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APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR IN THE MODERN WARFARE ARENA: THE ISRAELI - PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Since the 1947 United Nations resolution partitioning the lands of Palestine, Israel has survived 50 years of armed conflict with it's Arab neighbors. Improperly defined as individual wars by historians and military analysts, Israel has been quite successful in defending her sovereign territory in many past battles. Application of the principles of war in each of these battles was key to Israel's success. However, applying the principles of war over the entire spectrum of 50 years of conflict, it is clear to see that Israel has not always followed the principle of Objective by straying from the path of self defense and has resulted in a strategic defeat. Recent concessions made to the Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied territories lend to support to this theory.

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Abstract of

The Application of the Principles of War in the Modern Warfare Arena: The Israeli - Palestinian Conflict

Since the 1947 United Nations resolution partitioning the lands of Palestine, Israel has survived 50 years of armed conflict with it's Arab neighbors. Improperly defined as individual wars by historians and military analysts, Israel has been quite successful in defending her sovereign territory in many past battles. Application of the principles of war in each of these battles was key to Israel's success. However, applying the principles of war over the entire spectrum of 50 years of conflict, it is clear to see that Israel has not always followed the principle of Objective by straying from the path of self defense and has resulted in a strategic defeat. Recent concessions made to the Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied territories lend support to this theory.

APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR IN THE MODERN WARFARE ARENA:

THE ISRAELI - PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Conflict between the Arab nations and the people of Israel has existed for well over one hundred years. More relevant to the modern era, this conflict has endured since the inception of Israel as an independent state in 1947. The Israelis have been very successful in militarily defending its territories against its Arab and Palestinian neighbors. However, recent events in the Gaza strip and the occupied territories leave us pondering some very important questions for the modern warfare arena. If Israel has been successful in winning its wars, why are the Palestinians making gains in the Middle East at what most people consider Israeli expense? If indeed a state of war has existed between the Israelis and the Palestinians then what of the principles of war, do they not apply? Can a cumulative application of the principles of war provide differentiation between battles and wars?

In the coming chapters, this paper will attempt to answer these questions. First, we will identify if indeed a state of war exists between Israelis and Palestinians by using various definitions of war from "experts" past and present. Then we will review the origins of Israel as a nation and analyze the outcomes

of the conflicts of 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982 to identify victories through the use of the principles of war in each battle. Finally, we will challenge the commonly used application of the principles of war as they relate to the Arab - Israeli situation over time.

CHAPTER II

LESSONS OF WAR

The U.S. Army field manual on warfighting, states that war is characterized by the use of force in combat operations against an armed enemy.[1] Clausewitz summarizes war as "a clash between major interests which is solved by bloodshed," and reminds us that "the political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it."[2] Sun Tzu sees war "as of vital importance to the state; the province of life and death; and road to survival and ruin," and adds "if not in the interest of the state, do not act."[3] Therefore, war can be defined by armed conflict in support of political objectives. Reviewing the history of this region of the world, it is clear to see that a state of war existed between Israel and the Arab nations (to include Palestine) as described above, long before Israel was considered a state.

The history of the region to include Israel's rise to statehood is as equally important to this issue. Pre - World War

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[1] Department of the Army, FM 100-5 Operations, 1993, p. 2-0

[2] Michael I. Handel, SUN TZU & Clausewitz COMPARED, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1991. p. 10, p. 14

[3] ibid, p. 12

II Palestine included all of the areas we now know as Israel with Lebanon and Syria to the North, TransJordan to the East, and Egypt to the South. Although Jews owned land in many areas of Palestine, they were vastly out numbered by their Arab co-inhabitants. In fact, the Palestinian population more than doubled that of Jewish settlers. In 1945 there were 1,101,565 Muslims and 554,329 Jews in Palestine.[4]

In the 1940's even before the Nazi atrocities were uncovered, the British had been studying independent research into an Israeli partition of the lands in Palestine. This would allow the Jews autonomy to rule themselves within the confines of the land portioned to them. This plan slowly gained support beyond Palestinian borders. Anti-Nazi sentiment and international condemnation of the treatment of European Jews contributed in the plan achieving United States support. The U.S. began collecting international support for the partitioning of Palestine, and on 29 November 1947 the United Nations passed the Partition Plan resolution.

War broke out in Palestine almost as soon as the UN had passed the Partition Resolution.[5] This conflict lasted until early in 1949, when after gaining much of the land originally partitioned to the Palestinian peoples Israel signed an armistice with the Arabs and open hostilities ceased. The state of Israel

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[4]ibid, p. 266

[5] Mark Tessler, A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 261

had become an established fact, militarily secure and recognized by the international community.[6] The Arabs and Palestinians had lost Palestine in an unorganized, unprepared attack against a superior force that was Israel. However, the Gaza strip, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank were not in the possession of the Israeli State at this time. It is also important to note that the Palestinian-Arabs did not occupy center stage in the Arab-Israeli conflict between 1948 and 1967.[7] The issue to the Arab nations was the right of Israel to exist at all.

The 1956 SINAI - SUEZ WAR

The next large scale conflict erupted at the behest of the Israeli's in the 1956 Sinai-Suez War. Utilization of the Suez Canal had been at issue since the inception of the Jewish State. The final straw, as was seen by Israel and supported by Britain and France, was Egypt's nationalizing of the Suez Canal in July of 1956. Egypt assumed strict control of the Canal and along with it any chance for Israel's future use since access was denied to Israel as a matter of principle. What followed was the Sinai - Suez War.

