Transformation Déjà Vu?
A Comparison of Military Improvements of Israel
(1967-1973) and the United States (1990-2002)

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> [T]he dramatic military victory [in 1967] unconsciously created an albatross for the IDF [Israeli Defense Force]. In particular, the stellar performance in 1967 spawned an unrealistic standard of excellence virtually impossible for the IDF to duplicate in its next armed conflict. Furthermore the Israelis expected the Arabs to perform in the next war as poorly as they did in 1967. Rather than discern these two expectations as a recipe for disaster, the Israeli military unconsciously fell into the trap of preparing to fight its next war as it had waged its last conflict (Gawrych: 1).

Introduction

In 1967, an outnumbered and outgunned Israeli military achieved a stunning and militarily decisive victory in six days. It decimated the Arab coalition forces, achieving destruction of 85 percent of the Egyptian air forces and 80 percent of their ground equipment, and inflicted over 10,000 Egyptian casualties (Gawrych: 3). In 1973, when the Israelis again fought the Egyptians, the Israeli experience proved markedly different. While the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) eventually gained a tactical success, it achieved only a political stalemate. Much more significantly, it suffered three times as many casualties as in 1967, an unprecedented incidence of combat shock. The clear tactical losses early in the campaign erased the Israeli image of invulnerability, and helped create a backlash from the Israeli public's expectation of quick, bloodless victory that led to internal political upheaval and recrimination in Israel (Gawrych: 79). The Israelis learned after their painful experience in 1973 that the fruits of their 1967 success had sown the seeds for future military failure; their dramatic tactical successes in 1967 had created expectations of quick and bloodless future victories. After their 1967 successes, the IDF overestimated the superiority of its own soldiers, equipment, and doctrine while grossly underestimating the capabilities of its enemies. The internal development of the IDF after the 1967 War

centered on three pillars that overemphasized the traits to which they attributed their success: superior intelligence, air power, and rapid, tank-centric maneuver. As a result, these developed at the expense of other elements of combined arms and joint warfare, creating the vulnerabilities that were successfully exploited by a militarily weaker Egypt in 1973.

Today, as the United States prepares to fight a second Gulf War against Iraq, the parallels between the Israeli experience of 1967-1973 and that of the United States after the 1991 Gulf War hold instructive lessons for today's U.S. joint warfighter. Like the IDF in 1967, the U.S.-led coalition of 1991 achieved a stunning and tactically decisive victory over Iraq. That experience in many ways parallels that of the Israeli victory of 1967. It is important to analyze the U.S. experience and its parallels to that of the Israelis to determine if the United States is vulnerable to making the same errors or if it is doing what it can to avoid "the Albatross of decisive victory." The lessons of the Israeli experiences may help the U.S. joint warfighter avoid the potential dangers of false expectations about both his adversary and U.S. forces; the potential pitfalls of unbalanced doctrinal transformation based on the last U.S. victory that may exaggerate the nation's own vulnerabilities; and the historical tendency to fight the last war.

To see whether the United States Gulf War experience planted the seeds of its own future military failure by enabling many of the same mistakes the Israelis did from 1967 to 1973, it will be useful first to examine the Israeli experience in 1973 on the Egyptian (Sinai) front and identify the significant failures that the IDF suffered as a result of the impact of the 1967 decisive victory. Then a look at the U.S. Gulf War experience of 1991, analyzing the actions of the U.S. military since 1991, may show whether the nation is in fact on a path that may match the Israeli 1973 experience.

Israeli Experience 1967–1973

Arab-Israeli War of 1967

In May 1967, the Arab coalition of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan moved forces to their corresponding borders with Israel. With IDF intelligence warning that war was inevitable, Israel determined that a preemptive strike was essential to nullify the Arab coalition's numerically superior air and ground assets. The Israeli Air Force (IAF) took the initiative and, on June 5th, surprised the Egyptian forces with an aggressive preemptive strike, destroying more than 75 percent of the Egyptian Air Force on the ground. Having full control of the air, the IAF operated as artillery, directly supporting the IDF's outnumbered armor forces by neutralizing Egypt's overwhelming ground firepower. That soon allowed IDF armor free maneuver on the battlefield, permitting nearly unhindered dominant maneuver. Israel seized vast Sinai territory, eventually crossing the canal and threatening Cairo itself. The IDF's dominant maneuver led to decisive tactical victory over Egypt. In one week the IDF had successfully defended itself from a numerically superior force and pushed its borders out far enough to protect itself from indiscriminate shelling.

