

The new nature of war and the intelligence required for victory

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Recent years have witnessed dramatic changes in the perception of Western armies towards the use of military force. Sovereign states began finding themselves involved in conflicts against non-state actors, as opposed to the classic army-to-army familiar warfare of past days. Following the Cold War, high intensity conflicts (HIC) became an infrequent phenomenon whereas low intensity conflicts (LIC) have spread all over the world, offering the most significant military challenge to Western nations. The concept "Low Intensity conflicts" is commonly expressed as: Popular Warfare, Revolutionary War, Subversive War, Insurrection and Insurgency. The common denominator to all the above mentioned is that it is a conflict between unequal sides, one being a regular army having order, discipline, abilities and means that is operated by an ordained political level while on the other side one finds organizations, movements or individual acts, lacking substantial fighting means. Due to the failure of both super-powers during the Cold War to subdue guerrilla forces in Vietnam and Afghanistan, despite having overwhelming force and technological superiority, new military approaches have begun developing in the West in order to confront asymmetric adversaries. These approaches meant relinquishing the attempt to overpower an adversary via direct tactical overthrow in the battle field and adopting a tactic of indirect decision – through effects designed to disrupt the enemy's functioning as a system, thereby bringing it to cognitive strategic collapse. However, reality has proven that it is not enough to achieve a decision in the battle field. As long as the adversary maintains a political, national or religious will, the victorious side is committed to preserve this achievement in an environment unnatural for a regular armed force. Examples of this may be found in the way the West has dealt with Iraq and Afghanistan and in the way the state of Israel has dealt with Palestinian resistance movements.¹

In this scheme, Intelligence plays a vital part in the use of military force, and without it, the superior side will encounter difficulties in identifying the sustaining roots of the adversary, who has blended into its civilian surroundings, and in identifying the vulnerabilities and characteristics which maintain and prolong the aggressive resistance during and after the strong side's military operations. The object of this paper is to examine the following questions from an intelligence viewpoint:

- 1) What are the challenges confronting the superior side in an asymmetric conflict?
- 2) Can decision over a non-state rival be achieved by military means?
- 3) Why does an army possessing considerable military capabilities find it difficult to win the hearts and minds of its rivals despite its unlimited resources?
- 4) Why do Western intelligence agencies have difficulties in understanding the other side and determining the right combination of rewards and punishment which might preserve military achievements?
- 5) Do LICs all share common features or alternatively, do the features vary with each confrontation. In other words is it possible to generalize from one conflict to another?

¹ Tira, R. (2007), 'The Limitation of Standoff Firepower- Based Operations: On Standoff Warfare, Maneuver and Decision', The Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University.

These questions will be examined in light of the challenges and solutions that are available to the West in general and Israel in particular in their fight against non-state organizations in the radical Arab world.

Background:

Before tackling the issues raised in this paper, it is important to understand the meaning of an asymmetric conflict, and the military implication of confronting an adversary which is not a regular army. War in general is a dynamic phenomenon taking on various colors like a chameleon.² It is an exchange of violence between groups, with one group trying to force its will on the other. A war between nations represents a reciprocity of violence which like diplomacy and peace has defined rules and codes of conduct. A classic war has a chronological and spatial climax which manifests on the line where the forces engage each other – the contact line.

Clausewitz's war doctrine constructs an inherent and causal order which translates into victory by substantially harming the adversary's military capability thereby allowing the war's political objective to be realized. However, in an asymmetric conflict, there is no longer a line of contact, the weak side does not openly engage the army facing it, its area of operations is located in a predominantly supportive civilian environment and its military center of gravity is dispersed and compartmentalized thereby preventing a punctilious military strike from defeating him.

