in qualitative superiority. This qualitative edge would be achieved through several factors, including human capital—the quality of the soldiers and their training—maximum enhancement of striking power (the air force and armored forces), a focus on combat formations, investment in advanced weaponry, and above all, fighting spirit.

Limited resources forced Israel to rely on reserve forces to balance defense with economic growth. The small territory and narrow waist of Israel make the time factor critical and require rapid reserve mobilization and swift force deployment. Ben-Gurion described this as follows: "Our enemies can attack us with their full force from land, sea, and air, and if, God forbid, they reach Tel Aviv before we have organized and mobilized our full strength—we are lost."³ In addition, this challenge requires

an intelligence warning capability regarding an expected invasion or attack prior to its realization. Without timely warning and rapid mobilization, campaigns risk prolongation—with strategic consequences. At the core of Ben-Gurion's approach stood the need to shorten the duration of the campaign in order to minimize, as much as possible, casualties on Israel's side and damage to its economy.

After 1979, Israeli intelligence needed to detect 'strategic shifts'—changes in Egyptian policy that might violate the peace accords. In this context, a strategic shift refers to a change in Egyptian policy (due to a change of regime or other circumstances) contrary to the peace agreements, and an intention to undertake offensive action against Israel. Warning in this case was intended to allow sufficient preparation time in terms of force buildup and the reallocation of resources in response to the potential Egyptian threat.

The Heart of the Iron Wall: Decisive Victory

The heart of Ze'ev Jabotinsky's "Iron Wall" idea is the creation of military power whose presence and actions generate an impenetrable "iron wall" in the enemy's consciousness. When not even a "spark of hope of getting rid of us" remains in the enemy's mind, and the iron wall has no

2 David Ben-Gurion, *Army and State*, 1953. [in Hebrew]

3 Ibid.

cracks, only then will the enemy lose hope and reconcile himself to Israel's existence. In order to instill such a mindset in the enemy, the architects of Israel's security concept in the early years of the state argued that the IDF must achieve decisive victories in every war and in every encounter with the enemy. To achieve such decisiveness, Ben-Gurion maintained that the core strength of the IDF should be a striking force, with an emphasis on armored forces, supported by the air force.

The principle of decisiveness means that the mode of military action in every encounter with an enemy should yield an unequivocal outcome in Israel's favor. One of the operational expressions of the principle of decisiveness, as it took shape in Israel's security concept, was encapsulated in the idea of transferring the fighting to enemy territory. A rapid and powerful maneuver into enemy territory as quickly as possible was intended both to shorten the duration of the war (as noted, for economic reasons and to reduce casualties), to distance the threat from the civilian population, and to significantly increase pressure on the enemy. Decisiveness cannot be achieved by standoff weapons and aerial bombardment alone. This understanding took root as early as the 1950s, as reflected, for example, in the writings of Yigal Allon, commander of the Palmach, a senior IDF commander in the War of Independence and later a government minister: "Reciprocal

aerial bombardments—with conventional bombs—may cause severe damage and do much toward destroying the other side, but under Middle Eastern conditions they are insufficient to bring about a clear decision between victor and vanquished and to end a war."⁴

When not even a “spark of hope of getting rid of us” remains in the enemy’s mind, and the iron wall has no cracks, only then will the enemy lose hope and reconcile himself to Israel’s existence

Deterrence is the Result of Decisive Victory

The use of decisive force is intended to instill in our enemies a strong sense of deterrence that will prevent—or at least reduce—their desire to act offensively against the State of Israel in the future. Deterrence of enemies from acting against Israel applies both at the tactical level toward short-term use of force, and at the strategic level against a full-scale war or an intense and prolonged campaign. Since the enemies of the State of Israel are numerous and persist over many years, the principle of deterrence is meant to have a cumulative effect. In the early years of the state, Ben-Gurion recognized that Arab states would need decisive defeats before abandoning their goal to destroy Israel.

