

The Next Korean War: Drawing Lessons From Israel's Experience in the Middle East*

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What would an armed conflict between the two Koreas look like? The following analysis examines this question by drawing lessons from the history of military clashes between Israel and its Arab and Palestinian adversaries. Firstly, it suggests that an armed conflict on the Korean Peninsula would be limited in its scope. Although qualitatively inferior, the North Korean military could conduct a limited ground maneuver south to the DMZ by employing Egypt's strategy in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. A South Korean counterattack would also be limited. Advancing too deep beyond the DMZ would provoke Pyongyang to go on a nuclear alert and encourage Chinese and American pressure on Seoul to pull back. A South Korean refusal to comply could invite foreign intervention, similar to the American intervention in the 1973 War.

Secondly, this paper explores the challenge of guerrilla warfare (both above and below ground) that ROK forces are likely to encounter if they cross the DMZ. Israel's experiences in the 2006 Lebanon War and in Operations Cast Lead (2008) and Protective Edge (2014) illustrate that in facing such a challenge, even an indisputably superior force may have to pay a heavy price in casualties. Given that North Korean nuclear deterrence would prevent ROK forces from implementing reunification war plans, South Korea should consider stopping its counterattack at the DMZ, rather than pursuing the enemy into a terra incognita of topographical and subterranean traps.

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Introduction

Since the collapse of the Agreed Framework in late 2002, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has put much effort into advancing its nuclear and ballistic

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missile programs. In the past decade, North Korea conducted a series of nuclear experiments and missile tests and erected an indigenous 30 MW light water nuclear reactor and a uranium enrichment facility at Yongbyon.¹ Furthermore, there are indications that as early as 2013 North Korea restarted its 5 MW graphite-moderated, plutonium-producing reactor.² According to Chinese experts, Pyongyang already possesses an arsenal of 20 nuclear weapons.³ U.S.-Korea Institute analysts at Johns Hopkins University warn that by the end of the decade North Korea may acquire more than 50 atom bombs, each with a yield of up to 50 kilotons.⁴

In recent years, Pyongyang has also continued belligerent behavior toward Seoul as manifested by the sinking of the South Korean corvette *Cheonan* by a North Korean torpedo in March 2010, as well as by the North Korean artillery barrage on Yeonpyeong Island in November of the same year. In the absence of negotiations to ease tensions on the Peninsula, a diplomatically and economically isolated Pyongyang—with an impressive nuclear weapons capability—could choose to further raise the tension along the 38th Parallel. Pyongyang might even opt to follow in the footsteps of Pakistan, a country whose successful nuclear experiment in 1998 emboldened it to challenge the 1972 Line of Control in Jammu-Kashmir by sending troops behind Indian lines in the spring of 1999.

If tensions between the two Koreas ever escalated to the point of armed conflict, what would it look like? And, what should the Republic of Korea (ROK) do in order to be prepared for such a contingency? The following sections of this paper examine these questions by drawing lessons from the history of military clashes between Israel and its Arab and Palestinian adversaries.

The next two sections explain the scope of a hypothetical next Korean War by reflecting on the conventional and nuclear dimensions of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Egypt's objectives and strategy are reviewed in order to caution that the North Korean military, although conventionally inferior to ROK forces, could still carry out a successful, if limited, ground maneuver south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Arab and American reaction to Israel's nuclear saber rattling four days into the war could help us understand why an ROK ground maneuver would also be limited in its scope. Therefore, war plans devised by either side to unite the Peninsula are unrealistic. In the ROK's case, instead of spending time and resources on such plans, its military leaders would be better advised to focus on preparing for a limited armed conflict with the North.

The fourth section explores important challenges that the ROK military is likely to encounter in a limited conflict with the North. It does so based on Israel's experience of fighting limited wars against Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. In this regard, empirical evidence and post-combat analyses emphasize the inability of aerial campaigns and anti-missile defense systems to deal alone adequately with challenges such as missile, rocket, artillery, and mortar attacks as well as subterranean guerrilla warfare.

Ultimately, Israel had to send its ground forces into hostile territory to battle the threat of rockets and cross-border offensive tunnels. In 2006, when Israel entered southern Lebanon, its ground forces were undertrained and led by commanders who lacked experience in leading combined-force operations involving tanks, infantry, and combat engineers. Furthermore, on many occasions, command and control problems in the interface between the army and the air force deprived Israeli ground forces of close aerial support.

These operational failures were a direct result of Israel's military doctrine in the years preceding the 2006 War in Lebanon. Impressed by massive U.S. air campaigns, such as Operation Desert Storm (1991), top military strategists in Tel Aviv believed in the singular ability of a strong air force to lead Israel to victory in war. Consequently, budget allocations to the Israeli army decreased substantially. What Israel should have inferred from the 1991 and 2003 American invasions of Iraq is that battles are won on the ground by occupying the enemy's territory. Thus, investing in the build-up of aerial capabilities at the expense of ground force readiness for battle is a flawed strategy. South Korean decision-makers should keep this principle in mind.

