

## **Tactical Vs. Strategic Raid**

*Der namentlich nicht gezeichnete Beitrag wird zu einer Zeit veröffentlicht, in der über einen Militärschlag Israels gegen Iran diskutiert wird. In einem Interview mit der „New York Times“ hat Verteidigungsminister Ehud Barak den Eindruck erweckt, dass ein Angriff auf Iran unvermeidlich sei. Vor der Sicherheitskonferenz in Herzliya hat Generalstabschef Benny Gantz Anfang Februar betont: „Es ist wichtig zu handeln, eine starke und höchst verlässliche militärische Streitmacht aufzubauen, die fähig und in der Lage ist, so dass wir darauf vorbereitet sind zu operieren, wenn es nötig ist.“ Vor derselben Konferenz hat Gantz' Amtsvorgänger Moshe Yaalon, der dem Kabinett als Sicherheitsminister angehört, darauf hingewiesen, dass Israel die Fähigkeit besitze, alle Einrichtungen im Iran militärisch zu treffen.*

*Der Beitrag trifft eine Unterscheidung zwischen taktischen und strategischen Überraschungseinsätzen. Dafür habe das israelische Militär vier Spezialeinheiten gebildet: „Sayeret Matkal“ für Bodeneinsätze, „Shaldag“ für Kommandoaktionen in der Luft, „Shayetet 13“ für Kommandoeinsätze auf See und „669“ für Luftlandemanöver. Sie seien für Sondereinsätze fern der israelischen Grenzen in das Vereinigte Kommando zusammengeführt worden.*

*Als „strategischer Überraschungsangriff“ wird jener bezeichnet, der die Schwäche des Gegners ausnutzt und den Kriegsverlauf ändern kann. Für den Einsatz würden Kriegsschiffe, Transportflugzeuge, Helikopter und Allround-Fahrzeuge benötigt. Als Beispiel hebt der Autor die Überquerung des Suezkanals durch Ariel Sharon im*

*Oktoberkrieg 1973 bis hundert Kilometer vor Kairo hervor.*

*Als „taktischer Überraschungsangriff“ wird ein waghalsiger und überraschender Angriff bezeichnet, der sich in einer bestimmten Kampfzone abspielt. So habe es während des zweiten Libanon-Krieges im Juli 2006 Sondereinsätze im Hinterland des Feindes gegeben, die jedoch erst dann Erfolg gehabt hätten, als während der beiden letzten Tage des Krieges große Infanterieeinheiten zu Hilfe gekommen seien, die hinter den Linien der „Hisbollah“ operiert hätten.*

*Während der Operation „Gegossenes Blei“ im Gazastreifen Ende 2008/Anfang 2009 habe das Militär massive Luftschläge ausgeführt und die städtischen Zentren gemieden. Wie 2006 sei es nicht das Ziel gewesen, den Feind zu vernichten, sondern ihn hart zu bestrafen, die Ruhe an den eigenen Grenzen wiederherzustellen und Israels Abschreckung zu stärken.*

*Abschließend ruft die Analyse die Fehlerquellen der damaligen Einsätze in Erinnerung, die von der „Winograd-Kommission“<sup>1</sup> ermittelt wurden: die fehlende Absprache zwischen den führenden Militärs im Vorfeld und während der Kriege sowie der Mangel an angemessenen Kenntnissen des Libanon und der „Hisbollah“, der die Nutzung militärischer Chancen beeinträchtigt habe.*

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The IDF is establishing a Depth Corps, but the difference

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<sup>1</sup> Die Kommission unter Vorsitz des früheren Richters am Obersten Gerichtshof Eliyahu Winograd wurde nach dem Libanon-Krieg 2006 gebildet und trug die abschließenden Ergebnisse im Januar 2008 vor.

between a tactical raid and a strategic raid remains unclear even after the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead.

Source: IsraelDefense 6/2/2012<sup>2</sup>

The IDF is establishing a Depth Corps. The command will unite the IDF's special forces units – Sayeret Matkal (special ops), Shaldag (air force commandos), Shayetet 13 (naval commandos), and 669 (airborne SAR) – into a unified command for special ops far from Israel's borders. The report raises the debate as to the status of the raid in the IDF.

In general, the raid has been an aspect of combat operations since the beginning of armed conflict. It is mostly applied in offensive battles because its execution requires a concerted effort and many resources at the expense of defensive preparations.

Decades ago, Liddell Hart wrote in "Thoughts on War:"<sup>3</sup>  
"Decisive success in war is possible only through surprise, and surprise has to be a combination of several complex factors...by delivering a blow at an unexpected moment, from an unexpected direction, or concentrating unexpected strength in the blow." These words still ring

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<sup>2</sup> Official newsletter of the "Israel Defense Forces" (IDF).

<sup>3</sup> Spellmount Publishers 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Am 12. Juli 2006 wurden an der libanesischen Grenze die israelischen Soldaten Ehud Goldwasser und Eldad Regev von der Hisbollah verschleppt. Ihr Schicksal blieb ungeklärt.

