

“The IDF’s unique advantage, the commanders are the secret to its strength”: Lessons learned from 1982 to 2023 – CPT (res.) Gal Perl

CPT (res.) Gal Perl, Researcher, Dado Center

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Abstract

Until recently, the IDF forces were maneuvering in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, we need to prepare for a war in the north, if it comes. The book *With Me from Lebanon* was published over three decades ago, but its main lessons – the importance of the ground, independence of forces, mission command (and command from the front) and Subterfuge – can be of use in war in the Gaza Strip in order to succeed in the war in Lebanon.

Introduction

Israel’s strategic circumstances since October 7 have brought closer the possibility that the limited conflict in the north will evolve into a full-blown war. While fighting continues in the Gaza Strip, a long, complex, confrontation with Hezbollah is being conducted on the northern front. In a way, it is reminiscent of the Security Zone days, with both sides organized and deployed, acting within seemingly agreed-upon set of rules, with most of the fighting being Standoff fire and not maneuver-based. The IDF has succeeded in attaining significant successes, including striking hundreds of Hezbollah’s operatives (as well as Palestinian terrorists), infrastructure, weaponry, and more. However, this is not enough, and the IDF must ask itself (and thoroughly examine) what are the takeaways that can be applied in a potential ground operation in Lebanon. The list extends beyond the scope of this article, nonetheless, separating the wheat from the chaff while examining the lessons learned from the war in the south, the IDF should look back and learn from our previous operational experience in Lebanon – and the many books written about it.

Firstly, the war in Gaza has ended a three-decade debate within the IDF (as part of a wider discussion being held by all western armies) regarding the relevance and the need for a ground maneuver. Time and again, the question of the necessity of maneuvering forces on the ground in an age when the IDF has in its arsenal such powerful and precise Fire-Intelligence integration capabilities that have been proven effective in a series of operations – both in the Gaza Strip and other arenas.

About six months before ‘Swords of Iron’, the Chief of the General Staff, LTG Herzi Halevi, said that the maneuver has, first and foremost, psychological value. “An adversary who knows that it may feel the boots of its enemy on the ground. This is very important for deterrence. There is a certain level of achievements in war, that cannot be attained without maneuver.”¹ The ground operation, he asserted, requires two more

¹ Halevi, H. (23 May 2023). Chief of the General Staff’s talk in a conference in Herzliyya, Reichmann University

fundamental elements: The first, the importance of taking both responsibility and initiative; and the second, what he described as one of the significant lessons he had learned from the Russia-Ukraine war – the importance of fighting spirit.²

The need to dismantle Hamas as a military and governing force in the Gaza Strip has put an end to the discussion, at least in Israel, considering the goals of the war which necessitated a wide-ranging ground operation. Only ground forces in the enemy's territory, can chase it down, disrupt its operations, make it feel hunted,³ and minimize fire launched toward the home front.

The maneuvering forces, both the regular and the reserves, under the command of MG Yaron Finkelman, the Commander of the IDF's Southern Command, have shown impressive fighting capacity operating in the north and center of the Gaza Strip. They struck thousands of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Hamas operatives, destroyed military infrastructure (including tunnels, command posts, weapons depots and fortified positions), seized weaponry, and apprehended terrorists.⁴ Considering the sense of urgency, the reserves for the ground forces have shown themselves to be a force multiplier, despite years of neglect. Operational experience, maturity and judgement, professional know-how and high motivation enabled them to quickly make up the differences between them and the regular forces, and in many cases even to lead war efforts.

This conclusion is not born only of research, but also based on what I saw and felt during battle, as the reserve Marine-Paratroopers battalion in which I serve (the 697th Battalion) was called up under the "Fire Arrows" (551st) Brigade. Three weeks later, the battalion was already fighting under the command of LTC (res.) Tzach Ekshtein, in Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahya, al-Atara, and Sheikh Radwan in Gaza.⁵ Judging by my conversations with commanders and soldiers from other units who took part in the fighting, including the 55th Brigade, the 16th, and more, they too shared that experience.