The conflict's objectives from the weaker side's perspective are:

- a. To channel the adversary's military operations to a point where the strong side's advantages are neutralized – this is done by identifying its weaknesses and striking at them. The weak side will try to understand the conflict triggers and affect them in any possible way. Thus if military operations are conducted in order to stop subversive activity in the motherland, such as the American activity in Afghanistan following 9/11, the weak side, i.e. al-Qaeda, will try to generate an increased volume of terror activity in order to shatter the assumption pertaining to the effectiveness of using military force.
- b. To balance as much as possible the outcomes of tactical achievements – since a guerilla force is unable to significantly strike the adversary's military centers of gravity, it might be satisfied with multiple strikes on the adversary's end points.
- c. To identify the symmetries between the sides in order to try and focus an effort and thereby realizing achievements. For example, during the IDF's operation in Jenin (April 2002) against Palestinian terrorist organizations, the Israeli army refrained from using aerial force due to the highly populated urban environment. The terror agents used this fact and dug in further in the crowded and highly populated environment.
- d. To influence the conflict's nature and course by using those boundaries imposed on the strong side, due to constraints of time, resources, space, governing system as well as self-imposed legal boundaries and ethical limits.

² See Clausewitz on this matter.

Clausewitz, C.V. (1976) 'The People in Arms', in *On War*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, pp. 479 -483.

- e. To achieve foreign state-sponsorship, such as Iran's support of several international terrorist organizations, mainly in Iraq, Lebanon and Israel.³
- f. To gain cognitive achievement in the strong side's home front, within the international community and mainly among the direct public of supporters of the combatant organization. Thus the radical Arab world regarded the Hizbollah organization and Nasrallah, its leader, as the winners after the Second Lebanon War of July 2006, despite heavy damages caused to the organization and Lebanese infrastructures. The mere fact that the organization managed to survive the IDF's offensive and even managed launching missiles towards Israeli settlements was considered to be a victory.⁴

However, the decision in an asymmetrical conflict is ambiguous and is open to culturally-dependent interpretations on the part of the belligerent sides since it is not defined from a military perspective alone. The elements that determine the outcome upon the following parameters:

- a. The end perception of the final image of victory – for example the execution of Saddam Husein was a watershed in the eyes of the USA administration, intended to establish its victory over the Iraqi resistance pockets. In spite of this, terror activity continued, and images of terror acts were the ones seared in global and US public opinion. It is likely that if the Obama administration withdraws US military forces from Iraq, the withdrawal image will be seared in the minds of millions of Muslim extremists around the world as the concluding image of the war in Iraq.
- b. An inequality in the will and determination of the adversaries, mostly based on the religious ideological vision characterizing the civilian population on both sides.
- c. The intelligence battle between the adversaries – as detailed later in this paper.
- d. A balance of terror between the adversaries which is maintained by determining the centers of gravity and vulnerabilities.
- e. The mobility and control capabilities of the non-state organization. Al-Qaeda for example is not based on a single leadership and geographical area – instead it operates as a multi-armed octopus. Severing one of its arms still leaves the rest of its arms sufficient operating room.
- f. The preservation of Cities of Refuge for the leadership of the non-state organization – based on this principle, the heads of terrorist organization can operate freely nowadays from Damascus and Teheran.

Intelligence in asymmetric fighting

Intelligence serves both sides in the conflict. The side with the inferior force can attain achievements only when it brushes and strikes the superior side using the element of surprise. In order to be able to do so, the weak side needs to be familiar with the adversary's vulnerabilities and to possess information on his tactical moves. The quantitative advantage and resources available to the superior side are at the same time those that usually hinder his flexibility and his ability to masquerade his intentions.

³ See: Baer, R. (2008) 'The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower', New York: Crown Publishing Group.

⁴ Shelah, O. (2006) 'Anti- War', Strategic Assessment 9 (3):2-6.

The superior side however makes use of intelligence in order to neutralize the weak side's influential capabilities.

At the macro level, the superior side tries to gather information on the weak side's motives and his political-religious philosophy in order to understand what elements can bring him to relinquish his struggle. At the field level, the superior side tries to strike the weak side's tactical capabilities by obtaining information on operatives, the chain of command and its whereabouts, future plans and finally the elements backing the organization (state-sponsorship, funding and weapon supply sources, training sites).⁵

In order to realize the modern desire of winning the hearts and the minds, the superior side must invest considerable efforts in identifying the everyday needs of the civilian population which supports the weaker side and to blot out the authenticity of the latter's ideological arguments.⁶ This approach needs to be further investigated since up to this day in most asymmetrical conflicts around the world, modern nations have failed to strengthen those supportive elements in the civilian population despite of investing enormous resources.