The concluding section of this paper deals with the endgame of a limited war between the two Koreas. Based on Israel's experience in Lebanon, it raises the question of whether or not South Korean troops should cross the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) and perhaps even establish a permanent presence north of the DMZ. The section then moves to examine the implications of South Korea's limited military maneuverability north of the DMZ on its political goals and diplomacy vis-à-vis North Korea.

Lessons from the 1973 Yom Kippur War: The Conventional Dimension

North Korea's rapid economic decline from the early 1980s onwards⁵ caused it to lose whatever edge it may have had over the South in terms of conventional military capabilities. In the late 1990s, South Korea's defense budget was five-times larger than North Korea's.⁶ By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, South Korea's defense budget was three-times the size of North Korea's (\$25 billion and \$8.2 billion respectively).⁷ North Korea's economic malaise adversely affected its ability not only to purchase new equipment and technologies, but also to maintain old weapon systems. Significantly, most of North Korea's major weapon systems were designed in the 1960s or in earlier decades. Thus, in spite of the fact that North Korea has a numerical advantage over the South in terms of active duty personnel (1.2 million versus 683,000) and main battle tanks (4,100 versus 2,400), South Korea's ground forces enjoy an indisputable qualitative advantage over their North Korean counterparts. Moreover, in the air and on the sea, South Korean forces operate highly advanced weapon systems with capabilities that far exceed those of North Korea's aerial squadrons and naval fleets. Thus, according to an analysis conducted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the threat of a North Korean invasion of the South has diminished.⁸

Nevertheless, bearing in mind the IISS analysis, South Korea should not be tempted to fall into the trap of hubris and political complacency that Israel fell into in 1973. On the eve of the Yom Kippur War, similar balance of power calculations figured in Israeli decision-makers and military strategists' erroneous estimate that Egypt was not about to attack. This erroneous estimate resulted from misreading the military objectives and political goals of Egypt's President, Anwar Sadat, who came to power three years earlier. In the early 1970s, the Israelis expected Sadat to prepare for an all-out war, similar to those Egypt had waged in 1948 and 1967. In Clausewitzian terms, those wars were total wars, aimed at annihilating the Zionist entity. Sadat, however, had different plans.

Well aware of Egypt's conventional inferiority vis-à-vis Israel, Sadat decided to

stray away from the political path of his predecessor, Gamal Abdel Nasser. Under Sadat, Egypt was no longer preparing to fight a total war against Israel. Instead, Sadat instructed his generals to ready the armed forces for a limited war against Israel with the purpose of establishing an Egyptian foothold on the eastern bank of the Suez Canal. Sadat believed that a limited and successful Egyptian operation would lead to negotiations with Israel based on his February 1971 land-for-peace offer—an offer that the Israeli premier, Golda Meir, had spurned.

Initially, Sadat's generals opposed the idea of going to war against Israel. A "total war mentality" still guided these Egyptian officers' thinking, and memories were still fresh of the humiliating Arab defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War—during which Egypt lost the Sinai Peninsula. Like their Egyptian counterparts, Israeli generals were also thinking in terms of total war. In the early 1970s, they followed Egypt's military build-up and frequent mobilizations based on the assumption that Cairo would attack only when it was ready to fight an all-out war. In this regard, the Israelis estimated that the Egyptians would not start such a war before the Soviets supplied them with Scud missiles and advanced long-range fighter-bombers. Moscow, however, refused to equip Egypt with these weapon systems because it feared that if war erupted in the Middle East it would endanger détente with the United States.⁹

On October 6, 1973, when Egyptian troops crossed the Suez Canal and Syrian forces attacked in the Golan Heights, Israel was taken almost completely by surprise. Nevertheless, the element of surprise was not the only factor responsible for the collapse of Israel's first and second lines of defense in Sinai and for the failure of the Israeli counterattack on October 8. A sense of invincibility—nourished by the lingering memories of the swift and decisive Israeli victory in the 1967 War—caused Golda Meir's war cabinet to overestimate the capabilities of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and to underestimate those of the Egyptians and Syrians. Thus, on October 5, after receiving intelligence that the Egyptians and Syrians were already at jump-off points, Premier Meir's cabinet decided not to order a full military mobilization. This decision was based on two assumptions. First, a full military mobilization would be expensive and could precipitate an even more expensive war. Second, the presumption was that even if the Egyptians and Syrians were to attack, IDF regular forces and the Israeli Air Force (IAF) could hold them back until the reserves were fully mobilized. In the early morning of October 6, Israel's mythological defense minister, General Moshe Dayan, was still confident in the IAF's ability to check an Arab surprise attack and thus opposed a full military mobilization. Only a few hours before the war broke out did the Israeli chief of staff, General David Elazr, manage to persuade Premier Meir to order a full military mobilization.¹⁰ Consequently, on October 6, at 14:00, when Egypt and Syria launched their attack, the Israeli mobilization was still in its early stages.

