

PART ONE: ISRAELI RMA

The “Unconscious” RMA (1973–1991)

The story of the Israeli RMA starts on the battlefields in 1973, when doubts were raised about the credibility of the IDF's concept of operations. In Particular, two problems were highlighted: the low ability of the IDF to conduct combined arms operations, and the problem of the saturated battlefield. The latter resulted in high rates of attrition and significantly restricted operational maneuver, leaving no possibility for decisive breakthrough battle.¹ The efficacy of the traditional cult of the offensive began to appear reckless.² Hampered by numerous obstacles, the combined arms approach matured gradually in the decade that followed.³ The issue of the saturated battlefield, however, created serious dissonance in Israeli military thought.

Inasmuch as static defense totally discredited itself in 1973, the notion of opting for *reactive defense* emerged. During the late 1970s, Saadia Amiel, scientific advisor to the minister of defense, argued that recent achievements in microelectronics and particularly on stand-off PGMs might be the most suitable means to this end. It was his view that while these advanced technologies were no panacea, they had the potential to enable on-time assessment of threats, real-time battlefield intelligence, swift target acquisition, efficient command and control, and precision fire strike.⁴ His views found support among a select few⁵ but were not adopted by the Israeli defense establishment. The conventional wisdom posited that a transformation to defensive doctrine would signal to the enemy that the IDF had no intention to invade their territory. This, it was argued, would decrease deterrence capability and would motivate the enemy to invest massively in building offensive measures. Israeli decision makers assumed that even if based on a remarkable PGM arsenal, defensive military doctrine would not be able to stop enemy waves. Intelligence, communication, and weaponry systems based on state-of-the-art technologies were procured, but neither doctrine nor force structure of the IDF underwent any significant change.⁶

The IDF's brilliantly orchestrated suppression of the Syrian air defenses in the Bekaa Valley demonstrated this dual approach, when advanced technologies were used in a revolutionary manner, without effecting a major change in the IDF's concept of operations. Lessons learned by the Israeli Air Force (IAF) after 1973 brought significant techno-tactical innovation—an exclusive development of the defense industries and the IAF. The IDF improved combined

arms coordination, capabilities for dissemination of target intelligence, command and control, and precision fire.⁷ In summer 1982, Syria introduced mobile and static SAMs into the Bekaa Valley, and created a daunting tactical situation for the IDF. Syrian deployment threatened Israeli air superiority and restricted the ability to conduct reconnaissance, interdiction, and close air support missions. Once the decision to engage the Syrian air-defense deployment was made, the IAF executed an attack based on the most advanced weaponry. In the first two hours of the battle, the IAF destroyed nineteen SAM batteries, and in the next few hours shot down more than twenty enemy MIGs, without losing even a single airplane. On about 1,500 square miles of airspace, the IDF executed paramount intelligence collection, target acquisition, command and control, and real-time data dissemination to precision-guided stand-off fire capabilities. Simultaneously the IDF jammed most of the Syrian ground communication and conducted electronic countermeasures against radars that were subsequently destroyed by anti-radar missiles. The knockout of the Syrian air and air-defense forces utilized the most revolutionary electronic and information warfare capabilities. The real-time battlefield picture was produced by the data fusion from the airborne surveillance radar, remotely piloted and unmanned flying vehicles, which monitored the area uninterrupted. In the final stages of the battle, the IAF attacked Syrian armor with laser-guided missiles. The information was disseminated in real time, while sensors, command and control, and shooters operated as one orchestrated whole.⁸ The Israeli cutting-edge weapons and technologies were so revolutionary that the superpowers had not yet produced, let alone deployed, analogous equipment.⁹ The IAF had, in Soviet MTR terminology, operated as a gigantic, combined arms reconnaissance-strike complex. In American terms, Israeli conduct could be dubbed RMA-NCW-type battle par excellence, because it tailored intelligence and target acquisition systems, command and control elements, and precision stand-off fire into one integrated system and uninterruptedly implemented real-time sensor-to-shooter loops, for a relatively prolonged period of time.¹⁰

Despite the successful execution of this innovative approach, the experience did not produce any revolutionary transformation in the IDF's concept of operations.¹¹ Paradoxically, the Lebanon war led the IDF to favor quantity over examining conceptual, qualitative leaps forward.¹² Technologies and concepts of operation from summer 1982 were further developed in the IAF but became a sectarian, tactical innovation, with no significant impact on the

concepts of operation of other corps, let alone GS. During most of the 1980s, the GS hardly had time to dedicate to the question of revolutionary implications of the 1982 IAF success.¹³ Although pioneers in technology implementation, the IDF did not produce any significant leap forward in its vision of the future war and concept of operations.¹⁴ Israel regarded the Bekaa battle as a successful synthesis of advanced technology and creative operational improvisation—the essence of its qualitative edge.¹⁵ Thus, during most of the 1980s, state-of-the-art intelligence, communication, and precision fire systems were procured, without changing doctrine and organizational structure whatsoever. If new operation problems evolved, they were usually solved through additional force and sophisticated technological improvements.¹⁶

