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**Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, "From Israel with Deterrence: Strategic Culture, Intra-war Coercion and Brute Force." *Security Studies* 26:1 (2017), 157-184.**

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The main questions Professor Adamsky addresses in his timely article are three: What is the logic behind the Israeli conceptualization of the use of force in low intensity conflicts as “deterrence operations?” How did the Israelis come up with such a way of thinking? And what are the consequences of the policy which rests on this type of strategic logic?

Israel, as Zeev Maoz had claimed, is the most “fightaholic” state in the international system.<sup>1</sup> As such, it provides an excellent laboratory for the development and testing of strategic theories. One could expect that the prominent role that Jews had played for so many years in the buildup of theories in various fields combined with Israel’s unique security challenges would yield important outcome for strategic theory. Unfortunately the opposite is true: Strategic theory is an underdeveloped aspect of Israel’s strategic thinking, which by itself, is the product of a culture that gives preference to practitioners over theorists.

Adamsky emphasized this weakness in his earlier work, which studied the impact of strategic culture on the approach of the USSR, the U.S., and Israel to the Revolution in Military Affairs of the late twentieth century. Like others, he found the sources of this anti-intellectual approach in the Zionist ethos which aspired to produce a “new Jew” as the antithesis to the Diaspora Jew. The “new Jew” was to be strong, confident, free of inferiority complexes, indifferent (at best) to intellectual work and dedicated to the manual labor. The end

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<sup>1</sup> This term refers to “states . . . that have engaged in excessively high amounts of conflict in a sustained manner over their history.” For a discussion of this concept, including Israel’s ranking, see Zeev Maoz, “Pacifism and Fightaholism in International Politics: A Structural History of National and Dyadic Conflict, 1816-1992,” *International Studies Review* 6:4 (December 2004): 107-134.

result was that, to a large extent, especially in the military realm, the “people of the plow and the rifle” replaced the “people of the book.”<sup>2</sup>

A typical example of this anti-intellectual strategic culture is the fact that in the curriculum of the National Defense College of the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) courses on the theory of war and strategy had become relatively negligible.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, *Ma'arachot* (Campaigns, in Hebrew), the IDF's professional journal, hardly publishes articles about military theory. Of the 3,057 articles which were published between 1948 and 2000 only 74 (2.5%) dealt with theory.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the typical Israeli staff officer lacks the theoretical skills that are needed to carry out the task of operations planning. As Adamsky shows this lacuna is well manifested by the way the concept of deterrence is conceptualized in the IDF.

Deterrence, along with strategic warning of an incoming surprise attack and fast battle decisions after a war started, had been a central pillar of Israel's national security doctrine since the early 1950s. But the theoretical meaning of this concept seems to have been lost in recent decades. Adamsky, who conducted more than 25 in-depth interviews with senior IDF officers as a substitute to primary sources that were not available in declassified form, defined the conceptualization of deterrence in Israeli strategic thinking as a “conceptual salad” (167). Indeed, if deterrence in its classical conventional or nuclear contexts was a strategy aimed at maintaining the status quo without resorting to the use of “brute force,” the IDF planners proclaimed since the 1990s that they had constructed a new type of deterrence, based on a limited use of force. They termed this type of deterrence as “deterrence operations” or “campaigns between the wars” (169). Their context was the enduring low-intensity conflicts, primarily with Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, in which attaining a decisive victory was deemed as too costly. “Deterrence operations” substituted this unattainable goal and served as a means to prevent escalation by the Arab rivals (171).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors in Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 119.

<sup>3</sup> Notably, this had not always been the case. During its formative years in the 1970s and 1980s, the core course of the College had been Strategy and War. The course was built and taught by one of Israel's rare defense intellectuals, Maj. Gen. (res.) Professor Yehoshafat Harkabi. Unfortunately, after Harkabi passed away and despite the fact that the College graduates started receiving in 1987 an MA degree from Haifa University, this course lost its centrality and ceased to be taught in 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Avi Kober, “The Intellectual and Modern Focus in Israeli Military Thinking as Reflected in *Ma'arachot* Articles, 1948-2000,” *Armed Forces and Society* 30:1 (2003): 141-160, 153.

<sup>5</sup> In this sense the operational logic behind Israel's current “deterrence operations” is not very different from the logic of the strategy of “acts of retaliation” it employed in the 1950s. The IDF Chief of Staff, Moshe Dayan, gave this strategy a very clear and logical explanation when writing in 1959: “We cannot guard every water pipeline from explosion and every tree from uprooting. We cannot prevent every murder of a worker in an orchard or a family in their beds. But it is in our power to set a high price on our blood, a price too high for the Arab community, the Arab army, or the Arab government to think it worth paying. We can see to it that the Arab villages oppose the raiding bands that pass through them, rather than give them assistance. It is in our power to see that Arab military commanders prefer a strict performance of their obligation to police the frontiers rather than suffer defeat in clashes with our units.” (Moshe Dayan, “Military Operation at Time of Peace.” *Maarachot*, 129 (1959):54-61, 56). Notably, while the operational logic of the two strategies was similar, their strategic goal was different: in the 1950s Israel's use of force aimed at putting an end to

As Adamsky shows, Israeli practitioners find it difficult to accept that “defining continuous forceful pressure as deterrence is an oxymoron” (172).