The fact that the ground maneuver has been proven to be the correct operational response for the southern front, does not mean that it is necessarily the right response in the north.⁶ However, we must prepare. What's more – as supposedly said by former Chief of the General Staff, LTG Rafael Eitan (Rafal), the problem with the enemy is that they don't attend the final briefing.⁷

² Ibid

³ Mattis, J. and West, B. (2022). *Call Sign: Chaos*, (Hebrew version), Ministry of Defense and Modan, p. 122; at the time, the IDF learned quite a bit from the US' experience with urban warfare in Iraq. During the Second Intifada, the CO of the 890th Paratroopers Battalion, LTC Amir Baram, adopted a saying inspired from the commanders of the USMC (probably Mattis), as the battalion's slogan: "Patience, dedication, and the occasional bullet between the eyes"

⁴ IDF. (November 7, 2023). Statement of the Commanding Officer of the Southern Command: "We are fighting [...] in the heart of Gaza City. In the heart of terror [...] we will not stop [...] Until we are victorious." IDF site

⁵ The battalion killed, with fire and Armor support and in direct confrontation, approximately 150 Hamas terrorists, destroyed infrastructure and weaponry and met all objectives in a no less than astonishing manner. A reserve battalion at its best. This came at a cost. And that cost was high. During the fighting, four of the battalion's soldiers fell, and approximately sixty were injured

⁶ Ortal, E. (February 2024). "The War of October 7 – and the One to Follow", Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, pp. 6-23

⁷ General Eitan supposedly originally said "Kapak shtaim" (2 ק"פ"ק) a term referring to the second, final briefing before an operation, during which final coordination between all participating units is made, and the commanders strengthen their understanding of the CO's plan as well as what the neighboring units are planning. See: *Command and Control During Ground Operations* (August 2015, Hebrew ver.). Ground Forces, p. 137

Learning and Preparing for the Next War

Hezbollah has long ago ceased to be similar to the guerilla organization the IDF fought during the years it stayed in Lebanon, or the commando divisions that the IDF faced in 2006. Since the Second Lebanon War, Hezbollah has grown in scale, acquired advanced weaponry and an arsenal of ballistic rockets and missiles (some of them PGMs), as well as AT launchers, set up tunnel networks, and more. Moreover, its personnel have gained operational experience fighting in the civil war in Syria. In an article on the subject, BG (res.) Dr. Meir Finkel proposed “to treat Hezbollah like a regular army, like the Syrian commando during the 1982 Lebanon War”.⁸ As such, it is important to learn how the IDF fought these terror and guerilla forces (PLO terrorists) as well as the Syrian commando during the war in 1982.

Even though the shelf of books written on the First Lebanon War is not that heavily laden, there are a few relevant volumes. Without denigrating books written by researchers and journalists, and it is enough to mention **Israel’s Lebanon War**, by Ze’ev Schiff and Ehud Ya’ari,⁹ it is clear that books written by commanders are of special import, as their conclusions and insights are affirmed by those who were there themselves and led soldiers on the battlefield.

Like in most militaries, active IDF officers do not often publish books about incidents from the recent past. Prominent examples include **The Heights of Courage**, by BG (res.) Avigdor Kahalani about the armor battalion under his command during the Yom Kippur War,¹⁰ and **Undeclared War**, by BG (res.) Moshe Tamir (Chiko) about his time in Lebanon while serving in the Golani infantry Brigade – a book which contained important observations and criticism of the IDF’s stay in Lebanon, the fighting against Hezbollah and the strategy employed by the IDF.¹¹ It’s no small matter when a senior officer still in active duty publishes a book in which they include criticism of the military, and this shines a positive light on the IDF as an organization which allows critical discussions aimed at learning from its failures just as much as its successes.

One of the finer books amongst these, that brought forth insights that may be applicable to a looming war in Lebanon, is the book written by MG (res.) Yoram Yair (Ya-Ya), **With Me from Lebanon** (Maarachot, 1990, Hebrew edition). In it, he describes the fighting by the paratroopers brigade under his command during the war, from the landing at the source of the Awali River in June 1982 and to arriving in Beirut. In a way the author gave himself an easy time, as he only described the brigade’s battles during the first week of the war, even though it can be said that the war continued for at least two more years, if not more, until the IDF’s withdrawal in May 2000. Yair chose to focus on describing a week of fighting – from the landing and up to Beirut, while the IDF stayed in Lebanon for 18 more years.