The question of doctrine effectiveness was raised in the 1980s, under the impact, among other reasons, of the *Wald Report*. This internal report criticized the IDF approach to force buildup and defined its offensive concept of operations based on the armor and air force, and the doctrine of static defense as anachronistic and counterproductive. As a result, significant professional debate about force buildup gathered momentum in the IDF between two groups, broadly defined as “traditionalists” and “reformers.”¹⁷ Traditionalists went along with the conventional wisdom. In future war, they argued, Arab armies equipped with vast amounts of modern weaponry would try to impose on Israel a war of attrition. To counterbalance Israeli “weakness” to wage a prolonged campaign, they proposed the reliance on a traditional swift offensive that would bring battlefield decision, and criticized defense as a negative form of battle. Preventive offensive was seen as preferable over even the shortest defense. Tanks coordinated with airpower, and assisted by other corps, were seen as an ideal means for maneuvering, attacking, and capturing and controlling territory. Driven by this line of thought, “traditionalists” saw in the huge armor formations the backbone of future force. They demanded a sophistication of the iron fists of the IDF that would bring the offensive deep into the enemy rear. They did not ignore new technologies; they saw in them promising force and protection multipliers against enemy countermeasures.¹⁸

The reformers offered an alternative for the offensive breakthrough battle, which they regarded with skepticism. Instead of breaking through an almost impenetrable Arab defense, they proposed exhausting enemy forces and inflicting heavy losses in the front and in the rear by using air force, navy, and special operations forces and by capitalizing on Israeli superiority in stand-off PGM, command and control systems, and target acquisition capabilities. They argued

that by utilizing a qualitative edge in technology and human skills, and embarking on the defensive concept of operations, Israel could attain significant strategic benefits. Subsequent development maneuvers against a weakened enemy would be far less impressive than the victory in 1967 but would minimize attrition rates.¹⁹

The debate between the two groups expanded beyond the IDF and rose to a national level. In 1987, Dan Meridor from the Foreign and Defense Affairs Committee of the Knesset recommended gradually decreasing the traditional armored force and injecting free resources into the massive procurement of stand-off PGMs. This, the committee concluded, would create qualitative asymmetry in favor of Israel. Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin was open to the proposals of the reformers; he was reluctant, however, to discredit the offensive military doctrine. Thus, seizing the middle ground between the two schools of thought, Rabin chose to develop and to procure new weaponry, but to incorporate it in the existing force structure and concept of operations, without effecting any changes whatsoever in the architecture of Israeli military power.²⁰

Additional imperatives pushed toward further transformation, when the confluence of several political, social, and economic developments began to redefine the Israeli approach to military affairs in the early 1990s and led to a search for alternative solutions to preserving Israeli military power.²¹ The peace process and the future return of the territories to Arab states potentially nullified Israeli operational depth and made the traditional instinct for preventive strike and taking the war to enemy soil problematic. Under these geostrategic changes, the IDF was compelled to look for doctrinal alternatives to preserve Israeli security.²² In addition, Israel was incrementally transformed from a collectivist society to an individualist market economy with a higher priority placed on nonsecurity issues and a reluctance to spend excessively on defense. Under liberalization of the Israeli society, the idealistic zeal of both recruits and reservists to invest time and energy decreased dramatically, and voices for a abandonment of universal military service were heard. Economically, massive procurement of high-tech weaponry became extremely expensive in terms of training and compensation of the force that operated them. In tandem with the above processes, lessons from American military conduct in the first Gulf War began to permeate the Israeli vision. Desert Storm offered, in the view of many Israeli experts, an example of a major advance in “sophisticated conventional warfare” and demonstrated how advanced technology may revolutionize war.²³

In light of these social and geopolitical changes, and under the influence of the American experience, the Israeli military establishment started to contemplate the notion that big military and advanced technologies might be mutually exclusive, and that the best way to exploit the full potential of modern weaponry would be a small, sophisticated and professional force. In the process of digesting lessons from the 1991 Gulf campaign, the IDF gradually assimilated the idea that offensive mobility on its own was not an ultimate solution for the modern battlefield.²⁴ One after another, Israeli chiefs of the GS proclaimed their intent to transform the IDF into a “small and smart military.”²⁵ Their ideas strongly echoed the arguments of the “reformers,” who called for defensively oriented doctrine, and recreated a wave of attacks on the traditional security paradigm. The reformers argued in favor of destroying the enemy deep inside its territory without crossing international borders, and maneuvering precision fire in place of heavy forces.²⁶ Mostly from outside the IDF, experts examined the interrelation of stand-off PGMs, advanced sensors, target acquisition and C4I systems, UAVs, electronic and information warfare systems,²⁷ and their impact on the nature of warfare.²⁸ Under the rubric of “the future battlefield,” they analyzed how operational and strategic visions could be reassessed under the impact of these new technologies when linked to a creative concept of operations.²⁹