> In dramatic fashion, Israel had won outnumbered. The IDF, with 25,000 men, 1,000 tanks, and 250 combat aircraft, had decimated an Arab coalition of 300,000 troops, close to 2,000 tanks, and over 500 fighters and bombers…. Israeli losses in this lightning campaign were 983 killed, 4,517 wounded, and fifteen missing, a relatively small figure when compared to the over 10,000 Egyptian casualties. Jordan, for reluctantly participating in the Arab cause, lost 80 percent of its armor and suffered 700 killed and 6,000 wounded and missing (Gawrych: 3).

Israeli Lessons Learned from '67 War

After the 1967 War, Israel took away three lessons that it believed were the key to its success: perception of superior intelligence, technologically superior air power, and

ability to conduct rapid armored maneuver.

      1. <u>Superior Intelligence</u>. Given the lumbering Arab buildup of 1967, Israel was convinced that any future Arab attack would be preceded by ample warning indicators that the superior Israeli intelligence would be able to detect. Once they detected them, the Israelis were confident that they could analyze these indicators and give warning of attack. IDF Chief Intelligence officer General Eliahu Zeira guaranteed that intelligence would give one week's notice of any Arab attack (Ehud: 314).

      2. <u>Unmatched Air Power</u>. Israel was convinced that the technological advantage of the IAF made it the perfect tool for supporting the ground war. With the IAF capable of controlling the sky, surveying the battlefield, and supporting IDF armor with precision close air support, the IDF saw little need to devote its limited economic and manpower resources to artillery or infantry support for armor (Dupuy: 336).

      3. <u>Rapid Armored Maneuver</u>. The 1967 War demonstrated that lightning fast armored maneuver and firepower led to decisive tactical victory. Israel believed that this meant armor was the answer to victory in future wars. The Israelis were convinced that rapid penetration or envelopment of their adversaries' rear areas would cause the enemy to rapidly collapse. In the interim period between the '67 and '73 Wars, Israel applied its major effort to modernizing and equipping its tank forces.

      During the next six years, Israel relied on these lessons as a formula to gain future military victories. The application of these three lessons as pillars of Israeli military modernization was amplified by Israeli overconfidence in the capabilities of their own forces and a condescending disdain for those of the neighboring Arab countries. It was further ingrained by the perception of both the IDF and the public that all future IDF

military actions would achieve operational success quickly and bloodlessly (Gawrych: 17).

Egypt 1967-1973

While Israel was confident that it had the recipe for success in future wars, its past and future adversary, Egypt, was implementing changes to exploit Israeli weaknesses that the success of the 1967 War kept Israel from seeing. Egypt prepared to muddy Israeli intelligence capabilities with numerous exercises and deception. Furthermore, to exploit Israel's lack of infantry support for its armor, Egypt trained its infantry in antiarmor warfare and ambush tactics. Most significantly, Egypt adopted the Soviets' model of overlapping air defense systems, using the latest Soviet technology, including the SA-6 and the ZSU-23-4, to protect the Egyptian border and front lines from IAF assault. Through this intensive planning, close coordination, and repetitive training in the open, the combined armies of Egypt and Syria expertly used Tactical Deception (TD) exercise maneuvers, the cover of the religious holidays of Ramadan and Yom Kippur, and the highest canal tide date to mask preparations for and the subsequent execution of their ground offensive (Ehud: 311).

