

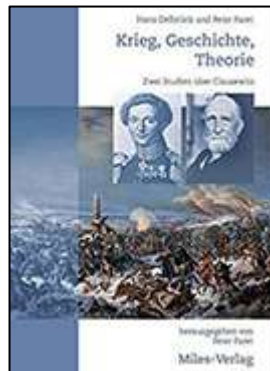
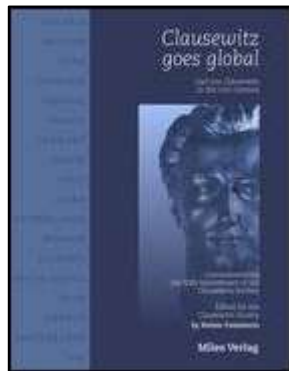


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Clausewitz and 21st Century Israeli Military Thinking and Practice

Avi Kober

Clausewitz, along with Sun Tzu, is often considered one of the two greatest theorists of war. The special status he has earned is based on the assumption that he offers a universal, cross-time and place theory. And indeed, not only are elements of Clausewitz's theory relevant today; some of them have proven of even greater relevance. But Clausewitz has also been a target of criticism, with the critics' fingers often directed to the perceived gap between his theory and the nature of war and strategy in our time. For some of them Clausewitz is no more than a great interpreter of Napoleon's wars.

The question this chapter addresses is: Are Clausewitz's ideas still valid in Israeli 21st century military thinking and practice? Both the number and the varied nature of the wars Israel engaged in during the Cold War and in its aftermath make the Israeli experience excellent source material. The main argument here is that judging from the Israeli case, whereas many of Clausewitz's basic theoretical ideas are still relevant, considerable aspects of his thought need addition, updating, or adaptation. The chapter considers the argument from three angles: the nature of war, the study of war, and the conduct of war.

The nature of war

It seems indisputable that one of the greatest weaknesses of Clausewitz's theory is its narrow approach to war. Clausewitz essentially treated war as a confrontation on the direct battlefield, virtually ignoring developments and factors that took place in the rear or before war broke out. In addition, he underestimated war's material factors such as economy and technology. Israel, however, is testimony to the broader concept of war. It is true that until the 1970s Israel tried to achieve quick battlefield decision, among other reasons as a means of neutralizing the non-operational factors in war and strategy, but since then its wars have undertaken a strong attritional form involving non-military dimensions.

The following discussion deals with more specific aspects of Clausewitz's perception of the nature of war: the tension between the rational

element of war and the forces of escalation; the extent to which low-intensity conflicts (LICs) challenge the Clausewitzian paradigm; the role played by intelligence; morality and war; and post-heroic warfare as a challenge to Clausewitz's perception of war.

The rational element of war vs. the forces of escalation

Clausewitz points to two basic elements in war. The first is the rational/calculative element, which treats war as a tool to achieve objectives. The second is the expressive/escalatory element, which although treated by Clausewitz as an ideal type of war, represents the inherent dynamics of military confrontation that sweep adversaries into spiraling escalation, almost regardless of their objectives or of any real cost/benefit calculation.¹ One can opt for violence out of a rational choice, believing that it could be tamed according to one's objectives, but once violence starts, it may soon feed on its own momentum.

The Arab-Israeli case is filled with examples of political considerations that have limited the scope of military operations. At the same time, there are examples of violence that went out of control. Most Israeli officials feared uncontrolled escalation that might lead to regular war or external players' intervention on the enemy's side. If already engaged in escalation, they usually wished to escalate to a level where the adversary would understand he cannot win, that is, to achieve escalation dominance. But Israeli success in these respects was limited and partial. Before the 1956 Sinai War, the 1967 Six-day War and the 1982 Lebanon War Israeli LICs deteriorated to HICs. In three wars of attrition Israel failed in preventing the intervention of players in the confrontations it was engaged in – when the Egyptians were drawn into the conflict with the Palestinians in early 1955, and again in 1967 into the conflict with Syria; and when the Soviets intervened in the Egypt-Israel 1969-70 War of Attrition.² As recently as 2006 Israel's political and military echelons initiated what proved to be a major retaliatory operation in Lebanon after some IDF troops were killed and kidnapped by Hezbollah, an operation that soon deteriorated into war.³

LICs: A challenge to the Clausewitzian paradigm?

The pervasiveness of LICs during the Cold War (some 80 percent of the conflicts during that period) and its aftermath (some 95 percent) has raised the question whether Clausewitz's theory has retained its descriptive and explanatory weight against the backdrop of this change in the reality of war. It has been argued that Clausewitz's theory is state-to-state, high-intensity conflict (HIC)-oriented, which allegedly makes it less relevant today. The fact is that Clausewitz *did* relate to the LIC context, which he called "popular war", after having observed such conflicts during Napoleon's campaigns in the Iberian Peninsula and Russia, although during his time they took on the form of guerilla warfare rather than terror.⁴

Although Israel has engaged in LICs for so many years, until the late 1980s IDF military thinking, education, and training were geared toward HICs,⁵ as LICs were perceived to be a relatively minor challenge. In recent years the combination of lack of intellectual tradition in the Israeli military establishment⁶ and the pervasiveness of LICs has gradually produced fragmented, eclectic LIC thinking.