The overall influence of this conceptual debate about the changing nature of warfare on the defense establishment was incremental. However, as an institution, the IDF made only piecemeal attempts to comprehend the emerging security regime and to transform itself along those lines.³⁰ Because of the intellectual conservatism and lack of relevant organizational framework, the IDF was unable to put these concepts together in a coherent form and to translate the abstract theoretical ideas into concrete military reforms. It was integrating technological advances into existing organizations and routines, rather than experimenting with radically different concepts. The acceleration of the Israeli RMA depended on the personalities involved, no less than on the changes in the strategic environment. Not until the time when a group of reformers determined to implement these ideas institutionalized itself in the IDF was the Israeli RMA put into motion.³¹ In contrast to “civilian” reformers outside the IDF, who mostly criticized the “offense and heavy” orientation of the IDF doctrine, “insiders” argued that lack of developed military thought and operational cognition produced this conceptual myopia. During the 1990s, three elements were introduced simultaneously into Israeli military praxis: a concept of operational art, a unique methodology for the analysis of military opera-

tions, and acknowledgment of the RMA. These three elements became organically interconnected: by utilizing new methodology, the IDF embarked on organizational and conceptual RMA innovation and treated it as development of the Israeli version of operational art. All three elements were introduced by the same small group of “insiders.”

An Acknowledgment of the RMA: Crafting the Israeli Operational Art

Serious study of the RMA, and introduction of this concept into military praxis, got under way inside the IDF with the establishment of the Advanced Operational Group, later upgraded to the Operational Theory Research Institute (OTRI). In the early 1990s, several retired Israeli generals and academics in the IDF military college came to the conclusion that, occasional display of operational insight notwithstanding, the IDF totally lacked *operational thinking*—an essential domain of knowledge between tactics and strategy. This void, according to the group, resulted in the conservative approach of Israeli military thought and prevented adaptation of the IDF to emerging technological and geopolitical realities. Short of operational cognition, the IDF lacked the intellectual milieu for systematic thinking about organizational structure and concept of operations. The group resembled the above-mentioned “reformers” and criticized both the form (the lack of an intellectual approach) and the essence (the doctrine’s irrelevancy) of the Israeli military praxis. They criticized the idealization of a tactical offensive excellence, as opposed to the development of a proper theory of war based on operational logic. According to them, tactical excellence in armor warfare diverted professional awareness from broader aspects of the theory behind operational maneuvering. They stressed the predominant tendency among IDF commanders to perceive the desired outcome of any combat activity as “mechanical destruction of opposing force.” They criticized traditional armored offensive maneuvers, which could neither deter nor prevent the threat of a surface-to-surface attack on the Israeli rear or low-intensity conflict.³²

The group sought to embark on scientific research to fill these voids, and its intention was approved by the GS in 1994. OTRI saw itself as a think-tank and consultancy for the development of an Israeli version of operational art; as an “experiment laboratory” for innovative concepts and doctrines; and, finally, as an “educational order” that would enlighten the IDF commanders to think critically and systematically about military affairs.³³ The institute became the

“knowledge authority” of the IDF in the decade that followed, and its influence grew tremendously, along with the improvement of its bureaucratic position within the military. The first educational activity for senior IDF officers, known as the Advanced Operational Course (KOMEM), was approved by the GS in 1995 and conducted the following year. By 1997 the Central and the Southern Commands employed the conceptual tools offered by OTRI, and by 2000 the GS itself cultivated and disseminated the institute’s ideas in the IDF. The intellectual engines of OTRI were Brig. Gen. (ret.) Shimon Naveh, who led the institute alternately with Brig. Gens. (ret.) Dov Tamari and Zvi Lanir. The institute stood behind most of the organizational and conceptual transformation that gathered momentum within the IDF in the subsequent decade.³⁴ In its activities OTRI advanced along two vectors: *operational art*, as a major research interest, and *general systems theory*, as a major methodology of inquiry and conceptualization.³⁵ The methodological credo of OTRI included theories from *architectural design* and *postmodernism*. The quintessence of these concepts served as the intellectual basis for the formulation of the IDF Concept of Operations—the codified version of the Israeli variation on the RMA theme.³⁶