Within less than 24 hours, the Israeli war cabinet came to realize that its faith in the abilities of the IDF's regular forces and the IAF to fend off the Arab attack was unwarranted. The 450 troops and 290 tanks that guarded sixteen Israeli strongholds along the Suez Canal were overrun by a superior Egyptian force of 90,000 men and 850 tanks. The Egyptian blow was so devastating that the retreating Israelis lost more than half their 290 tanks. On the Golan Heights, 178 Israeli tanks failed to stop some 800 Syrian tanks from rapidly advancing toward the Jordan River. Moreover, sophisticated Soviet Surface to Air Missile (SAM) batteries deployed along the Suez Canal and the Israel-Syria border wreaked havoc on the IAF.¹¹ Twenty-four hours

into the fighting, all of the IAF's combat flying missions had ended in failure.¹² The IAF simply could not take advantage of its aerial superiority and assist Israeli troops on the ground. The fact that in 1973 the IAF was allocated 52 percent of the Israeli defense budget turned its failure into an even more resounding one.¹³

By October 8, Israeli reserve forces had arrived in Sinai and it seemed as if balance of power calculations were again tilting in Israel's favor. About 1,000 Egyptian tanks—mostly T55s, but also T-54s and T-62s—faced some 960 technologically superior Israeli Centurion M-48 and M-60. Thus, in order to prevent the Egyptians from consolidating their positions along the eastern bank of the Suez Canal, and in an effort to push them back to the western bank of the canal, the IDF launched a full-scale counterattack. This counterattack turned out to be one of the darkest moments in Israeli military history. The Egyptians were already dug into a lodgment extending 10 to 15 kilometers into the desert. Not only did they succeed in holding their ground, but they also inflicted a heavy toll on the Israeli attackers.¹⁴ Egyptian SAM batteries on the western bank of the canal effectively intercepted and downed IAF fighters that attempted to turn the tide on the battleground. As a result, in the late afternoon of October 8, IAF fighters were instructed to keep a distance of 24 kilometers from the canal. The only exception to that rule was fighters on priority missions.¹⁵ At the end of that day, the Israeli military was beaten and its morale broken.

If economic and political dire straits goad North Korea into launching an attack against the South, it would probably do so in accordance with strategic principles similar to those that guided Sadat on the eve of the October 1973 War. For a conventionally inferior North Korean military to seek more than a land grab of a narrow strip south of the DMZ, let alone the reunification of the Peninsula, would be to invite defeat and humiliation. In this regard, North Korean strategists who have read the history of the October 1973 War probably know that they should not repeat the fatal mistake that Egypt made in the second week of fighting.

On October 14, encouraged by his forces' success on the battlefield, and against the better advice of Defense Minister Ali Ismail and Chief of Staff Saad el Din Shazli,¹⁶ the overly confident Sadat instructed Egyptian troops to march forward toward the Refidim, Giddi, and Mitla passes—about 35 kilometers east of the canal. In accordance with Sadat's orders, the Egyptian forces moved out of their dug-in and protected positions under the umbrella of the SAM missiles. Having lost their strategic advantage, the advancing Egyptian forces were no match for the superior Israeli armored divisions that finally enjoyed effective IAF aerial support. Consequently, the Egyptians suffered heavy losses and began to pull back toward the canal. Within less than 48 hours, Israeli forces managed to break through Egyptian lines and started crossing the Suez Canal through an open seam between the second and third Egyptian armies. By the time the war ended because of international pressure (October 24), Israeli forces were on the western bank of the Suez Canal—within approximately 100 kilometers of Cairo—and Egypt's third army (some 45,000 men) was encircled.¹⁷ Militarily speaking, Egypt was brought down to its knees.

Lessons from the 1973 Yom Kippur War: The Nuclear Dimension

In response to a North Korean attack, Seoul should avoid the potentially nuclear consequences of advancing too deep into North Korean territory. Such an advance

would entail a loss of face and credibility for Kim Jong Un's regime, which could be cataclysmic. Thus, a South Korean counterattack should stop at the MDL, or not far beyond it. To understand why, we should revisit the events that took place during the week that followed Israel's calamitous October 8 counterattack.