Although the USA has alleviated many ailments of various populations in Iraq; has rehabilitated the administration in Iraq, has developed infrastructures and has created a convenient political climate following Iraq's occupation, it is still sweepingly perceived as a brutal conqueror and is the target of much and constant criticism.

We can see here the main problem facing the strong side's Intelligence – distinguishing the innocent civilian population from the one supporting the struggle.

The word 'intelligence' is derived from the Latin 'intellego' which means **to distinguish and to separate**. That is, intelligence is not only about distinguishing between significant and insignificant gathering objectives and information types but also about separating legitimate targets that aid the war effort from non legitimate ones which if struck might hinder the war effort.

This is a complex task, raising question marks and offering blurring boundaries. Take for example a Muslim religious leader preaching for opposition against a conquering enemy or an Arab government from within a masque. The superior side in the conflict has to decide whether these are legitimate religious preachers or, if they are inciters of terror and insurgency.

Accepted Western logic says that that hurting innocent civilians while fighting terrorist organization or military opposition will enlist new supporters to the fighting circle and therefore consciousness-oriented counter measures can remove supporters from the fighting circle.

However, separating the innocent from the involved is aimed at convincing not only the civilian surroundings of the guerilla or terrorist organization but first and foremost the civilian home front of the attacking side.

'Reducing casualties of civilians that are not participating is the best way of winning the hearts and minds of the strong side's home front. The same way that a terror or guerilla organization determines that influencing the

⁵ Greer, J.K. (2005) 'Operation Knockout: COIN in Iraq', *Military Review*, 16- 19.

⁶ Mackaitis, T. (2003) 'Winning Hearts and Minds in the War on Terrorism', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 14 (1): 21 – 38.

civilian society and global public opinion is a conflict objective, so does the superior side in the conflict needs to consider civilian relations in their objectives.

The Intelligence separating the innocent from legitimate targets addresses the ethical necessities of the strong side, as well as the Geneva Conventions' rules of warfare which apply to all sides, and therefore reinforces the backup which keeps eroding as the fighting continues. It is important to emphasize that this is a product of Western culture and political environment – the desire not to hurt civilians during war is a modern ideal which to this day has not yet been fully manifested.

Are the historical lessons for the current counterinsurgency (COIN) of any importance? Can experiences from one asymmetric conflict in a certain geographical area be applied to a conflict in a different geographical area and what are those lessons?

1877 years ago, in the year 132 AD, a great revolt erupted in the Roman province of Judea against the strong Roman army residing in the borders of Palestine. The rebels were Jewish zealots to country and religion, and despite lacking military training and means, they initially managed to overcome the regular Roman army and even caused heavy damages to such a degree that at the conclusion of the three years revolt, Hadrian, the Roman Emperor, sent the Senate an epistle without the customary greeting: "If you and your children are in health, it is well; I and the army are in health" (Historia Augustae, Hadrianus 4, 2).

Asymmetrical conflicts are not a new phenomenon, and neither is the need to deal with them appropriately. During the Pax Romana era, the empire met with local revolts which developed into military conflicts. On occasions the Roman garrison managed to nip the uprising while still in the bud, but on occasions (as in the case of the Bar Kokhba revolt), the uprisings caused heavy damages – tactical loss of troops and impairment of the Roman provinces' product. The Jews channeled the battles to narrow places and tunnels where the Roman army lost its comparative advantage; they avoided face-to-face battles; and they hurt both the moral of the Roman army and that of the Senate back home.

The Bar Kokhba revolt was crushed by Sextus Julius Severus, governor of Britain who was urgently dispatched to deal with the Jewish revolt. The historian Cassius Dio claims that 985 villages were razed and that 580,000 Jewish were killed in the fighting (Cassius Dio 69, Roman History).