Until the early 1990s, similar to the situation in the US prior to the 1980s, the importance of the operational level was absent from professional cognition of the IDF.³⁷ Filling this void, OTRI was inspired by two theories of modern military thought: the Soviet theory of Deep Operations and the American doctrine of the Air-Land Battle. Because the latter was seen by OTRI as an American emulation and adaptation of the former, Soviet works on operational art became the yardstick of theoretical excellence³⁸ and the intellectual fundament for Israeli experts.³⁹ They saw the Soviet terminology as much more advanced and rich than any Western analogue,⁴⁰ and applied it extensively to interpret Israeli military affairs and doctrine.⁴¹ After 2000 the documents and memoranda written in the GS, as well as the professional jargon of Israeli senior officers, included a significant quantity of terms borrowed from the Soviet military lexicon. OTRI experts saw the Soviet and the American doctrines as methodologically identical: both recognized the existence of operational art; both developed “harmonious patterns of thought and action in an environment saturated with contradictions”; both had put away “a mechanistic approach aimed at the destruction of enemy’s forces” and had chosen a “systemic approach seeking to disrupt the rival system’s operational rationale.”⁴²

OTRI proposed to emulate this approach for the development of Israeli operational doctrine. This methodology envisioned the enemy as a multidimen-

sional system, whose ability should be neutralized by: *fragmentation strike*, which isolated an enemy's military subsystem from the strategic supersystem and disrupted its consolidating logic; *simultaneity*, which coordinated actions across the spectrum of operations, to shock and paralyze an enemy system; and *momentum*, exploitation of the synergetic effect produced by fragmentation and simultaneity, in order to deny the opposing system response time, ultimately causing it to break down.⁴³

Israeli experts argued that the Soviets and the Americans had succeeded in making this conceptual leap forward, thanks to adaptation of the *systemic thinking approach*. Conceptualization of warfare in general systems language provided, according to OTRI, the most relevant analytical lenses to deal with a complex and chaotic operational environment. They believed that this theory would enable translation of abstract strategic directives into mechanical tactical missions, and vice versa—linking all the tactical engagements together to achieve the strategic goal.⁴⁴ The battlefield decision, according to this school of thought, was not necessarily occupation of territory or destruction of enemy forces in an integral battle of annihilation, but neutralization of an enemy system's logic by the triple operational strike described above.⁴⁵ According to Israeli experts, this logic was applicable to both low- and high-intensity conflicts,⁴⁶ and the digitalization and extension of the battlefield in the RMA era only multiplied the relevance of this approach.⁴⁷ After the mid-1990s most of the Israeli senior officers went through KOMEM, an educational course offered by OTRI. The curriculum consisted of four major thematic blocks: *operational art*, based on the works of the Soviet theoreticians; *structure of paradigmatic changes, epistemology and dialectics*; *systems theory and cybernetics*; and *space perception*.⁴⁸ The graduates of their educational activities were seen by OTRI as soldier-philosophers who would become agents of influence inside the senior level of the IDF.⁴⁹

OTRI experts presumed that the main asset of future military forces would be the ability to rapidly evolve knowledge, and they sought to provide the IDF commanders with unique, systematic reasoning capabilities. The methodology produced by OTRI was a mixture of general systems, chaos, and architecture theories, and postmodern approaches from various academic fields.⁵⁰ OTRI experts saw rationalism, scientism, and objectivity, where formal logic reduced the perception of the world to its elementary forms in order to pinpoint causality, as irrelevant mechanical reductionism. Like postmodernists, they maintained that reality is an organic, nonlinear, complex, self-organizing,

dynamic system of interacting items, where chaos exists side by side with order. Warfare was seen as chaotic engagement between two systems and as an ephemeral accumulation of events, where each situation was different and unique, and open to a variety of interpretations. OTRI argued that military organizations, with their hierarchical, linear mind-set, tend to perceive complexity as a simple system, applying a “one doctrine fits all,” mechanical approach. OTRI offered to grasp reality in its totality and internal dynamic, without reducing its complexity. To adapt military doctrine to the uncertain and changing reality, they legitimized *subjective knowledge in context* as the only tool to cope with complex issues. To achieve this goal, OTRI’s methodology advocated *conceptualization*—developing a n invented language to explain observed phenomena in the given context.⁵¹ It did not accurately represent an observed phenomenon but made heuristic interpretations about it.⁵²