Yair’s book is about an efficient, surprising maneuver.¹² It also talks about shrewd field commanders who took initiative, and dedicated forces who showed great fighting spirit. Readers would learn about the dilemmas, the mistakes, the successes, how the brigade conducted integrated lethal, Joint Warfare fighting, as well as the challenges and difficulties. Although the book describes the actions of a force sent deep into enemy territory, its lessons are also appropriate for a scenario of a force sent to the front.

In the preface to the book, then Minister of Defense, Yitzhak Rabin, wrote that the Lebanon War had once again illustrated “The IDF’s unique advantage, [...] that the

⁸ Finkel, M. (May 2023). "Coordination of expectations: what is victory in the next Lebanon war and what is its price", Dado Center Journal 39, P. 128

⁹ Schiff, Z. and Ya’ari, E. (1985) *Israel’s Lebanon War*. Touchstone

¹⁰ Kahalani, A. *The Heights of Courage*. (1992, Prager [Hebrew ver. 1975, Schocken])

¹¹ Tamir, M. (2005). *Undeclared War*, (Hebrew version), Maarachot.

¹² Shelah, O. (2015). *Dare to Win*, (Hebrew version), Yedioth Books, p. 173

commanders are the secret to its strength [...] [The war] once again proved the necessity of the infantry corps. In the age of planes, missiles, and computers, there is still no alternative for a soldier creating facts with their body, legs, and mind. It is clear from the lines written in this book, how sophisticated military thought and walking down the old, but good, road of employing stratagems to surprise the enemy, spares sweat and blood, and enables military successes. In places where tanks had not yet gone and planes could not penetrate, only the infantryman could get the job done, and with success” (p. 7). In many ways, this could be said about the ongoing fighting in the Gaza Strip during ‘Swords of Iron’, and this is what it will be like during the possible war in Lebanon.

Surprising the enemy – appearing in a spot that will send it off-balance

When the government decided to commence operation ‘Peace for Galilee’, the 98th (then 96th) Division was tasked with an amphibious landing at the mouth of the Awali in Lebanon. The main force of the division was a Paratroopers brigade under the command of Yair, enhanced with engineering, artillery and armor. The operation deep in Lebanese territory was surprising, and enabled the IDF to quickly maneuver north, toward Beirut. On June 6, 1982, the men boarded the Israeli navy’s tank landers and sailed toward Lebanon. The brigade executed an amphibious landing at the mouth of the Awali. “Unlike some of the stories, these aren’t safe shores; we are drawing near the greatest of dangers – war” (p. 22).

After the landing, Yair was unsure how to move northward. “Going straight toward the enemy’s main force would not properly make use of the advantages of a brigade like mine; this is not fighting characteristic of paratroopers. Paratroopers’ strength is in flanking and appearing – sometimes by air, sometimes by sea – in the most surprising spots, where the enemy cannot prepare to meet them. This time too, we cannot give up on the principle of flanking, and we need to find a way to surprise the enemy on land, difficult as it may be – to appear in a spot that will send the enemy off balance and bring about its collapse” (p. 52).

The “Tighozet” route, through the Chouf mountains, was the most challenging line of advance along the coast. “Seeing as both the enemy’s mode of operation and its location are a riddle, I can only check that I read the map properly, and understand the environment; so that the route I chose to move the forces along really does allow every component – paratroopers, armor, artillery, engineering – to make the best use of its advantages and at the same time, to mask its weaknesses”(p. 53).

Yair and his paratroopers waged a long, tasking campaign (70 km). Even though on the surface, choosing the mountainous route was supposed to slow the brigade down, in practice Yair’s choice paid off and the paratroopers were the first force to arrive in Beirut. A significant portion of the fighting was led by the reconnaissance battalion under the command of LTC Doron Almog (Avrotzky), which consisted of “the three brigade-level companies – recon, engineering, and AT, with all their APCs – the battalion commander with eight tanks, and part of the brigade’s medical company” (p. 92).¹³ The brigade’s reconnaissance company lead the advance, under the command of Israel Ziv, with the Battalion CO Almog alongside.