The Romans did not seek to win the hearts and minds of their Jewish subjects, and were happy to make do with a victory over the Jewish minds simply doing so by spreading terror, a tactic that is nowadays called deterrence. Unhindered by any moral reservations and having no pressure from home, the Roman way of dealing with an asymmetric adversary was unlimited military aggression. The price paid by the rebels and their supporters was unbearable – the Roman strategy preferred fearful and dissatisfied subjects over satisfied subjects, fearless of the Empire's might.⁷ Centuries later, the weight of LICs has risen so that in the last decades close to 90% of the military conflicts around the world are between asymmetric rivals. This statistic threatens the stability of the Old Order, the international system and the traditional duties and rights relationship between citizens and their nation-state. Since globalization has confiscated responsibilities such as economical and foreign policy from the

⁷: For Roman strategy and challenges in that age:
Luttwak, E. (1976) *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, Baltimore.

hands of the nation-state, the use of force has become the main banner for the latter. When terror hits within the borders of the state, trust in the capabilities of force is shattered, leading to a possible crisis between a state and citizens.⁸

Not only has the age of globalization placed a threat sharing similar features in front of different states, but it has also enabled non-state organization, mainly terrorist organizations, to enrich each other and share goals, values and co-learning. In the age of open communication and the internet web, operatives in various organizations working against different targets keep in constant contact.⁹ This is why it is important for state Intelligence organizations facing these terror coalitions to co-operate and to learn from one another. Israel's experience in COIN can be used just as efficiently by both the USA's army in Iraq and the Egyptian regime in Cairo in their fight against radical terror groups.

It is also worth learning from the failure to mobilize civilian society as a moderating element in each and every asymmetrical conflict, and from the success in using deterring measures.

COIN in Israel – the Intelligence circle and understanding the adversary in Lebanon and Gaza

In July 2006, two Israeli soldiers were kidnapped at the Lebanese border. The IDF responded with an all-out offensive against the Hizbollah organization.

The kidnapping scenario from the Israeli border had been a possibility known by all the Israeli defense authorities for a long time, as was the possibility of there being an escalation in military tension

Israel initiated a military offensive against a weaker guerilla organization and left the battle without achieving any real decisive victory. Hizbollah's image of victory was the cease-fire of both sides while maintaining its' survival and continuing to demonstrate its ability of firing missiles on the Northern part of Israel. Israel which was following RMA principles used much fire power and very little ground maneuvers. Hizbollah's center of gravity was destroyed within the first hour of the war – its' long range missile capacity – but the Hizbollah did everything in its power to operate whatever it had left.

Despite the heavy price paid by the organization and its civilian supporters the war was seared in the Arab world's consciousness as a victory for Hizbollah and a loss for Israel.

Two and a half years later, in December 2009 Israel launched an extensive military operation against the Hamas organization in the Gaza Strip. This time the operation consisted of two stages: a stage of aerial strikes and a ground maneuvers stage causing the immediate withdrawal of Hamas operatives and the destruction of many of the organization's infrastructures.

⁸ Van Creveld, M. (1991) 'The Transformation of War', New York: The free Press.

⁹ Schweitzer, Y. and Goldstein Ferber, S. (2005) 'Al-Qaeda and the Globalization of Suicide Terrorism', Tel – Aviv: jaffee center for strategic studies.

While in both cases Israel did not win the hearts and minds of the population, the Second Lebanon War ended in continuous missile fire from Lebanon and an Israeli perception of defeat whereas the military operation in Gaza ended in a significant reduction in Hamas's missile launching abilities and an Israeli perception of victory

Over the decades, the state of Israel has maintained an active and highly trained intelligence capability. Israel's ability to gather information on countries and terror elements has in many cases succeeded in reducing the range of threats against the state.

One may say that over the years Intelligence has become the central pillar of the strategic security of Israel.

In both of the above mentioned cases, intelligence was employed, and in both cases Israel fought terrorist organizations of similar military capability and state-sponsorship in the image of Iran. What then are the reasons for the different outcomes in the military aspect; is it only changes in combat tactics, geographical distance or perhaps there are some new insights on Israel's part?

In order to get to the bottom of it, we need to first examine the concepts of the radical Arab adversary mirrored to Israel through the intelligence cycle.