Israel before the 1973 War

Arabs prepared for the worst by greatly overestimating the IDF response. Conversely, the IDF's success in 1967 led it to grossly underestimate its Arab enemy's will and ability to fight. IDF leadership was convinced of its superiority over the Arab coalition and convinced that the Arabs knew they were inferior as well (Herzog: 228). When indicators grew of another Arab attack, Israeli intelligence felt confident assessing that this Arab activity could be nothing more than an exercise, since another attack would

surely be suicidal (Ehud: 317). In addition, the military success of the 1967 War left Israel viewed internationally as a regional bully that conducted diplomacy through its position of military strength. Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, trying to fight this perception, was less willing to take preemptive action without definitive proof of an impending Arab attack (Dupuy: 408).

By the start of the 1973 War, IDF intelligence had failed to warn of the Arab attack, leading to the significant loss of initiative that was the bedrock of the IAF war plans. As a result, the IAF was denied air superiority by Egyptian air defenses and proved subsequently ineffective in supporting IDF armor. This led to the Egyptian infantry's ability, in the early days of the war, to inflict heavy losses on IDF tanks through low-risk antiarmor warfare (Ehud: 321).

Israeli Lessons Learned from '73 War

1. <u>Superior Intelligence</u>. The 1973 War exposed Israel's flawed assumption that intelligence would guarantee enough warning to seize the initiative. Intelligence failed to foresee that Egypt might use a military attack for goals other than strategic victory. That belief, as well as overconfidence in the deterrent power of the IDF, led General Zeira to claim that war was improbable despite all the indications otherwise (Dupuy: 585). Despite the superior intelligence capabilities of the IDF that, in hindsight, provided all of the indicators of imminent attack, the Israeli leadership proved unable or unwilling to act on the information. This demonstrated that political will was as important as clear intelligence information. In addition, even a robust network of intelligence collection and assessment was still susceptible to tactical and operational deception.

2. <u>Unmatched Air Power</u>. The 1973 War demonstrated that air superiority was

essential before effective air power could be brought to bear against ground forces. As the IDF had devoted few resources to ground artillery, the lack of an IAF first strike, coupled with technological advances of the Egyptian military, negated the IAF's presence over the forward line of troops, leaving the armor with no effective artillery fire support (Herzog: 309-310). Although Israeli air power was overwhelming, this conflict demonstrated the clear need for a more balanced fire support capability from both the air forces and ground systems.

3. Rapid Armored Maneuver. Israel's flawed doctrine for air power and the superiority of armor was highlighted at the expense of infantry support (Ehud: 342). The overconfidence of the IDF armored forces, coupled with their doctrine, caused commanders to commit to unsupported armor attacks against the Egyptians. This combination resulted in piecemeal commitment of forces and excessive losses. Although IDF tank forces eventually achieved their objective by executing a deep envelopment, Egyptian forces failed to crumble as expected. Egyptian infantry exposed IDF tank doctrine flaws, and demonstrated that tanks, left unsupported by adequate infantry or fire support, were vulnerable (Dupuy: 591, 595). Before the '73 War, Israel always had air superiority; without it, Israel learned that its armor became vulnerable due to its lack of ground intelligence and adequate infantry support.

U.S. Military Experience 1991-2002

1991 Gulf War (Decisive Tactical Victory)

Like the IDF winning victory over the Arabs in 1967, the 1991 U.S.-led coalition achieved a dramatic and decisive tactical victory over the Iraqi forces in a 100-hour ground campaign that followed a 100-day air campaign.

> The Iraqis lost 3,847 of their 4,280 tanks, over half their 2,880 armored personnel carriers and nearly all their 3,100 artillery pieces. Only five to seven of their forty-three combat divisions remained capable of offensive operations. In the days after the cease-fire the busiest soldiers were those engaged in the monumental task of counting and caring for 60,000 [Iraqi] prisoners. And these surprising results came at the cost of 148 Americans killed in action. In the theatre of operations, [the coalition] had won the fastest and most complete victory in military history (Schubert and Krause: 201).