In its LICs Israel has applied at least two important aspects of Clausewitzian theory: first, the role played by attrition⁷ (although Clausewitz did not confine attrition to LICs). After World War II attrition became a dominant feature of such conflicts, both as a type of war and as a strategy employed in war, particularly by the weak. The aversion to encounters of attrition among Israel's political and military elite and their preference for *blitzkrieg* notwithstanding,⁸ since the early stages of the first intifada Israeli leaders have evinced a greater understanding of the importance of attrition.⁹ Second is the role played by centers of gravity in popular uprisings outside the actual battlefield. Basically, Clausewitz preferred hitting centers of gravity on the direct battlefield, but he acknowledged the effect of targeting leadership and aiming at enemy public opinion while coping with a popular uprising.¹⁰ Especially in the second intifada, Israel targeted Palestinian leaders; particularly effective was the campaign against Hamas's political and spiritual leadership.¹¹

The role of intelligence

Not only was Clausewitz (unlike Sun Tzu and other thinkers and practitioners) skeptical of the value of intelligence in war; he even considered it a source of friction.¹² Yet notwithstanding the perpetual tension between reliance on intel-

ligence as compared to reliance on military capability and force deployment, which entails considerable security expenses; repeated intelligence failures; problems stemming from lack of information on the one hand and too much information on the other; and questions regarding the credibility and reliability of intelligence estimates, it is hard to imagine military activity or political and military decision making without intelligence serving as a main source of information. In LIC, where the enemy is so elusive, it has in fact become a crucial factor. It seems, therefore, that Clausewitz judged intelligence too harshly.

One cannot ignore the contribution of intelligence throughout the years to Israeli counterinsurgency successes. In the second intifada, the IDF managed to implement a high degree of inter-service (military-police-General Security Services/Shin Bet) jointness, thereby improving the efficiency of its counterinsurgency activity. Joint Computerized Command Control Communications and Intelligence (C⁴I) operation centers were established, working for the first time in IDF history as joint operational entities. The centers provided visual monitoring to all command levels, down to the tactical leaders and combat helicopters, with all being able to see the same evolving battle picture on their computer screens. The Shin Bet provided real time intelligence through its channels; the IAF extended and verified information through its unmanned aerial vehicles and other aerial platforms; and Field Intelligence supplied updated information from its observation units. Once the intelligence picture was complete, the field commanders could decide on the best way to carry out the mission, which was then monitored throughout by the C⁴I command centers.¹³ Intelligence also played a major role in targeted killing activities. Inter-service (ground forces-military intelligence-IAF-police-Shin Bet) activity allowed the IDF not only to identify the targets but also to shorten the sensor-to-shooter loop, that is, the time between identifying a target and hitting it, to real time or near real time.

Morality and war

Although as a human being and likely a sensitive man Clausewitz could not deny war's dangerous and costly nature, he did not hide his negative attitude towards "kindness" in war.¹⁴ As a realist and a person who lived in a non-liberal, militaristic society, he was mainly interested in ensuring effectiveness on the battlefield. For him war was only one means among others, and he did not particularly care if force was applied as a first or rather last resort. His insis-

tence on a rational use of force should not be interpreted as a moral stand, but as a utilitarian, pragmatic approach, whereby force must be tamed if it has to serve the political objective. Clausewitz also believed that once the expenditure of effort exceeded the value of the political objective, the objective must be renounced and peace must follow.¹⁵ For him, however, peace meant no more than a situation in which no violence took place, rather than any ideal relationship between two parties. More recently, especially during the interwar period, military thought was dominated by British thinkers, who were highly inspired by a liberal democratic tradition. Since then, moral and legal aspects have played a major role in war.

As a liberal-democratic state, Israel saw moral and legal considerations become an integral part of its military thought and practice at two levels: first, as an international systemic constraint; and second, as a self-imposed domestic moral commitment. At the systemic level, criticism of Israeli counterinsurgency policy has stemmed not only from Israel's Arab enemies, but also from international organizations such as Amnesty International that have blamed it for using force indiscriminately and disproportionately, for continuously violating the basic rights of the local population, and for adopting a policy of targeted killing, which allegedly denied terrorists the right to a fair trial, claimed the lives of innocent people, provoked more killings of civilians as revenge, and complicated the peace process.¹⁶

A more recent, 21st century challenge has stemmed from so-called lawfare. Unlike criminal jurisdiction of an international tribunal that is exercised by an international organization such as the ICC, universal jurisdiction exercised by states that feel it is within their moral obligation to mankind to prosecute individuals who allegedly committed crimes outside the boundaries of the prosecuting state may have disastrous consequences for any state carrying out military actions. It essentially creates and imprisons defendants in their home countries, lest they be arrested once they step beyond their own borders. In recent years many Israeli commanders have refrained from traveling abroad to countries that apply such procedures.

Beyond the criticism stemming from the international system and without explicitly acknowledging it, issues of just war, discriminate use of force, proportionality, and civil liberties have penetrated into Israeli military thought and particularly counterinsurgency policy, even at the unit level. Israel's strong commitment to fight morally has been expressed *inter alia* by the development of doctrinal and technological means and information gathering

methods that could considerably reduce collateral damage; the existence of a code of ethics, which was formulated by the IDF as a result of the ethical dilemmas Israeli troops faced during the intifadas; close control by the IDF's judicial authorities on targeted killing of terrorists and other operations in the territories; rules of engagement and methods of dispersing demonstrations that tried to ensure that loss of life or serious bodily injury was minimized; and occasional rules by the Israeli Supreme Court on matters such as discriminate use of force, torture, and human shields. In the early 1990s the Military Advocate General upgraded the international law unit, turning it into a department headed by a full colonel. The department is in charge of making sure that the IDF abides by the laws of war; of approving or prohibiting the use of methods such as targeted killing or controversial weapon systems; and of developing relations with governmental and non-governmental international organizations. Since the late 1990s military lawyers have become involved in operational aspects, something that might subordinate operational considerations to legal ones to the point of curtailing operational sophistication and freedom of action. And indeed, Israel has often restrained its behavior despite the fact that hitting civilian targets could have a greater punitive and deterrent effect.¹⁷ As a result of the Goldstone report, in March 2010 the IDF announced a new officer job at the regiment level – humanitarian assistance officer – whose mission is to identify humanitarian problems that might occur as a result of fighting among civilians and to solve them in the course of the fighting.