¹³ On a personal note, this was the first book of war memoirs that I read (as a boy). My father, Aryeh Perl, an officer with the paratroopers who fought in the brigade and was the deputy CO of the medical company, refused to tell me about any of his experiences. After the battle of Damour, the company was split up: one Detachment, under my father’s command, was put under the brigade’s reconnaissance battalion, which was commanded by Almog, while the second remained with the rest of the brigade. Eventually Dad told me about the landing from the sea; about the fear he felt when they were hit by mortar fire; about a wonderful meal they

Yair described the recon battalion's advance "The men are overloaded, and the climb is very difficult. The bulletproof plates under the vests are warm, making them sweat and lose fluids" (p. 73). There is a clear lesson here for the next war. Soldiers, especially those in the vanguard, will have to be light and agile to operate in the mountainous Lebanese terrain. If not, the force will not be able to fight efficiently, as it will buckle under the heavy weight on its back.¹⁴

Six kilometers east of Damour, the vanguard met the enemy. "In a few seconds, the lack of water was forgotten, and the unit is in the midst of a charge. Israel is charging along with part of the force along the ridge above, and Doron is running with some of the others on the road. In a matter of minutes, the charge is over: ten terrorists killed, ten terrorists captured" (p. 73). The water has run out, but Ziv insists to give water to the prisoners too. This is just a small incident, but there is much in the little there is. First of all, the importance of Command from the front. Years later, MG (res.) Almog wrote: "Leading up front allows each commander to get, in the shortest time possible, the best information about the enemy's state, the condition of our forces, about the terrain, the troops' morale and how tired they are, and about what we call in a sit-rep 'additional factors'. The commander's presence at the front in critical points, like moments of crisis in the battle, allow them to be an example to their men – which could bring about a shift in momentum, breathing new energies in soldiers and commanders alike".¹⁵ This observation was proved in previous operations in Gaza,¹⁶ as well as in the ongoing war, and will not be any different in Lebanon.

For instance, at midnight between October 28 and 29, 2023, the men of the 551st brigade crossed the security fence near Kibbutz Erez and into the Gaza Strip, moving on foot for three kilometers toward Beit Hanoun. The 697th battalion was at the head of the advance,¹⁷ with an armor company that had been put under it in the vanguard. The company CO was in the lead.¹⁸ At first light, the battalion struck the outskirts of the urban area. The recon company, under the command of MAJ Moshe Leiter, led a rapid advance from one building to the next on the left flank, encountered terrorists and struck them. On the right flank, company B encountered terrorists in a building. A team from the company and from the battalion XO's command group fired toward the terrorists, while a tank fired two shots at the building. The battalion set up camp on the outskirts of the area. During the first battle, the battalion CO and the brigade CO, COL Ido Kass, were nearby and in complete control, while the two company commanders were in the lead.

Secondly, even under the stresses combat brings, the logistical difficulties, the fear, and the rage toward the enemy, the commanders did not give up on the IDF's values – purity of arms and combat morals. My battalion CO often says that moral behavior means being willing to pay the price, in this case lack of water, of adhering to the values of the IDF. This approach is also apparent in the words of the Chief of the General Staff and

made in Qabr Chamoun, after the fight; about how he rushed in a jeep with another doctor to save an injured Lebanese baby (they "took over" a hospital by singlehandedly and found the right infusion). About how he kicked out two doctors when he found out they had looted Lebanese property. About the improvised force he was attached to, that took over the President's palace in Beirut (and the people threw rice at them), and about the World Cup finals that he saw in a flat in town. The rest I had to read in Yair's book

¹⁴ Shelah, O. (January 7, 2011). A heavyweight question. Maariv (Hebrew)

¹⁵ Almog, D. (June 2012). Commander's place in battle. Maarachot 443, p. 29 (Hebrew)

¹⁶ Druck, D. (2022). "The combined and joint battle 2006-2014", in: The development of the combined battle in the IDF. (Editor: M. Finkel). Maarachot and Moden, p. 297 (Hebrew)

¹⁷ On the first night only half the battalion went in, because of a justified concern that there would not be any buildings fit to hold all the men. The second half reattached the next night

¹⁸ The company was part of the 8108th Battalion under the 679th Reserve Armor Brigade

the CO of the Southern Command while addressing the since the beginning of the war, about the need to fight without forsaking the IDF's ethics.¹⁹

Back in 1982, In a different battle in the same area, a battalion of terrorists set up an ambush, however, the brigade's vanguard spotted it ahead of time and utilized subterfuge.²⁰ The AT company and an armor force moved along a route heading to the village, while the battalion CO and the engineering unit advanced on the ridge up above the ambush. Approximately 50 terrorists trapped between the forces were killed, and about 20 captured.