Cognizant of the heavy losses incurred by the Israeli army and air force in just four days of fighting (nearly 500 tanks, 49 aircraft, and 500 men) Defense Minister Dayan feared that if this attrition rate continued, within a few days Israel's defenses would crumble and Egyptian forces could advance toward Tel Aviv. Although Washington shared with the Israelis intelligence that included a detailed account of the Egyptian plan of invasion,¹⁸ Dayan prudently perceived Egypt's limited operation merely as an opening gambit. Dayan's analysis of Israel's military situation and of Egypt's intentions was gloomy to the point that on October 9 he proposed to mobilize the elderly and the young and arm them with bazookas, so, if worse came to worst, they could make a last stand against the invading Arab forces.¹⁹

Two days earlier, Dayan's growing despair over Israel's military situation, especially on the Golan Heights, drove him to request Premier Meir to use Israel's nuclear weapons in order to change the situation on the battlefield. In an interview with Avner Cohen of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Arnan Azaryahu, who was an aide to cabinet member Israel Galili, recalled that Galili told him after a cabinet meeting on October 7 that Dayan had brought up the idea of preparing for a nuclear "demonstration." According to Azaryahu, Galili and Deputy Premier Yigal Allon opposed the idea "saying it was premature to consider the nuclear option and that Israel would prevail using conventional weapons."²⁰ Premier Meir sided with Galili and Allon. Thus, the chief of Israel's Atomic Energy Commission, Shalheveth Freier, was instructed not to take any preparatory steps regarding Dayan's suggestion.²¹

Nevertheless, according to Seymour Hersh and Walter Boyne, on October 9, Meir's war cabinet decided to go on a nuclear alert. Consequently, 13 nuclear weapons were readied for operation and targeted on Egyptian and Syrian headquarters in the vicinities of Cairo and Damascus.²² Significantly, Hersh and Boyne refer in their account to a cabinet meeting that was held a day after, rather than prior to, Israel's failed counterattack in Sinai (October 8). It is possible that the shocking failure of that counterattack persuaded Premier Meir's war cabinet to accept Dayan's request and go on a nuclear alert.

Hersh and Boyne also claim that Israel used its nuclear threat to coerce the United States into initiating an immediate and massive airlift to resupply the beaten Israeli military. In this regard, both scholars suggest that threatening messages were conveyed to Secretary of State Kissinger by the Israeli Ambassador to Washington, Simcha Dinitz. The essence of those messages was that Israel's decision whether or not to use its nuclear weapons "depended upon the effectiveness and rapidity of U.S. aid."²³

In spite of his account of how Dayan's proposal of preparing for a nuclear "demonstration" was turned down on October 7, Avner Cohen acknowledges that Israel went on a nuclear alert twice during the first week of the war. For Cohen, "those state of alerts involved certain readiness 'dispositions' such as mobilizing the Jericho missiles from their shelters, fueling them, and other related activities. Such activities require the authorization of the prime minister and the minister of defense but apparently do not require a formal decision by the war cabinet."²⁴

Unlike Hersh and Boyne, Cohen does not contend that Israel's nuclear alerts

were purposefully used to blackmail Washington for immediate military assistance. However, he seems to recognize their decisive role in persuading Washington to render such assistance to Israel. In his book “Worst-Kept Secret,” Cohen brings the account of William Quandt, an aide to the National Security Council, who recalls “how profound the impact of American intelligence reports of these ‘dispositions’ [during the nuclear alerts] was on Henry Kissinger. Quandt believes those reports were critical to the American decision to initiate the airlift to Israel.”²⁵

In Washington, the working assumption of Kissinger, Secretary of Defense Schlesinger, and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William Colby was that Israel would use its nuclear option only a heartbeat before a military collapse.²⁶ Israel’s nuclear alerts, and the briefing Kissinger received in the morning of October 9 from the Israeli military attaché on the shocking failure of the Israeli counterattack, made Washington realize the gravity of the situation. Was Israel almost a heartbeat from a military collapse, or did it have enough resources for at least two more weeks of fighting as Director Colby estimated? Washington was not willing to take any risks. Later that day, after consulting with Kissinger and other confidants, President Nixon instructed his advisors not to allow Israel to lose the war and ordered them to expedite the delivery of U.S. military assistance to Israel. Furthermore, Nixon decided to replenish Israel’s losses in battle and thus allowed the IDF to immediately tap its reserve stocks.²⁷ Nixon’s instructions were implemented with urgency. The following day, El-Al aircraft landed in Israel with a supply of new Hughes BGM-71 TOW anti-tank missiles. Those missiles wreaked havoc on Egyptian armor and played a crucial role in driving back the October 14 Egyptian attack.²⁸

Two important lessons can be drawn from the nuclear episode of the 1973 War. The first lesson concerns the great difficulty of reading the intentions and interpreting the moves of an adversary as a battle rages. President Sadat planned neither to capture Tel Aviv nor to liberate the entire Sinai Peninsula. However, in Israel, Egypt’s success in implementing its limited operation invoked fear and despair to a degree that motivated Dayan to push for a nuclear show of force and led to two Israeli nuclear alerts in the first week of the war. In this regard, Walter Boyne suggests that on October 9 Syria’s forces on the Golan Heights began retreating “due to the rattling of Israel’s nuclear saber . . . for [Syrian] forces were still far stronger than their [Israeli] opponents.”²⁹ Conversely, it seems as if President Sadat was unimpressed by Israel’s nuclear alerts as he ordered the Egyptian forces to expand their limited operation and advance beyond the 10–15 kilometers strip toward the passes. Had the October 14 Egyptian attack succeeded, Dayan’s plea for a nuclear show of force could probably have mustered the support of other Israeli cabinet members.

