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ISRAEL MILITARY: THE IDF

ASSESSING, AND DEALING WITH, POLITICAL AND SECURITY THREATS: SALAFI JIHAD, THE EASTERN FRONT, AND GPS-GUIDED MISSILES

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THE THREAT OF THE “SALAFI CRESCENT”

Col. (res.) Dr. Shaul Shay

Besa Center, Jan. 21, 2014

There is a notion that a hegemonic Iran is attempting to dominate the crescent-shaped part of the Middle East where the majority population is Shiite or contains a strong Shiite minority, through an array of Shiite proxies: Iraq, Alawite-dominated Syria, and the powerful Shiite militia Hizballah in Lebanon. Yet, the growing involvement of Sunni Salafi *jihadis* in Iraq (since 2003), among the rebels in Syria (since 2011), and in Lebanon has created a “Salafi Crescent.” This reflects a Sunni ambition to establish a caliphate controlling much of the Middle East and form the Islamic State “from Diyala [in eastern Iraq] to Beirut.” Al-Qaeda's hatred of the Shiites was expressed by its founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who called them “the insurmountable obstacle, the prowling serpent...the enemy lying in wait” and ordered his followers to “fight them.”

Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), a *jihadi* group of predominantly Sunni fighters, rose to prominence after the US-led invasion of Iraq. The ensuing insurgency provided the group with fertile ground to wage a guerrilla war against coalition forces and their domestic supporters. In the face of successful US counterterrorism efforts and the Sunni tribal awakening, AQI's violent campaign has diminished since the peak years of 2006-2007, though the group remains a threat to stability in Iraq and the broader Levant. Since the withdrawal of US forces in late 2011, AQI has accelerated the pace of attacks on predominantly Shiite targets in an attempt to reignite conflict between Iraq's Sunni minority and the Shiite-led government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Meanwhile, AQI has expanded its reach into neighboring Syria. In April 2013, AQI announced that it was changing its name to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and that the Syrian group Jabhat Nusra would join it. Jabhat Nusra's leaders objected, however, and the two groups have remained independent.

Much of the violence in Iraq is blamed on ISIS, which has launched a vicious bombing campaign in Iraq as part of an anti-Shiite insurgency that claimed more than 8,000 lives in 2013. On January 3, ISIS asserted control over the western Iraqi city of Fallujah, declaring it an Islamic state. The capture of Fallujah came amid a campaign of violence across the western desert province of Anbar, in which local tribes, Iraqi security forces, and al-Qaeda-affiliated militants have been locked in fighting. The ISIS fighters have steadily asserted their control over Anbar's desert regions for months, and resisted assaults by both Iraqi government forces and local tribal leaders to maintain control of all of Fallujah, and perhaps as much as half of Ramadi, Anbar's capital. The sectarian tensions between Iraq's Sunnis and the Shiite-led government have been further inflamed by the war in Syria. Al-Qaeda's growing influence in Syria has given terrorists control over the desert territories spanning both sides of the Iraqi-Syrian border, enabling them to readily transfer weapons and fighters between the two arenas.

Syria has become a magnet for al-Qaeda and other *jihadi* recruits, as the Assad regime has been an ally of Iran since the 1980s. Al-Qaeda's direct involvement in Syria includes ISIS, Abdullah Azzam Brigades, al-Qaeda-affiliated Fatah al-Islam, and Jordanian Salafi *jihadists*. Highlighting the widening regional Sunni-Shiite schism, influential Sunni Sheikh Youssef al-Qaradawi called on all those who can perform *jihad* to head to Syria to fight the Alawites and Shi'ites, who are "worse than Christians and Jews." Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's leader, called upon Syrians to "rise against the criminal Alawite regime" of Bashar Assad. In June 2013, between 30 and 60 Shiite civilians were killed by rebel forces in Hatla, a village near Iraq that was invaded by thousands of foreign-backed *jihadists* this week. Rebel fighters denounced the "pug-nosed" Shiite "dogs" and burned dozens of homes.