⁴ Yigal Allon, *Screen of Sand*, third edition, Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing, 1981, p. 68. [in Hebrew]

Not Only the Existence of Power, but the Willingness to Carry Out a “Preemptive Counterattack”

Deterrence is an elusive concept, and it is difficult to determine at any given moment the enemy’s precise intentions. One of the fundamental understandings is that the manner in which force is employed would have a greater deterrent effect than the mere existence of IDF capabilities. Yigal Allon articulated this in the 1950s:

Precisely Israel’s capability and willingness to launch a preemptive counterattack, whenever the preparations of the Arab armies take on a threatening and dangerous character, will reduce the need to undertake decisive military measures and will increase the chances for peace. For it is not enough that the IDF exists and possesses power as a means of deterrence; the manner of its use is no less important than its very existence. On this, there is no dispute.⁵

Self-Reliance with Great-Power Support

To strengthen deterrence, Israel’s founders pursued two complementary strategies: first, the principle of self-reliance, expressed through nuclear capability and sole reliance on IDF forces during wartime (without foreign

forces); and second, the establishment of strategic relations with a global power.

The development of Israel’s nuclear capability began in the mid-1950s with French assistance, through the construction of the Nuclear Research Center near Dimona.⁶ While Israel has never revealed the extent of its nuclear capabilities, it has attained an image of a nuclear-armed state, and this contributed to strategic deterrence. Moreover, in the 1980s the “Begin Doctrine” was added, stipulating that Israel would act to prevent hostile states from developing nuclear weapons. The doctrine became tangible in June 1981 with the attack on the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq; later, in September 2007, when Israel struck the Syrian nuclear reactor; and most recently, in June 2025, with the attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities.

The State of Israel’s pursuit, from its earliest years, of a close relationship with a global power was intended to add a diplomatic umbrella and an important layer to the “Iron Wall”. This was based on the assumption that states tend to think very carefully before attacking a country that enjoys the backing of a global power. In its first two decades, France was Israel’s primary arms supplier and key partner in the 1956 Sinai Campaign. These relations deteriorated in the period surrounding the Six-Day War, and France

⁵ Ibid. p. 77

⁶ BenLevi, Raphael. “The evolution and future of Israeli nuclear ambiguity.” *The Nonproliferation Review*, 29(4-6) (2022), pp. 243-265

even imposed an arms embargo on Israel. After 1967, Israel forged a strategic partnership with the United States that has steadily deepened despite fluctuations. Since the late 1960s onward, Israel began to equip itself with American weapon systems across almost all military domains. Ties between the Israeli defense establishment and its American counterpart steadily strengthened and even became an asset for the United States, particularly in the fields of intelligence and technology. The United States became Israel's primary diplomatic defender, notably preventing anti-Israel resolutions at the UN Security Council. It should be noted, though, that Israel has never signed a formal defense pact with the United States.

Israeli governments and the security establishment viewed settlement as a central element for security

Settlement as an Essential Element of Security

Settlement has been central to Zionism, embodying the Jewish connection to the land. Early security leaders viewed settlement as critical to Israel's territorial defense and strategic depth. As noted, Ben-Gurion spelled out Israel's essential security requirements, including: "...settlement in vulnerable areas, along the borders, at the

approaches to Jerusalem, in the Negev, in the 'mixed' Galilee..."⁷ Yigal Allon wrote about settlement:

From the very beginning of the resettlement of the returning exiles, settlement became a security factor of the highest order, and it will continue to be a military factor as circumstances and times change. And conversely: without settlements who are also fighters, defending the land would be impossible, even if the power of the army were doubled; just as without an excellent army the invader would not be defeated. The two are inseparable.⁸

Allon even viewed the settlements as fulfilling a role in the security deployment: "A dense network of settlements, deployed in depth, properly fortified, armed with the best modern weaponry and organized in a solid territorial defensive array, can serve as a kind of strategic depth, as a substitute for the geographic depth that does not exist..."⁹

Thus, from the first decades of Israel's existence and until the late 1980s (when, for example, a government program to establish lookout settlements in the Galilee was implemented), Israeli governments and the security establishment viewed settlement as a central element for security, both in terms of strategic depth and border defense. "The

7 David Ben-Gurion, *Army and State*, 1953. [in Hebrew]

8 Yigal Allon, *A Curtain of Sand*, p. 263. [in Hebrew]

9 Ibid. p. 254

government's policy in favor of settlement is absolutely clear. It speaks both of outposts and of permanent settlements. This policy stems first and foremost from socialist Zionist ideology. We see settlement as a security necessity..."¹⁰ However, from the 1990s onward, a change in policy occurred: the number of new settlements established in the State of Israel was greatly reduced, and the role of the Nahal Corps was changed from settlement to educational activity.

