

Israeli Military Reveals Official Defense Strategy for First Time Since 1950s

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on Aug. 13 released, for the first time in 60 years, a document outlining Israel's defense strategy.

IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot's decision to make the document public affords a glimpse into Israel's official defense doctrine for the first time since the Jewish state's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, approved the principles of the military's strategy in the 1950s.

In the introduction to the document, Eizenkot states that the military's operational strategy is based on the "security triangle"—a term coined by Ben-Gurion—comprising the elements of "deterrence," "early warning" and "decisive victory," with the addition of a new dimension labeled as "defense."

A military source told *Israel Hayom* that while the 33-page document is titled "IDF Strategy," its outline represents the "Eizenkot doctrine." Eizenkot's plan has yet to be approved by the Israeli government, and some of its aspects contradict the recently proposed "Locker report," which suggests extensive cuts in defense spending.

"IDF Strategy" reviews changes the military has already undergone as well as plans it will implement in the future to meet the challenges posed by Middle East dynamics. Some of the changes include improving the effectiveness of ground maneuvers and enhancing the IDF's cyber capabilities.

Eizenkot explains that the new strategy is based on the understanding that the conventional and unconventional first-circle threats Israel faces—meaning threats looming on its

borders—are decreasing, while the threats posed by terrorist organizations, projectile fire and cyberattacks are increasing.

The first principle outlined in the document is “relying on a defensive security strategy” that strives “to ensure Israel’s existence, generate effective deterrence, defer conflict and, if necessary, neutralize threats.”

The principles of military offensives are also outlined, stating the IDF’s basic operational premise is that defeating the enemy solely via defensive tactics is impossible. Another principle notes the importance of strategic cooperation, including bolstering defense ties with the U.S. and fostering strategic ties with other key countries.

A key characteristic of regional dynamics, according to the document, “is the fact that the enemy strives to impose Islamic rule across the Middle East, including in Israel. [The enemy] seeks to exhaust Israeli society, as it assumes it will prove to have little resilience.”

Outlining the enemy’s operational principles, the chief of staff’s brief explains that the threat posed by sub-state entities—especially Iranian-sponsored terrorist organizations—has increased, as these groups now strive for territorial expansion and sovereignty.

To properly meet these challenges, especially during wartime, the military will need to end the next campaign with a decisive victory that allows it to dictate cease-fire terms, reads the document. To minimize any damage inflicted on the Israeli homefront, the IDF would need to establish an improved security situation on the ground following the conflict—one that would undermine the enemy’s ability to resume its force-building efforts.

The document stresses that the main approach to achieving decisive victory is cunningly using offensive maneuvers that

play on the enemy's weaknesses, thus using the IDF's comparative advantages to ensure it achieves its "shock and awe" objectives.

While the military proved reluctant to use ground forces during its last few campaigns, the document officially states that one of the principles guiding the new strategy is engaging all relevant forces in "immediate maneuvers." Moreover, the military's cyber capabilities will be used to support both its defensive and offensive maneuvers, across all branches and on all levels.

Another important tier of the new strategy, put on paper officially for the first time, is the need to "reduce civilian, border-adjacent vulnerabilities," in a manner that would see the IDF evacuate endangered communities placed under imminent danger by fighting. That aspect is believed to have been one of the conclusions drawn from 2014's Operation Protective Edge, during which there were no organized evacuation of the Israeli communities adjacent to the Gaza border.

Eizenkot's strategy includes a lengthy review of the IDF's intent to diversify operational capabilities in the "campaign between the wars," a concept describing the Israeli military and intelligence communities' efforts to monitor and undermine the force-building capabilities of Israel's enemies. The document further details the IDF's strategy for dealing with non-bordering nations, presumably including Iran. That strategy "is largely based on CBW (clandestine military operations) ... to the point of offensive efforts meant to undermine the enemy's strength, limit its scope of operations, and thwart its intentions and abilities."

Addressing the IDF's own force-building efforts, the document says the military must accelerate the development, procurement and implementation of new technologies, explaining that pursuing such technology will "enable accurate,

multidimensional firepower capabilities, in the shortest amount of time, across an extensive target bank.”

Offering a glimpse into the scope of that target bank, the document cites “tens of thousands of targets” around Israel’s northern border and “thousands” of targets in the southern sector near Gaza.

The final aspect of Eizenkot’s doctrine focuses on human capital.

“The IDF has always drawn its strength from the quality of its personnel and the deep understanding that the military guarantees Israel’s national existence,” states the document. “The IDF will spare no effort to defend and protect Israel under any circumstances, while exhausting the core characteristics of its commanders and soldiers: a fighting spirit, initiative and quality operation, and the uncompromising desire to achieve our objectives.”

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