ISIS has been active in Syria since 2012, fighting to control major outposts and the provincial capital of al-Raqqa in northern Syria. The group is fighting both Assad's forces and the secular Syrian rebels who once had viewed the group as an ally in the fight to topple the embattled leader. Fierce fighting between ISIS and Syrian rebel groups was reported in December 2013 in a dozen locations, with ISIS taking control of the strategic Idlib province town of Saraqeb, which sits on the Aleppo-Damascus highway.

Jabhat Nusra, Syria's homegrown Salafi-*jihadist* group, has important links to al-Qaeda affiliates and demonstrates a higher level of effectiveness than many other rebel groups. The group has shown sensitivity to popular perception and is gaining support within Syria. The emergence of indigenous Salafi *jihadist* groups such as Jabhat Nusra is far more dangerous to the long-term stability of the Syrian state than foreign *jihadist* groups, as they represent a metamorphosis of a Salafi-*jihadist* ideology into a domestic platform that can achieve popular resonance.

Lebanon has been roiled by tensions and clashes over both Hizballah's strong military support for Assad and a number of rebel-supporting Sunni communities. Car bombings, rocket attacks, and kidnappings have targeted both parties, and armed clashes have been frequent. Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah has publicly

justified Hizballah's involvement in Syria to stop al-Qaeda-style Sunni radicals, or *takfiri*, in their tracks. He sees Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq as part of the same battlefield.

On January 4, ISIS claimed credit for a suicide car bombing that took at least four lives and wounded dozens in a Hizballah-controlled suburb of Beirut, marking the first attack by the group in Lebanon. The group warned that the bombing was the start of a campaign against the "wicked criminals" of Hizballah for its role in helping the Syrian regime."

Another al-Qaeda affiliate, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, claimed responsibility for November's suicide bombing of the Iranian Embassy in Beirut. Group leader Majid al-Majid blasted Nasrallah's characterization of killed Syrian regime members as martyrs as "an insult to millions of Muslims." He didn't hesitate to threaten all of Lebanon should Hizballah continue to support the Assad regime, and hinted that his organization would plan an attack on Lebanese tourists, should the state continue to strengthen Hizballah and its leaders. Al-Majid was captured by the Lebanese security service, and on January 4 died in custody.

In the last decades an Iran-dominated Shia Crescent was considered the main threat to Israeli and regional security. The growing involvement of Salafi *jihad* in the region has produced a new threat. The latest operations of al-Qaeda and its affiliates in the three countries of the Shia Crescent – Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon – highlight the group's growing regional influence and ambitions. The Sunni *jihadist* groups might destabilize the whole area and transform it into an unstable, ungovernable conflict zone. Such an uncontrolled region would become a safe haven for Islamic terror groups and training center for militants from the Sinai, Arabian Peninsula, and elsewhere, and a platform to launch *jihad* against Israel and moderate Arab countries in the region. A positive outcome of this scenario, however, will be the decline in Iranian influence in the region.

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THE JORDAN VALLEY: ISRAEL'S SECURITY BELT

Prof. Efraim Inbar

[Israel Hayom](#), Jan. 6, 2014

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry [was] once again in town trying to reach a framework agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. One of the issues of dispute is the fate of the Jordan Valley, which is indispensable for Israel's national security. The Jordan Valley is the only available defensible border on the eastern front, which is the closest border to Israel's heartland -- the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv-Haifa triangle -- which holds 70 percent of its population and 80% of its economic infrastructure.

Many pundits claim that Israel no longer needs the Jordan Valley as a shield against aggression from the east. They argue that the demise of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, the weakening of civil-war-torn Syria, and the impressive stability of Jordan in light of the turmoil of the Arab world renders the threat of the eastern front and its proximity to Israel's center a thing of the past. Yet this is a very short-term perspective, motivated by the desire to convince the Israeli public opinion that the Jordan Valley is militarily dispensable. Such a view ignores the immense potential for political upheaval in the Middle East, as recently demonstrated during the Arab Spring. The destabilization of Hashemite Jordan and Saudi Arabia and a radical jihadist Syria are not far-fetched scenarios for the near future. The re-emergence of the eastern front as a security threat could soon follow.

