



ARGAMAN

Rebuilding the IDF Ground Forces as the Backbone of Israel's Military Power: A Comprehensive Plan

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The Paradigm Project: A New Strategic Agenda for Israel

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Publisher: Amiad Cohen

Original Hebrew version published in September 2025

Published in Jerusalem

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Herut – The Center for Israeli Liberty, 5 Aholiav St., Jerusalem 9446778

Printed 2026

English Edition © Herut – The Center for Israeli Liberty Publishers

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Printed in Israel



Chapter 4

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Executive Summary

The State of Israel faces a challenging security environment, shaped by a prolonged conflict with the Arab–Muslim world from the beginnings of Zionism to the present day. Since its establishment, Israel has sought to ensure its survival through a high-quality military force designed to defeat its enemies in every encounter and to project military power. According to the classic security doctrine, based on Ze’ev Jabotinsky’s “Iron Wall” doctrine as adopted by David Ben-Gurion, only by demonstrating military superiority will Israel’s enemies come to terms with the state’s existence. Accordingly, the State of Israel has allocated substantial national resources to its defense establishment, foremost among them compulsory conscription and the sustained investment of a significant share of GDP in security needs.

However, over the years the state’s security doctrine changed, a shift reflected in the reduction of resources allocated to the IDF’s ground maneuver forces. In response to changes in the threat environment—including the signing of peace agreements with some former enemy states—a prolonged transition to a “small and smart” military unfolded. As part of this process, the size of the ground forces declined due to the closure of brigades and divisions, and the reserve force was eroded. The emphasis shifted toward investment in high-end technologies, the Air Force, military intelligence, and technological defensive systems such as the Iron Dome and “smart” border barriers, based on the belief that

future wars would be conducted primarily through sophisticated weapons systems rather than large-scale ground combat.

Recent wars, foremost among them the Iron Swords War, exposed the severe consequences of this shift. Although the IDF succeeded in achieving partial ground control and inflicted significant damage on Hamas and Hezbollah, the lack of sufficient maneuver forces led to difficulties in urban warfare and in achieving a rapid, decisive outcome. At the root of this change lay a failure in defining the reference threat, which focused on the enemies' intentions rather than on their actual military capabilities. This scenario did not adequately account for the possibility of multi-front warfare, nor did it include preparedness for surprise ground attacks within the territory of the State of Israel.

This document argues that the severe damage sustained by Israel's adversaries in the most recent war—including Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, and the Syrian regime—does not justify delaying the strengthening of the ground forces, as proposed by recent government committees. There are four main reasons for this:

1. **Terror threats do not disappear—they recover:** Even after Hamas and Hezbollah have absorbed heavy blows, they may recover, as has happened in the past. The rehabilitation and rearmament mechanisms of terrorist organizations do not come to a halt; therefore, the IDF must maintain ready and capable ground forces.
2. **Focusing on intentions rather than capabilities is a conceptual failure:** For years, Israel's reference scenario was based on analyses of the enemy's intentions rather than on assessments of its capabilities. This approach overlooked the fact that potential threats—such as Egypt, Jordan, Shiite militias, and radical Islamist forces in the Middle East—could become active adversaries in the future.
3. **Building ground force capability is a long-term process and must not be left to the last minute:** Establishing a new armored brigade is not a one-or-two-year endeavor; it requires many years of investment in manpower, training, and the procurement of suitable equipment. Building several brigades—and certainly divisions—takes a great deal of time, and therefore the process must begin now.
4. **A strong ground force is a strategic-political tool:** This is not just a necessity at the operational level. A powerful military projects national strength, reinforces deterrence, and provides Israel with room to

maneuver on the international stage. Neglecting the ground forces, on the other hand, weakens Israel's standing and limits its freedom of action in times of crisis.

To ensure Israel's continued ability to defend itself, this document proposes a fundamental change to the current nature of Israel's force deployment and, consequently, in its force build-up. The force deployment concept rests on four principles: initiative, decisiveness, power, and the conduct of combat on enemy territory. As a result, a force build-up is required that will restore and strengthen the ground forces, while developing the capability to defend on all fronts and to conduct offensive operations on multiple fronts simultaneously. This is not meant to replace the current excellent long-range capabilities of the Air Force—which should be maintained— but rather that rebuilding the ground maneuver forces should be prioritized over further expansion and continued over-emphasis on air power.

In order to rebuild Israel's capability for decisive ground maneuvers, a series of changes in force build-up must be implemented:

1. **Expanding the order of battle of the ground forces:** Additional brigades and divisions must be established in numbers sufficient to enable simultaneous defense on all fronts and concurrent offensive operations on the required fronts. These divisions and brigades must possess full operational readiness and an appropriate training framework.
2. **Ground-based firepower:** An independent and diverse fire capability must be developed for the maneuvering forces. This firepower should cover short- and medium-range engagements, across the full spectrum of intensity and with varying levels of precision.
3. **Combat engineering:** Engineering units must be expanded so that every brigade combat team includes an engineering battalion, or at least a reinforced heavy engineering equipment company. In addition, improved solutions must be developed—within the Engineering Corps or elsewhere—for dealing with underground threats.
4. **Tactical battlefield intelligence:** Relevant combat collection capabilities must be developed, and collection frameworks established at multiple echelons.
5. **Combat mobility:** Broad mobility capabilities must be restored across all forces. This may include light vehicles, armored trucks, light AFVs, or any other solutions suited to the operational concept.

6. **Administrative and logistical support:** It must be ensured that, alongside the buildup of the combat forces, the logistical support capabilities of those forces are developed as well.
7. **The near-ground airspace:** The project should include an operational concept as well as the acquisition of drones, drone swarms, and additional aerial platforms—each with distinct capabilities (visual, radar, explosive payloads, and others).
8. **Night fighting:** Extensive procurement of night-vision equipment must be undertaken for all maneuvering units across all branches.
9. **Improving the readiness and preparedness of the reserve forces:** The reserve system is a critical pillar in a full-scale war, yet it currently suffers from erosion in both operational readiness and equipment levels.

Moreover, the new concept emphasizes the importance of extensive ground maneuver as an integral component of Israel's overall military doctrine. In the international arena, the State of Israel often faces diplomatic pressure that limits the duration of war-fighting. Rapid and decisive ground maneuver can secure military achievements that help translate battlefield success into political gains. Ground maneuver should therefore be regarded as a central means of defeating adversaries and preserving long-term deterrence. This does not mean raising the defense budget to extraordinary levels of GDP as was mistakenly done following the Yom Kippur War, but rather a rise of a few percentage points relative to Israel's GDP, similar to that recommended by the recent government committee, and as a specific, time-limited, multi-year defense plan, so as not to harm Israel's credit rating.

This policy poses significant implementation challenges, yet it is vital to ensuring Israel's combat capability in the face of unpredictable future threats. Israel must acknowledge that the struggle for its existence is far from over, and that it must build a military force that is strong, resilient, flexible, and constantly prepared for any possible scenario. The document calls upon the nation—its citizens and its leaders—to once again adopt a mindset of resilience and continued preparedness, alongside the enduring aspiration for prosperity and growth, grounded in the understanding that the challenges facing the State of Israel are not transient. A state with a deep Jewish national identity, combining strength and determination with economic success and innovation, is the key to our success and prosperity.

Introduction

Background

The State of Israel is situated at the heart of a hostile environment. From the very beginnings of the Zionist enterprise in the Land of Israel, the Arab–Muslim population—both that residing between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea and that along the borders of this region—did not accept the idea of a Jewish state. Consequently, from the birth of the pre-state community and up to the present day it is clear that the fundamental condition for Israel’s existence is a high-quality military force—capable of protecting the country’s borders and its citizens, and projecting military power toward all who would seek to harm it.

According to the “Iron Wall” concept, formulated by Ze’ev Jabotinsky and adopted by David Ben-Gurion as the security doctrine of the State of Israel, only when its neighbors understand that they cannot defeat Israel by force of arms will they reconcile themselves with its existence and establish normal relations with it.

A direct outcome of this concept is the allocation of substantial national resources to Israel’s security establishment. Foremost among these is the compulsory military service law, which provides the IDF with the best human capital in the State of Israel. Beyond that, a significant share of GDP—higher than that of developed Western countries—is devoted to security needs.

However, the amount of resources allocated to the defense budget and the way the “pie” is divided among various security needs have changed over the years. Old threats have been replaced by new ones, enemy states have signed political agreements with Israel, and shifts in Israeli society and its priorities have all affected the security establishment in general and the IDF in particular.

The cornerstone of Israel’s security doctrine, as shaped by David Ben-Gurion, was rapid decision and victory. More precisely, it entailed blocking of the enemy, transferring the fighting to the enemy’s territory, and achieving a swift defeat. The reasons for this are clear: Israel’s geographic size and lack of strategic depth do not allow it to conduct a war within its own territory. Israel’s demographic situation relative to its adversaries requires the mobilization of reserve forces in wartime and the shutdown of the economy, and therefore necessitates shortening the duration of war. To meet these conditions, there is a need for ground forces capable of defending, attacking, and rapidly defeating the enemy.

From these same factors and for these same reasons, according to this doctrine, when the opportunity arises, a preventive operation—or at least a preemptive strike—should be carried out in order to deny the enemy the capability to invade Israel and defeat it. In recent decades, as part of the changes noted above, fewer and fewer resources have been allocated to the ground

maneuver capabilities of the IDF. As a result, the ground forces have shrunk, and the ability for decisive maneuver has been considerably reduced.

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A State's Military Power

A state's military power is measured through an integration of parameters such as the type, size and composition of its armed forces, including infantry, armor, artillery, air force, navy, and special forces; its type of weaponry and the level of technological advancement; the defense budget and its share of GDP; the logistical system—supply capabilities, mobility and deployment capacity, and domestic defense-industrial production; military alliances, international ties, and cooperation; human and physical resilience, including the level of training, discipline, and fighting spirit; military experience and success on the battlefield; and additional factors.

When building military power, a state must define the reference threat it faces and invest in force development and military strength in those parameters that will help it prevail over the potential adversaries comprising that threat. A state whose enemies are distant and threaten it only with stand-off fire is fundamentally different from a state whose enemies reside along its borders. A

state confronting terrorism and guerrilla threats operating with simple means and small formations differs from one facing large armies employing heavy weapons and divisional frameworks. Likewise, a state possessing geographic depth, economic depth, or other forms of strategic depth differs from one that lacks them. Each of these states will invest its resources in different components of military power in order to deter its enemies and prevent war, or to defeat them should they choose to fight.