<sup>5</sup> Am 25. Juni 2005 wurde der Feldwebel Gilad Shalit von „Hamas“ im Gazastreifen entführt. Er kam im Oktober 2011 im Austausch mit palästinensischen Gefangenen frei.

true.

A raid deep in the enemy's defense layout is an exceedingly intricate and challenging operation that demands special weapons and transportation. It must be comprised of soldiers and commanders with proven courage, tenacity, creative thinking, survivability, and especially, the capacity to exploit sudden opportunities.

When is a raid considered strategic? It is strategic when its purpose is to exploit a major weakness in the enemy that can change the course of the war. In other words, it is strategic when it has the effect of shuffling the cards and creating a new reality.

One of the most complex challenges facing commanders and staff officers is to identify an opening that can alter the direction of a campaign, or the opposite—to invite grave danger. In combat, the name of the game is spotting opportunities and threats.

What the rear-based headquarters often see as an opportunity or immediate danger is not the reality on the battlefield. In many instances, the enemy creates deceptions designed to look like death traps.

Throughout history, the defending side, especially when defending a narrow and crowded combat zone, would concentrate its forces on the front, build a massive array of fortifications and obstacles, and create a network of defensive lines from the front to areas deemed vital for regional defense. In Israel, there are two fighting theaters: in the north, a narrow front facing Syria and Lebanon, bristling with enemy forces and a wide range of weapons;

and in the center and south, broad fronts facing Jordan and Egypt with a concentrated defense layout around roads leading from the front lines to the depth of the territory.

On the modern battlefield, defenses usually consist of a highly effective arrangement of fortifications and obstacles based on the massive use of land mines, anti-tank missiles, and mobile fighting units. The attacking side, realizes the exorbitant price a direct assault will incur, along with the need to outflank the defensive fortifications and strike in the enemy's depth in order to reduce the fighting time, save lives, and create situations for battlefield decisions.

Military history is filled with examples where outflanking the enemy lines and penetrating deep into its territory, have decisively changed the face of an entire campaign. Such moves can be traced back to infantry troops and cavalry in the distant past, and to mechanized armor maneuvers in the present.

The modern battlefield demands various landing capabilities: naval vessels, air transports, helicopters, and all-terrain vehicles in order to bring a critical mass of forces and weapons deep inside enemy territory. All these are necessary to ensure the force's survival and sustained presence in the field so that it can have an effect on the enemy.

In IDF history there were cases when a force penetrated deep behind enemy lines as an outflanking maneuver. Two examples of such tactical raids are the paradrop at the Mitle Pass in the Sinai Campaign (1956) and the

landing of forces near Sidon in the First Lebanon War (1982).

An example of a strategic raid is the crossing of the Suez Canal by Ariel Sharon's division in the Yom Kippur War, which brought the IDF to within one hundred kilometers of Cairo, and surrounded and cut off the Egyptian Second and Third Armies (Egypt's main fighting forces) in the rear. The Egyptians had no choice but to ask for a ceasefire.

Interestingly, the Suez Canal crossing is not referred to as a raid, but as the "shift to the offense" or the "battle of the canal crossing." However, according to a strict doctrinal analysis, the many elements in Sharon's crossing describe the combat term: raid. It is without a doubt, that this raid had strategic value.

### *A Tactical or Strategic Raid*

Confusion still abounds in the military on the difference between the concept of a strategic raid and the application of special forces deep in the battlefield.

Tactical raids, daring and surprising, create conditions that only affect the immediate combat zone, whereas strategic raids change the course of the military campaign by creating conditions for winning the war and influencing decisions at the political level.

An in-depth strategic raid is generally performed by special forces. However, this alone would not have a strategic effect on the campaign, unless it is specifically intended to do so. On the other hand, special forces can

perform a series of tactical raids that make a significant impact on the various battlefields.

While high intensity warfare, which characterized Israel's conflicts from the War of Independence (1948) to the Yom Kippur War (1973), naturally created opportunities for deciding the campaign, especially in light of the enemy's massive and well-arranged deployment, by enabling strikes against his weak points and throwing him off balance. Now, in the age of low intensity (asymmetric) warfare, spotting opportunities that can change the face of a campaign is a more challenging task.

The IDF and the political-defense echelon were both bitterly criticized for their lack of preparedness and management in the fighting of the Second Lebanon War (July 2006). This gave birth to the Winograd Commission that investigated the war's shortcomings, even though special operations were carried out on an unprecedented scale in the enemy's backyard. During the fighting, a special team was established in the Operations Branch of the General Staff to plan raids in the enemy's rear. Two of the more famous missions were Sayeret Matkal and Shaldag's operations in Baalbek in Northern Lebanon, and the naval commando raid in the residential area of Tyre where senior Hezbollah figures lived. Only during the last two days of the war were large infantry units airlifted behind Hezbollah's forward defense lines.

During Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip (January 2009), special forces also carried out deep penetration raids, even though the fighting was less intense than during the Second Lebanon War.

In both wars (Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2009), the IDF used massive air power unremittingly, ground forces sparingly, while avoiding the enemy's defensive positions in urban areas (especially during Cast Lead). In both cases, the primary goal was not to defeat the enemy, but to punish him severely, restore quiet to the front, and strengthen Israel's deterrence.