Moreover, the U.S. decided to cut its losses and leave Iraq and Afghanistan, which constitutes a victory to all radical forces in the Middle East. A more energy-independent America might decide that it has less of a stake in the Middle East, allowing greater freedom of action to Islamist elements to take over American

allies. Israel cannot count on the U.S. to always lend its weight to Arab moderates. Under President Barack Obama, Washington supported the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and might make the same strategic mistake in Jordan.

Advocates of turning over the Jordan Valley to the Palestinians also discount its topographical importance by referring to current military technology, which allows precision strikes from a distance. They argue that the ability to launch defensive strikes from the coast eliminates the strategic need for the Jordan Valley as a means of defense. Yet, these armchair strategists overlook the history of military technology, which shows a clear oscillation between the dominance of offensive and defensive measures over the centuries. The belief that the technology of today -- which indeed temporarily reduces the importance of topography -- will remain unchallenged constitutes a dangerous strategic fallacy.

Designing stable defensible borders in accordance with the current, but transient, technological state of art and political circumstances is strategically foolish. Therefore, if Israel wants to maintain a defensible border along the Jordan Valley it also needs to secure the road from the coast to the Valley, via an undivided Jerusalem and via Maaleh Adumim -- 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the river. This is the only west-east axis with a Jewish majority and the only safe route via which Israel can mobilize troops from the coast to the Jordan Valley in a case of emergency.

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MISSILE DEFENSE EXPERT WARNS OF GROWING STRATEGIC THREAT

Yaakov Lappin

[Jerusalem Post](#), Jan. 15, 2014

Israel's enemies are arming themselves with precision-guided heavy rockets and will inevitably come to possess GPS-guided ballistic missiles, an architect of the Israeli missile defense program warned on Wednesday. Speaking at a conference called Missile Defense: Asset or Liability for Regional and International Stability, held at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv, Dr. Uzi Rubin warned that the growing threat is strategic, not merely tactical. Rubin, who founded and directed the Defense Ministry's Israel Missile Defense Organization, and ran the Arrow program, said that "Iran possess over 400 ballistic missiles that can reach Israel, with warheads of 750 kilograms. Syria possesses 200 to 300" such missiles, having used up part of its arsenal in its civil war, he added.

Syria and Hezbollah have thousands of heavy rockets, and tens of thousands of light rockets, Rubin continued. "That's the bad news. The worse news is that these rockets are being turned into smart rockets. The Iranians took the Zilzal 2 and turned it into a guided rocket. The third generation of it contains a homing sensor and a GPS. The Syrians can have this capability too, to create a fully guided M-600 rocket with GPS. Hezbollah probably has these," he said. The M-600 carries a 500-kilogram warhead, and a guided version of it would be a devastating weapon, Rubin warned. He showed a photograph of Tel Aviv and the Defense Ministry/IDF General Headquarters site, the Kirya, saying one M-600 strike could collapse half of the area. "That would change the skyline of Tel Aviv. This is not a tactical threat, it's not harassment. This is a strategic threat. Even worse news is coming; ballistic missiles are becoming smart," he said.

In the next five to 10 years, Israel's enemies will inevitably arm themselves with GPS-guided ballistic missiles such as Scuds, he said. "Perhaps Syria already has this capability," Rubin said. "This can significantly disrupt Israel's air power. Israel will of course recover. We are talking about escalating a war to quicken it, and end it within three days. They are talking about doing the same. This threat can degrade

the IDF's ground capabilities" via accurate missile strikes on army mobilization and staging grounds, Rubin warned. "It can paralyze Israel's war economy. And of course, it can inflict massive casualties. I'm not talking about Dresden, but Coventry, perhaps," he said, referring to cities bombed in World War II. In such a scenario, the IDF would not be able to use its missile defenses to protect the general population, but rather, they would primarily be employed to "preserve Israel's capability to fight a war, and save lives as far as possible. Priorities will inevitably change," he said.