Thus, Israel's national security doctrine in the first decades of its existence was based on the "Iron Wall" idea and expressed through three pillars: decisive victory, cumulative deterrence, and strategic warning. These pillars guided the development and operation of the IDF in its early decades and helped Israel address the challenges posed by its enemies. The goal of decisive action was to create deterrence, keep the threat away from the country's civilians, and shorten the duration of a campaign. Deterrence aimed to increase the time between wars and erode the enemy's motivation to attack Israel. The warning pillar sought to compensate for the lack of geographical depth in Israel's territory and allow the mobilization of reserves while avoiding the need for a large standing army. The three pillars did not emerge out of nowhere; they aligned with the strategic,

political, social, security, economic, and value-based assessments of the young national leadership, formed in the face of multiple threats and against all odds. Implementing these principles led Israel successfully to military victories against the surrounding Arab states.

The Changes to the Security Doctrine over the Past Three Decades

The late 1980s and early 1990s marked a transition between two significant periods, both globally and in Israel. The central global driver was the collapse of the Soviet Union (in 1991), which marked the end of the Cold War and the transition from a bi-polar balance of power to a unipolar world—the United States. In the 1990s, Europe, after years of recovery from the World Wars, embraced diplomacy as a substitute for force, relied on American hegemony in world affairs, and laid the groundwork for the establishment of the European Union in 1993.

The Changing Nature of Israel's Enemies: From Pan-Arabism to Pan-Islamism

At the same time, several changes in the Middle East had a major impact on Israel's national security. In 1979, the Islamic Revolution took place in Iran, bringing the

10 Minister Israel Galili's response on behalf of the Golda Meir government regarding the government's policy toward the Gaza Strip. (Knesset Records, Session 289 of the Seventh Knesset, 27.3.1972, pp. 2105–2106). Huberman, Billig, *The Policies of Israeli Governments Toward Jewish Settlement in the Gaza Strip, 1967–2005*. [in Hebrew]

Ayatollahs to power. This event marked the beginning of a broad regional shift from Pan-Arabism to Pan-Islamism. In the 1980s, two Islamist terror organizations were established that would, over the years, become the clearest expression of the changing nature of threats to Israel: Hezbollah (1982), the Shiite group in Lebanon, and Hamas (1987), the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood organization in the Gaza Strip. Both organizations declared the destruction of the State of Israel as their goal. Another important Sunni terrorist organization was al-Qaeda, founded in 1988 in Afghanistan, marking the rise of global jihad against the West.

Against the backdrop of a developing terrorist threat and an increasing capability to launch rockets and missiles into Israel's cities, Israel also saw a decline in the classical threat that had shaped its security doctrine—invasion by regular state armies¹. The Yom Kippur War (1973) against the Egyptian and Syrian armies and the First Lebanon War (1982) against the Syrian army were the last wars in which the IDF fought against regular Arab armies. Moreover, the “peace agreements” Israel signed with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) reinforced the sense in Israel that the threat of a large-scale ground invasion had passed.¹¹ This also shaped the narrative of the end of the era of wars, the end of the conventional threat, and the perception that Israel would now face only a sub-

conventional threat (terrorist organizations) or a super-conventional one (nuclear).