An analysis of Hezbollah and Hamas's fighting patterns shows that both organizations employed a comprehensive layered defense from the border to the heart of their urban areas. Both fired volleys of rockets into Israel's depth up until the last day of the fighting, and both emphasized the leadership's survival and retention of strategic bargaining chips (the captured soldiers Eldad Regev and Udi Goldwasser in Lebanon<sup>4</sup>, and Gilad Shalit in the Gaza Strip)<sup>5</sup>.

The lesson to be learned is that while the majority of the IDF's air, land, and sea forces deal with the enemy's defense layout, destroy rocket launchers and their operators, and target civilian infrastructures, the potential for a strategic change during war lies in operations directed against the enemy's leadership, and in the case of Lebanon, indirectly against the Lebanese government.

The question is whether such opportunities existed during these two wars. The books and articles published after the events seem to shed light on the answer. The literature mentions the idea of a raid on Beirut International Airport for the purpose of controlling it for a certain period and using it as a staging area for missions in Beirut. This could have had a decisive impact on Hezbollah's nerve center and had its leadership fight the IDF in the south or in



Beirut. This would also have placed the population and the Lebanese government under duress, not to mention the regional and international implications of such a move, while Hezbollah made a concerted effort to counter the incursion of the hesitantly managed IDF forces in Southern Lebanon. Had it happened, such a raid might have reversed the negative trend in the fighting and shifted the weight of the battle to the enemy. It also might have shortened the war (although the operating forces would have been at risk and their retreat threatened, even though Israel controlled both the sea and air).

There was also uncertainty whether Hezbollah was hiding Regev and Goldwasser in the Dar el Hikmeh Hospital in Baalbek. Naturally, a raid designed to rescue them, whether they were alive or not, could have changed the course of the war and swiped Hezbollah's bargaining chip out of its hands, especially since the Israeli Security Cabinet had defined the return of the two soldiers as a goal of the war.

After Cast Lead, declassified reports stated that during the operation, senior Hamas leaders went into hiding in the Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. It also said the security forces had a short lead regarding Gilad Shalit's whereabouts. In Gaza, as in Lebanon, a raid on Hamas's leadership and the rescue of Shalit would have made a strategic impact on the course of the campaign and its long-term ramifications.

### *Structural Failure*

Now to the political echelon: how, if at all, did the senior

state and defense decision-makers interact with the IDF as executor, when considering the implementation of a strategic raid while managing war?

To answer this question, we must first consider if the military, state, and defense apparatus has mastered the skills, knowledge, and professionalism required for identifying an opportunity when (and whether) a strategic advantage can be gained. In addition, in order to take advantage of the opportunity, a deep understanding of the opponent is needed within the context of timing and our own force's capabilities.

The Winograd Commission called attention to the absence of professional discussion among the senior defense figures who were involved in the decision-making process both before and during the war. The lack of deep knowledge on Lebanon and Hezbollah may have stunted their ability to recognize strategic opportunities.

In addition to military proficiency and knowledge of the enemy, there should also be some form of experience in commanding raids and special operations deep behind enemy lines. As for the senior level of decision-makers—the prime minister, defense minister, chief of staff, director of intelligence, and head of the operations branch (who should all have a profound knowledge of and familiarity with the enemy and the ground forces' capabilities)—only the head of the operations branch measured up to this criterion. The others went from a partial understanding to no understanding at all. This lack of knowledge and familiarity with the professional aspects had a direct influence on the courage and resolution needed by the senior decision makers to decide in favor of a strategic

raid that entailed a great amount of risk.

Another factor is the IDF's force buildup and ability to carry out a complex raid. Today, the IDF is able to execute a difficult, large-scale raid deep into enemy territory. Naturally, Israel's air and naval superiority in Lebanon strengthens the assumption that the forces can remain in enemy territory for as long as necessary.

Only two of the key figures in the Second Lebanon War remained in their position three years later when Operation Cast Lead was launched – the prime minister and head of intelligence. The chief of staff, minister of defense, and head of operations have all been replaced.

The ability to seize a strategic opportunity improved significantly between 2006 and 2009. The IDF applied the lessons of the Second Lebanon War and reorganized force building through training, exercises, and professional learning. Senior officers have become far more knowledgeable on the enemy and other regional players, the capabilities of the ground army and special forces, and the requirements for deep penetration raids. This improvement was supposed to project boldness and determination, but in Operation Cast Lead, as in the Second Lebanon War, opportunities were not exploited and no major ground action took place. However, the reason may have come from an awareness that opportunities did not have to be fulfilled during the campaign, since winning at all costs was perhaps more important than the desire to create fundamental changes in reality. In this case, the operational objectives drawn were limited and modest, so as not to aim for strategic gains like the ousting of Hamas or the return of Gilad

Shalit.

The IDF and senior figures in the defense establishment can expect to face more challenges. In order to seize strategic opportunities in the future, operative ideas should be envisioned beforehand, tested in training exercises and routine security duties, and materialized into plans and battle orders.