United States Lessons Learned from 1991 Gulf War

In its final report to Congress on the conduct of the Gulf War, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) identified five general lessons: (1) the importance of Presidential leadership in setting clear goals, providing a sense of purpose, and rallying domestic and foreign support to achieve those goals; (2) the edge provided by high-tech weapons coupled with effective doctrine; (3) the quality of the personnel from top to bottom; (4) the importance of sound planning, forward-positioned forces, and strategic lift; and (5) the long lead time needed to deploy. Perhaps more significantly, the report strongly emphasized the significant time required to assemble the people and systems that had won the victory (U.S., *Conduct*: xviii). The time required to develop leaders, equipment, and doctrine makes it essential that the U.S. military make sound decisions as it tries to "transform" itself in the post-Gulf War and post-Cold War world. Mistakes and bad decisions today hold the potential for long-term impact on future leaders and systems.

U.S. Transformation Efforts Since 1991

As the United States has moved away from the Cold War, it has struggled to redefine its military doctrine in order to "transform" itself for the challenges of the new millennium and simultaneously achieve a "peace dividend." As a result, the U.S. military

has simultaneously cut over 40 percent of its force structure even as it has increased operational tempo by 300 percent while simultaneously attempting to mold itself to face future undefined threats (U.S., *QDR*: 58). In *Joint Vision 2020*, a statement of the future path for U.S. forces, the United States has focused the nexus of its transformation on four pillars: Full Dimensional Protection, Dominant Maneuver, Precision Engagement, and Focused Logistics (U.S., *JV 2020*: 3). All of these pillars require information dominance to achieve full spectrum dominance. The *Joint Vision 2020* operational construct is hauntingly similar to the Israeli "take-aways" from their 1967 War: Supremacy of Intelligence (Information Dominance?), Unmatched Air Power (Precision Engagement?) and Rapid Armor Maneuver (Dominant Maneuver?).

In the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War, the military establishment basked in its success. The impact of that triumph has clearly colored evolving military doctrine. Unfortunately, "[V]ictory against such an enemy, gratifying as it was, did not constitute a definitive test of any theory or doctrine," but was nevertheless immediately seized upon by all the Services to justify expanded budgets and to justify their significance (Schubert and Krause: 235). While one can argue the specifics of any training, doctrine, or procurement decision, there is a clear emphasis in today's military on high-tech solutions, like technical intelligence collectors, at the cost of low-tech human intelligence capabilities (HUMINT) as well as heavy reliance on Global Positioning System (GPS) and digitized command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C4I) to provide the information dominance to offset reduced forces. A focus on fewer, air-delivered precision systems over less sophisticated "mass" systems and a desire to achieve strategic and tactical movement/maneuver capability by acquiring lighter and faster ground systems are

similarly highlighted. While none of these areas of current focus are inherently wrong, they each provide the potential for the U.S. military to create its own vulnerabilities a la the post-1967 Israelis. Like Sadat, who in 1973 was more focused on a diplomatic and informational victory than a military one, a clever enemy of the United States may find the seams today created by an unbalanced U.S. transformation that has been molded by the nation's own arrogance, and successfully exploit them.

Potential U.S. "Transformation" Errors

1. <u>Information Superiority (Supremacy of Intelligence)</u>. Defined as "the capability to collect, process, and disseminate an interrupted flow of information while exploiting or denying an adversary's ability to do the same" (U.S., *JV 2020*: 8), this element requires a high reliance on technology, which can be both a boon and a crutch as demonstrated by the effects of computer viruses on military network systems. While all these technologies give the United States great capability to fight like-minded adversaries, they also make it vulnerable to focused asymmetric attack. While U.S. ground forces have lost much of their ability to navigate without GPS and naval and air forces similarly have become overly reliant on GPS availability, simple off-the-shelf local jamming capability could be a simple but dramatically effective means for the next adversary to degrade U.S. operations.

2. <u>Precision Engagement (Unmatched Air Power)</u>. This element requires interlinking sensors and systems to identify targets and engage, if necessary, to achieve the desired effects, including the use of both kinetic and nonkinetic weapons (U.S., *JV 2020*: 2). Again, the strong reliance on technology has led to some potentially dangerous assumptions. For example, with the decreased size and weight of some systems, there is

now a greater ability to get some vulnerable systems into harm's way. That leads to the belief that precision technology makes up for the sometimes-needed benefits of quantity to offset unexpected enemy asymmetric success. In addition, on many occasions systems that were designed to defeat the latest in technological advances have been defeated by enemies using rudimentary weapons and tactics. Another unintended consequence of U.S. "precision" is the perception that the inevitable collateral damage must be deliberate since U.S. weapons are so inherently accurate.