Efforts to adhere to the highest moral standards and abide by the law, however, have occasionally failed, usually because Israel's LICs are waged under complex conditions, for example, the difficulty in distinguishing between combatants and noncombatants; stress among soldiers; intelligence failures; poor planning or performance; lack of professionalism and discipline; or murderous terror activity, such as the Palestinian suicide bombing campaign during the second intifada.

Israeli post-heroic warfare: A challenge to the Clausewitzian perception?

Western democracies engaged in asymmetrical wars have tried to bridge operational effectiveness and morality by opting for a “post-heroic” policy. By sparing not merely the lives of their own troops and civilians but also the lives of enemy civilians, they have not only complied with the principles of discrimi-

nate use of force and proportionality and respected the right to life, but they have also gained greater domestic and external legitimacy as well as sustainability in such wars.

Clausewitz criticized 18th century war for resembling a game with preset rules rather than real war. Conversely, had he lived to see post-heroic war, he most probably would have been puzzled, as for him war was nothing but a unique social phenomenon entailing killing on both sides. Moreover, for him sacrifice and destruction were justified as means for achieving operational effectiveness, and there was no point in preserving one's forces by avoiding bloodshed.¹⁸

Thinking and operating along post-heroic lines was introduced in the background of war in the late 1970s, first by Israelis and then by Americans, long before post-heroic warfare's first rule was formulated by Edward Luttwak. The explanation Luttwak offered was demographic, but in the Israeli case post-heroic warfare seems to have stemmed also from a combination of technological developments, liberal-democratic values, and the non-existential nature of the LICs Israel has been engaged in. A few examples will illustrate the extent to which the two post-heroic rules have influenced Israeli behavior.

Israel managed to sustain its presence in Lebanon for more than 20 years (1978-2000), basing it on strong public support. A major reason for that support was the fact that the death toll was relatively tolerable – some 25 soldiers each year. The death toll for Israeli civilians was also tolerable.¹⁹ In 1997, however, post-heroic warfare's first rule – avoid casualties among your own troops – was broken, when a helicopter crash over the Galilee claimed the lives of seventy-three Israeli soldiers on their way to Lebanon. This was followed a few months later by the casualties inflicted on Israeli troops in Wadi Saluki in August 1997 (five fatalities) and the September 1997 elite commando unit operation in southern Lebanon (which cost twelve soldiers their lives). As a result of these incidents, the voices calling for a withdrawal from southern Lebanon, spearheaded by the anti-war Four Mothers movement, commanded much attention, and the door for the 2000 withdrawal was opened. In 1999, Chief of Staff Shaul Mofaz admitted that the IDF was relying on air activity against Hezbollah, rather than activities on the ground, so as to reduce Israeli casualties.²⁰

During the Second Lebanon War, Cabinet members warned against a ground operation due to its likely death toll,²¹ IAF fighter bombers flew at high

altitude in order to avoid pilot casualties;²² every casualty was reported to the chief of staff; and in one case an entire battle was stopped because of one casualty.²³ Chief of Staff Dan Halutz admitted that a “no-casualties” approach penetrated the Israeli military mentality as a result of the IDF’s preoccupation with terror challenges.²⁴ According to IDF Chief of Human Resources General Elazar Stern, part of the explanation for the IDF’s failure in the war was oversensitivity to casualties.²⁵ During Operation Cast Lead IDF troops advanced under the protection of a rolling barrage.

As for the second post-heroic rule, during the intifadas the IDF developed and used non-lethal and less lethal weapons, in order to minimize casualties among Palestinian civilians. Despite the suicide bombings during the second intifada, the IDF made an effort to uphold post-heroic warfare’s second rule. Targeted killing, which became a major if controversial counter-terror method that was widely criticized, was to a great extent compatible with the notion of discriminate use of force, with the number of innocent civilians killed during these actions dropping consistently over the years.²⁶

There are also two examples of post-heroic warfare’s second rule from the village of Qana in southern Lebanon. In 1996, during the Israel-Hezbollah first war of attrition, Israel launched Operation Grapes of Wrath. Israeli artillery fire inadvertently killed 100 civilians in Qana, which forced Israel to stop the operation. During the Second Lebanon War, after 28 Lebanese civilians were killed in the wake of an IAF strike on a building in the same village, Israel declared a 48-hour suspension of air strikes over southern Lebanon in order to allow an investigation and time for civilians to evacuate the area.

The Study of War

Even a sworn military thinker like Clausewitz – for whom “the powers of intellect” played a significant role²⁷, especially in coping with challenges posed by uncertainty – believed that “in the art of war, experience counts more than any amount of abstract truths.”²⁸ This skepticism notwithstanding, he believed that theory can and ought to provide commanders with the tools for becoming better commanders. But unlike his predecessor Frederick the Great or his contemporaries Antoine Henri Jomini and Dietrich von Bülow, he thought there was no point in offering predetermined principles or recipes for success on the battlefield, as every confrontation is unique. Instead, he perceived of theory as

a set of tools which every commander must use to tailor solutions suited to his own circumstances.

Clausewitz may have been satisfied with the skills IDF commanders demonstrated in coping with friction on the battlefield, but he surely would have been less satisfied with the tendency both to rely on improvisation and to underestimate the value of knowledge. And indeed, noteworthy improvisation by the IDF became a self-defense mechanism, which compensated for lack of professionalism.²⁹ Resourcefulness on the battlefield developed into a cult of escaping troubles upon their occurrence, instead of thinking systematically ahead.