Over the past thirty years, the IDF has undergone a process whose central focus was the transition from a large army to a “small and smart” force. Based on an analysis of threats in the regional and global environment facing Israel, military and state leadership decided that it was both possible and appropriate to reduce the size of the army and invest more in the Air Force, intelligence, technologies, and advanced systems. As part of this process, brigades and divisions in the ground forces were disbanded, combat platforms and weapons systems were reduced, and training was scaled back.

But is the analysis of reality, the threats, and the reference scenario accurate? Does the size of the ground forces provide the military power required by the State of Israel in light of the reference threat? What should be the guiding principles in building its land power? These are the critical questions that must be addressed.

The IDF's Strength in Light of the Iron Swords War

This document was written while the Iron Swords War was still ongoing. Nevertheless, it is already possible to state that the strength of some of Israel's adversaries—particularly those nearest its borders—has been significantly reduced. Hamas in the Gaza Strip has lost a substantial portion of its capabilities, both in terms of commanders and fighters, and in terms of weaponry and combat infrastructure, including large sections of its underground network that were destroyed. The IDF has also achieved ground control over parts of the Gaza Strip. Hezbollah was likewise weakened: its command chain, especially senior leadership, has suffered severe losses, hundreds of fighters were killed, and a significant portion of its long and medium-range missiles, weapons depots, production facilities, and other infrastructure were destroyed. The Israeli strikes on Iran, in response to its missile attack in October 2024, hit long-range surface-to-surface missile production facilities, advanced air-defense systems (S-300), and intelligence and logistical installations, affecting Iran both physically and psychologically. Finally, following the attacks by rebel forces in Syria and the destruction of Syrian army weaponry by Israel's Air Force, the Syrian military effectively ceased to exist. Equally important, Hezbollah's supply line from Iran was cut off.

In the next phase, during Operation Rising Lion in June 2025 Israel expanded its direct

actions deep into Iranian territory. The IDF struck key nuclear sites, missile launchers, and air-defense batteries, as well as logistical facilities and sensitive governmental infrastructure. Senior figures in the Iranian military and nuclear establishment were eliminated, production and development capabilities were disrupted, and the regime's sense of invulnerability was severely undermined. Although Iran responded with a massive barrage of hundreds of missiles and UAVs targeting Israel, the air-defense systems intercepted most of them, and the damage to Israel remained relatively limited. The results of the operation made it clear that Israel is capable of projecting significant strategic power even into the heart of Iran, and that the cost Tehran must pay for its actions has increased substantially.

The Current Policy

As noted above, military force is built in light of a threat analysis and the determination of a reference scenario for which the armed forces must prepare. It is clear that the manner in which the threat analysis is conducted and the reference scenario is defined directly affects force development in practice.

The Process of Defining the Reference Scenario in the State of Israel

The IDF's reference scenario is approved by the Political–Security Cabinet. This scenario serves as a working tool for preparedness (force building) and for the development

of operational plans. Its approval is a structured process involving military and security bodies as well as political decision-makers. The main stages of this process are as follows:

1. **Situation assessment and threat characterization (IDF):** The Intelligence Directorate conducts an analysis of the strategic threats facing Israel, including enemy states, terrorist organizations, changes in the international arena, and the enemy's technological capabilities. The Planning Directorate and the Operations Directorate translate the intelligence into operational assessments and formulate the reference scenario in accordance with Israel's national security doctrine. The Chief of the General Staff reviews the proposed scenario and forwards it for further discussion within the defense establishment.
2. **Review of the scenario (Ministry of Defense):** The Ministry of Defense reviews the scenario presented by the IDF, incorporating diplomatic, economic, and strategic considerations. If necessary, the Ministry of Defense and the IDF update the reference scenario accordingly.
3. **Presentation of the scenario to the government:** The Minister of Defense, the Chief of the General Staff, and senior intelligence officials present the reference scenario to the government. The government discusses the scenario within the framework of the Political-Security Cabinet and, at the conclusion of the process, reaches a decision that

includes principled approval of the scenario, which then guides the IDF and the defense establishment in their operational preparedness.

4. **Implementation and budget approval (Knesset):** Once the government approves the reference scenario, the resulting force structure and operational plans are translated into budgetary requirements. The Knesset, through the Ministerial Committee on Armaments and budgetary discussions, approves the defense budget based on the reference scenario and its implications.
5. **National Security Council (NSC) oversight of the process:** The NSC plays a central role in the process. Its task is to coordinate and synchronize all the different actors, aligning national strategic interests with the IDF's reference scenario. The NSC is responsible for preparing Cabinet discussions and ensuring that the security authorities present complete and relevant data, and at the conclusion of the process, to formulate opinions and recommendations for the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. After the reference scenario is approved, the NSC supervises the implementation of Cabinet decisions in accordance with the scenario.

Assumptions Underlying the Current Policy

As with any policy formulation, the analysis of threats and the definition of the reference scenario are influenced by the worldview of the decision-makers. The worldview that

underpinned the determination of Israel's reference scenario in recent decades was that the State of Israel would no longer fight "major wars." This document does not address whether this worldview arose from the assumption that Israel, its citizens, and its leaders were unwilling or unable to bear losses in lives and property—leading to the adoption of the "end of major wars" perspective—or whether it was influenced by a broader Western and developed-world perspective, which emphasized the futility, illegitimacy, and lack of necessity of wars, and consequently viewed the Israeli public as unwilling to pay the price of conflicts. In practice, the approach underlying the development of Israel's national military force was that the country would not face a full-scale war in the foreseeable future.

The understanding that we are not going to face a "major war," and moreover, that we are not willing to wage wars that incur significant losses, led to a security concept centered on other elements:

- a. **Diplomatic Agreements** – Reliance on diplomatic agreements, based on the belief that they provide a higher level of security than military power. These agreements were made with states and sub-state entities, some grounded in concrete actions and others based on future expectations. This reliance deeply influenced force building vis-à-vis these actors and the potential threat they posed. For example, the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan
- b. **MABAM – The Campaign Between Wars** – This campaign became the primary operational effort of the entire defense establishment. Its goal was to continuously reduce the capabilities of Israel's enemies, maintain the balance of power in Israel's favor, and thereby delay or deter their desire and ability to initiate war against the country. Most of the IDF's resources and force development were directed toward the units relevant to this effort—primarily the Intelligence Corps, including the special operations units, and, of course, the Air Force. However, with a caveat: it was defined that *MABAM* would always be conducted below the threshold of war and must not drag the country into an unplanned conflict. As a result, enemy capabilities were never reduced to the required level. At the same time, within the IDF itself, the forces not participating in *MABAM* gradually eroded.
- c. **Technological Defense** – As part of the desire to minimize losses, vast resources were invested in the most advanced defensive capabilities in the

completely eliminated the IDF's force development against them, both in terms of combat force structure and in intelligence gathering.

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world. This includes a multi-layered air-defense system, smart border fences and obstacles, spatial monitoring networks, and excellent intelligence capabilities. The role of this defense was to reduce the ability of Israel's enemies to inflict damage and to provide flexibility for the decision-makers.

Finally, there was the assumption that the only potential existential threat against the State of Israel is Iran's attempt to develop nuclear weapons. If Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, the strategic balance in the region would be disrupted, placing Israel's very existence at critical risk. Consequently, a significant portion of the defense budget was directed toward efforts to halt Iran's nuclear program.

The Reference Scenario

Aside from the campaign against the Iranian nuclear threat through various means, the primary reference scenario for which the IDF prepared—and to which the ground maneuver forces were oriented in recent years—was a limited and constrained one. The main adversaries in this scenario were Hezbollah and Hamas, and the working assumption was that the IDF would conduct an offensive in one arena while remaining on the defensive in the other. According to this scenario—which also downplayed the intensity of fighting against these semi-military terrorist organizations—the conflict would last no more than 30 to 45 days, and munitions, stockpiles, spare parts, and related resources were prepared

accordingly. Throughout the most recent multi-year plans, this scenario was adjusted slightly upward or downward: the number of fronts on which Israel would attack or the duration of the fighting varied somewhat from period to period. However, the essence remained the same—a war against relatively weak semi-military terrorist organizations, one that could be concluded within a few weeks to a few months, without a multi-front campaign involving all actors in the region.

Current Ground Force Development Policy

In light of this reference threat and the operational concept that maneuver forces would be employed only for limited operations, the bulk of the maneuvering power relied (de facto) on the regular forces. While in the early decades of the state, the operational doctrine held that “the regular army will stop an invasion and the reserves will take the decisive offensive action,” in recent decades, plans and force development were based on the assumption that “the regulars will stop an invasion, be relieved in defense by the reserves, and then go on offense.” Beyond this, the plans were primarily designed for short attacks, both in terms of maneuver distance and duration, and the force was organized accordingly. Although these definitions were never formally stated, they were implemented in practice.

Within the Ground Forces, several flagship projects were undertaken over the past decades:

1. **Digital Ground Army:** An advanced command and control (C2) system that provides a shared situational picture and connectivity for all ground forces.
2. **“Namer” – Merkava Armored Personnel Carrier:** A vehicle for transporting infantry troops, among the most advanced of its kind in the world.
3. **Merkava Tank:** Continuous development of the Merkava tank, from Mark 3 to Mark 4 and more advanced variants.
4. **Trophy – Active Protection System:** An active defense system for advanced armored vehicles, including Merkava tanks and Namer APCs.
5. **Keshet Mortars:** New 120 mm mortars at the battalion level, providing significantly greater lethality and much higher accuracy compared to the older 81 mm mortars.

Beyond these projects, the IDF also procured a range of additional new capabilities, from advanced munitions to night-vision and observation systems.

Support fire for maneuver forces did not improve significantly within the Ground Forces during these years (beyond the Keshet mortars) and largely relied on the Air Force, which received substantial investment in all multi-year plans. To compensate for this gap, the connectivity between the Air Force and maneuver units gradually improved over the years, and during the Iron Swords War, cooperation reached a high level, providing close support to the ground forces.

The IDF's regular divisions in 2023 looked completely different from the divisions of the 1990s. The equipment and technology at their disposal were far more advanced.