OTRI saw the traditional IDF approach to “estimation of situation” as mechanical and irrelevant for operational and strategic planning.⁵³ Conceptualization, in its turn, would enable interpretation of blurred political directives, and their translation into effective operational campaign planning. Conceptualization was expected to enable “discourse”—a dialogue between the political echelon and the operational and tactical level of command, where everyone would be able to interpret intentions and orders of others.⁵⁴ The ideas generated during the discourse were presented in “knowledge maps,” and the insights were translated into operational directives and orders.⁵⁵ OTRI trained the IDF commanders to see themselves as “operational architects”—to interpret and to conceptualize combat environments using the language of a vanguard architectural schools and works on urbanism, cybernetics, and psychology. It was OTRI’s belief that the logic of these disciplines offered greater facility for interpreting situations than did traditional military terminology. Theoretical texts considered essential readings were works by Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Christopher Alexander, Gregory Bateson, Clifford Geertz, and Bernard Tschumi. The language used by senior Israeli commanders in this period resonated strongly with the architectural literature. For example, urban warfare in April 2002 was described by the Israeli commanders as “inverse geometry.”⁵⁶

OTRI’s ideas spread across the IDF rapidly. In 1998, the head of the Central Command, Moshe Ya’alon, coping with challenges in the Palestinian arena, substituted “estimation of situation” with a new alternative methodology. The Central Command invented its own tools, language, and concepts to examine phenomena, trends, and occurrences beyond the tactical dimension of the

conflict.⁵⁷ This new methodology moved to the Southern Command, then to the GS, and from there it was disseminated throughout the IDF, including the Research and Analysis Directorate of Military Intelligence. When Ya'alon became the chief of the GS, he turned the “conceptualization” and “discourse” process into “a main axis of the GS estimation of situation.”⁵⁸ Ya'alon saw this methodology as a tool for generating a conceptual and organizational revolution in the IDF that would introduce new military knowledge into the intellectual vacuum on the operational level.⁵⁹

When in the mid-1990s the American theoretical RMA debate had evolved into the all-encompassing military reform, the Israeli Ministry of Defense decided to cooperate on this issue with its US colleagues. ONA was identified as a main intellectual and bureaucratic engine of that process in the US, and designated as a counterpart. OTRI was chosen as the most relevant Israeli partner.⁶⁰ The first encounter between the RMA theoreticians from the two countries took place in 1997 in Israel. Its goal was to expose each side to the other's professional vision of the changing nature of war. American experts headed by Andrew Marshall presented the main postulates of the American approach to the RMA.⁶¹ OTRI and the Doctrine and Training Unit of the GS (TOHAD) observed the changing security and technological environment, recognized the necessity of embarking on a profound organizational and conceptual reform, and presented a new methodology for the development of Israeli military thought and operational art.⁶² The Israelis did not accept the term *RMA* in its pure American form, having found some of its aspects irrelevant to the operational realities of the IDF.⁶³ However, the RMA concept on the whole was found extremely relevant for emulation. Israelis who participated in the meeting saw themselves as the architects of the Israeli version of the RMA. Although differences of interpretation were in evidence, both delegations acknowledged that the emerging transformation in the nature of war should be reflected in the organization and concept of operation of the two militaries. It was agreed that in subsequent years the experts of the two countries would be in constant touch, for adaptive, mutual learning.⁶⁴ The subsequent contacts, workshops, and scientific seminars on military theory, innovation, and experimentation with the ONA⁶⁵ became one of the most important sources of intellectual influence on the builders of the Israeli RMA concept. The concept of RMA and, later, the US Defense Transformation were presented by OTRI as the main frame of reference for similar processes in the IDF.⁶⁶ Israeli conceptual reform, which resulted in a new Concept of Operations, was deeply influenced by the US Defense Transformation.

Following the first meeting with ONA, the Israeli participants started to cultivate an intellectual climate in the IDF that would foster acceptance of the RMA.⁶⁷ About a year prior to the first meeting with the Americans, when interest in the topic of the RMA became officially established at the IDF, the Doctrine and Training Division, influenced by OTRI, started to translate and to disseminate historical and theoretical works on the Soviet MTR, the American ALB, and the American RMA, which aimed to fulfill educational lacunae in the theoretical knowledge of IDF officers.⁶⁸ Simultaneously, an unprecedented number of professional publications on various conceptual aspects of operational art appeared,⁶⁹ including applications of smart munitions and information technology on the operational level.⁷⁰ Articles translated from English reflected the American vision of the RMA new theory of victory.⁷¹ Following the first encounter with ONA, the opening volume of *Ma'arachot* in 1998 was fully dedicated to the RMA⁷² and its implications for Israel.⁷³ This theoretical knowledge about diagnostics and changes in the nature of war was designated as a n e s s e n t i a l intellectual foundation for formulating the Israeli version of the operational art. In subsequent years manifestation of the American RMA during the conflict in Kosovo was vigorously discussed in the IDF. Technological and conceptual lessons from the American campaign significantly influenced the Israeli visions of modern war, especially in terms of smart munitions and the role of airpower in the modern battlefield.⁷⁴ It became obvious that technological, political, and social changes made the existing paradigm of military operations obsolete and that there was a need to invent a new system of explanations. However, in 1997, OTRI experts, paraphrasing Tom as Kuhn, argued that in terms of the RMA the IDF was in a stage of the epistemological crisis—one step before emergence of a new paradigm.⁷⁵