Against this backdrop, it is easy to understand what underlay the attitude against the study of military history and theory articulated by Major General Gershon HaCohen, Commander of the IDF Military Colleges. “Isn’t it possible that [Chief-of-Staff Moshe] Dayan was able to produce such a fascinating [operational] plan [for the 1956 Sinai War] precisely because he did *not* have to spend four years in studying Clausewitz and Jomini?” asked General HaCohen rhetorically.³⁰ At the same time, he admitted that General Norman Schwarzkopf, whose brilliant operational plan in the 1991 Gulf War he could not but praise, “had learned a lot” prior to that war.³¹ Schwarzkopf himself was quite proud of that plan, and was eager to explain how a combination of the principles of war and Hannibal’s indirect approach vis-à-vis the Romans during the Punic Wars served as his main source of inspiration.³²

The tension between reliance on improvisation and theoretical and doctrinal tools has also been reflected in the IDF’s command and control system. The IDF has been credited with a mission-oriented command system, but a good decentralized command can succeed only if it is based on a thorough education and training process whereby all commanders acquire the same set of professional tools, which they will later employ on their specific battlefield. This explains why the IDF’s mission command gradually deteriorated over the years, until it became no more than lip service.

The Conduct of War

The following section examines both the anachronistic and the still relevant aspects of Clausewitz’s thoughts on the conduct of war, as represented by the Israeli case. Generally speaking, Clausewitz’s narrow approach to war also ap-

plies to his treatment of the conduct of war, which is reflected in some of the characteristics below.

Deeper political intervention in the conduct of war

The sensitivities and vulnerabilities of Western democracies involved in LICs, coupled with the existence of unprecedented effective sources of information and means of command and control at the political leadership's disposal, have stimulated the political echelon's direct involvement with operational and tactical matters, something that Clausewitz would have justified³³. This involvement has gained the name "tacticization of grand strategy". This combination of sensitivities and command and efficient control and control means also explains why the Israeli political and military echelons have recently been heavily involved in the details of the military efforts to stop flotillas heading to Gaza in an attempt to break the blockade Israel imposed on the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip, which from a purely military point of view is no more than a tactical challenge.

The tactical echelon in turn has become more sensitive to the political repercussions of its activity, incorporating political considerations in its tactics-related decisions. Commanders engaged in LICs have often become "soldier-statesmen" rather than combat leaders, a process that could be dubbed as "grand strategization of tactics."³⁴ This reality was reflected by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's meeting with a group of IDF colonels engaged in LIC in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the second intifada. "As a young officer, whenever I met with politicians, I spoke tactics, and they spoke strategy. With you, I speak tactics, while you speak strategy", Sharon said.³⁵ These processes are compatible with Clausewitz's recommendation that statesmen have a military understanding,³⁶ but also that the military understands the wider picture. They have only gained more relevance under LIC conditions.

The forgotten dimensions of strategy

Michael Howard's famous piece on the "forgotten dimensions of strategy"³⁷ criticized Clausewitz's focus on the operational dimension of strategy, arguing that it reflected a narrow and not sufficiently modern and material perception of the conduct of war. In Clausewitz's defense, however, it should be noted that the societal dimension is present throughout his work and that from his

treatment of centers of gravity one learns that he did acknowledge the impact of actions beyond the actual battlefield, at the grand-strategic level of war.³⁸ Had Clausewitz lived today, he would most probably have been puzzled by the extent to which Western militaries have become committed to the “forgotten” technological dimension to the point of developing a cult of technology, something that is particularly reflected in RMA thinking.

The IDF has been no exception. Only a decade ago it still held a balanced approach with regard to technology, aware of the danger entailed in over-reliance on technology at the expense of the non-material human factor. In recent years, however, strongly inspired by technological developments and RMA, technology has started overshadowing the non-material aspects of Israeli strategy and tactics, becoming the main factor in military thought, buildup, and operations. To a state that has suffered from a strong sense of quantitative inferiority vis-à-vis the Arab militaries; a technology-based military has been very appealing as a force multiplier. Israeli LIC thinking too has often demonstrated the naive belief that the IDF’s technological edge would enable it to cope effectively with irregular challenges at a relatively low cost, in terms of both casualties – which also suits post-heroic warfare principles – and the economic burden.

At what levels of war is war waged?

For Clausewitz there were two levels of war – strategy and tactics. One of the consequences of the broadening of war and strategy since his death has been the addition of two levels – the operational level and the grand-strategy level. Another development pertains to the relative weight of the levels: in wars of attrition and LICs the levels at the two extremes of the levels of war pyramid – tactics on the one hand and grand-strategy on the other – have become the most important. In LICs in particular, the strategic and operational levels of war are usually intentionally bypassed by the militarily weaker side in order to balance the militarily stronger side and divert the confrontation to those levels in which the weaker side has better chances of compensating for its weakness. The military encounters, therefore, usually take place at the tactical level, where they are limited in terms of forces, time, and place, whereas the objectives of those engaged in the conflict and sometimes also the targets they aim to hit tend to be outside the direct battlefield, at the grand-strategy level, with the enemy’s society and economy constituting the center of gravity.

This phenomenon likewise applies to the Israeli case. In recent decades, the adversaries in the Arab-Israeli conflict – both states, like Syria, but particularly non-state players, like the PLO, Hamas, and Hezbollah – have adopted such an approach. At times when Israel felt that the enemy had pushed its patience too far, it was dragged into operating at the operational level, and sometimes even at the strategic level, e.g., Operations Accountability (1992), Grapes of Wrath (1996), and the Second Lebanon War (2006) against Hezbollah; and Defensive Shield (2002) and Cast Lead (2009) against the Palestinians. In most cases the confrontation ended with Israel imposing heavy damage on the other side.