The brigade's last battle before Beirut was against a Syrian commando battalion in Shemlan. The CO of the Northern Command, MG Amir Drori, and the Chief of the General Staff, LTG Rafael Eitan (Rafal), pushed Yair to take over the village as quickly as possible so he could join the Christian Phalanges' forces. "The reason for the pressure from 'above' was clear to me. It is equally clear, however, that I couldn't put too much pressure on the officers under my command. I need to take into account my orders and put in any changes possible into the plan to ensure the mission is complete as quickly as possible. But I need to act like a pressure valve and keep the commanders under me safe" (p. 152).

In the battle, he wrote, "Both sides, the Israeli paratroopers on the one hand and the Syrian commandos on the other, are now akin to a pair of boxers in a ring, just before the gong is heard, signaling the end of a long, equal match between them. Both of them have given their all, so they can win" (p. 154). It was clear to Yair that "the victor would be the one who could manage to muster the last of their strength, despite the pain and exhaustion, to lay one more fist, a strong, accurate strike, that would bring their opponent to the matt and decide the battle" (p. 154).

As such, when the AT company's advance was halted, he decided the right spot for him to make the best impact on the battle was in front. "In order to spur the exhausted soldiers into this last decisive effort, to squeeze the last inch of energy that they still had left, the XO and I run up to the head of the column (p. 154). The charge, with the brigade commander and his deputy at the front, decided the battle and the brigade's advance toward Beirut was secured.

The unit's fighting spirit and cohesion harnessed by commanders leading from the front were the reason hurt, exhausted forces could stand up to the task and keep moving forward. In this regard, Yair wrote: "The professionalism, the order, and the discipline of the unit high as they are, are not enough to move the men to fulfil any task during battle, when facing death. A commander who is not be able to gather their unit and will not be able to cultivate solidarity between soldiers and commanders during war, will not have at their disposal the training, order, and discipline that were instilled during training" (p. 83).

This is how it has always been. In the final battle before Beirut, in the battles the IDF has fought since then, in 'Swords of Iron', in the Gaza Strip. Fighting spirit is also the reason that the 697th, one day after suffering casualties and injuries in Beit Hanoun, on November 10, 2023, rose like the phoenix, went on an offensive, killed Hamas operatives and continued fulfilling its tasks. There is no alternative to fighting spirit, and just like Noah's ark, it is built before the flood – in training and exercises, war simulations at every level (company, battalion and up), whether in Joint Warfare exercises (for example, division-level exercises or the 2022 exercise in Cyprus), cultivating and teaching commanders to act with initiative and aggressiveness. It is built during service

¹⁹ Barnea, N. (February 16, 2024). Bibi no-no. Yedioth Ahronoth (Hebrew)

²⁰ Almog (June 2012), p. 28

in active units, team-building events for commanders, and in-depth looks at doctrine, history and more.

Lessons

The 98th Division's maneuver deep in Lebanon is one of the only cases in the history of Israel's wars of a successful joint action on the front and within the depths of enemy territory. However, as the IDF History Department researcher Saul Bronfeld has said, "the successful landing helped bring about the quick collapse of the terrorists organized resistance south of the Awali, however, it was not enough to create a strategic flanking action of Beirut. IDF brigade only surrounded Beirut after the ceasefire and arrived at the city only after the hard fighting in the valley."²¹

The book **With Me from Lebanon** may be short and succinct, however, there is much good advice and excellent insights for commanders, from the fire-team to the brigade level. Reading it, especially after fighting in Gaza, I have found several important lessons relevant to Lebanon as well:

Land, land, and again, land. Before the enemy, before any other factor that affects the ability of military units to act – is analyzing the terrain. The ability to glean potential shapers from the terrain, including key locations, kill zones, controlling and controlled areas and more, is the foundation of any operational plan. In Lebanon, as Yair showed when he led his brigade on a surprise flanking maneuver, terrain is a limiting factor as well as an enabling one. The terrain in the mostly flat Gaza Strip, with the IDF moving relatively short distances, posed less of a challenge for maneuvering forces. Lebanon is a whole other ball game.