The Three Withdrawals and their Consequences

During the last decade of the twentieth century and the years that followed, the State of Israel carried out three major military withdrawals. First, Israel signed the Oslo Accords in 1993 with the PLO, dividing Judea and Samaria into Areas A, B, and C, and transferring security responsibility for Areas A and B to the Palestinians. In May 2000, Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon in a rapid and unilateral manner, which led to Hezbollah's immediate takeover of the Lebanese side of the border with Israel. In 2005, Israel unilaterally implemented the Disengagement Plan, which involved the withdrawal of all Israeli presence—both military and civilian—from the Gaza Strip, the demolition of all settlements, and the removal of thousands of residents from the territory. In 2007, only two years after the Disengagement Plan was carried out, Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip by force, overthrowing Fatah's rule and becoming the de facto sovereign.

The justification given for the withdrawals was that they would provide Israel with international legitimacy to strike its enemies with greater force if attacked from these territories. It was also argued that the

11 Moshe Ya'alon, “50th Anniversary of the Six-Day War Conference” at *Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi*, June 5, 2017. [in Hebrew]

withdrawal would remove the enemy's motivation to attack or, at the very least, make it difficult for the enemy to gain public legitimacy for war.

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As a corollary of the assumption that the era of full-scale wars had ended, the wars that did occur—or, under the new terminology, the “limited conflicts”—were considered to be against terrorist organizations who were isolated from the states and peoples in which they operate. In this view, Hezbollah is not Lebanon, the residents of the Gaza Strip are not Hamas, and Fatah terrorists are not the Palestinian Authority.

Kidnappings and Prisoner Exchanges

Since the 1980s, Israel agreed to a series of highly disproportionate prisoner exchange deals which portrayed the country as weak and susceptible to extortion. The most notable of these were: the first Jibril deal (1983), in which 4,765 prisoners were released in exchange for six Nahal soldiers; the second Jibril deal (1985), in which 1,150 prisoners were released in exchange for three IDF soldiers; a deal with Hezbollah

(2004), in which 450 prisoners were released in exchange for three IDF soldiers kidnapped by the organization on Mount Dov in 2000; and the Gilad Shalit deal (2011) with Hamas, in which 1,027 Palestinian prisoners were released in exchange for the soldier kidnapped by the organization in 2006. These prisoner exchange deals weakened Israel's reputation in the eyes of its enemies, likely encouraged further kidnappings, and filled the Judea, Samaria, and Gaza with numerous released fighters, some of whom joined the leadership of terrorist organizations and other operational roles.

Defense Instead of Decisive Victory

Over the past three decades, efforts have been made to update and delineate Israel's security doctrine. Various committees addressed this issue, but their proposals were never formalized. The most significant change to the security discourse of Israel's political and defense establishment was the addition of the “defense” pillar—alongside decision, deterrence, and warning—proposed by the Meridor Committee in 2006. The defense pillar was in reaction to the development of the rocket threat posed by terrorist organizations to the Israeli home front. This change, together with the processes described above, has produced a de facto shift in Israel's security doctrine over the past three decades. Some argue that the addition of the defense pillar contradicts the principle of decisive victory.¹²

12 Yagil Henkin, *Nuclear Iran: Is Israel Ready for Disaster?*, podcast “On the Meaning”, 2024. [in Hebrew]

The protection of the civilian and military rear, whether through passive defense (shelters and reinforced rooms) or active defense (Iron Dome), was intended to provide maneuvering forces with better conditions to act against the enemy and achieve decisive outcomes. In practice, however, the protection measures have become a justification to avoid maneuvering when there are no civilian casualties.

The Fundamental Assumptions of the New Doctrine

Thus, over the past three decades, a process of change has taken place in Israel's security concept, expressed in the following new assumptions:

The end of the era of wars – Worldwide, including in the Middle East, there will no longer be high-intensity wars. For various reasons, dramatic and intense interstate conflicts that require the mobilization of all national resources—including readiness to pay a heavy price, and to extract an even heavier price from the enemy—will no longer occur.

War against terrorists rather than war between nations – As a derivative of the previous assumption, the “limited conflicts” taking place today are against terrorist organizations that are detached from the states and peoples among whom they operate. Over recent decades, the IDF has pursued “guilty individuals” using exclusively tactical military means. Civilian systems that produce, support, and sustain

terrorism have remained outside the scope of the struggle. The new doctrine brings to bear immense technological power that enables it to conduct low-intensity wars of attrition while minimizing harm. Because the nature of the threat has changed, a rapid and decisive defeat of the enemy is no longer perceived as a vital necessity.