However, it is important to emphasize that only the regular divisions were equipped in this way. The first reason is that these projects and equipment are extremely expensive, making it a major resource challenge to similarly outfit the entire Ground Forces. The second reason is that the IDF never truly planned for a wide-scale, deep maneuver involving all forces and all divisions. Evidence of this can be seen in the Iron Swords War, into which the IDF entered with no plan to seize the entire Gaza Strip with multiple divisions, but only a limited plan to attack the northern sector. As a result, the reserve divisions were not intended to carry out significant maneuver missions like the regular forces, and therefore, there appeared to be no need to equip them in the same manner.

Moreover, the reserve forces have steadily diminished in size over the past three decades. Divisions and brigades were disbanded, the number of tanks has been reduced to roughly one-third of its original size, the artillery inventory has also decreased, and additional units and formations were either disbanded or downsized.

In line with the policy described and with the aim of equipping and organizing the forces that would actually fight in the best

possible way, a “Ground Force Readiness Structure” was established. Under this structure, readiness and equipment levels were defined for all IDF brigades, each according to its expected role. The regular brigades were prioritized at the forefront and thus fully equipped as required. The elite reserve brigades came next in the priority order, receiving less equipment and being assigned lower readiness levels than 100%. The remaining reserve brigades were designated solely for defensive and routine security missions, with very low levels of both equipment and readiness. Many additional brigades were disbanded.

Further cuts also stemmed from this policy. The Reserve Service Law enacted in 2008 greatly limited the number of service days for each reservist per year. Before this law, reservists could be called up for up to 36 days of service annually. The new law established a three-year model: a non-officer, non-commander could serve up to 54 days over three years; a non-officer commander up to 70 days; and an officer up to 84 days. While this reduced service model benefited the economy and the reservists themselves, it negatively affected operational readiness and unit cohesion. In addition to reducing annual reserve days, the law also lowered the exemption age from reserve service. Previously, the exemption age was 54 for men and 38 for women. The new law lowered the exemption age to 40 for soldiers, 45 for officers, and 49 for certain positions as determined by the Minister of Defense.

In this context, it is worth noting that, following the same policy, the regular army was also affected by Amendment No. 19 to the Security Service Law, which reduced mandatory service from 36 months to 32 months. This change made it very difficult to maintain full staffing in combat units and, more importantly, harmed the professional level of the units, as the most skilled and effective human resources were lost at the peak of their experience.

Failures and Problems in the Current Policy

Failures in Process

The first and most significant failure in the reference scenario approval process is that it begins with an intelligence assessment by the Research Division of Aman (IDF Intelligence Directorate). Israel’s intelligence bodies have excellent capabilities in tactical and operational intelligence, but very limited ability in strategic intelligence and overall strategic assessment. Several factors contribute to this gap. First and foremost, it is inherently more difficult to assess an enemy’s strategic intentions than to gather tactical information on personnel or weaponry for targeting purposes. Beyond that, there exists a deep cultural gap between the predominant mindset of Aman personnel in Israel and the culture and perceptions of Israel’s adversaries. This fundamental gap negatively affects the ability to predict the enemy’s strategic mindset and intentions. Adding to the problem, the political-cultural diversity

within Aman and other intelligence bodies is minimal, limiting its capacity to bring multiple perspectives to strategic analysis. In practice, over the years, Israel's intelligence community has demonstrated a limited ability to provide reliable strategic forecasts—whether due to objective challenges or subjective biases.

Only large-scale maneuver, the seizure of territory, and the clearing of areas of enemy forces and infrastructure can decisively defeat an adversary

The Security Cabinet, which is meant to bring the strategic perspective to the discussion, is not exposed during the reference scenario approval process to the full spectrum of threats or to the capabilities of all actors in the arena. It receives the reference scenario from the IDF only after the scenario has undergone processing and situational assessment. In other words, a regional actor—no matter how powerful—will not be considered in cabinet discussions, or its weight will be downgraded, if the IDF's situational assessment has determined that it does not constitute a threat due to a lack of perceived threatening intentions.

The Ministry of Defense and the National Security Council (NSC) do not have the appropriate staff to critically examine Aman's and the broader intelligence community's situational assessments. As a result, in practice, there is no effective

oversight of the formulation of the IDF's reference scenario, and instead of the scenario being subjected to review and further deliberation, it is most likely approved as is.

Failures in the Pre-Iron Swords War Reference Scenario

The reference scenario for which the army was built in the decades preceding the war, relied largely on an analysis of the enemies' intentions according to the IDF's assessment, and as a result, some threats were downplayed while others were removed from consideration altogether.

1. The expected campaign did not include a multi-theater scenario involving more than two simultaneous fronts. The threat analysis was lenient and did not assess that the enemies could be highly coordinated.
2. The scenario did not include a large-scale, surprise invasion into Israeli territory.
3. The strength of Hezbollah and Hamas was not assessed correctly, and so we planned for a shorter operation than would be required to defeat them. This may also stem from the defined objective vis-à-vis these organizations: if the goal was not decisive victory but rather raids and strikes, a shorter time frame could be deemed sufficient.
4. States such as Egypt and Jordan were not taken into account—certainly not Turkey and Yemen—with all the implications that follow from this.

Failures in Building the Ground Maneuvering Force

The central failure was the relinquishment of a powerful maneuvering force. Only large-scale maneuver, the seizure of territory, and the clearing of areas of enemy forces and infrastructure can decisively defeat an adversary. When the IDF gave up these capabilities, it effectively gave up its ability to achieve decisive victory.

When a comprehensive war is required and the forces are insufficient—whether in terms of readiness, capabilities, or numbers—the war becomes far more prolonged, exacting a heavy toll on the economy, the home front, and morale. For this reason, one of the cornerstones of Israel’s national security doctrine has been rapid decision and swift victory.

The reduction of maneuvering forces, based on the assumption that in the foreseeable future there would be no need for large maneuver formations, missed two very important elements. First, we could never guarantee that we truly understand the enemy’s intentions. Second, force-building processes take a very long time. Major projects of the kind mentioned above take a decade or more. Once certain projects are abandoned, or units and force structures are disbanded, this cannot be remedied within two or three years.

Within the maneuver force-building that did take place, there were several additional shortcomings. We will briefly

note them here and expand on them later in the proposed policy:

1. The maneuver force order of battle (OOB) was smaller than required, and within it there was excessive differentiation between the various forces.
2. Within this order of battle, an excessively low level of readiness was defined for a substantial portion of the brigades.
3. An independent fire-support array for the ground forces was not developed, leaving maneuver operations dependent on the Air Force and its availability relative to other missions assigned to it. In urban combat environments, and especially when the Air Force is required to operate across multiple fronts—including a “third circle”—a gap emerges in the intensity and availability of fire support for maneuvering ground forces.
4. Without relevant supporting forces across all domains, it is impossible to conduct a broad and effective campaign. The development of force structure in combat support and logistical support elements—such as intelligence collection, engineering and heavy engineering equipment, mobility, and transportation—did not match the requirements of modern warfare in the urban environment.

The Proposed Policy – Strengthening the IDF’s Capacity for Decisive Victory

We must adopt the working assumption that in the foreseeable future, the State of Israel will continue to exist in a state of struggle against forces which do not accept its basic legitimacy to exist. The roots of this struggle are ancient, but the current form has existed since the beginning of Zionism, the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, and the establishment of the state. The opposition of the Arab/Muslim world to the State of Israel stems from a wide range of reasons and is not limited to the question of where precisely Israel’s borders are drawn. The struggle is deep-rooted—cultural, ideological, religious, economic, territorial, resource-based, and more. The forms of the struggle and the actors participating in it have changed over the years, but its essence has not changed, that is: a profound opposition on the part of the Arab, Muslim, regional environment to Jewish political independence anywhere between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. At times, the actors in this struggle were states with organized armies; at other times, they were armed popular militias. In certain periods, terrorist and guerrilla organizations led the struggle, and at other times states from a “third circle” did so with long-range weaponry. The active players in the struggle and their methods have changed from time to time, but the essence has remained the same.

Therefore, the nation—its leaders and citizens alike—must live with a national consciousness of resilience and constant preparedness, alongside the aspiration for prosperity and growth. The combination of security strength with economic success and innovation forms the key to national resilience, rooted in a deep Jewish-national identity. This is not a struggle we choose, but one imposed upon us by history, and it demands that we sharpen our awareness, strengthen our resolve, and ensure that Israel’s military capability enables the state to survive, prevail, and thrive.

Principles for Analyzing the Security Reality and Potential Threats

There is an inherent problem in defining a reference scenario. When we attempt to simulate the operational situation against which the IDF will have to fight—even if we take into account the most extreme scenario—we are forced to assume that we know what the future could or might hold. This assumption is highly problematic, as a review of Israel’s short history and the longer history of wars in general shows that a significant portion of wars have erupted by surprise, both in terms of the outbreak of war itself and the way the enemy organized and fought it. The timing, location, intensity, weaponry, and other components were unpredictable in a large part of conflicts between nations. The Iron Swords War, the Second Lebanon War, and the Yom Kippur War are clear local examples. In the Yom Kippur War, we were surprised

by the Egyptians' and Syrians' initiation of the war, and equally surprised by their method of fighting and the new anti-tank capabilities. In the Second Lebanon War, although we initiated the war, we did not plan it in advance; rather, we responded to a surprising move by Hezbollah, which attacked an IDF patrol and abducted three soldiers. We were also surprised by Hezbollah's method of fighting in the nature reserves. Finally, in the Iron Swords War, we were surprised both by Hamas's initiation of the war (and subsequently Hezbollah) and by the method of fighting and the extensive use of underground infrastructure.

Nevertheless, the political leadership must define for the IDF against what threats it should build its force. Without a compass guiding force development, the security establishment—and the IDF within it—risks either failing to prepare for the required threats or preparing for threats that do not align with the priorities envisioned by the political leadership.

The reference scenario must include, as a fundamental working assumption, the fact that war will break out by surprise and that its intensity cannot be predicted in advance

In light of all the above, the methodology for determining the threat against which the state builds its military power must be improved. First and foremost, the reference scenario must include, as a fundamental

working assumption, the fact that war will break out by surprise and that its intensity cannot be predicted in advance. Moreover, since force development is a multi-year process, it must not focus solely on the set of immediate threats, but rather on the full spectrum of potential threats in the region.

The assessment that determines the threat against which preparedness is required must be based on clear empirical criteria, rather than on general assumptions that cannot be verified or measured. For example, an adversary's intentions are not a measurable variable and are almost impossible to assess reliably; by contrast, the military power of a potential adversary is a clear and unambiguous datum.