Significantly, the events of the 1973 War took place 400 kilometers south of Tel Aviv on a strip of land extending no more than 20 kilometers deep into the Sinai Peninsula—a desert more than three times the size of Israel before the 1967 War. Pyongyang is only about 180 kilometers north of the DMZ. In this regard, the impact that a successful ROK counterattack against an invading DPRK force would have on decision-makers in Pyongyang could be much more profound than the impact on Israel of Egypt’s successful limited operation. Thus, it would be prudent for ROK forces not to cross the DMZ between the two Koreas after they push back the DPRK troops. If a decision is taken to cross the DMZ, then the ROK ground maneuver should be limited to areas in the vicinity of the DMZ. Similarly to Dayan, a militarily beaten North Korean leadership might fear a decapitating move on the

part of South Korea and may well interpret a ROK advance across the DMZ and up north as an indication of a South Korean attempt to reunify the Peninsula. As in the case of Israel, if not employing nuclear weapons, North Korea would at least rattle its nuclear saber and turn to China and Russia for military and diplomatic aid.

The second lesson that we can draw from the nuclear episode of the 1973 War is that a nuclear deterrent gives the junior ally in an unequal alliance a significant leverage over its senior partner. During the first days of the 1973 War, Washington stood aside while Israel was bleeding. It is possible that Washington wanted to teach Israel a lesson by allowing it to pay the consequences of Premier Meir's arrogant rejection of Sadat's 1971 peace initiative. However, by October 9, Washington understood that in order to stymie a potential Israeli escalation from nuclear alerts to a nuclear show of force, it had to help Jerusalem save face by turning the tide on the battlefield. All other considerations, such as the negative effect of supporting Israel on Washington's relations with the Arab world, and thus on oil prices, were marginalized. Likewise, China and South Korea's growing economic and diplomatic cooperation would probably have a marginal effect on Beijing's policies if North Korea goes on a nuclear alert. Similarly to Washington in 1973, Beijing would understand that in order to prevent a nuclear catastrophe on the Peninsula, Pyongyang's face must be saved.

If North Korea goes on a nuclear alert—which might well cause the United States, China, and Russia to follow suit—Seoul should pull back its forces toward the DMZ without delay. If Seoul fails to act quickly, it could face heavy Chinese, Russian, and even American pressure to do so. Thus, in the event of a North Korean attack, the best strategy for South Korea would be to strike back hard, reclaim territories south of the MDL, but avoid pursuing the retreating North Koreans deep into enemy territory.

The Challenges of Guerrilla Warfare and Rocket Attacks

The next Korean War may begin as a “conventional war” in the sense that each side would try to claim or reclaim territory by conducting land-based maneuvers, but it could easily change. A South Korean decision to cross the DMZ will position ROK troops on a terra incognita of urban hideouts, topographical traps, and subterranean tunnels. In such an event, DPRK forces, instead of fighting to reclaim territory, may opt to operate as a guerrilla force. The purpose of DPRK guerrilla warfare would be to wear down the South Korean enemy by causing it to lose as many men and as much equipment as possible.

In the Second Lebanon War (2006) and during Operation Protective Edge (2014) both Hezbollah and Hamas applied such a strategy. For example, in the 2006 War Hezbollah used its knowledge of the topographical features of southern Lebanon to estimate possible routes of advance of IDF forces. It then attacked the advancing IDF troops with barrages of anti-tank and mortar fire. Fortified Hezbollah dugouts in “nature reserves” served as another measure to surprise the Israelis.³⁰ Reportedly, North Korea provided Hezbollah with assistance in building a subterranean net of military installations and tunnels before the 2006 Lebanon War broke out.³¹ Furthermore, North Korean instructors trained Hezbollah fighters in subterranean guerrilla warfare.³² After the war ended, Hezbollah expanded its complex net of tunnels and hideouts within villages in southern Lebanon. These expansion works possibly included cross-border tunnels that can serve for moving forces or planting explosives under

Israeli military facilities along the border with Lebanon.

Hezbollah had dug and used offensive tunnels against Israeli targets long before the 2006 Lebanon War. As early as September 1996, Israeli Special Forces discovered a system of tunnels in Jabal Sujud, close to an Israeli outpost in southern Lebanon. The fact that North Korea has been training Hezbollah cadres since the late 1980s³³ suggests that North Korea has been involved in Hezbollah's subterranean project from its inception.