The first part, which is the basis of the intelligence cycle, is defining the targets.

When analyzing the Middle East we can see that Israel is an outstanding phenomenon: a Jewish, Western democracy, surrounded by Arabic, Muslim totalitarian regimes.

The Middle Eastern reality presents an endless array of threats. However, a small country as Israel is not capable of addressing each and every threat as a target of high priority. Israel is forced to be selective in choosing its targets.

"The short blanket effect" is a term used to demonstrate the effect of limited resources: If the "short blanket" covers the legs, then naturally the chest will be exposed, and if it covers the chest, the legs will remain exposed and therefore there is no other choice than to focus only on the critical threats.

Another point is again the difficulty of distinguishing between enemy citizen and an innocent one.

An interesting example of such difficulty is the case of Marwan Barghouti, a Palestinian politician, the head of the Tanzim – an army organization of the Fatah, in Ramallah.

The Israelis had perceived Barghouti in the 1990's, the years of the Oslo agreement, as an important positive element in the peace process.

A few years later In April 2002, based on information gathered by the Israeli Secret Service, Marwan Barghouti was arrested and sentenced to 5 life sentences, charged with guiding and directing terror attacks.

The second set of problems is related to the art of information gathering:

During the years, the state of Israel has developed impressive gathering abilities and technological methods known as Visint and Sigint, as well as human sources known as Humint which supply much crucial intelligence information.

In recent years, starting from 2000, Israel has succeeded in developing strong intelligence in Samaria, Gaza and Judea, an Intelligence that sets targets, supplies information and distributes it all, in real time. The traditional intelligence circle has been shortened to mere seconds as has the ability to find and destroy the enemy.

The operational Intelligence has grown and improved in the context of the Palestinian al-Aqsa uprising and suicide bombers who have ravaged Israel's cities. This brought a substantial reduction of suicide bombers, which continues, even now in 2009.

Despite its impressive achievements, the intelligence gathering process has had to overcome several difficulties:

The first difficulty is the distribution of the intelligence targets within civilian population.

A second difficulty is associated with the fact that a high percentage of Israel's rivals are small terrorist organizations and guerilla units. The size, isolation and compartmentalization of these organizations directly affect the Intelligence's ability to penetrate or plant human sources in the heart of the organizations.

The most important part in the Intelligence cycle is the processing of the information that has been gathered – the platform upon which every Intelligence organization succeeds or fails.

Raw material that is collected is useless if its implications are not comprehended in depth.

The main difficulty has to do with knowing an enemy coming from a different background.

For example Israeli Sigint agents analyze Arabic sources reports and recorded conversations, day by day, trying to determine the true meaning behind the words. However, an important question to be asked is whether a person coming from a free democratic and modern background is able to understand another person coming from a strict society?

From a bird's eye view perspective, can a decision be achieved over an organization or a movement having a culture and philosophy which are very different from the concepts of the strong side? If hits at the center of gravity are not considered a loss, if strikes at fighting and leadership infrastructures do not bring decision, is it at all possible to bring an asymmetric conflict to an end, within the boundaries of modern law and ethics?

The answer is yes, but not without difficulty.

The first step on the part of the superior side, is 'to know the enemy' and its' thought process. The Israeli operation in Gaza began with IDF knowing that the Hamas is yearning for an entrance of ground forces into the

Gaza Strip. To the Hamas, an image of victory, portrayed by a burning tank, or a kidnapped soldier was worth the mass destruction caused by this kind of operation.

Israel, having learned the lessons of Hizbollah's perception of victory in the Second Lebanon War, used increased ground maneuvers contrary to the method used by regular armies in their fight against terrorist organizations in recent years, and thus prevented the image of victory that Hamas was trying to arrive at during this conflict.

This process of getting familiarizing oneself with the rival's desires, consciousness and ambitions is valid not only for the conquering and fighting stages but also and maybe primarily for the occupation stage.-The reality of life in which the insurgents are continually fighting and disrupting the occupation army.