Therefore, the process should not begin with Aman's assessment, but rather with a survey of all regional forces that could potentially threaten the State of Israel. Presenting these facts at the outset of the process will help decision-makers gain a broader perspective and more professionally evaluate priorities. Based on this picture, they will be able to assess short- and long-term threats, weigh the likelihood of threats against their severity, and, above all, critically and comprehensively review the military situation.

Beyond this, there should be an additional body, outside of Aman, whose role would be to provide an alternative perspective on the assessment of the threats facing the State of Israel. This body could be a department

within the National Security Council, or another entity (such as the “*Ipcha Mistabra*” body proposed by legislators), but it must be separate from the formal intelligence community, so as to avoid groupthink.

These two elements—a broader picture of the potential threats facing the State of Israel, and an additional professional body examining the adversary system from a different analytical angle—would provide decision-makers at the political level with better tools to properly guide and direct the defense establishment.

Principles for the Reference Scenario

Recognizing that we do not have of comprehensive access to all the necessary information, we will attempt to outline several principles that should guide the process of threat assessment, upon which the security system must build its capabilities:

- a. Potential threats should include all military actors and terrorist organizations that are hostile to the State of Israel in practice or in potential. From Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip, through the states bordering Israel—most notably Lebanon and Syria, but also Jordan and Egypt—as regime changes in these countries could undermine the stability of existing agreements and open dangerous, high-intensity fronts against us. Beyond these states, Israel must also prepare for threats from more distant circles—
- b. The threat should assume a synchronized system operating against Israel—a multi-front, multi-domain, and simultaneous war. This means that the State of Israel could find itself confronting multiple armies and terrorist organizations conducting coordinated and integrated attacks across the land, air (aircraft, missiles, and rockets), maritime, and cyber domains, simultaneously striking the various fronts including the home front.
- c. Accordingly, the IDF must first and foremost possess the capability to defend all fronts simultaneously, against ground, air, and maritime attacks, as well as in the additional operational domains.
- d. In such a scenario, the IDF will be required to attack and destroy the enemy on multiple fronts, both near and distant. Therefore, the IDF must build a decisive force capable of shortening the duration of the campaign as much as possible. It must develop capabilities to strike the enemy across all fronts using a variety of means—aircraft, missiles, cyber capabilities, and, of course, maneuvering ground forces. The IDF must not put all its eggs in one basket. It is entirely possible that a particular capability will be neutralized or fully engaged on one front and thus unable to contribute to defense or offense on other fronts.

e. It is important to emphasize that since there is no substitute for powerful ground maneuver in defeating the enemy, the defense establishment must build a military force that enables combat across the full spectrum of operations, including deep and wide maneuver. The strength of this maneuver force must allow for both offensive and defensive operations on multiple fronts simultaneously.

Principles for Building a Decisive Force – Ground Maneuver Capabilities

Introduction: the relationship between the operational concept and force buildup

After defining the central threats against which the state must prepare, the operational concept must be clearly defined, since it directly influences the manner in which the forces are built.

An operational concept outlines the principles for the use of force. For example, a defensive operational concept will lead to the allocation of substantial resources to the construction of fortifications, obstacles, and defensive weapons, whereas an offensive concept will emphasize the need for maneuvering forces and offensive firepower. An operational concept focused on wars of attrition will require entirely different resources than one aimed at rapid decisive battles, and a state whose operational concept seeks to neutralize threats at their formative stage will build a force fundamentally different from that of

a state that acts only once a threat has fully materialized.

Israel's operational concept: fundamental principles

Israel's principal threats are from its land borders, therefore, its ability to defeat its enemies depends on its capacity to prevail in ground combat. Given Israel's limited geographic size and lack of strategic depth, its defense strategy is based on transferring the fighting to enemy territory rather than conducting prolonged battles within its own borders. The operational implication of this approach is preventive war, or at least preemptive strikes, when an appropriate window of opportunity arises.

However, political, legal, and policy constraints make the option of launching a preventive strike complex and difficult to implement in practice. In most cases, the ability to initiate a preventive war or a preemptive attack depends on the emergence of an opportunity and on international timing; therefore, it is not always possible to exploit such a window when needed, and certainly not with ample time for preparation. Consequently, the IDF must be prepared at all times for immediate and decisive action—both defensively and offensively—without reliance on external factors.

The Importance of the Maneuvering Force

The importance of the maneuvering force is amplified in light of Israel's unique

political circumstances. In most wars in which Israel has been involved, a “political hourglass” has been operating against it—a limited window of time in which fighting can be conducted before international pressure forces Israel to stop. Wars based solely on stand-off fire do not lead to rapid decision; rather, they create prolonged wars of attrition and fail to produce meaningful strategic change. By contrast, ground maneuver enables the achievement of tangible military gains, such as the seizure of territory, the destruction of enemy infrastructure, and physical control of the battlespace. Only concrete, sustainable achievements—such as the seizure of territory, the destruction of the enemy and its infrastructure, and control of the battlespace—carry real weight at the end of the fighting, and these can be delivered only through ground maneuver.

The influence of values on the operational concept

The IDF’s operational concept is shaped not only by operational constraints and professional doctrines but also by values. The following are two central factors influencing the army’s mode of operation:

- A stringent interpretation of the laws of armed conflict – In recent years, a particularly stringent interpretation of international conventions and laws has taken hold in Israel, going beyond what is legally required. This approach mandates highly precise, “surgical” strikes (which require very costly intelligence resources and munitions) and affects maneuver warfare—its intensity, its speed, and the safety of maneuvering forces. An overly strict interpretation of international conventions and laws—beyond sometimes being mistaken, self-righteous, and even immoral toward the state’s own citizens—reduces the IDF’s operational effectiveness.¹
- Balancing the life of the individual versus collective security – Public discourse that has penetrated the military regarding the loss of soldiers’ lives and its impact on Israeli society directly influences the planning of military campaigns. The more cautious the political and military leadership becomes in employing ground forces out of concern for casualties, the more the ability to carry out effective offensive maneuvers diminishes. Moreover, the aspiration to protect soldiers through advanced technological means entails heavy costs for every

1 For example, the failure to relocate the entire civilian population to “humanitarian islands” already in the early days of the fighting in the Iron Swords War, and to declare the entire Gaza Strip a combat zone (except for those islands), imposed severe constraints on every offensive action undertaken—both in the timing of attacks (each time requiring the evacuation of civilians from a specific area prior to the start of the attack) and in fire-employment policy (since additional approvals were required for any preparatory fire or extraction fire). Not to mention the simple fact that in every attack the enemy knew we were coming to the area, because we had announced to the population that it needed to evacuate.

armored or protected weapons system, a factor that ultimately leads to a reduction in the size of the forces planned for maneuver.

Public discourse that has penetrated the military regarding the loss of soldiers' lives and its impact on Israeli society directly influences the planning of military campaigns

Core principles of the operational concept

Based on all of the above, four key principles can be identified on which the IDF's operational concept should be based:

1. **Initiative** – striving to eliminate threats before they materialize (through a preventive war or a preemptive strike).
2. **Decisive victory**² – striving for a deception-based³ decision in every engagement with the enemy, rather than conducting prolonged wars of attrition.
3. **Fighting on enemy territory** – Israel cannot afford to conduct a war within its own territory; therefore, the fighting must be transferred to enemy territory.
4. **Overwhelming force** – the application of maximum force in engagements with the enemy in order to shorten the duration

of the fighting and reduce harm to our forces.

Summary: adapting the operational concept to a changing reality

The State of Israel faces mounting security challenges that require updating and adapting its military operational concept. Israel must break free from the prevailing notion of the “end of major wars” and build a force capable of confronting multi-front wars, surprise attacks, and prolonged fighting.

According to the new operational concept, the IDF's force-building will be based on strengthening ground maneuver capabilities, empowering the reserve forces, and enhancing engineering, logistics, and independent fire capabilities. Only through a strong and ready ground force will Israel be able to ensure its ability to defend itself and achieve decisive outcomes when necessary, while preserving political and strategic freedom of action.

Force Building – Principles and Capabilities

a. Redundancy and robustness

The primary directive for defending the country's borders, on every front and from

2 *Decisive victory* means the breaking of the enemy's capacity to resist and to operate effectively against us. A state of decisive victory is usually evident when the enemy has lost its ability to act effectively against us.

3 This means is a military approach to achieving a decision over the enemy through deception, surprise, and the intelligent use of existing resources, rather than a reliance on massive firepower alone. The approach focuses on exploiting the enemy's weaknesses, employing deception, and creating a relative advantage through unexpected maneuvers, operational friction, and sophisticated battle management.

every regional command, is to defend its sector independently against all threats using its own forces. To achieve this, each regional command must have organic forces built with robustness and redundancy.

In this context, robustness means that the forces are resilient and maintain operational capability even under difficult and unexpected conditions, such as enemy attacks, communication disruptions, or loss of resources. Redundancy means having backups and duplicates of critical forces and resources (such as combat units, ammunition, and transportation), so that the command can continue functioning even in the event of partial loss of available assets.

In warfare in general, and in defense in particular, forces must be built with resource redundancy, which is required due to the friction and inherent uncertainty of the battlefield. For example, the assumption that forces can be redeployed from one sector to another on the basis of predefined plans may be sound in theory, but in practice numerous disruptions are likely to occur: the enemy may block routes, the number of vehicles available for troop transport is limited, and vehicle drivers are not necessarily soldiers subject to military orders. Therefore, each command must prepare sufficient defensive forces in every region, without relying on the rapid movement of forces. Past experience shows that redeploying a full brigade combat team between fronts may take about a

week, and the ability to move several combat teams simultaneously is limited.

Due to the chaos expected in war, ground forces must be built with redundancy and robustness so that they can defend the state and preserve its territorial integrity even without prior or accompanying intelligence and without support from air forces. Therefore, while in combined operations it is possible to rely on cooperation among ground, air, and intelligence forces, there is a need to build a ground force capable of independently defending its sector even without external support.

b. The divisions

The fundamental unit of maneuver in the IDF's ground forces is the division. It represents the highest tactical echelon, and within it the entire ground force is organically integrated: the maneuvering forces – infantry, armor, and combat engineering; the combat support forces – artillery and ground fire, intelligence and reconnaissance, communications and cyber; and administrative support, including a logistics battalion, medical units, rear-echelon forces, military police, and more.