Terror beyond the border can be managed through a policy of containment –

Although terrorist organizations and their increasingly sophisticated capabilities are developing at an alarming pace on the other side of the border (sometimes only meters away from Israeli civilian or military facilities and sometimes deep within the territory), they are not considered an existential or immediate threat requiring continuous action. These organizations can be contained, with the understanding that Israel will be able to block their operative goals when necessary. The conflict with enemies—particularly the Palestinians—can be managed; there is no need to decisively defeat them. Therefore, there is no imperative to hold territory. The conflict can be managed and kept at an acceptable level along borders and lines determined by Israel. Military force will be used only when necessary and to the minimum extent required to preserve the conflict at a controlled level.

An example of this approach can be found in the IDF Strategy document, first published in 2015 and expanded in 2018 by then-Chief of Staff, Gadi Eisenkot². In the document,

Eisenkot describes the “prevention and influence approach” as the IDF’s primary approach, whose:

“...main objective is to preserve the existing strategic situation in the short-term. ...According to this approach, the IDF strives to thwart emerging threats and delay war, and to damage the enemy’s capabilities in order to create optimal military, state, and cognitive conditions for a future decisive victory should war break out, and to strengthen deterrence. This approach advances objectives of shaping the environment, weakening adversaries, reducing their force buildup, and undermining their legitimacy, and also promotes the building of partnerships and force development, aimed at strengthening Israel’s power. Under this approach, the IDF operates defensively, while also carrying out offensive actions within this framework, but seeks a return to calm rather than escalation.¹³

A prolonged occupation cannot be justified—especially in opposition to international pressure. Within Israel’s military and political leadership, a cognitive norm has developed that it is never appropriate to control territory through military force (even though international law allows it and it forms an inherent part of military action in war). Moreover, if Israel

is not careful in how it exercises its power and implements its policies, it may face international sanctions similar to those imposed on South Africa for its apartheid policy. Implicit here is the assumption, for example, that Israel’s control over Judea and Samaria was always illegitimate.

Rationalist management of the struggle

– An attempt to manage the conflict based on economic, political, and other interests that serve as decisive factors in the decision-making of leaders in the Western world. This approach ignores differences in the value attributed to human life. Leverage is applied according to this rationale (for example, economic sanctions) to delay the adversary’s buildup or even attempt to prevent conflicts. As part of Western thinking, there is an assumption that when individuals or extremist organizations (dictators, revolutionary movements, terrorists, and resistance organizations) assume power, their ideology moderates under the constraints of governance: the need to address the economic interests of the population, employment issues, water and electricity infrastructure, and even day-to-day life, such as garbage collection. As a result, policymakers argued that employing Palestinian workers in Israel and improving the material living standards of the population would moderate Hamas, as it would have something to lose. Similarly, the population itself would resist initiating war to avoid harming their

13 Gadi Eisenkot, *IDF Strategy*, 2018, p. 19-20 [in Hebrew]

standard of living. In this way, Israel analyzed Hamas through a Western lens, which tended to avoid recognizing the strength of its ideological component committed to jihad and the destruction of Israel. In Israel, the prevailing approach held that the solution to the situation was political rather than military.

The idea of nationalism came to be perceived as a cause of the disasters of the World Wars and was therefore deemed illegitimate, on par with Fascism and Nazism

The Ideological Background for the Change in Israel's Security Doctrine

The change in Israel's security doctrine since the 1990s stemmed not only from developments on the ground—such as shifts in the nature of threats, the state of the Israeli economy, and global technological advances—but primarily from shifts in the values in Israeli society, particularly among the institutional elite. These shifts arose from several deep ideological currents in the global intellectual sphere, which gradually gained traction in Israel during the 1990s.