     3. <u>Dominant Maneuver (Rapid Armor Maneuver)</u>. The ability to use forces to gain positional advantage with decisive speed and overwhelming ops tempo defines Dominant Maneuver (U.S., *JV 2020*: 20). In Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan U.S. forces initially attempted to apply solely one-dimensional air power solutions to achieve objectives. While the vastly superior U.S. Air Forces have been critical to success, providing as-advertised Dominant Maneuver, in every case it required multidimensional (air-sea-ground) application of force to achieve the desired outcomes. Properly (not necessarily equally) balanced application of joint force capability is more effective than any one-dimensional approach. Such a balanced approach, however, may be contradicted by the political reality of desired low casualty rates. Conducting a one-dimensional, air-centric war may even lead to the misperception of a low U.S. commitment by allies or even the enemy. One can even win the air campaign and lose the informational war. Similarly, the impact of strategic attack may be negated when fighting nonstate or nonindustrialized, dispersed, infantry-type enemy. In addition, the desire to be more strategically mobile is sound and may require some trade-offs between lethality, protection and mobility. Nevertheless, this does not mean lighter is inherently better for all contingen-

cies. The U.S. Army in its rush for relevance has cut 25 percent of its artillery and armor capability in its dwindling number of divisions based on the unproven premise that superior information dominance will offset such a decrease in lethality, firepower, and tactical mobility. As the Israelis learned, in combat quantity has a quality all its own.

United States in 2002

As the United States ponders future military action against Iraq, many voices both in and outside the Pentagon continue to speak of certain victory. While few pundits propose a bloodless victory, there is an unmistakable tone of overconfidence that seems to perceive the Iraqi capabilities as unchanged from the 1990s.

While most military and civilian experts seem to recognize that the Iraqi military can alter its approach to future conflicts with the United States, current war plans seem not to reflect the possibility of either dramatically different enemy and/or tactics. According to an article in the 5 July 2002 edition of the *New York Times*, the United States still envisions fighting Iraqi massed formations by attacking with large ground and air forces in a phased, sequential, and very conventional campaign (Schmitt: 1). The assumption is that the even better technology the nation has today will provide for a rapid, decisive victory.

As a result of the 1967 War, Israel gained a reputation as a regional superpower with unmatched military capability. Its success also helped it earn a reputation as a "bully" that used its power to dictate unacceptable conditions to its neighbors. Similarly, the United States after the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union has certainly gained a "global bully" reputation among both enemies and erstwhile friends.

U.S. focus on military confrontation with Iraq may fail to recognize that the ad-

versary, Saddam Hussein, like Sadat in 1973 Egypt, may not need a military victory to achieve his political and informational objectives. If, like Sadat, he can craft an operational strategy that allows him a diplomatic victory, he can lose the battles and still win the war. While there is debate over the efficacy of the U.S. public's aversion to casualties, there is little doubt that the victory in the Gulf War reinforced a general expectation of quick and bloodless victories. Some sense of this may be evident in the reaction of the public and the policy-makers to the unexpected drawn-out air campaign in Serbia-Kosovo and even initially in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

While there are many parallels between the Israeli 1967-1973 experience and the U.S. experiences after 1991, the final impact of decisive victory on future U.S. operations may not be known until after a "Gulf War II." U.S. military transformation is a deliberate attempt to create a mindset of innovation and adaptation. It focuses not on fighting the last war but on vigorously trying to anticipate the demands of future conflicts to develop capabilities, technologies, doctrine, and organizations that can be decisive in those conflicts. While transformation is not a "magic bullet" that will guarantee bloodless victory, it does appear to be a genuine effort by the politico-military establishment to avoid the potential pitfalls of a decisive victory such as those that plagued Israel in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.

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