In any large campaign, the forces operating under the regional division commander are the divisions, not lower echelons. Occasionally, the commander may operate the divisions through a corps, but the corps serves as a command headquarters, not as an operational force. The forces actively

conducting the ground military campaign are the divisions themselves.

In the IDF, there are three main types of divisions:

1. Multi-domain divisions – Divisions whose role is to maneuver, attack, or defend across all sectors and on all required fronts. These divisions form the spearhead of IDF maneuver forces and are therefore the best equipped, organized, and trained units in the IDF. The regular IDF forces constitute a significant part of these divisions, but they also include reserve brigades and numerous reserve support units integrated into the headquarters and regular forces.
2. Single-domain divisions – These divisions are also intended to maneuver, attack, or defend, but only within a specific sector. Their structure is similar to that of the multi-domain divisions, but their level of organization and training is lower. These divisions are composed entirely of reserve forces.
3. Regional Divisions – The primary role of these divisions is to defend a specific sector on a given front. The brigades within these divisions are also regional brigades, and during periods of routine security, the battalions under their command are not necessarily organic to the brigade or division. In times of war,

these divisions mobilize their reserve battalions, whose readiness levels and combat equipment are relatively limited and intended solely for defensive purposes in a specific sector.

As of today, the number of existing divisions and their readiness levels are significantly below what the IDF requires to fulfill its designated mission, as outlined above. According to data published over the past thirty years, the number of divisions in the IDF has been drastically reduced.⁴ The number of tanks dropped to less than 30% of what it was before the Oslo process in the early 1990s (from over 4,500 to fewer than 1,300).⁵ Artillery brigades were disbanded, more than 100,000 reserve soldiers were released from the system, regular service was shortened from 36 months to 32 months, permanent staffing levels were cut, and more. Among the multi-domain divisions—the spearhead of maneuvering—only 50% have independent artillery capabilities, and some have no tanks at all or fewer than required.

It is important to emphasize that it is possible to reduce certain weapons systems based on the assumption that new technology allows one to achieve more with fewer platforms. One can reasonably assume that, with advanced command-and-control systems, a modern tank can engage more

4 IISS, *The Military Balance* 1991, 108–9; *The Military Balance* 1995, 136–7; and *The Military Balance* 2013, 383–384

5 According to the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies

targets at longer ranges than an outdated one, and that with its advanced protection systems it will also be less vulnerable to enemy fire. Based on such assumptions, it is possible to adapt the tank force structure to the requirements of modern warfare. However, forces must not be reduced on the assumption that there is no longer a threat and that they will not be needed, at a time when the potential threat around us has not diminished. Equally flawed is the notion that intelligence and stand-off fire alone can prevent enemy maneuver against us or can suffice to attack and defeat the enemy. Certainly, one must not rely on agreements of any kind as a substitute for military power in ensuring the security of the state.

In light of the necessity for each regional command to function independently and for a decisive force capable of joining an offensive on any front—the following principles are required:

1. The Battalion Combat Team (BCT) – The BCT is a battalion organized for combat, and it constitutes the basic building block of the maneuver force's core formations. Each battalion must be authorized and organized so that it is capable of carrying out the defensive and offensive missions assigned to it. A sufficient standard must be established, and it must be ensured that all maneuvering BCTs meet this standard—a condition that does not exist today. Differentiation may be maintained among battalions with different roles and missions, but there cannot be a situation in which a BCT is unfit to carry out its missions.
2. The Brigade Combat Team (BRCT) – When organizing for a mission, the brigade should include one armored battalion and three infantry battalions, engineering forces and a fire support unit. The basis for a high-quality brigade combat team should be one armored battalion, one mechanized infantry battalion, and two wheeled infantry battalions. Variations on this force structure may be required, depending on a specific sector or mission.
3. The Division – The division's combat forces should include four maneuvering BRCTs and a fire brigade with an artillery grouping. In addition, the division should have the capability to absorb special forces for designated missions. These four BRCT would enable the division to operate along two main efforts while maintaining continuity and operational endurance. It may be possible to build divisions on the basis of three infantry brigades and one reinforced armored brigade with four battalions, allowing the formation of four balanced BRCTs from these four brigades, each including an armored battalion.
4. Required Number of Divisions – Assuming that all battalions in the IDF, including those in the regional divisions, are properly organized for combat, and that all BRCTs are built accordingly, the IDF should be organized as follows:

Northern Front – Two divisions in defense (the Galilee and the Golan Heights) and one in reserve.

Eastern Front – Two divisions in defense (north and south of the Dead Sea) and one division in reserve.

Western Front – Three divisions in defense (two opposite Sinai and one opposite Gaza) and one division in reserve.

Central Front – One reinforced division (Judea and Samaria) and one brigade in reserve.

General Staff Reserves – Three decisive maneuver divisions, capable of joining any sector as required.

The General Staff Reserves would be able to split between more than one sector, and together with the local reserve divisions and the defensive divisions, it would be possible to conduct offensive maneuver warfare on two fronts simultaneously (and even more), while maintaining defense on all other fronts. These divisions must provide the IDF with the capability to conduct deep maneuvering (over hundreds of kilometers) and wide maneuvering (with several divisions operating in parallel), to defend against or attack organized armies or terrorist armies and defeat them, to seize territory and maintain control over it for an extended period of time. This is essential in order to enable the State of Israel to decisively defeat its enemies within a relatively short time frame and to achieve concrete political gains.

Today, the IDF lacks a significant number of components required to meet the above framework. Hundreds of tanks are lacking, nearly ten artillery brigades, and large numbers of engineering forces are lacking. Therefore, a structured process of organizing and equipping the forces appropriately must begin immediately. Differentiation between divisions can be defined based on sector-specific characteristics or the immediacy of the threat, but this differentiation must be far smaller than the disparity that currently exists between divisions. Not all divisions need to be equipped with identical systems, but every division must possess all the capabilities required for its mission. Its soldiers and commanders must be trained and fully proficient at all times in operating the weapons systems at their disposal and must master all required combat, command, and control (C2) techniques.

c. Ground-based firepower

Maneuver, by definition, is the integration of movement and fire. Combat forces maneuver across terrain, close in on the enemy, destroy it, and seize territory, while synchronizing with fire-support units. Fire missions may include destroying enemy forces in areas into which ground forces will not maneuver; striking the enemy in maneuver areas prior to the arrival of forces or during the maneuver itself; and “softening” and fixing enemy targets as a preparatory and accompanying phase to maneuver. There is no maneuver without fire—hence the historical designation of artillery as the “King of the Battlefield.”

Israel's ground maneuver force suffers from a significant lack of independence in the realm of supporting fire.

In the modern battlefield, offensive and supporting fire does not come solely from artillery. It is also delivered by fighter aircraft, attack helicopters, RPAs, rockets and missiles launched from various platforms, loitering munitions, armed drones, and of course cannons and mortars. Beyond the new units and platforms that comprise the modern fire-support system, the munitions themselves have also changed. The demand for specialized munitions has grown significantly, particularly in urban warfare (which now constitutes a very large proportion of contemporary conflicts). On the one hand, precision munitions are required to engage enemy forces in civilian environments; on the other hand, very high firepower is required to destroy fortified and built-up infrastructure in urban terrain.

Israel's ground maneuver force suffers from a significant lack of independence in the realm of supporting fire

Currently, only mortars, artillery, and a limited number of armed drones belong directly to the maneuvering divisions. All other assets are part of the Air Force and are allocated to commands and divisions for specific operations by the Operations Directorate of the General Staff.

The mortars and artillery organic to the maneuvering divisions fail to meet operational requirements in almost every respect. First, their numbers are insufficient: not every maneuver battalion has a mortar platoon with four tubes, and not every division has an organic artillery brigade (at the brigade level, there is no fire-support unit at all). Second, these systems lack sufficient firepower to destroy enemy positions and infrastructure in urban terrain. In addition, they do not provide the capability for precise, surgical strikes when such accuracy is required.

While the Air Force indeed possesses all these capabilities, and the Operations Directorate allocates them to the maneuvering forces, the allocation-based support model involves significant complexities. Such allocation is not guaranteed in advance, which greatly complicates planning. The method also lacks flexibility, making it harder to respond to unforeseen events. When the supporting and supported forces do not belong to the same unit, coordination becomes longer and more complex, and less suited to the realities of the battlefield. In addition, the approval process for fire required by Air Force personnel is dual-layered—subject both to Air Force regulations and to the directives of the supported echelon—resulting in frequent and unnecessary friction on the battlefield. Finally, maneuver support under this system must always compete in prioritization with General Staff-level and other Air Force missions,

a dynamic that naturally works to its disadvantage.

To illustrate, a battalion commander who wishes to destroy a building threatening his forces at a range of 350 meters, and who for operational reasons decides to do so using fire support rather than maneuvering forces, has no organic means capable of carrying out this mission. If the target is deemed “urgent,” he may scramble a fighter aircraft through the brigade headquarters for a so-called “flash” strike. At best, such an attack will arrive no earlier than half an hour after the request is made. This stands in sharp contrast to the employment of organic battalion mortars, where less than ten minutes after an order is given—by the battalion commander or one of the company commanders—the fire mission can be executed.

In recent years, the target-intelligence units of the maneuvering brigades have been disbanded, reconnaissance companies in the brigades have largely become commando companies, and the brigades’ observation companies have been left with outdated and irrelevant equipment

Another example: a brigade commander who wishes to destroy fortified positions, dominant structures, and enemy staging areas in a neighborhood into which his brigade is maneuvering will be forced to

plan an Air Force strike package prior to the attack. He has no means at the brigade or division level to deliver such a preliminary “fire strike.” Planning such an air strike must reach the Air Force at least four hours before execution; the number of targets that will actually be attacked becomes clear only shortly before the strike, and the ability to alter preplanned targets is almost nonexistent.

Therefore, it is necessary to build an independent, diverse, and robust fire-support capability for the maneuvering forces. This fire capability must cover short and medium ranges (up to roughly 20 km), across the full spectrum of firepower and with varying levels of precision. These capabilities should include high-explosive rocket systems, UAV and loitering-drone capabilities, and an attack-helicopter force providing direct support, among others.

As part of the ground fire-support array, the establishment of an “attack-helicopter battalion” in support of the maneuvering forces should be considered. An attack-helicopter battalion, combined with reconnaissance and strike drones (for observation and fire), could provide significant firepower in certain sectors. The cost of such a force should be weighed as an alternative to a tank force—for example, in the Sinai theater—where its effectiveness in halting an enemy maneuvering force might be greater. Naturally, such a force has operational limitations in severe weather, which do not apply to a ground maneuver

force. On the other hand, it has distinct advantages, and when combined with other forces it may prove more effective, more economical, and more flexible.