Apart from this conceptualization confusion between “coercion” and “brute force,” Israel’s “deterrence” policy suffers from three operational weaknesses. One is the product of the IDF’s military superiority. Despite its declared goal of influencing the opponents’ behavior, Israeli deterrence strategy focuses more on the operational aspects of force employment rather than its psychological aspects. Thomas Schelling explained more than fifty years ago that in order to “exploit a capacity for hurting and inflicting damage one needs to know what an adversary treasures and what scares him...”<sup>6</sup> But Israel’s intelligence collection effort focuses far more on potential enemy targets (‘target bank’ in the IDF’s terminology) than on understanding the opponent’s values and strategic calculus.

A second, somewhat similar weakness is the IDF’s constant failure to correctly estimate its policy’s success or failure. Although it is a well-known social science’s problem<sup>7</sup> and other militaries have failed in finding the accurate causality between operational success and effective deterrence, the IDF seems to simply ignore this issue. Instead, its deterrence practitioners assume that their policy succeeds when the opponent avoids escalation and that it fails when escalation takes place. This weakness feeds and is being fed by the first weakness that does not pay enough attention to the opponent’s strategic calculus (167-168).

The third weakness involves what Adamsky terms, on the basis of the Clausewitzian reference to victory in war, as “the culminating point of deterrence.” This point can be crossed in two situations: In peacetime, “when threats, instead of holding aggression in check, become so convincing that the adversary assumes that an attack is inevitable and decides to preempt”; and in wartime, “when force employment becomes so devastating, that it incites the enemy, which feels concerned with nothing to lose, to escalate it” (174).

Adamsky’s adaptation of this concept of the classic strategist, Carl von Clausewitz, is interesting and thought provoking. In its peacetime connotation it constitutes a subcategory of the ‘security dilemma’ in crisis situations. But in contrast to the classic spiral model, which asserts a growing tension between equal adversaries that focus on strengthening their military capabilities due to a sense of insecurity, Adamsky’s concept relates to the actions taken by a militarily stronger actor that employs threats rather than accumulating brute force. In its wartime connotation, Adamsky’s concept resembles more closely Clausewitz’s phenomenon of the culminating point of victory. There is, however, a major difference between the two contexts. In classic military theory this point is the stage where the attacking army can no longer advance due to the enemy’s defense, logistical problems, or combat fatigue. In the Israeli context this point arrives at a far earlier stage of the confrontation. As all “deterrence operations” had shown, the IDF reached this point at the end of the opening stage of the conflict, where it used its military and intelligence superiority to destroy most of the opponents’ assets that were accumulated in the IDF’s ‘target bank.’ But since the Hezbollah and Hamas

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Arab low intensity challenges; the goal of its “deterrence operations” is less ambitious, mainly to prevent an escalation in the enduring low intensity conflicts with Hezbollah and Hamas.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 3.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of this shortcoming in a broader context, see: Philip Tetlock and Dan Gardner, *Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction* (New York: Crown, 2015).

continued resistance, primarily by launching rockets from hidden launchers, the only way to end the conflict by military means was through a large-scale ground offensive. Here, however, fear that such an offensive might involve heavy Israeli military casualties and a growing public sensitivity to such losses, led Israel's political and the military echelons in each of the confrontations since the mid-1990s to avoid launching a ground offensive. The result was a mostly static and exhausting confrontation that lasted for weeks and ended in a truce that did not reflect the IDF's achievements at the beginning of the operation. In this sense, the experience was gained in more than twenty years of 'deterrence operations' shows that in Israel's culminating point of deterrence is not at the stage where its army cannot advance any more (given the correlation of forces with relatively weak opponents this is not an operational problem), but at the phase where all known enemy targets were destroyed.

Clausewitz's students agree that identifying the culminating point of victory is a demanding task. Michael Handel noted that it is not a fixed point "but often ... entirely a matter of the imagination [i.e., it cannot be identified objectively]."<sup>8</sup> Hence, locating the perfect balance between attack and defense necessitates the rare qualities of the 'military genius.' In the Israeli case this task is easier for two reasons: the IDF's battlefield dominance and the near perfect battlefield information that is available to the military commanders and civilian policy-makers. Unfortunately the IDF's anti-intellectual environment, in which the culminating point of victory is an unknown concept, does not produce military geniuses. Moreover, the limited scope of 'deterrence operations,' which allows the dominance of political considerations, primarily the need to satisfy popular demand for a severe punishment of the enemy, contradicts the strategic logic of ending the conflict at its culminating point. Consequently, Israel's 'deterrence operations' have all ended long after their "culminating point of deterrence" has been reached.

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought* (London: Cass, 2001), 183.