The introduction of nuclear weapons would not replace conventional threats, but create an additional layer of nonconventional ballistic threats, Rubin said. Missile defenses already in place could intercept incoming nuclear missiles, he added. "Anything that can intercept a missile from Iran doesn't give a damn if it's nuclear or nonnuclear. Missile defense systems don't distinguish between warheads." The upper atmosphere Arrow 2 system, and the more efficient Arrow 3 interceptor, which operates in space, will constitute the defensive against any nuclear attacks. "Global and regional players" consider Israel to have a nuclear deterrence, Rubin added. Missile defenses add to Israel's deterrence, he argued.

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DEBATING THE FUTURE OF THE IDF

Yaakov Lappin

[Jerusalem Post](#), Jan. 4, 2014

As the Middle East becomes ever more anarchic and unpredictable, a group of high-ranking former and current military figures gathered at Bar-Ilan University this week for what would turn out to be one of the liveliest and frank public debates on the future of the IDF ever held. The conference, called IDF Force Structure, was organized by the *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies* and *Israel Defense* magazine, and contained two panels of speakers, each of which used their rich personal experience in the security world to build up deep and well-founded arguments on how Israel should tailor its armed forces in the first quarter of the 21st century.

The former navy chief, R.-Adm. (res.) Eliezer Marom, used the opportunity to say that the Israel Air Force enjoys an unreasonable monopoly over the IDF's firepower. The monopoly was in fact dangerous, Marom said, since an unpredictable challenge to air power would severely limit Israel's ability to direct long-range fire at enemy targets. "If something happens to the air force, like it did during the Yom Kippur War, there won't be firepower directed at the depth of the enemy's territory," he warned. Most of the IDF's guided weapons systems are launched autonomously these days, and it would be easy to spread out the weapons more evenly among the air force, ground forces, and navy, Marom said. The ex-navy commander cast doubt on the idea that squadrons of fighter jets have to take off every time a target needs destroying. "It would not be a problem at all," he said, to direct surface-to-surface missile fire when needed.

In truth, senior elements in the IDF agree with Marom's analysis, believing that the navy can and should play a bigger supporting role in ground combat. Navy vessels should serve as floating guided-weapon launch pads. That said, they still regard the air force as Israel's supreme strategic branch. In the IDF's coming four-year working plan, called Teuza (Hebrew for "valor"; the plan is awaiting government approval), the air force and its guided weaponry appear to take second place in the military's priority list. Intelligence would appear to be in first place. The air force continues to be perceived as the most effective operational tool for strategic gains in war. Ground forces hold third place in the priority list, and are seen as an inseparable component of an Israeli victory in any full-scale war. Moreover, the navy might find itself playing additional, classified roles that could be game-changers in a future conflict.

During his address, Marom paid tribute to the IDF's networking capabilities, in which the three branches – air, ground and navy – and their various platforms are merged into one. In effect, this means that today, an

infantry battalion commander can order an attack on a target in Gaza by simultaneously employing missiles on navy ships and tank fire. Yet with all due respect to technology, Marom pointed out, “in the end, in order to win, we need boots – with human legs in them – on the ground.”

Maj.-Gen. (res.) Gal Hirsch, deputy head in the reserves of the IDF’s Depth Corps, presented one of the most fascinating and radical visions during his address. Hirsch argued that technological advances and regional changes have prepared the ground for a second revolution in military affairs (the first occurring in the late 1970s to the early 1980s). Faced mainly with enemies that know no limits, and which employ terrorism, guerrillas or subversion rather than organized military forces, Israel now has to create its own surprise force, Hirsch said. He showed a graphic of a floating iceberg, and then a second image, in which an intricate matrix of wires, signals and colors pulsed inside the iceberg. “What you see is not the whole picture. We need to know what is happening underneath the iceberg,” he explained. “We need capabilities and forces that know how to exit the frame,” Hirsch said, adding that a combination of secret services, commando units and special forces fit the bill. Creating a force based on what Hirsch described as the “Six Cs,” command and control, computing, intelligence, surveillance, cyber and special forces, would make the IDF “far more effective.”