In concluding the discussion on ground-based firepower, it should be emphasized that in order to enable broad procurement, significant portions of these capabilities can be relatively low-cost, by lowering requirements for precision or special effects, provided they enable powerful and effective fire support for maneuver in the modern battlefield. The regional commands and divisions require these fire capabilities immediately.

d. Combat engineering

If in the past artillery was defined as the “King of the Battlefield,” in the recent wars fought by the IDF, combat engineering is the arm that may be more deserving of this title. A combat team without heavy engineering equipment at its forefront is exposed to enemy sabotage and its destructive capability is significantly impaired. The rate of destruction of enemy infrastructure in urban terrain or in the subterranean domain, without sappers and without forces from the Special Operations Engineering Unit (Yahalom), is low to nonexistent; likewise, the ability to investigate and exploit enemy infrastructure exists only within engineering forces. In recent years, the IDF has wisely quadrupled the Yahalom unit but the regular combat engineering battalions, the sappers, and the heavy engineering equipment operators have not received

the same level of attention. The shortage of combat engineering machinery in the IDF is severe, and for a large portion of brigade combat teams, no engineering battalion is allocated at all, simply because there are not enough such units available.

The IDF must add combat engineering units so that every brigade combat team has the required capabilities to conduct maneuver warfare, as follows:

1. In each division there will be three combat engineering battalions, mechanized to the same standard and quality as the armored fighting vehicles within the division.
2. In every BRCT that does not include an engineering battalion, there will be an expanded heavy engineering equipment company.

Subterranean domain – Currently, responsibility for operations in the subterranean domain rests with the Engineering Corps. The IDF’s level of preparedness to handle large-scale subterranean operation are insufficient. This factor was one of the major impediments during the Iron Swords War. Just as urban warfare emerged at the beginning of the current millennium and has only grown in intensity over the years, it is reasonable to assume that the subterranean domain is “here to stay.” Therefore, broader and more effective solutions must be found to address it, whether within the Engineering Corps or externally. This issue has evolved from a tactical problem into

a strategic one, and it must be addressed accordingly.

e. Field intelligence

The IDF possesses excellent intelligence capabilities. Despite the gaps revealed on October 7, 2023 (which stemmed mostly from perception and operational issues rather than insufficient capabilities), it is important to emphasize that during the Iron Swords War—both in Gaza and Lebanon (and perhaps even more acutely in the north)—Israel’s intelligence community demonstrated extraordinary capabilities, not seen anywhere else in the world. However, even though intelligence in the General Staff is strong, the field intelligence capabilities of maneuvering units have gradually weakened over the years, and some of the units responsible for providing this intelligence have even been disbanded.

When the Intelligence Directorate or other intelligence bodies gather and process information, they rely on certain sources and collection agencies that do not exist at the tactical level and are sometimes irrelevant to it. Tactical intelligence collection was previously carried out through observation with binoculars and by interrogating prisoners of war and enemy civilians. Modern Israeli battles, however, often take place in areas where binocular observation is ineffective. Urban areas, subterranean spaces, and complex terrain all reduce the effectiveness of horizontal observation.

As a result, in recent years, the target-intelligence units of the maneuvering brigades have been disbanded, reconnaissance companies in the brigades have largely become commando companies, and the brigades’ observation companies have been left with outdated and irrelevant equipment. At the battalion level, observation sections remain—now renamed “Enemy Detection and Destruction”, but even these have mostly not been used for their intended purpose due to inefficiency. Reliance on General Staff intelligence has thus become absolute even at the tactical level.

This reality weakens maneuver capability and makes it dependent on the General Staff level and on continuous “broadband” communications. This situation must change. Relevant collection capabilities must be built for maneuvering forces, and appropriate frameworks must be established at the various echelons—UAVs equipped with recorders and diverse sensors at the division level and possibly also at the brigade level; drones with high-quality observation capabilities and additional sensors at the brigade and battalion levels; mobile radars for forces in the field; and tactical Signals Intelligence capabilities distributed among maneuvering battalions. All of this, of course, should be in addition to strengthening traditional capabilities such as binocular observation, higher quality night-vision systems and organic prisoner interrogation teams in every battalion. While some of these capabilities already

exist and serve maneuvering forces, significant further development is required, along with wider distribution and the institutionalization of a multi-echelon operational concept.

All of these observation capabilities must be highly networked with command-and-control (C2) systems, so that information emerging from the field can be processed rapidly and transformed into a clear enemy situation picture—one that enables decisive action and generates targets for destruction by the fire-support elements of the maneuvering forces.

f. Combat mobility

Effective maneuver in wartime requires a high level of mobility. In the IDF, as the concept of maneuver was gradually abandoned, the capability to transport infantry forces (and other non-mechanized forces) was also reduced. In armored units, mobility is inherent, as it is in infantry brigades equipped with Namer or Eitan APCs (highly advanced Merkava-based armored personnel carriers on tracks or wheels). However, there are only a few such infantry brigades. Most forces, which in the past were transported on M-113 APCs were left without an independent mobility capability. For many years, the IDF maintained only a single mobility unit, assigned to one of the light divisions, capable of moving a force smaller than a brigade in a single night. Recently, additional units of this type have been established, but their capabilities are more limited than those of the original unit. Even

so, these units remain a small handful—far from sufficient to meet operational needs.

From the understanding that mobility is an elementary requirement for conducting deep and wide maneuver, the IDF must restore broad mobility capabilities for all forces, including those that are not mechanized on advanced armored fighting vehicles. Light vehicles, armored trucks, light armored platforms, or any other solution compatible with the operational concept should be considered—provided that mobility capability is maintained at a high level of readiness and is widely and reliably available.

One of the key factors in increasing the pace of operations is the ability to fight continuously, day and night

g. Administrative support

A deep and wide maneuver requires strong logistic capabilities. Without the delivery of ammunition to the spearhead of the maneuvering force, combat will halt after only a very short advance; the same is true without fuel, food, and water. The ability to repair damaged or malfunctioning equipment and return it to service is what enables the preservation of offensive momentum. Casualty evacuation, control of supply routes, and the rotation and replacement of personnel—all of these are complex and critical elements of deep maneuver into enemy territory. Over the years, as the IDF ceased to believe in such

forms of maneuver, its combat logistics capabilities steadily declined and certainly were not upgraded in line with advancing technologies.

The trucks assigned to each battalion gradually wore out and became unserviceable; the number of combat ambulances steadily declined; armored and unarmored evacuation platforms are not available in every battalion; fuel supply is highly problematic; and there are additional shortcomings as well.

It must be ensured that, alongside the buildup of the combat forces of all divisions required for defense and offense, the logistical capabilities of those forces are also developed. Combat support is an integral part of maneuver warfare, yet it has been severely neglected in recent years. A combination of simple means deployed widely as required, together with advanced systems (such as large drones and autonomous vehicles), will provide the capabilities necessary to sustain maneuver continuity.

h. The near-ground aerial domain (low-altitude airspace)

The domain of aerial platforms—loitering systems, fixed-wing aircraft, and drones—is a rapidly evolving field that opens up new and far-reaching possibilities that were unimaginable in the past. Although Israel is among the world's leading countries in unmanned aerial systems (UAS), this capability resides almost entirely within the

Air Force, while a significant gap exists at the level of maneuvering ground units. Brigade and battalion-level observation UAVs exist in insufficient numbers, and the drone domain lags far behind. The IDF entered the Iron Swords War with a lower level of drone capability than its adversaries—an almost inconceivable situation given the qualitative differences between the sides and the disparity in their budgets. During the war itself, and thanks to a great deal of improvisation, various systems (many of them civilian rather than military) were introduced, capabilities were developed, and operational and coordination techniques were established.

The Russia–Ukraine war is illustrative of the power of mass employment of drones. The IDF's maneuvering forces must become a global spearhead in this field. This capability can serve as a force multiplier that fundamentally changes the nature of ground maneuver warfare. Efforts should be concentrated in this domain as a flagship project within the Ground Forces (similar in scope and importance to the Merkava and Namer projects or the Digital Army Program). The project should include an operational concept for different units and echelons, the development and codification of command-and-control and employment techniques, and the procurement of drones of various types, drone swarms, and additional aerial platforms—each with different capabilities (visual, radar, explosive payloads, and more). The technologies in this field already exist, and the potential is enormous.

i. Robotics

The field of robotics has gained significant momentum during the Iron Swords War. The use of robotics was primarily through remotely operated systems that carried out missions at the front lines of combat without exposing maneuvering forces to risk.

Robotics on the battlefield can serve diverse roles—advance reconnaissance for maneuvering forces, route clearance, the employment of demolitions or other forms of firepower, logistics along rear supply routes, and more.

This is a nascent field, and it is reasonable to assume that it will develop significantly in the near future. The integration of robotic capabilities with AI capabilities could provide a major advantage on the battlefield. The addition of robotic systems to every brigade combat team, across a wide range of capabilities and uses, would constitute a highly significant force multiplier.

j. Night fighting

Israel's size and population, its geographic isolation among hostile states, the international "hourglass" pressure that begins the moment fighting starts, and the large reserve army that must eventually return to the civilian economy—all of these require a high operational tempo in wartime. One of the key factors in increasing the pace of operations is the ability to fight continuously, day and night (naturally, combat units require rest, but headquarters can operate in shifts and maintain continuity, while

combat units rotate among themselves, preserving an uninterrupted sequence of operations). Beyond shortening the duration of the war, a high operational tempo places constant pressure on the enemy and accelerates its defeat.

There are IDF units whose level of night-fighting proficiency is very high. However, this is not a characteristic of the force as a whole, and certainly not of the reserve units. A broad procurement effort is required to equip all maneuvering units, across all corps, with night-vision capabilities—ranging from night-vision systems for drivers and operators of all types of platforms, through night-vision devices for fighters and commanders and sights for all weapon systems, and up to advanced, long-range observation systems. Extensive training in night combat must be mandated, despite the risks involved. In addition, systemic challenges that hinder night fighting—such as coping with explosive devices in darkness—must be addressed and resolved.