The role played by airpower and sea power

Regrettably, one of the greatest weaknesses of Clausewitz's work is its continental orientation, which diminishes its external validity. It is true that airpower became a significant component of war only after Clausewitz's time, but sea power did play a central role in war before and during his time, and it is nonetheless missing from his work.

When it comes to Israel, airpower (and to much lesser extent sea power) has always been considered a necessary condition for battlefield decision, which Israel has traditionally achieved via its ground forces. In recent decades, as the IDF has become fascinated with RMA ideas, Israel has been swayed by the belief that technology now offers new opportunities for destroying the enemy with standoff precision fire while saving the lives of troops and minimizing enemy civilian casualties, and that airpower has become decisive on the battlefield. In 2002, still as IAF chief, General Dan Halutz referred to the IAF's capabilities: "Airpower alone can decide, let alone be the senior partner in such decision."³⁹

In the Second Lebanon War the IDF's planners were so confident that airpower alone – or almost alone – could do the job⁴⁰, that they did not provide the government with any real alternative until the last stage of the war. Had the IDF been acquainted with the history of airpower, it would have known that no battlefield decision at the strategic level has ever been achieved from the air (Kosovo, which was so frequently referred to as a model of decision from the air, was a grand-strategy decision, achieved by denying Serbian *society* the ability to carry on the war – not the Serbian army, which remained almost unharmed). The fact that battlefield decision still needs boots on the

ground keeps airpower and sea power in supporting roles that enable battlefield decision, without being able to achieve it on their own. This also keeps Clausewitz's focus on ground forces relevant.

Playing an important role in deterrence, airpower and sea power help prevent war no less than wage war. Since Clausewitz preoccupied himself with how to wage war, not how to prevent it, one would find this aspect of modern war missing from his work. In the Israeli case, strategic deterrence is heavily based on airpower and submarines, and its theoretical sources are not to be found in Clausewitz's work.

What happened to the commitment to achieve battlefield decision?

Although Clausewitz was neither interested in deterrence nor in early warning, elements that have constituted two legs of the Israeli security concept triangle, he was nevertheless highly interested in the third leg – battlefield decision. In recent years the IDF's commitment to battlefield decision in its Clausewitzian meaning, i.e., denying the enemy the ability to continue to fight has eroded significantly.

In an interview with a brigadier-general from the IDF's Planning Branch less than three years before the Second Lebanon War, the senior commander made a comment one would normally not expect to hear from a professional officer: "When I started my job, I found in the plans the phrase, 'defeating the Palestinians. I asked myself, what is that nonsense? Whom exactly are we supposed to defeat? What does defeat mean? We tried to think of alternatives to defeating the enemy. Initially I talked about a 'victory image', which is merely an appearance. It then became a matter of producing a victory show."⁴¹ On another occasion Chief-of-Staff Moshe Yaalon expressed skepticism about the ability to land a decisive blow to a guerrilla organization like Hezbollah.⁴² His successor, Dan Halutz, did not believe that a knockout was an option in the Second Lebanon War or that "defeating a terror organization" was achievable. He therefore thought battlefield decision was irrelevant.⁴³ During the 2000s, "burning an idea in the enemy's consciousness" became more important for IDF commanders than affecting its capabilities. Reflective of this approach was Chief of Staff Moshe Yaalon's statement during the second intifada that "[Israel must] burn into the Palestinian consciousness" that violence does not bring them political gains.⁴⁴

In such a state of mind, it is no wonder that when the Second Lebanon War broke out then-Chief of Operations General Gadi Eisenkot said that defeating Hezbollah was unattainable.⁴⁵ “The military does not even pretend to achieve battlefield decision,” was Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni’s impression from the military’s ideas aired during a Cabinet meeting held on July 31.⁴⁶ This attitude toward battlefield decision was also reflected in an edited volume published in 2004 by the IDF’s publishing house titled *Low Intensity Conflict*, which projected skepticism about the chances of achieving battlefield decision in LICs.⁴⁷

The impact of the firepower/maneuver ratio

One of the most powerful factors that have affected the conduct of war in our time has been the firepower-maneuver balance. Technology has made it possible to attack the enemy and transfer the war to its territory via fire, to bypass ground operations, to concentrate fire instead of forces, and to launch first strike and surprise the enemy within minutes. Some of these capabilities, which Israel has had at its disposal, have challenged some of Clausewitz’s concept of the conduct of war.

Offense/defense. Unlike Clausewitz, Israel has traditionally preferred offense to defense, considering it the stronger form of war and a preferred strategy, given its narrow territorial margins and inability to absorb enemy attack on its soil.⁴⁸ During the course of its LICs, however, it gradually learned that in LIC contexts offense and defense were preferably applied in tandem, complementing each other.⁴⁹ The increased threats to the civilian rear and society’s expectations to be effectively defended have left no choice but to invest in passive and active defense. None of these considerations, however, treated defense as the stronger form of war.

Remnants of indirect approach. For Clausewitz nothing could replace direct approach as a means for bringing about the enemy’s collapse. The IDF, on the other hand, has preferred the indirect approach, in which it saw a very effective force multiplier. After the early 1970s, however, only little was left of the traditional Israeli indirect approach,⁵⁰ one important reason being the ascendancy of firepower over maneuver. Some Israeli military thinkers, however, believed in a fire-based substitute for Liddell Hart’s indirect approach.⁵¹

The decline of the IDF indirect approach was exemplified during the 2006 Second Lebanon War. Had the IDF truly been committed to its sophisti-

cated indirect approach tradition, its ground operations would have opened by quickly outflanking and encircling the enemy and using the element of surprise to capture the northern parts of southern Lebanon first. An indirect approach *à la* Sun Tzu or Liddell Hart would have caused confusion among the enemy ranks and might have brought about its psychological collapse much better than the Clausewitzian direct approach, which enabled Hezbollah to recover and stand strong. Instead of creating a top-down effect, IDF ground troops were engaged in a Sisyphean effort to translate achievements in numerous battles into operational and strategic gains.