Amir Rapaport, editor-in-chief of *Israel Defense* magazine and a member of the *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies*, noted the intensive debate being held in the IDF on whether to prioritize firepower, or ground maneuver capabilities. A lack of training and proficiency in basic skills, neglect of ground forces and a failure to invest in armored vehicles led to systemic failures during the Second Lebanon War, Rapaport noted, adding that the IDF repaired these shortcomings between 2007 and 2011. Now, he said, some of this work is being undone. According to Rapaport, in the coming years, cyber warfare capabilities will be at the top of the IDF’s its priority list – higher even than the air force. “If there is a recruit suitable to become either a pilot or a cyber-operator, he will be sent to be a cyber-operator,” Rapaport said. The Intelligence Unit 8200, which according to reports, runs cyber war programs, can inflict as much damage with the press of a button that paratroopers can with weapons, he said. Intelligence-gathering units are next on the list of priorities, enjoying an enormous budget, followed by the air force, which is due to receive the F-35 fighter jet in the coming years. But budget cuts will affect numbers of armored fighting vehicles (AFVs), tank units and ground forces combat training. “I’m not sure there will be enough AFVs in the next clash,” Rapaport said...

With no current existential threats facing Israel, and enemies seeking to inflict damage on Israel’s civilian sector, the IDF should focus on being able to strike the enemy’s infrastructure, weapons and commanders, while minimizing harm to Israeli civilian casualties and noncombatant deaths on the other side of the border. “I very much agree with the reduction [of heavy vehicles]. What will remain constitutes an enormous core [of military forces] in comparison to other armies in the world,” Klein said. Maj.-Gen. Meir Kalifi, former military secretary to the prime minister, said Israel should seek to build a flexible military, guided by its capabilities, rather than trying to design the IDF according to a forecast of future developments. Strategic and security forecasts are less relevant now than ever, he argued. Maj.-Gen. Gershon Hacoheh, current corps commander of the General Staff, looked at how differing cultures play a part in military force build-ups, and offered some salient perspectives.

Whatever technical advantage Israel develops, hostile Arab entities like Hamas and Hezbollah will work to neutralize them, he said, turning disadvantages into advantages. Israel’s enemies adapt quickly, and leverage their inferior strategic conditions as tools against the Jewish state. Recent examples include Hamas’s movement of human shields to rooftops of buildings designated for destruction via air strike. “When we identify a problem, we look for a technical solution. We think like graduates of a business school. They focus on primitive adaption, and then watch how it creates a new situation,” Hacoheh said.

ON TOPIC

[Israel Air Force Shows How It Bombs Terror Targets \(Video\)](#): *Jewish Press*, Jan. 16, 2014 — The Israeli Air Force almost immediately retaliated to Wednesday night's multiple rocket attacks on Israel and scored direct hits on an underground rocket launcher, a weapons storage facility and a factory manufacturing weapons.

['Jerusalem Post' Person of the Year: The Israeli Soldier](#): *Lauren Izso, Jerusalem Post*, Jan. 1, 2014 — After asking readers to vote for who they think was the most influential figure of 2013, and after receiving many nominations ranging from someone's Jewish Bubby to the great former South African leader Nelson Mandela, the votes are finally in.

[Mowing the Grass: Israel's Strategy for Protracted Intractable Conflict](#): *Efraim Inbar & Eitan Shamir, Besa Center*, Jan. 2014 — A baobab is something you will never, never be able to get rid of if you attend to it too late.

[With Natural Gas Fields in the Eastern Mediterranean, Israel Now Has a New Front: the Sea](#): *Nicholas Saidel & Julian Kasdin, Tablet*, Jan. 17, 2014 — Israel is beginning to realize the benefits of the recent discovery of 36 trillion cubic feet of gas off its coast in the eastern Mediterranean, mainly in the Tamar and Leviathan gas fields, located near Haifa.

[Hezbollah Upgrades Missile Threat to Israel](#): *Adam Entous, Charles Levinson & Julian E. Barnes, Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 2, 2014 — U.S. officials believe members of Hezbollah, the militant group backed by Iran, are smuggling advanced guided-missile systems into Lebanon from Syria piece by piece to evade a secretive Israeli air campaign designed to stop them.