High confidence among commanders and soldiers in their night-fighting capabilities is a critically important factor in creating operational continuity and a high tempo of operations, and a strategic tool for shortening the duration of the war while achieving objectives and defeating the enemy.

k. Weapons systems

As noted above, the IDF strives to equip itself with some of the best and most advanced

weapons systems and combat-support systems in the world. This characteristic, however, has created a gap: these systems are extremely expensive, and their cost does not allow for widespread distribution across the force. Therefore, procurement policy in this domain must be refined. Expanding the IDF's overall "muscle mass" by fielding additional ready divisions will require the acquisition of simpler systems that provide the necessary operational response—even if that response is not optimal, but merely sufficient. This does not mean that the IDF should forgo its quality or its technological edge. Rather, alongside "boutique" capabilities allocated to specific units according to their operational requirements, other units should be organized and equipped with cheaper systems that are nevertheless adequate for their assigned missions.

The ability to carry out missions using alternative means is closely linked both to the concept of operations and to the mentality of the fighters, commanders, and decision-makers. For example, the exclusive use of precision-guided munitions is effective and reduces collateral damage, but it is also extremely expensive. Procuring a larger quantity of unguided munitions is far cheaper, but it requires a different operational concept. Another example concerns (near-) absolute protection of armored fighting vehicles. Such protection is highly advantageous, but it is not feasible for all types of armored platforms. Employing forces that are not fully armored

requires appropriate operational planning and a willingness to absorb casualties. Moreover, in certain sectors—due to the nature of the terrain and the enemy—it may be operationally preferable to use a platform other than the Merkava tank, one with greater mobility and sufficient firepower, even if its level of protection is lower.

To increase the IDF's "muscle mass," there will be no choice but to decide on procurement at different levels of equipment quality, in accordance with the resources available to the IDF and based on an adapted concept of operations.

No less important is the fact that maintaining expensive equipment is itself extremely costly. As a result, a situation often arises in which forces are equipped with very expensive systems but do not train with them, because training and maintenance are too costly. Operationally and professionally, it is better to have a weapon that is "good enough" but operated with a high level of proficiency than an excellent weapon operated with low proficiency.

I. The reserve army

David Ben-Gurion (in the famous "18-Point Document") explained the essence of Israel's reserve army: *"We cannot maintain a standing army like the Arabs, both for budgetary reasons and economic reasons. Therefore, our combat power relies on reserves, and preparing the reserves to withstand the test—this is our primary concern."*

This meant that Israel's decisive force would be its reserve army. In recent years, however, plans have increasingly been written on the assumption that the standing army will block an invasion, be relieved by reserve forces in the defensive mission, and only after that will the standing forces go on the offensive. In a world of raids and limited operations, the standing forces were assumed to be sufficient to complete the mission on their own.

**The IDF's character as a
"people's army" based on
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addressed**

To build the number of divisions required in order to defend against an attack by a broad coalition of enemies across all theaters, to conduct offensive operations on multiple fronts simultaneously, and to decisively defeat the enemy, the IDF must rehabilitate and rebuild the reserve force. The guiding principles for building reserve units should be:

1. Conceptual – The reserve force is for both offense and defense, on all fronts, on the front lines as well as in the rear. It constitutes the main component of the decisive capability of the ground maneuver forces.
2. Force Structure (Order of Battle) – In order to increase the number of divisions and fill them with all the required capabilities,

it is necessary to strengthen the existing reserve units and also establish new reserve units.

3. Equipment – The level of differentiation between the equipment available to regular units and those available to reserve units must be reduced. There will always be distinctions, and not all units will be equipped in the same way, but it must be ensured that even units equipped at a lower level still possess all the means and equipment required to carry out their missions.
4. Training – In order to preserve the readiness of reserve units to carry out their missions in war, they must be trained better than they are today. Genuine readiness must be defined and enforced both at the individual level (the reservist) and at the organizational level (company, battalion, brigade, etc.). This readiness must be rigid and non-negotiable. The Reserve Service Law must be adapted to the number of training days and routine security duties required to maintain readiness and unit cohesion, and this readiness requirement must be anchored in law, so that budgets cannot be diverted from it.
5. The Regular Army Builds and Sustains the Reserves – According to Ben-Gurion, the primary role of the regular army is to train the reserve army. While this has changed somewhat over the years—the regular army today has broader missions and a higher relative share of the combat forces—training the reserve army remains one of the most important

roles of the standing army. To this end, every effort should be made to ensure that soldiers are trained during their regular service on the same weapons systems with which they will fight in the reserves. For example, today armored corps soldiers are trained on the Merkava Mark 4 tank, while most reserve armored brigades do not have tanks of this type. It is therefore essential to ensure that training and force generation are conducted with a long-term view toward extended service in reserve units, and not solely according to the immediate needs of the regular army.

As a complementary effort, a national prioritization for reserve service members must be established, including through legislation. This prioritization should not serve merely as symbolic recognition of their contribution, but as a genuine response to the gaps and disadvantages created by reserve service, including proper compensation, and tax discounts.

m. Expanding the combat force structure and improving its quality

The ability to increase the number of combat divisions depends first and foremost on the ability to expand the number of soldiers—both combat and non-combat personnel—in the standing army and the reserves. In addition, the IDF's character as a "people's army" based on compulsory conscription carries many advantages, but also poses challenges that must be addressed. One of the central challenges inherent in the compulsory service model is the lack of

professionalism in roles filled by conscripts who serve for only a short period of time.

The scope of this document does not allow for an in-depth discussion of these topics, but the following principles can be outlined:

1. Recruitment Model – A tiered, adapted model should be developed in which everyone serves, but for varying periods of time, and receives different compensation according to the nature and duration of their service. This ranking and adaptation will improve the situation so that, on one hand, the quality of personnel and the duration of specialization for combat forces are higher, and on the other hand, the waste of resources on underutilized personnel is prevented.
2. Length of Service – In combat roles and other critical positions, the length of service should not be less than 36 months. This is required for three reasons: To achieve a high level of proficiency and professionalism; To prevent inefficiency, as combat soldiers who have just reached the required professional and operational experience would otherwise be discharged after only a few months; To increase the number of active-duty combat personnel.
3. Increasing the Reserve Force – To establish the new brigades, the IDF will need to reduce the number of exemptions that have been granted to soldiers in recent years. This could return tens of thousands of soldiers who were released

from reserve service for various reasons but are still capable of serving.

4. **Extending the Length of Reserve Service** – The exemption age for reserve duty, which has decreased over the years, should return to 46 (25 years of reserve service). Beyond this period, for those serving in combat units, combat roles, command, or support units, there will be an additional service period of about 10 years in rapid-response units and Home Front Command units. At the end of this period, reservists will be transferred to the “unassigned” pool.
5. **Strengthening the Permanent Staff Component in Combat Units** – In professional armies worldwide, the cadre of combat non-commissioned officers (NCOs) is one of the most central elements of a military’s operational readiness. For example, in the U.S. Army, NCOs are the backbone of the force, playing a crucial role in maintaining the operational and professional readiness of units. At the platoon level, NCOs serve as squad leaders and platoon sergeants; at the company level, they act as First Sergeants; and at the battalion level, the senior role is Command Sergeant Major, who assists the battalion commander directly. These NCOs lead small teams, conduct tactical and professional training in weapons, advanced equipment use, and operational scenario exercises. They foster teamwork and morale, maintain discipline and order, and ensure soldiers’ physical and mental readiness for the field and operational activity. In the

IDF, there is currently no established culture of combat NCOs, and there are virtually no permanent positions for non-commissioned combat soldiers. This gap significantly weakens the professional capability of combat units. Strengthening this permanent cadre—even without converting the entire maneuver force into a professional army—would greatly improve professionalism and maneuvering capacity. These soldiers, integrated into the reserve system as well, would be invaluable in maintaining readiness and ensuring a high level of preparedness for executing reserve unit missions in combat.

6. **Strengthening the civilian component** – There are many roles, particularly combat-support positions or staff functions, that are better performed by civilians rather than enlisted soldiers. The major advantage of civilianizing these roles lies in knowledge retention: a civilian performs their job over many years, whereas a soldier—whether in the regular army or permanent staff—typically changes roles every one to two years. Command and administrative positions staffed by civilians can manage long-term projects, preserve institutional knowledge more effectively, and improve the overall quality and professionalism of the military. Moreover, transferring military roles to civilians frees up officers and soldiers to focus on field and combat positions.

Beyond all of the above, it is possible to think more broadly and explore “outside-

the-box” ideas that could fundamentally change the service model. For example, Ben-Gurion suggested that the Border Guard, established in 1953 as part of the Israel Police, serve as a central security force for border protection, particularly in civilian areas, in order to relieve the IDF and allow it to focus on broader military missions. The idea was for the Border Guard to function as a force handling security threats close to the country’s borders and dealing with routine security issues, such as infiltrations, smuggling, and local raids. It may be worth reconsidering this idea today to relieve the burden on the reserves and to allow the maneuvering units to focus on core operational missions.

It may be possible to adapt this idea to the current reality by recruiting the maximum number of potential soldiers for training as basic riflemen (without high-profile requirements), having them initially serve in home-front security roles, and then assigning them to various units, possibly even outside the IDF (such as the fire and rescue service, ZAKA, national service, etc.).

Such an approach would serve several purposes:

- Broader training of riflemen, who could also serve in rapid-response units and regional defense within their communities during civilian life.
- Reducing the home-front security burden both on the regular units, which could focus more on combat maneuver training, and on the reserve units.
- Allowing differentiated service durations and rewards according to the different units.
- More efficient and effective allocation of manpower.

Without deep maneuvering, territorial conquest, and operational control over enemy territory, the enemy is neither defeated nor willing to abandon its aggression against the State of Israel

Of course, these are only initial suggestions that requires further development, but they demonstrate the potential for alternative approaches that balance the need for a “people’s army” with the need for efficiency and professionalization.

Advantages of the Proposed Policy

The proposed policy requires the State of Israel to reestablish its decisive military power. Such decisiveness can only stem from the existence of a force capable of ensuring ground defense across all theaters, while simultaneously possessing sufficient offensive capability to maneuver into enemy territory in order to seize ground and destroy the enemy and its infrastructure on multiple fronts. The existence of such a force will ensure that even if we are surprised by our enemies (which should

be the working assumption in the national security concept), we will not be defeated. Moreover, following the initial surprise, we will know how to turn the situation around and to defeat the enemy within a reasonable timeframe, and improve our overall security situation.