Concentration of fire instead of concentration of forces. The ability to concentrate or disperse rapidly long range and precise fire has made dilemmas of concentration versus dispersion of forces, typical of maneuver-oriented operations, much easier to solve. It has already caused the distinction between interior and exterior lines – which Clausewitz, like other military thinkers, discussed in his theory – to lose much of its relevance.

Another consequence of the ascendancy of firepower has been the narrowing of the gap between strong and weak. By concentrating rocket or missile fire on the stronger side's rear, as did the Palestinians and Hezbollah from the early 1980s to the 2000s, the weaker side has made technology a force multiplier. At the same time, as was proved during the Second Lebanon War, in counter-insurgency operations concentration of fire has a much smaller effect than ground maneuvers.

Lower likelihood of first strike. Clausewitz considered first strike, let alone strategic surprise, hardly feasible or effective.⁵² This is understandable given the technological capabilities during his life time. With the dramatic technological developments that have taken place since his death, however, first strike became a central feature of strategy in general and in Israeli strategy in particular. The possibility of launching a destructive first strike without exposing the preparations for it serves not only the initiator but also the defender, who is better equipped with immediate, near real time intercepting or retaliating options via firepower. This lowers the risk of being taken by surprise, and serves those like Israel that due to political reasons suffer from constraints on launching a first strike.

The role played by logistics. Clausewitz did not preoccupy himself much with logistics either as a national effort in the rear, which is supposed to support military operations, or as an effort on the direct battlefield, which is sup-

posed to support maneuver. He simply did not believe it was a decisive factor. The ascendancy of maneuver, which reached its peak during the interwar period and in the Arab-Israeli wars in the 1950s and the 1960s, as well as the role played by *blitzkrieg*, has made logistics a critical factor.

This has been reversed, though, with firepower becoming dominant and maneuvers becoming less feasible and necessary. In the Israeli case, this explains why after years of faith in *blitzkrieg* and a logistics system that used to push supplies to the advancing combat units, in the years preceding the Second Lebanon War the IDF assumed that such a logistics system was obsolete. It has therefore been replaced by a more centralized system, which was based on modularly structured area-logistics units.⁵³ During the war, however, it became clear that the new system may have improved control over logistical resources and saved manpower and stocks⁵⁴, but at the same time, it crippled the combat units' logistical autonomy and countered operational art's logic and spirit. It is doubtful it would have met operational requirements had the war involved large scale ground maneuvers.

The emergence of the notion of diffused warfare

Some RMA-inspired Israeli thinkers believe that a fundamental shift has taken place in the conduct of war, from waging campaigns consisting of horizontal clashes between rival forces, which entail breaking through the opponent's layers of defense and proceeding along defined lines with distinct start and finish lines, to diffused confrontations that take place simultaneously on the entire battle space, distributing the force's mass among a multitude of separate pressure points, rather than concentrating it on assumed centers of gravity.⁵⁵ The notion of diffused warfare, which took hold of the IDF prior to the Second Lebanon War, contradicts the notion of concentration shared by theorists and practitioners for many generations. Moreover, it seems to have taken strategy back to the Clausewitzian idea of accumulating numerous tactical successes and translating them into operational or strategic achievements.

Other enthusiastically adopted RMA-inspired elusive notions, such as effect-based operations (EBO),⁵⁶ have also distanced Israeli commanders from the old but simple concept of center of gravity, which as part of the general idea of concentration has united military thinkers and practitioners for

centuries, except for the dilemma of where and against what it would be best to concentrate forces.⁵⁷

“Military genius”

IDF commanders have often demonstrated high adaptability to changing conditions on the battlefield.⁵⁸ Clausewitz would surely have found in them at least a grain of “military genius,” which is based on intuition and “needs no theory.”⁵⁹ At the same time he would have recommended that they not underestimate knowledge, which, according to him, also has practical dividends (as discussed above in reference to the study of war).

From Clausewitz’s discussion of the commander’s performance in battle, it is obvious that he assumed their physical presence on the battlefield. In the 21st century, Israeli commanders’ traditional skills of running battles by leading troops on the battlefield have been negatively affected by RMA. It strengthened their temptation to run battles from headquarters located in the rear and over plasma screens, as occurred during the Second Lebanon War.⁶⁰ This “may have changed the focus of our command,” Chief of Staff Halutz admitted.⁶¹ Yet as former Deputy Chief of Staff Matan Vilnai said, one can run MacDonald’s using plasma screens, not a battle.⁶² This practice was rectified in the wake of that war.

Can the stronger side win?

Like his successors Moltke and Engels but unlike most post-World War II theorists and practitioners, Clausewitz was quite optimistic regarding the chances of a well equipped, trained, and highly motivated regular army to defeat insurgents. The misfortunes great powers have experienced during the post-World War II asymmetrical conflicts, however, created the impression that non-state players are almost undefeatable.