Hamas too has years of experience in digging offensive tunnels and conducting subterranean guerrilla warfare against Israel. For example, on June 25, 2006, Hamas fighters penetrated through a cross-border tunnel 100 meters into Israeli territory, killed two IDF soldiers, and kidnapped Gilad Shalit. During Operation Protective Edge, Hamas and Islamic Jihad employed similar subterranean tactics of penetration, attack, and kidnapping. On July 17, 2014, a failed attempt by Hamas fighters to penetrate into Israeli territory near Kibbutz Sufa triggered Israel's land-based operation which was aimed at detecting and demolishing offensive tunnels along the Israel-Gaza border.³⁴

Israel's decision to launch a land-based campaign was made after nine days of standoff aerial and artillery attacks that illustrated the very limited efficacy of these standoff tools in dealing with the threat of offensive tunnels and guerrilla warfare. Moreover, standoff airstrikes and artillery fire did not succeed in coercing Hamas into stopping its relentless barrage of rockets and mortar shells against civilian and military targets in Israel. In this regard, the first phase of Operation Protective Edge validated the findings of the Winograd Commission that was appointed by the Israeli government to study the 2006 Lebanon War. Essentially, the commission criticized the Israeli high command for adopting in the years that preceded the 2006 Lebanon War a new military doctrine that relied heavily upon standoff airpower, while neglecting preparations for land-based maneuvers. Thus, between 2002 and 2006, the budget allocated to the Israeli army was reduced by 25 percent and was mostly invested in equipping and training Israel's ground forces to deal with the Palestinian challenge in the West Bank.³⁵

According to the Winograd Commission, historically speaking, Israel's military doctrine was centered on the presumed ability of the IDF to concentrate a large ground force, transfer the war to the enemy's territory as quickly as possible, and decide the war by defeating the enemy's ground forces and capturing its territory. The IAF was mostly tasked with assisting a major ground assault. However, by 2006, a new military doctrine stipulated that ground forces would play a very limited role in the battlefield. They were still expected to defend Israel's borders, but, during wartime, ground forces were to be used only in quick in-and-out special operations against specific targets. Impressed by the performance of the U.S. Air Force during Operation Desert Storm, Israel's leading military strategists had a strong conviction in the ability of the IAF to decide the next war by taking advantage of the technological quantum leap in the development of aerial weapons and intelligence capabilities. Thus, precision standoff attacks from the air turned from serving as a supportive element to a ground assault into the central component of Israel's new military doctrine. Standoff air attacks were supposed to wreak havoc on the enemy and coerce it into submission, while avoiding the high costs in casualties involved in land warfare.³⁶

Referring to the way in which the 2006 War in Lebanon was strategically conducted, the Winograd Commission let fly most of its arrows of criticism at Israel's chief of

staff, General Dan Halutz—the first fighter pilot to hold this position. The Commission determined that Halutz persistently adhered to the principles of Israel's new military doctrine although he was aware of the failure of standoff air and artillery attacks to achieve the campaign's goals. These goals included crushing Hezbollah's infrastructure in Lebanon, eliminating its leadership, and coercing it into ceasing its rocket attacks and returning to Israel two kidnapped soldiers. Significantly, on July 14, only two days after the air campaign had commenced, General Amos Yadlin, Israel's chief of military intelligence and one of its most senior fighter pilots, estimated that Israel would not achieve its goals by applying its new military doctrine. Almost two weeks later, on July 26, General Ido Nehushtan, another senior fighter pilot and the head of the IDF's Planning Directorate, reportedly advised Halutz to shift strategy and initiate a major ground operation. Nevertheless, according to the Winograd Commission, Halutz believed that "if the military would be given enough time, it would be able to hurt Hezbollah in a significant way from the air and provide military and political success without the complications of issues like control of territory, friction, and heavy losses."³⁷

Although General Halutz was a staunch supporter of Israel's new military doctrine, his reluctance to commit the IDF to a major ground operation could have also resulted from a lack of confidence in the IDF's ability to carry out successfully such a mission in the absence of proper training and preparation in the preceding years. Indeed, during the last few days of the war, after the Olmert government ordered the launch of a major ground offensive in southern Lebanon, the Israeli army experienced much difficulty in carrying out its mission. In the years prior to the war, the army was occupied mostly with policing activity in the West Bank. Thus, in 2006, most Israeli division commanders, and their soldiers, lacked the necessary knowledge and experience to conduct combined-force operations simultaneously employing tanks, infantry, and combat engineers.

Furthermore, Israel's new military doctrine, which was predicated upon standoff attacks from the air, negatively affected the wartime cooperation between the army and the IAF. According to the new doctrine, the IAF served as the central component in achieving Israel's goals in Lebanon during the first three weeks of the war. Toward the end of the war, as it became clear that the new doctrine failed to achieve desired outcomes, the IAF found it difficult to adapt to the high command's decision to place primary reliance on a major land-based operation to decide the war. Concretely, the IAF lacked the required experience in joint-air-ground training to provide on-call close aerial support to IDF ground troops. In addition, although it could have contributed significantly to the maneuverability of ground units in southern Lebanon, the IAF's transport helicopter fleet focused exclusively on serving Special Forces operations deep inside Lebanon.