In this context it is worth mentioning two common phenomena found in Intelligence evaluations emanating from the desire to win the hearts and minds of the civilian population enveloping the terrorist organizations.

In the West a certain patronage is being developed toward third world population: the basic assumption is that financial investment and the improvement of living conditions will result in a financial interest and encourage better relations with the West. This is one way the Intelligence evaluation is often mistaken, relying on an erroneous acquaintance with the Arabic society. Not only does the process of advancement not appeal to certain radical populations in the Arabic society but it also intimidates and symbolizes the proximity to the Great Satan.

The second well-known phenomenon in this context- is the excessive use of a “mirror image” – viewing the opponent as if it were an exact reflection, in other words, analyzing the drives and intentions of the Islamic adversary according to what is familiar to the analyst, namely, what is known and logical within the Western culture that the analyst represents.

In this fashion, the opponent is evaluated according to the analyst's subjective feeling, without regard to its (the opponent's) innate culture and philosophy. If the analyst is exhausted, then the other side must also be tired; if he is interested in the quality of life, then the other side must be interested in it as well. If the analyst or

policymaker desires a peace agreement, the other side must surely share this desire. This imaginary symmetry is a function of a limited acquaintance with the opposing side.¹⁰

As a result, in recent years it is common to encounter Israeli Intelligence evaluations, which are affected by the desire for peace, or of Israel's fatigue from past and current wars.

The Intelligence evaluator turns into a prophet, a seismograph that reflects his surroundings. Even if the Intelligence's evaluation and those of Western countries in general, claim tomorrow that Iran's nuclear project was built with the purpose of peace, it will not change the basic fact that Iran is closer than ever to achieve possession of nuclear weapon.

Conclusion:

¹⁰ Mansour, A. and Hendel, Y. (2007) 'Arab Culture in the Eyes of the West', Strategic Assessment 9 (4):66- 71.

Since the end of the Cold War, conventional warfare between nations has become a rare phenomenon whereas asymmetric conflicts have become a common affair. The familiar rules of war have lost their validity in face of LICs characterized by the lack of a contact line and a defined opponent. With the dawn of the age of globalization, asymmetric wars began assuming shared features, as the opposition (mostly terror and guerilla organizations) learned and enriched itself from similar conflicts in other regions.

In recent years, the West is facing a tidal wave of organized terror, mostly Islamic in different parts of the world. Despite an unmistakable balance of power, and differences in military power and resources, terrorist organizations have managed to channel military operations against them to the strong side's vulnerabilities, taking advantage of the latter's moral boundaries, civilian support limitations and limitations on the yielding of force in civilian environment.

Terrorist organizations have created a balance of power in which military achievements mean nothing since it seems that there isn't any decisive victory.¹¹

Although those organizations have a limited damage potential, their destructive influence on the patterns of national sovereignty in the modern world are becoming clearer with time. New fighting doctrines were developed to deal with this threat and its problematic environment. These doctrines call for surgical strikes from the outside without directly brushing with those points perceived as operational vulnerabilities in the first stage. There are also policies mixing the sticks, military force used against terror agents, and the carrots, incentives given to the civilian population enveloping those terror agents, with the intention of winning its hearts and minds.

Due to the complexity of the offensive, and the civilian environment in which those organizations operate, Intelligence has become the central pillar for conducting military conflict efforts and diplomatic mediation efforts with the civilian environment which supports the terrorists. However, despite intelligence efforts, there has been little success in reducing terror capabilities and support.

An examination of Israel's military conflicts in the past three years shows that if correctly used, Intelligence products can annul the achievements of terrorism, but on the other hand, if wrongly used, these products could lead to a perception of defeat against these organizations. The most important lesson to be learnt from COIN in Israel and other places around the world is that it is impossible to impose heart desires on the realities of life.

In this new age of wars and new rules of warfare, Intelligence is tasked with finding the levers of influence and the means to apply them in a war which has no contact line. Only after having found those, is it possible to make plans to reduce the next circles of enmity.

¹¹ Jones, S, G. and Libicki, M, C.(2008) 'How Terrorist Groups End Lessons for Countering al Qa'ida', Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.