The Israeli case seems to put the question in the right proportion. First, it may be true that liberal-democratic societies tend to suffer from chronic perseverance when conducting LICs, but this seems to apply only to those cases where their vital interests are not at stake. Israel’s conflict with the Palestinians, however, does entail Israeli vital interests, as a result of which Israeli cost tolerance has been high. Moreover, the cost of Israel’s LICs in terms of losses and quality of life has been mitigated by the moderate economic cost inflicted on

Israel, as well as by the fact that the death toll was usually relatively limited. The more remote the LIC activity from the country's population centers and the greater the share of the lower classes in combat units, the less severely the threat was perceived by the Israeli society.⁶³ Second, given its LIC aversion, most of Israel's asymmetrical conflicts were imposed on it, therefore almost never igniting a significant public debate regarding their legitimacy. Third, in handling LICs, Israel, like other liberal democracies, can afford to conduct the conflict post-heroically. This does not merely imply constraints on going to war and on conducting it, but at the same time constitutes a way to overcome the society's aversion to war. Fourth, it is true that unlike in the past, weaker sides in our time also play in the technological ballpark, taking advantage of technology-based multipliers. It seems, though, that Israel, like other stronger adversaries, will always retain its technological edge.

The Israel-Palestinian balance sheet shows that in its military operations against the Palestinians Israel usually had the upper hand, and that the two intifadas ended because the Palestinian cost tolerance proved to be lower than that of Israel. Like Egypt and Jordan, the PLO eventually recognized the existence of Israel and decided to negotiate with it on the basis of a two-state solution. When one adds to this the relative quiet in the West Bank after the 2002 Defensive Shield operation, the quiet on the Lebanese border in the post-2006 Second Lebanon War period, and the relative stability on the Gaza Strip front following the 2009 Operation Cast Lead, the unavoidable conclusion is that asymmetrical conflicts do not necessarily end to the detriment of the strong.

Conclusion

Judging from the Israeli case, it seems that whereas many of Clausewitz's basic theoretical ideas are still relevant, considerable aspects of his work need updating and adaptation, something that Clausewitz would most probably have acknowledged and done himself had he lived longer or later.

As far as the *nature of war* is concerned, the tension between the rational and the expressive elements in war; the central role played by society in war; and the challenge of "popular war," which today is referred to as LIC, asymmetrical war, or insurgency have all retained their relevance. Clausewitz's approach to the *study of war* likewise carries a valuable, lasting message. He knew exactly what one could expect of a theory – not any recipes, rather a tool kit

that helps the commander tailor solutions suitable to his particular conditions. Clausewitz's discussion of the *conduct of war* also offers at least three lasting principles: the right and the duty of the political echelon to intervene in military operations, if necessary, and the expectation of the military echelon to understand that there is a greater picture, wherein the military dimension is only one, though a very important, consideration; the importance of achieving battlefield decision; and the dialectic nature of the relationship between offense and defense.

But one cannot ignore those aspects that Clausewitz did not acknowledge or address. Absent from his treatment of the *nature of war* are some of the major features of modern war that have emerged after his death, particularly the broadening of war beyond the direct battlefield; the importance of intelligence; the role played by morality in war; and post-heroic warfare – the latter two applying to and characterizing mainly liberal democracies.

Clausewitz's treatment of the *conduct of war* also fails to represent developments, changes, and capabilities, most (though not all) of which have taken place after his death: the emergence of the operational and the grand-strategy levels; the centrality of the levels at the two extremes of the levels of war pyramid; "the forgotten dimensions of strategy" (technology and logistics); the role played by airpower and sea power; the firepower/maneuver ratio and its impact on the offense/defense balance, interior and exterior lines, the indirect approach, and *blitzkrieg*; and concentration of fire.

Notes:

¹ For the expressive/escalatory element see Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton: Princeton UP 1976), pp. 76-77; C.R. Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 26; Raymond Aron, *Peace and War* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 168, 967; Fred C. Ikle, *Every War Must End* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 34; Colmar von der Goltz, *The Conduct of War* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1908), p. 5; Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), Ch. 1; Robert Osgood, *Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1957), pp. 28-45.

² Avi Kober, *Israel's Wars of Attrition* (New York: Routledge 2009), pp. 143-69.

³ Chief of Staff Dan Halutz's testimony before the Winograd Commission. <http://www.vaadatwino.org.il/pdf/תמליל%20דן%20הלוצר.pdf>, p. 50; Minister of Transportation Shaul Mofaz's testimony before the Winograd Commission, <http://www.vaadatwino.org.il/pdf/תמליל%20שאול%20מופז.pdf>, p. 43.

⁴ See the chapter "The People in Arms" in Clausewitz, *On War*, pp. 479-83

⁵ Eliot A. Cohen, Michael J. Eisenstadt, and Andrew J. Bacewicz, *Knives, Tanks, and Missiles: Israel's Security Revolution* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), p. 71; Avi Kober, "Israeli Military Thinking as Reflected in *Maarachot* Articles, 1948-2000," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Fall 2003), pp. 153-4.

⁶ Kober, "What Happened to Israeli Military Thought?"

⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 93.

⁸ Kober, *Israel's Wars of Attrition*, pp. 35-49.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 596.

¹¹ Avi Kober, "Targeted Killing during the Second Intifada: The Quest for Effectiveness," *Journal of Conflict Studies*, Vol. 27 (2007), <http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/JCS/bin/get.cgi?directory=Summer07&/file-name=jcs27art06.html>

¹² Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 117.

¹³ *Defense Update*, 26 April 2005.

http://www.defense-update.com/2005_04_01_defense-update_archive.html

¹⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 75.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁶ Michael L. Gross, "Fighting by Other Means in the Mideast: A Critical Analysis of Israel's Assassination Policy," *Political Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (December 2003), pp. 350-68; M. Gross, "Assassination: Killing in the Shadow of Self-Defense," in J. Irwin (ed.), *War and Virtual War: The Challenge to Communities* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 99-116.