The unsatisfactory support provided by the IAF to the major ground operation that the IDF conducted south of the Litani River could be partially explained also by the decision of the Israeli high command to divide the northern front into two operational theaters. At the beginning of the war, the IAF was given, for the first time in its history and at the expense of the Northern Command, responsibility over an operational theater north of the Litani River. In the final phase of the war, the IAF was overly occupied with intensifying its standoff attacks against targets all over Lebanon. Consequently, ground troops south of the Litani River found it difficult to enlist on-call close aerial support. The Northern Command, which oversaw the

major ground operation during the final 72 hours of the war, had no overarching operational authority over the IAF. Thus, it could not force the IAF to fly more combat-support sorties south of the Litani River.³⁸

The 2006 Lebanon War ended on August 14, as a result of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701. The goals that the Olmert government had set at the beginning of the war were not achieved. Standoff aerial attacks and artillery fire failed to damage substantially Hezbollah's "nature reserves" and subterranean infrastructure, short range rockets continued to fall on targets in Israel until the very last day of the war, and Hezbollah's leadership remained mostly unharmed. The ill-prepared IDF ground forces should not have been expected to achieve in 72 hours what standoff airstrikes failed to achieve in three weeks. Nevertheless, by the end of the war, Hezbollah had suffered heavy losses in human lives (around 600 Hezbollah fighters were killed)³⁹ and its public image was impaired. The people of Lebanon blamed Hezbollah, alongside Israel, for the massive destruction brought upon them by the war.

Since the end of the war, Hezbollah has refrained from launching rockets at targets in Israel and from increasing the tension along the Israel-Lebanon border. Instead, it has focused on rehabilitating, expanding, and improving its operational infrastructure, capabilities, and arsenal, which includes more than 60,000, mostly short-range, rockets and missiles.⁴⁰ Undoubtedly, Hezbollah is preparing for a second round against Israel. In this regard, it is possible that Hezbollah's commitment to assist militarily the Assad regime in its fight against ISIS and the rebels in Syria, prevented the organization from opening a second front along the Israel-Lebanon border during Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in July 2014.

On the Israeli side of the border, in the years that followed the 2006 Lebanon War and under the command (2007-2011) of General Gabi Ashkenazi, who replaced Dan Halutz as chief of staff, the lessons drawn from the war were implemented. Although the IDF did not cut down resources aimed at sustaining its standoff aerial, naval, and artillery capabilities, it ramped up the production of "Merkava" main battle tanks and "Leopard" armored personnel carriers. Furthermore, time and resources allocated for training ground forces units were significantly increased. In this regard, an emphasis was put on combined-force training within divisions and on the development of combat-engineering tools to deal more effectively with the challenge of subterranean and urban warfare. The augmentation of ground forces' capabilities during Ashkenazi's term as chief of staff was geared towards reviving the military doctrine that guided the IDF until the new millennium—a doctrine based on a ground maneuver, preceded and supported by standoff firepower.⁴¹

Operation Cast Lead (2008), and to a lesser extent Operation Protective Edge (2014), put to the test the doctrinal counterrevolution that characterized the years following the end of the 2006 Lebanon War. Both operations had the limited objective of stopping Hamas' rocket and mortar attacks against Israeli civilian and military targets. They were not launched with the purpose of toppling the Hamas regime in Gaza. Thus, in both operations the land-based maneuver began only after more than a week of heavy standoff aerial, naval, and artillery attacks that failed to coerce Hamas into a ceasefire. While in Operation Cast Lead IDF forces had reached the outskirts of Gaza City and lost ten soldiers during the fighting, in Operation Protective Edge IDF forces operated merely two-kilometers deep into the Gaza strip and focused on destroying offensive, mostly cross-border, tunnels. However, despite the very limited Israeli penetration into the Gaza strip in Operation Protective Edge, the

IDF lost 64 soldiers, many more than it had lost during its deep incursion into the strip during Operation Cast Lead.⁴²

The high number of dead Israeli soldiers in Operation Protective Edge suggests that the Hamas upgraded its urban and subterranean warfare capabilities after Operation Cast Lead. The high number of casualties possibly also influenced Israeli decision-makers against making a deeper incursion into the Gaza strip. Significantly, the decision not to advance deep into Hamas territory in Operation Protective Edge was made despite the fact that during Operation Cast Lead the deep incursion into Gaza resulted in a drastic decrease of the number of rocket and mortar attacks against Israeli targets.⁴³