Any policy that holds that it is possible to continue to forgo the strength of maneuver forces and rely instead on superior intelligence and standoff firepower endangers Israel in the following scenarios and ways:

1. A surprise attack in which the enemy succeeds in deceiving Israeli intelligence and also manages to disrupt the Israeli Air Force's ability to stop it would endanger the State of Israel through the loss of territory and the killing of many civilians, as occurred on October 7, 2023.
2. Even in a situation where Israel is not fundamentally surprised, but the enemy attacks simultaneously on several fronts, reliance on the Air Force and standoff fire to halt the attacks is a very dangerous assumption, one that could easily fail.
3. The civilian economy—by virtue of its size and structure, which requires the rapid return of reservists to civilian life—depends on a swift decision on the battlefield. Exchanges of standoff fire (by the Air Force or other fire-support systems) are a classic form of attrition warfare and do not lead to a rapid conclusion of hostilities. Likewise, weak maneuvering forces, lacking power and robustness,

cannot bring a multi-front war to an end within a reasonable timeframe. Failing to build a large and capable maneuvering army puts the civilian economy at risk when entering a war.

4. Most importantly, without deep maneuvering, territorial conquest, and operational control over enemy territory, the enemy is neither defeated nor willing to abandon its aggression against the State of Israel. Fighting that does not end with the seizure of enemy territory does not produce a military achievement that the political leadership can leverage. Moreover, with a significant portion of the enemies surrounding us, there is no realistic prospect for a political settlement; therefore, only the military outcome of the fighting will define the political reality that follows. Consequently, ending a conflict without territorial conquest leaves the State of Israel without a tangible achievement at the conclusion of the struggle. A war of attrition based on standoff fire may indeed inflict severe damage on the enemy and its infrastructure, but its outcome will merely be the end of one round and a wait for the next—without any real improvement in the state's security situation.

The proposed policy is capable of addressing these challenges. A stronger, larger, and better-trained ground force will be able to repel a surprise attack effectively, even in the absence of advance intelligence warning and with only partial support from the Air Force.

If this policy is implemented, larger ground forces will defend the country's land borders and prevent enemy penetration, even if the enemy attempts to do so on multiple fronts simultaneously. More importantly, the construction of maneuvering divisions—in appropriate numbers and in accordance with the quality principles outlined above—will enable the State of Israel to transfer the fighting into enemy territory on several fronts at the same time, while allowing the Air Force to continue addressing aerial threats and third-circle states. Such action, implemented through a sound operational concept and an appropriate doctrine of warfare, will yield a significant military achievement within a reasonable timeframe and will enable the political leadership to reach an agreement from a position of strength.

The Challenges of the Proposed Policy

There is no perfect policy, nor one that does not pose difficulties for those tasked with implementing it. The policy proposed here as well—whose core lies in a different assessment of the threat environment for which the State of Israel must prepare and of the manner in which military force should be built—also entails challenges for its decision-makers:

A. The manner of force build-up has little meaning if the force employment concept of the state's and military's leadership is not aligned with it. The core of the force employment concept rests on a central

principle of decision: decisively defeating any threat that emerges in the region against the State of Israel before it reaches full maturation, and achieving decision when war is imposed upon us—through the seizure of territory and the destruction of all enemy forces present therein. If this offensive approach is not adopted, even the construction of a decisive force will not translate into victory in war.

B. Beyond this, the state's leadership will have to facilitate a change in national priorities, demonstrating leadership, determination, and responsibility. The defense budget, which in recent years has declined to approximately 4.5% of GDP, will need to increase in order to meet the country's security needs. It does not need to rise to 40% of GDP, as it did after the Yom Kippur War—an increase that led to what economists refer to as the “lost decade”. Rather even a rise in accordance with the Nagel Committee's recommendations of at least 6.5% of GDP may suffice. Perhaps the increase should be somewhat higher, but in any case, it could be time-limited as part of a specific multi-year defense plan, so as not to harm Israel's credit rating. In any event, such an increase does entail giving the build-up priority over some other public spending, and leaders must know how to communicate this to the public and mobilize public support for it.

C. With regard to mobilizing public support, the leadership will also need to once again instill in the public consciousness of all its

citizens that we are a country engaged in a struggle that, unfortunately, has never truly ceased, and whose end we do not know. Therefore, we must all live with the awareness of being a “nation in arms,” a reality that requires from us—not only a significant investment from the state budget, but also a personal investment from every citizen—both in the number of reserve duty days performed each year and in the total number of years spent in active reserve service.

D. This policy also poses challenges for the IDF. Even if all the required budgets are allocated and the concept of force employment is adapted to be decisive and initiative-driven, implementing the policy will still not be simple—first and foremost because establishing new frameworks within the IDF takes time. Staffing the required manpower, both in the standing army and in the reserves, and carrying out the necessary procurement are far from straightforward tasks. It is easier to establish a new air squadron and acquire aircraft than to establish a new division with all of its constituent components.

E. In addition to these challenges, the IDF will need to change its internal organizational culture in a way that allows for a shift in how resources are allocated within the military. A new distribution will be required—one that enables the maneuvering ground forces to grow much more rapidly than other force components. This organizational change will also require transferring some

centers of power (such as firepower), which are currently concentrated almost entirely in the Air Force, to other parts of the military. The cultural change will also need to take place within the Ground Forces themselves, which in recent years have grown accustomed to thinking in terms of “boutique excellence” rather than a system that is “good enough” but large and robust. This issue is closely tied both to the employment of force and to force buildup.

We must all live with the awareness of being a “nation in arms,” a reality that requires from us—not only a significant investment from the state budget, but also a personal investment from every citizen

F. It is essential to ensure that these changes are implemented responsibly, so as not to lose relative advantages that Israel has enjoyed to date. Excellent intelligence capabilities, the strategic arm of the Air Force, and similar assets are all relative advantages of the State of Israel over its adversaries, and they must not be weakened under any circumstances. The effort to expand and strengthen ground maneuver capabilities must not come at the expense of other outstanding force elements.

G. Maintaining a larger force structure also entails higher sustainment costs and requires a multi-year budget that includes the costs of maintenance and the replacement of some of the equipment.

Afterword

The State of Israel faces a complex security reality, in which its enemies do not rest for a moment, but continuously develop capabilities and seek opportunities to undermine its sovereignty and harm its citizens. In recent decades, the IDF has reduced its ground maneuvering force, based on the belief that standoff firepower and advanced intelligence would suffice to neutralize threats. This approach led to excessive reliance on deterrence and remote warfare, but reality has shown that without substantial ground maneuver, it is impossible to decisively defeat the enemy and provide genuine security for the State of Israel. To ensure national resilience, a fundamental change in force buildup is required, and the capability for decisive victory must be restored—a strong, powerful, maneuvering ground force.

However, beyond questions of manpower, equipment, and maneuver, lies the core issue—the most important of all: spirit. Israel is a nation in struggle, and the fight for its existence has not yet ended. The role of Zionism in human history is not merely

to establish a Jewish state, but to ensure that it is strong, powerful, and capable of defending itself for generations to come, so that the Jewish people may always make their voice heard in the broader human arena. To achieve this, a strong military alone is not enough—there must be a culture of initiative, a willingness to take risks, and offensive-minded leadership, both on the battlefield and in the political sphere. IDF soldiers and commanders, as well as the nation's elected leaders, must internalize that responsibility for Israel's security does not end with the management of defensive wars, but rather with the creation of conditions in which the enemy does not dare to attack—and when it does, it is defeated decisively, swiftly, and lethally.

Israel cannot afford to be drawn into prolonged wars of attrition. It must initiate, achieve decisive victory, and build a force that denies its enemies both the capability and the will to attack. This is the call of the hour, and it is the obligation of every generation, renewed time and again, for the future of the people and the state.

Appendix: Comments on the Nagel Committee Report

The Nagel Committee report presents an optimistic approach regarding Israel's security reality. The committee identifies two possible approaches: a "pessimistic" approach, according to which Israel's enemies—chiefly Hamas, Hezbollah, and Syria—will recover and again pose a threat; and, by contrast, a "success-oriented" approach, which the committee recommends. According to this approach, it is possible to formulate a less intensive security policy based on the assumption that Israel's enemies are on a trajectory of weakening, and that the IDF will be able to deal with them primarily through a continuous campaign between wars.

The committee states that "one must not be tempted... to assume an extremely severe reference threat and build a complete response to it, at an enormous and unnecessary economic cost." Instead, it advocates building an "appropriate response," which, according to the committee, should be evaluated "in light of history." This approach ignores potential strategic dangers and rests on assumptions about regional security trends that lack a solid foundation.

The main gaps between the committee's approach and our position:

1. **Threat assessment** – The committee's report downplays the significance of major threats, such as Egypt, Jordan, Shiite militias, and radical Islamic forces east of Jordan and from Syria. Relying on the enemy's intentions rather than its capabilities creates strategic blindness that could lead to a security surprise similar to historical failures.
2. **Ground force build-up** – The committee recommends postponing the strengthening of the ground forces to the second half of the multi-year plan. We, by contrast, believe this process must begin immediately. Establishing an armored brigade or a division is not a one- or two-year effort, but one that takes many years. Waiting could leave Israel critically unprepared for the next confrontation.
3. **Readiness of the ground forces** – The committee claims that during the Iron Swords War a "deep and successful maneuver" was conducted. In practice, however, this was not a genuine deep maneuver but a limited operation. Even today, the IDF does not possess a sufficiently large maneuvering force capable of operating deep in enemy territory and decisively defeating adversaries on multiple fronts simultaneously.
4. **Dependence on other branches** – The committee's recommendations emphasize the integration and connectivity of ground forces with the Air Force and intelligence elements. In practice, however, such dependence is not always feasible on the battlefield.

There is a need for ground forces with independent operational capability, able to operate deep in enemy territory without absolute reliance on air support.

5. **Decisive power and its political implications** – A strong ground force is not only a critical component of defense and battlefield decision, but also a tool that projects political power. The State of Israel must maintain a well-trained, large, and powerful ground army not only for combat purposes, but also to preserve deterrence and strengthen its strategic

standing in the international arena. Neglecting this component weakens Israel's power vis-à-vis its enemies and the international community alike.

Therefore, the position of this document is clear – the time has come to invest in building up the IDF's ground force, and not to wait until it is too late. We must prepare for every scenario, including a multi-front conflict, and ensure that the IDF possesses a genuine maneuver force capable of deciding wars and winning them.