¹⁷ Amos Harel, "Avodot Patzar: Interview with the Military Chief Advocate," *Haaretz*, 18 September 2009.

¹⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 98.

¹⁹ Ofer Shelah and Yoav Limor, *Captives in Lebanon* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2007) [Hebrew], p. 132.

²⁰ Interview on Israeli Radio, Channel 2, 6 October 1999.

²¹ Ariella Ringel-Hoffman, "This Is Not How a War Should Be Conducted," *Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, 23 March 2007; Scott Wilson, "Israeli War Plan Had No Exit Strategy," http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/20/AR2006102001688_pf.html

²² Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, p. 244.

²³ Israeli Radio, Channel 7, 2 November 2006,
<http://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/155971>

²⁴ Amir Bouchbout, "Halutz's Swords Speech",
<http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/506/032.html>

²⁵ Israeli Radio, Channel 7, 2 November 2006.
<http://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/155971>; Yossi Yehoshua, "Declining Values," *Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, 13 July 2007.

²⁶ Kober, *Israel's Wars of Attrition*.

²⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 101.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 164. See also p. 186.

²⁹ Emanuel Wald, *Kilelet Hakelim Hasbvurim* [The Curse of the Broken Vessels] (Tel-Aviv: Shoken, 1987) [Hebrew], p. 183.

³⁰ Gershon HaCohen, "Educating Senior Officers" in *Is the IDF Prepared for Tomorrow's Challenges?* BESA Colloquia on Strategy and Diplomacy, 24 July 2008, p. 28.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Hannibal and Desert Storm," *BBC Time Watch production*, 2002.

³³ See Stuart A. Cohen, "Why Do They Quarrel? Civil-Military Tensions in LIC Situations," *The Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Spring 2003), pp. 21-40.

³⁴ Bernard Boëne, "Trends in the Political Control of Post-Cold War Armed Forces," in Stuart Cohen (ed.), *Democratic Societies and Their Armed Forces: Israel in Comparative Context* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), pp. 73-88; Eliot A. Cohen, "Technology and Supreme Command," Ibid., pp. 89-103.

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- ³⁵ *Yediot Abaronot*, 1 February 2002.
- ³⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 608,
- ³⁷ Howard, Michael. “The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 5 (Summer 1979), pp. 975-86.
- ³⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 596.
- ³⁹ Amnon Lord, “The Air Went Out,” *Makor Rishon*, 2 November 2006. <http://www.makorrishon.co.il/show.asp?id=14091>.
- ⁴⁰ Halutz’s testimony before the Winograd Commission, p. 16.
- ⁴¹ Interview with Brigadier General Eyval Gil’adi, *Yediot Abaronot Weekend Supplement*, 19 September 2003.
- ⁴² Shelah and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, p. 129.
- ⁴³ Halutz’s Testimony before the Winograd Commission, p. 25.
- ⁴⁴ *Haaretz Weekend Supplement*, 30 August 2002.
- ⁴⁵ Halutz’s Testimony before the Winograd Commission, p. 54.
- ⁴⁶ Ringel-Hoffman, “This is not How a War Should be Conducted.”
- ⁴⁷ Haggai Golan and Shaul Shai (eds.), *Low-Intensity Conflict* (Tel Aviv: Maarachot, 2004) [Hebrew].
- ⁴⁸ For the most compelling works on compellence, see T.C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 1-18; A. George and W. Simons (eds), *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (Boulder: Westview, 1994). On deterrence-by-punishment as opposed to deterrence-by-denial, see G. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Ami Gluska, *Eshkol, Give the Order!* (Tel Aviv: MOD, 2004) [Hebrew], p. 101.
- ⁴⁹ Kober, *Israel’s Wars of Attrition*, pp. 50-71.
- ⁵⁰ Kober, “The Rise and Fall of Israeli Operational Art,” pp. 185-6.
- ⁵¹ Shmuel Gordon, *The Bow of Paris* (Tel Aviv: Poalim, 1997) [Hebrew], particularly pp. 320–2.
- ⁵² Clausewitz, *On War*, pp. 198-9.
- ⁵³ Kober, “The IDF in the Second Lebanon War,” p. 29.
- ⁵⁴ Amnon Barzilai, “[Chief of the IDF’s Technology and Logistics Branch General Udi] Adam’s Technological Revolution,” *Haaretz*, 2 April 2004.

⁵⁵ Haim Assa and Yedidya Yaari, *Diffused Warfare* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2005) [Hebrew].

⁵⁶ Allen W. Batschelet, *Effects-Based Operations: A New Operational Model?* (Carlisle: US Army War College, 2002).

⁵⁷ Edward A. Smith, *Effects Based Operations: Applying Network-Centric Warfare in Peace, Crisis, and War* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense Command and Control Research Program, 2002).

⁵⁸ Moshe Dayan, *Story of My Life* (Jerusalem: Edanim 1976) [Hebrew], p. 244; Tuvia Ben-Moshe, "Liddell Hart and the Israel Defense Forces: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (April 1981), pp. 369-91.

⁵⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 145.

⁶⁰ Sheath and Limor, *Captives in Lebanon*, p. 385.

⁶¹ [http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/pages/ShArtSR.jhtml?](http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/pages/ShArtSR.jhtml?itemNo=755196&objNo=59745&returnParam=Y)

[itemNo=755196&objNo=59745&returnParam=Y.](http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/pages/ShArtSR.jhtml?itemNo=755196&objNo=59745&returnParam=Y)

⁶² Amira Lam, "We Betrayed our Constituency", *Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, 1 September 2006.

⁶³ Kober, *Israel's Wars of Attrition*, pp. 74-5.