The New Concept of Operations: Theory and Practice

In the late 1990s the IDF higher command had realized that the combat paradigm of the IDF had lost its relevance for the emerging assortment of scenarios and threats. The need for a n e w c o n c e p t o f o p e r a t i o n s arose from strategic changes in the region, diversification of the balance of threats, budget cuts, advanced technological capabilities, and the influence of the American RMA's ideas about the changes in the nature of warfare. Synthesizing between two sources of intellectual inspirations (Deep Battle of the Soviet operational art and the US ALB) and elaborating on the methodology of general systems theory, OTRI started to make radical proposals for organiza-

tional and conceptual changes in the IDF, beginning in the late 1990s. The most central recommendation demanded the formulation of an operational doctrine that would serve as a coherent framework for the buildup, training, and operation of the IDF. Specific recommendations included the reduction of traditional elements of heavy maneuvers and development of operational capabilities for mobility and striking power and for waging simultaneous multidimensional operations on the front and in the rear, both by fire and by maneuver.⁷⁶

Heads of the regional commands, influenced by OTRI methodology, began posing questions regarding planning of military operations, organizational structures and force buildup, and command and control relations with the GS. In response, then-CGS Shaul Mofaz set up a team that drafted a document entitled *IDF Strategy*. However, the work got bogged down and was renewed under CGS Ya'alon when, in 2002, he established several teams of senior officers to reassess various aspects of the Israeli military doctrine. Ya'alon saw this process as a conceptual revolution in Israeli military affairs that would provide doctrinal guidance for the IDF in the RMA era. The new Concept of Operations (CONOP) published in 2006 became the quintessence of Israeli views on the nature of warfare in the RMA era.⁷⁷ Since OTRI experts provided professional-academic support for doctrinal workshops, the final product reflected the significant number of its ideas promoted, including the methodology of systemic operational design (SOD).⁷⁸

The new CONOP prescribed transforming both the organizational structure and the doctrine of the IDF. In terms of fire–maneuver balance, the CONOP emphasized precision and stand-off firepower (mostly from the air) at the expense of ground maneuver by heavy armor formations. It discredited the utility of massive ground engagements and defined capturing territory as less important than destroying targets with minimum casualties and collateral damage. Holding territory was deemed a political and operational burden. Presence on enemy soil was to be replaced by the ability to maneuver through it for fixed periods of time, and to produce “operational effects” to impact an enemy system. In contrast to the traditional IDF doctrine, the CONOP advocated bringing the war to the enemy’s territory not by “boots on the ground,” but by an integrated system of stand-off, precision-guided fire, based on real-time intelligence and supported by command and control systems. These reconnaissance-strike complexes were expected to enable stand-off control of the territory.⁷⁹ The actual capabilities for these tasks existed for more than a decade;

however, military thinking had not kept pace with the sophistication of the IDF equipment.⁸⁰

The new theory of victory strongly contrasted with classical linear operations, where the enemy was brought to its knees in a decisive battle of annihilation. The new approach demanded simultaneous attack throughout the entire depth and dimensions of operational deployment that would create overall paralysis of the enemy system. This type of victory not only was based on physical annihilation, but paid a great deal of attention to affecting the “rationale” of an enemy system and paralyzing its motivation and ability to keep on fighting.⁸¹ In addition to emulating the Soviet approach, which is clearly seen here, this new theory of victory relied heavily upon the American concept of Effect-Based Operations (EBO). EBO advocated applying military levers not only for the sake of inflicting damage per se, but in order to produce indirect and cascading effects that would influence the enemy as a system and attain the strategic goals of the campaign. In 2003 OTRI organized a conference on EBO and, together with TOHAD, disseminated explanations of its operational principles in the IDF. The GS workshops identified EBO doctrine as a revolutionary military concept, offered training for it during the large-scale exercise in summer 2004, and adapted it in the new CONOP.⁸² In its emulation of the US, the IDF was strongly influenced by the application of these new ways of war in Iraq.⁸³