In the aftermath of the World Wars, particularly in Europe, philosophies that emphasized the individual at the expense

of the “old institutions” of the state, the nation, and the community gained strength. Moreover, the idea of nationalism came to be perceived as a cause of the disasters of the World Wars and was therefore deemed illegitimate, on par with Fascism and Nazism. As a result, these ideas rejected the frameworks and cultural structures of the past and turned toward creating a new conceptual language based on ultra-individualism that was inherently anti-militaristic. At the same time, postmodernist ideas¹⁴ eroded the notion of absolute truth—particularly in Europe and the United States—and the sense of justice in the Western world began to blur, leaving its mark on perceptions of the international, national, and social spheres³. In Europe, a “transnational”¹⁵ identity began to develop, which viewed the existence of supranational institutions, to which states are bound in matters of justice, law, and morality, as a desirable goal⁴.

These ideas also began to penetrate Israel's academic and social spheres. Toward the 1990s, alongside changes in the nature of security threats and the growth of economic prosperity, a transformation also occurred in the character and identity of Israeli society. Israeli society shifted from a refugee society defined by survival and a looming existential

14 For further reading, see: Steven R. C. Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism*, Sela Meir Publishing, 2019; Shmuel Trigano, *The New Dominant Ideology—Postmodernism*, Jerusalem: Carmel, 2020. [in Hebrew]

15 For further reading, see: Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2003; John Fonte, *Sovereignty or Submission*, 2011.

threat to a Western society of abundance, possessing technological superiority and lacking a tangible existential threat. This created fertile ground for the embrace of postmodern ideas—including the erosion of the concept of the enemy—at the political level, and from the 1990s onward also within the Israeli security establishment, through internal think tanks and external bodies aimed at instilling values in IDF soldiers in the form of educational foundations and NGOs.

One of the central bodies that came to exert influence over IDF thinking was the Operational Theory Research Institute, headed by Shimon Naveh, which—through the training of the IDF’s senior command—created a new conceptual language detached from traditional military doctrine. This new conceptual language pushed the notion of decisive victory to the margins and generated alternative concepts such as limited conflict, systemics, calming [hoga’ah], and levers. In this way, formulations were introduced into IDF discourse such as: “First and foremost, it is necessary to extricate ourselves from the framework in which we were educated, whose foundation rests on the ideas of deterrence, decisive victory, and early warning, and to develop adaptive capacity that will enable coping with the organizing idea of limited conflict and the strategy of calming employed within it.”¹⁶ Thus, in

practice, Israel’s security doctrine was eroded from within the security establishment itself. At the same time, the belief in the impossibility of defeating terrorism gained increasing prominence, which went hand in hand with the belief in the declining importance of ground forces and the lack of purpose in ground maneuver altogether. These ideas surfaced clearly in the manner in which the IDF operated and functioned during the Second Lebanon War, as reflected in the Winograd and Shomron commissions that investigated it.

This new conceptual language pushed the notion of decisive victory to the margins and generated alternative concepts such as limited conflict, systemics, calming [hoga’ah], and levers

The cultural transformation experienced by the West, including Israel, since the World Wars can be summarized through the reaction of the American thinker Lee Harris to the shock that struck his fellow citizens following the September 11 terrorist attacks (many in Israel were likewise deeply shocked by Hamas’s actions—militarily, ideologically, culturally, and humanly):

“They forget, in short, that there has ever been a category of human

16 Shmuel Nir, “Attrition and the Adaptation Test,” *Studies in National Security*, 4 (January 2001). For further reading, see Naveh Dromi, *Flowers in the Barrel*, Sela Meir Publishing, 2022 [in Hebrew]

experience called the enemy... That, before 9/11, was what had happened to us. The very concept of the enemy had been banished from our moral and political vocabulary. An enemy was just a friend we hadn't done enough for yet. Or perhaps there had been a

misunderstanding, or an oversight on our part— something that we could correct. Our first task therefore is to try to grasp what the concept of the enemy really means. The enemy is someone who is willing to die in order to kill you.”¹⁷

17 Lee Harris, *Civilization and Its Enemies, The Next Stage of History*, 2004, p.xii