In Operation Protective Edge, Israel relied upon its Iron Dome air-defense system to intercept incoming rocket attacks. Nevertheless, it seems that Iron Dome is still far from providing an effective and comprehensive solution to the threat of rocket attacks. Although Israeli defense officials claim that Iron Dome succeeded in intercepting more than 80 percent of the rockets fired at Israel, Richard M. Lloyd of the Tesla Laboratories claims that less than 40 percent of the rockets were intercepted. Theodore Postol of MIT suggests an even lower interception rate—no higher than five to ten percent.⁴⁴ These expert opinions, and the fact that more than 60 percent of the rockets fired at Israel missed their target and fell in open spaces outside of urban centers, call into question the ability of Iron Dome to deal effectively with a rate of rocket launches substantially higher than the daily average of 115 during Operation Protective Edge. Moreover, there is no argument among experts that Iron Dome is incapable of providing an effective response to short-range rockets and mortar fire.⁴⁵

Significantly, the North Korean military is equipped with a higher number of far more advanced missiles, rockets, and mortars than Hamas and Hezbollah. If Pyongyang decides to fire missiles and rockets at South Korean civilian targets, anti-missile and anti-rocket systems cannot be relied upon to stop the incoming barrage. Thus, in preparation for an armed conflict with the DPRK, an emphasis should be put on maintaining and expanding ROK homefront safety measures, such as public shelters.

An Endgame to a Limited Conflict on the Korean Peninsula

The previous sections highlight several important points. Firstly, due to the North Korean nuclear option, the ROK would be limited militarily in its response to a North Korean attack. Secondly, ROK ground forces, rather than the Korean Air Force (KAF), would have to bear the main burden of repelling a North Korean attack. Thirdly, by crossing the DMZ, the ROK army might find itself dealing with the costly challenge of urban and subterranean guerrilla warfare. Based on these points, South Korea needs to set military and political goals for a possible armed confrontation with the North, and to devise a strategy for achieving them.

North Korea's nuclear option dictates that in an armed conflict between the two Koreas ROK forces would refrain from advancing too deep into North Korean territory. ROK troops marching toward Pyongyang might make Kim Jong Un's regime lose face and domestic political credibility, thereby provoking a North Korean nuclear saber rattling if not actual war. An armed conflict between the two Koreas would thus probably be confined to the vicinity of the DMZ. Correspondingly, ROK war plans, and the training of ROK military forces, should focus on limited ground

maneuvers.

In preparation for a North Korean attack, Seoul should allocate sufficient funds for equipping and training ROK ground forces, even if some of these funds would have to be allocated at the expense of cuts in the budgets of the KAF and navy. Seoul should not forget that by neglecting its ground forces in favor of investing more resources in aerial capabilities, Israel almost lost the 1973 War and had to pay a heavy price in human lives in 2006.⁴⁶ If hostilities erupt on the Korean Peninsula, the United States may offer aerial support to the KAF, either through direct involvement or by providing technical and material support. However, ROK troops, rather than American forces, would be expected to lock horns with the enemy on the ground and repel a North Korean blitz operation aimed at a limited land grab.

However, after repelling the aggressor's attack and, if necessary, reclaiming lost territory, should ROK troops cross the DMZ? The Second Lebanon War and Operation Protective Edge instruct us that in facing the challenge of urban and subterranean guerrilla warfare a conventionally superior force may have to pay a heavy price in casualties. Given that North Korean nuclear deterrence would prevent ROK troops from marching toward Pyongyang, and that the Kim regime would agree to a ceasefire only if ROK troops pull back to the MDL, Seoul should carefully consider whether or not to order its troops to cross the DMZ.

Operational requirements, such as encircling enemy troops, may justify a time-limited incursion beyond the DMZ. However, regardless of its forces' success in the battlefield, South Korea should refrain from establishing a permanent presence north of the DMZ. In this regard, Israel's experience of establishing a security belt in southern Lebanon in 1985—after the First Lebanon War ended—could serve as a valuable lesson to South Korea. Holding onto this security belt proved costly in human lives and financial resources as Israeli military convoys and outposts became the target of Hezbollah's guerrilla warfare. Eventually, after 15 years of being bogged down in the Lebanese quagmire, Israel decided to withdraw completely its forces from southern Lebanon. Moreover, a South Korean presence north of the DMZ would be a humiliating thorn in Pyongyang's side, increasing the probability that it would resort to desperate measures such as launching missiles and rockets at civilian targets in South Korea. By escalating the situation Pyongyang would hope to exert both domestic and international pressure on the South Korean government to withdraw its troops to the MDL.

The fact that South Korea would be limited in its military moves on the Peninsula in the event of an armed conflict with the North suggests that Seoul's political goals regarding the future of the Peninsula should be modest and their pursuit confined to the diplomatic arena. In this regard, a diplomatic approach of engagement could create economic and political leverage over Pyongyang that would be conducive to maintaining peninsular stability. Conversely, by arming itself with "strategic patience" in anticipation of a North Korean implosion that would solve the nuclear problem and bring about the reunification of the Peninsula, Seoul is courting increased tension and North Korean aggression on the Peninsula.

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