"Together we stand alone". This slogan, adopted at the time by an IDF's Paratroopers battalion commander for his unit,²² needs to be one of a series of lessons that should be taken into account by the units that will maneuver in Lebanon, as well as those still in active combat in Gaza. The battalion is an autonomous, independent unit that is not reliant on the "mother brigade" and can act on its own. The size of the area and Hezbollah's deployment requires to act while preserving mutual aid between forces, making sure to operate within the principle of fully utilizing every force, while employing fire and support components as possible. However, the battalion must be able to solve its problems on its own, as Hezbollah is able to challenge the IDF in a way that its forces, even an entire brigade may fail to provide much needed aid.

Mission-oriented command is a way of life. During the war in Gaza, the IDF rolled back to a mission-oriented command approach, abandoning the Micromanagement method typical of its years of routine security activity. According to this approach, the commander in the field has the liberty to "choose unexpected plans-of-action in order to complete the assigned mission",²³ as if they wait for instructions, they will never be able to capitalize on unforeseen opportunities.²⁴ To put this approach into practice, an organizational culture that facilitates the understanding the commander's intent must be created, considering the tension between that and focusing on a particular task; mutual trust based on capabilities as well as good communication built on a shared understanding of combat doctrine, tolerance for mistakes made without malicious intent,

²¹ Bronfeld, S. (2022). Landing in the Awali estuary - "What more can you ask of us homeland". Yesodot 3, p. 66 (Hebrew)

²² Finkelman, Y. (November 19, 2008). Debriefing Operation "Double Challenge" Paratrooper Patrol Battalion 5135. 35th Brigade (Hebrew)

²³ Shamir, E. (2014). The Pursuit of Mission Command, (Hebrew version), Maarachot and Modan, p. 19

²⁴ Ibid, p. 51

a built-in tendency for action and showing initiative, a strong link between authority and responsibility.²⁵

Moreover, the quality of a military unit is measured by the authorities and freedom of operation given, as well as the expectations set of the junior command. While war can and has made the IDF choose the mission-orientated command approach even when these characteristics are not extant. The scope and intensity of the fighting, the need to make timely decisions, and senior command's inability to be always involved with each force and places – all a natural part of war – has forced the IDF's senior command to trust its field commanders and give them freedom of operation.²⁶ They, in turn, have proven themselves worthy of that trust. In Lebanon, the anticipated magnitude of fighting, the enemy's known characteristics, the challenging terrain and other factors, make the commanders' understanding of two levels up and one level below imperative.

Subterfuge is a core skill. Each adversary system has an obvious center of gravity (a controlling area, a C&C center, central structure, a component which if struck destabilizes the adversary's organization, striking it off-balance). At its core, subterfuge is analyzing the adversary, identifying this center of gravity, and understanding how to strike it in a rapid, unexpected manner. This was how Yair's brigade operated in the First Lebanon War; this is how the IDF acted during "Swords of Iron". As said by BG (res.) Tamir, the enemy's system in the Gaza Strip has been dismantled as a result of the integration of the intense fire effort ("The refractive element") – which damage the tunnels just moments before the forces on the ground maneuvered into enemy territory, and denied Hamas operatives the cover of the subterranean space – and the ground maneuver which chased down and killed Hamas operatives who were forced to remain above ground.²⁷

Improvisation is founded on doctrine. It is important to act according to doctrine dealing with Command and Control (C&C) and the Brigade Combat Team (BCT), and of course according to the good old blue handbook (which changes color with every edition).²⁸ Improvisation, when done right, is based on doctrine (and everything is written). It can be said that improvisation is actually just adapting doctrine to the given circumstances (the adversary, the terrain, our force, and of course, the 'H'). When it isn't done this way – the results are often grave.