Although the new CONOP saw precision and stand-off fire as the principle technique of future warfare, maneuver was not totally discredited. The CONOP suggested establishing a new force structure for the IDF basic formation. It was envisioned as a network of small and autonomous units that would be capable of executing versatile missions, including target acquisition and guidance and execution of precision fire from the air and from the ground. These units would operate as a self-synchronizing network, in which formations coordinate with each other horizontally, and orient and navigate through the battlefield without going through the central command. A network of separate units would be diffused throughout the whole operational depth and would operate semi-autonomously, but jointly in frames of the unified campaign plan. Under the assumption that it takes a network to combat a network, these “swarming” formations would adjust themselves to the stealth capability of the enemy. Considerable authority would be delegated top-down, and decisions would be based on chance, contingency, and opportunity and would be made in real time, on the immediate tactical level. This concept was

expected to be effective against both conventional and asymmetrical threats.⁸⁴ Although developed in-house, “swarming” and diffused warfare tactics were strongly inspired by the US Network-Centric Warfare concepts. Given the frequent contact with the parts of the US military responsible for the development of and experimentations with *transformation concepts*, it is not surprising that the IDF was strongly influenced by this American approach.⁸⁵

To ensure that combat activities could be simultaneously executed by all the involved IDF units and synchronized throughout the whole operational depth and from all possible dimensions,⁸⁶ the concept of *jointness* (*shiluv*), borrowed from the US Defense Transformation, was established and became another banner of the Israeli RMA. It implied the ability to deploy units from all of the branches in a synchronized manner, which became possible through the advanced command and control systems. Ideally, *jointness* blurred borders between services, left classical linear combat behind, and opted for simultaneous multidimensional warfare.⁸⁷ The new CONOP also added an operational level to IDF planning and thinking. The concept of an “operator”—a commander responsible for deployment of all the forces in the comprehensive theater of war—was introduced into the GS alongside the notion of *jointness*. New departments for campaign planning were established in addition to the existing operational planning units.⁸⁸ The preference for flexibility in weapons development, in light of diverse and unpredictable threats,⁸⁹ also strongly resembled the recently introduced American “capabilities-based approach.”⁹⁰

The operational experience during the Second Intifada became a laboratory for some of these new approaches.⁹¹ The combat experience was regarded as successful and provided field-based evidence in support of the new CONOP and the methodology developed by OTRI.⁹² Diffused warfare was considered a great success and an effective revolutionary innovation.⁹³ The IDF operated in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a network of reconnaissance-strike complexes, which collated data on highly dynamic targets from an assortment of intelligence sensors and transmitted it in real time through sophisticated C4I systems, to precision-guided, stand-off, “smart” fire from manned and unmanned, aerial and ground platforms. The IDF shortened sensor-shooter loops to minutes and seconds. It widely practiced the jointness concept, when these sensor-shooter centers consisted of representatives from different IDF branches, and even civilian intelligence agencies, and operated as an integrated whole.⁹⁴ Eventually, the GS convinced itself of the rightness of its course. It was believed that these operational methods could be applied to any contingency

scenarios, both in low-intensity conflicts (LICs) and in high-intensity conflicts (HICs).⁹⁵ Advanced systems, which would enable the application of these concepts to the conventional realm, were rapidly developed.⁹⁶

According to the common wisdom that crystallized after the 2006 campaign, the ideas inspired by OTRI account for some operational misfortunes during the war, and much blame for the poor performance of the IDF lay with the recent CONOP.⁹⁷ This work deliberately refrains from analyzing the combat effectiveness of the CONOP in the context of the Lebanon war, primarily because of the different research focus. The book deals with the intellectual history and cultural roots of military innovation, regardless of its combat utility. However, some remarks are appropriate here. When judged from a more distant perspective, it seems that linking the poor combat effectiveness of the IDF directly with the 2006 CONOP and OTRI is an oversimplification. The Lebanon campaign cannot serve as an empirical test for the quality of the IDF's "operational theory," because it was not really implemented in Lebanon. The CONOP was the latest, but not the final, stage in a decade-long process of crafting Israeli operational art. Moreover, the document was introduced to the IDF several months prior to the war, and its concepts still had not gone through field experimentation and a full training cycle when the war broke out. The concepts were disseminated through the IDF but not fully absorbed; they were vaguely understood and implemented only partially during the war, and not according to doctrinal guidance.⁹⁸ Also, it should be emphasized, OTRI developed theories and concepts that were intended to serve as thinking tools for the IDF and not as command practice.⁹⁹