Conclusion

Until recently, the soldiers of the 98th Division, under the command of BG Dan Goldfuss, have been fighting in Khan Yunis. On October 7, they fought to stop the Nukhba operatives attacking Israeli communities and IDF bases nearby the Gaza Strip. After then, between December 2023 and April 2024, the division stormed Khan Yunis, struck Hamas terrorists and destroyed weaponry and infrastructure, engaging in integrated warfare both below and above ground.²⁹

At the same time, we must prepare for the next war, should it come. This preparation requires us to ask difficult questions, including how competent would forces be, namely the reserves, if the IDF had the time train them? Has the IDF been training properly in the years prior to the war, in a manner that simulates the war well enough, whatever form it takes? Have we prepared our forces well enough? The IDF has already begun

²⁵ Ibid, p. 41

²⁶ Tamir (2005), p. 275

²⁷ Interview with BG (res.) Moshe (Chiko) Tamir, Kfar Daniel, February 19, 2024

²⁸ A pocket handbook consisting of a set of instructions, tips and notes about C&C and fighting doctrine given to the junior command in the IDF

²⁹ Goldfuss, D. (March 13, 2024). Statement of the commander of the 98th Paratroopers Division. Khan Yunis

combatting tunnels in Khan Yunis – a decision that required willingness to take risks (the subterranean domain neutralizes many of the IDF's Joint Warfare advantages), boldness, and professional skill therefore avoided as much as possible.

Another question relates to the duration of the fighting, the patterns of combat and the way the IDF operates. In the past, there have been conversations in the IDF about reducing the duration of war (or at least, removing the home front from the area of combat). Six months into the war we can confidently say that neither this nor that has happened. This issue requires thinking about the rest of the war from a standpoint of managing equipment stores and order of battle (both regular and reserves), as well as how the IDF is going to be set up in the field (martial law, establishing a security zone, and more open questions), as Hamas has changed how it is deployed in the Gaza Strip, transitioning into waging a guerilla war – the IDF too, has reduced its forces and moved to conducting small-scale offensive operations.

The war has changed shape since it first started, and has shifted into its second stage, similar to what happened in Judea & Samaria after operation “Defensive Shield”. It has become “the IDF's mop-up war against the recovery of Hamas in areas that have been taken over and abandoned, to which the terror organization has returned, once again holding them in its grasp.”³⁰The IDF has continued to act to combat this recovery. An example is operation “Local Surgery” (March 18 – April 1, 2024), during which the 162nd Division raided Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza.³¹

At the battalion level, with every objective we were tasked with attacking, we sat down and analyzed it so we could act not only with the appropriate force and at the right time, but also in a manner that would deny the enemy any opportunity to set up a campaign to resist us. We must assume the Hezbollah will be able to set up one, so there are not shortcuts in this case either. CCVWH (Center of gravity, critical assets, vulnerabilities, what will decide, how to decide), has been and will remain the leading approach, because at the end of the day, there is a mission to fulfill. The terrain, independent forces, familiarity with combat literature, mission-oriented command (and leading from the front), and subterfuge are the essence of the main lessons we should learn from Yair's book - and from the war in Gaza – to succeed in the war in Lebanon.

This article is dedicated to my brothers in arms from the 697th battalion. Those that are alive and well, those that are injured – may they recover quickly – and most of all, those that fell in battle: MAJ (res.) Moshe Yedidia Leiter, SGM (res.) Yosef Chaim (Yossi) Hershkowitz, MSG (res.) Matan Meir, MSG (res.) Sergey Shmerkin, and the two tank crewmen from the 14th Brigade who fought with us shoulder to shoulder, and fell while in battle while deployed with the neighboring battalion, MAJ (res.) Aryeh Rein, and MSG (res.) Nitai Meisels. May their memory be a blessing. May we be worthy of their sacrifice.

The author thanks MG (res.) Yair Golan, COL (res.) Boaz Zalmanowicz, COL Yaron Simsolo, COL Ido Kass, and LTC (res.) Aviram Ring for their excellent comments on this paper.

³⁰ Ziv, I. (March 22, 2024). The action at Shifa was the opening shot of the 'Second Iron Sword War'. N12 (Hebrew)

³¹ Levy, S. (April 1, 2024). Suicide terrorists and documentation from October 7: new details about the operation in Shifa. Mako (Hebrew)