Indeed, the critique of "operational theory" both before and after the 2006 campaign and the poor conduct in the field reflect a conceptual cacophony that emerged in the IDF prior to the war. Many critics outside the IDF treated the newly invented language and methodological approach as esoteric, blurred, incomprehensible, and meaningless. The uncontrolled development of the new terminology, free from any standardization, interfered with the ability to grasp the essence of the operational concept. Even if potentially contributing, innovative methodology and doctrinal ideas were lost in lexical confusion.¹⁰⁰ The euphoria of conceptualization "befuddled the minds of Israeli military leaders"¹⁰¹ and turned the IDF into a Tower of Babel, in which tactical commanders had no clue during the war about how to translate incomprehensible orders formulated by their superiors in postmodern language.¹⁰² Other experts questioned the very essence of the innovation. Some defined the doctrinal

logic of the new CONOP as counterproductive, compared to classical ways of waging war,¹⁰³ and saw the application of postmodern concepts to military affairs as damaging, if not downright unprofessional.¹⁰⁴ An additional group criticized the blind, mechanical emulation of the American RMA, which was seen by them as irrelevant for the Israeli geostrategic realities.¹⁰⁵ Some senior officers argued that there was nothing revolutionary in the changing military regimes, with no impact whatsoever on the classical principles of war.¹⁰⁶

During the several years prior to the war, a significant number of senior IDF officers approached new concepts from the position of bureaucratic and intellectual conformism and utilized the new vocabulary only as lip service to the conceptual fashion of the moment. Very few truly studied these new ideas deeply and in an orderly fashion. Even fewer were ready to admit that they did not understand the meaning of what they were reading and/or saying. While some voiced their concerns, others were embarrassed to openly admit their confusion. Using the same terminology they often meant different things, which contributed to the overall conceptual mess. In 2005 the new CGS, Dan Halutz, started to reorient the IDF in a somewhat different conceptual direction. With his arrival, the IDF was further disoriented conceptually and tried to figure out which of the concepts associated with the previous CGS's school of thought stayed intact under the new boss and which should be thrown away. The confusion reached its height when in April 2006 CGS Halutz, who declared his intention to redirect the IDF conceptually, approved the last CONOP, which he inherited from his predecessor without making any changes. The CONOP was defined as a basic military document, but it was not entirely clear within the IDF whether the document should indeed be implemented to the letter or should be treated as an additional new draft, like those disseminated in the previous years. When Israel surprised itself with the decision to go to war, the IDF was experiencing the climax of its conceptual disorientation. Eventually, different command authorities in the IDF approached warfare from somewhat different conceptual backgrounds, according to how they understood the notion of "operational theory" and its doctrinal status in the IDF. This bureaucratic-conceptual chaos and doctrinal relativism were among the factors that made the IDF war machine somewhat dysfunctional during the war.¹⁰⁷

PART 2: ISRAELI STRATEGIC CULTURE

Cultural Characteristics and Cognitive Style

Although Israeli culture is a fusion of Jewish, European, subethnic Levantine, and American traditions, it is not accurate to describe it as a “shapeless hybrid about which all generalizations are impossible.” Its coherent inner logic allows one to speak of a single Israeli culture.¹⁰⁸ In terms of social structure, individualism coexists in Israel with well-developed group orientation,¹⁰⁹ but that differs from “individualistic America” or “collectivistic Russia.” Israeli individualism expresses itself in a casual attitude toward rules and regulations, in self-reliance, and in little respect for imposed authority. However, Israeli loyalty is less oriented to oneself and tends to be focused more on the pursuit of collective goals and the well-being of the society. Despite the ongoing transformation of the Israeli society from a collectivistic ideal to a more liberal individualistic one,¹¹⁰ and Americanization of Israeli culture,¹¹¹ in Hofstede’s measurements Israel scored only moderately individualist.¹¹²

Egalitarian social norms established by the founding fathers produced a striking informality of behavior and inattention to hierarchy. Defined by anthropologists as a “small power distance society,” Israel has a second-lowest in equality in superior–subordinate relations.¹¹³ This atmosphere exists even in such a hierarchical organization as the IDF. Having a lean organizational structure and simple military bureaucracy, the Israeli military and defense systems are informal and egalitarian and foster a lot of innovative ideas bottom-up through informal organizational shortcuts.¹¹⁴ Lack of distance, a cult of simplicity, and social informality have produced an “ultra-low-context” communications style among native-born “new Israelis” (*sabras*). In *sabra* narrative a direct, even confrontational, communication style (speaking “*dugri*”) was equated with integrity and synonymous with “honest and authentic.” In contrast, a pacifying, diplomatic style is regarded as suspect and hypocritical and perceived as “insincere and artificial.”¹¹⁵ Although the various waves of immigration brought different cultures and communication styles, they were socialized to the norms of speaking *dugri* and to the point (*tachlis*)¹¹⁶ and were eventually absorbed by the low-context approach of the Israeli melting pot.¹¹⁷ Israelis prefer a direct, spontaneous, natural, and unrestrained speech that leaves little to interpretation.¹¹⁸ For practical Israelis, style matters less than content; they are uncomfortable with formality and ceremony and disrespect external forms of courtesy. They have manifested this mode of interaction