The Israeli's utilized several of the key principles of war to fulfill a quick and decisive victory. The principles of Mass, Objective, and Unity of Command were clearly established and adhered to. The principle of Mass is defined as the ability to provide an overwhelming combat power at the decisive place and

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[6] ibid, p. 264

[7] ibid, p. 336

time.[8] By utilizing the Israeli forces to attack through the Sinai and Gaza in several different locations, and the French and British utilizing air raids and eventually landing in the Suez Canal Zone to take control, the concept and benefits of the principle of Mass and Economy of Force were realized. Planning meetings which took place in the months preceding this campaign between the French, British and Israeli military leaders established solid chains of command, detailed coordination, and paved the road to success in terms of the principles of Unity of Effort and Objective. The war was deemed a complete military victory for the Israeli - British - French Coalition. For Egypt, which was forced to accept a ceasefire with foreign troops occupying large portions of its territory, the war was a bitter and humiliating defeat.[9] Although Israel had gained stunning military victories in the Sinai, political and henceforth strategic victories again were elusive. The International community refused to entertain the complaints and claims of Israel while the nation occupied the Sinai and Gaza. In the end the Israeli's turned over control of the Gaza and the Sinai to U.N. forces, and the Suez was eventually returned to the Egyptians as well.

The SIX DAY WAR of 1967

The Six Day War in 1967 has been touted as Israel's finest

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[8] Department of the Army, FM 100-5 Operations, 1993, p. 2-4

[9] Mark Tessler, A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Indiana University Press, 1994. p. 349

military hour. This war was brought about by what Israel perceived as threats to her national security. Egypt had recently signed defense pacts with both Syria and Jordan and the Israelis believed it only a matter of time before they would be attacked. Finally, Egypt blockaded the Straits of Tiran, an important water way for Israeli commercial shipping, and Israel decided to strike.

Israel flawlessly engaged several of the key principles of war to include Offensive, Mass and Surprise but relied upon all of the principles working in conjunction with each other to guarantee victory. The Israelis established the principles of Surprise and Mass as a result of excellent intelligence gathering. The now famous 0745 air strikes on the Egyptian air bases (0845 Egyptian time) came at a time when all of the Egyptian leadership was enroute to work. The Egyptian "ready 5" alert aircraft had been returned to static positions or were in the hangars at 0745 because the pre-dawn strike window of opportunity had come and gone. The Israelis capitalized on this ensuring little or no Egyptian aircraft would ever make it off the runway. Additionally, the Israelis utilized deception to ensure not only Surprise but rapid victory. Israel masterfully employed deception on three separate fronts across the employment of its forces: Air Force, Army and Navy. The Air Forces, weeks before, had begun to fly long range recon missions to the south over the Gulf of Aqaba. These feints convinced the Egyptians that the Israeli's were planning to attack around the southern

periphery of the Sinai peninsula instead of from over the Mediterranean Sea.[10]

The Army's plan of deception unfolded on the Egypt - Israeli border in the Eastern Sinai. The Israelis made an armored brigade appear as if it were actually three armored brigades utilizing dummy tanks and camouflage netting. The purpose of the deception plan was to convince the Egyptians that Israeli ground forces were planning another mad rush down the coast to Sharm el-Sheik, just as they did in 1956.[11] This led the Egyptians to mass its troops in that area and left the majority of the Western Sinai exposed.

Finally, the Navy's contribution to deception consisted of moving four tank landing craft over land to the Israeli port of Eilat in the north of the Gulf of Aqaba. However, by cover of nightfall, the Israelis would move them back and repeat the process the next day during daylight hours. This apparent "massive buildup" of tank landing craft could only mean that the Israelis were preparing for an amphibious assault of Sharm el-Sheik just as they did in 1956. The Egyptians mobilized the majority of their naval assets to the area where they remained bottled up for the majority of the war. Therefore, through the use of deception by the Air Force, Army, and Navy, Israel was able to achieve the principle of Surprise in support of their

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[10] W.J. Kotsch, U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, Vol. 94, June 1968

[11] ibid, p. 6

attacks and overwhelming victory. The Arab nations were no match for the Israelis and by 10 June the Arab states had agreed to a ceasefire.

As a result of this war, the Gaza strip, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and a majority of the Sinai were now in the possession of the Israel and became what is known as "occupied territories." A rebirth of the Palestinian movement began to emerge as formalized troops of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) fought against Israel in Gaza during this war. In 1967, the conflict began moving back to its original center: a dispute between Palestinians and Israeli Jews.[12]

The 1973 Yom Kippur War

In 1973 the Israeli government assuming they would have at least 24 hours notice prior to any attacks refused to believe that the Arab nations were once again preparing for war. On 6 October, 1973 Syria attacked Israeli held positions in the north while Egypt attacked positions in the south in an extremely well coordinated effort. Attempting to regain the Sinai and the West Bank, the Egyptians and Syrians took Israel totally by surprise. In the unfamiliar role of defender, Israel was more reactive than proactive. Once Israel was able to stabilize the theater in the Golan Heights, an offensive was planned and carried out in the Sinai. Economy of Force, Surprise, and Maneuver were all principles of war utilized in the "retaking" of the West Bank and

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[12] F. Robert Hunter, The Palestinian Uprising: A War by Other Means, University of California Press, 1993. p. 15

Sinai from the Egyptians and Syrians. Economy of Force was displayed in Israel's decision to use its available ground and air power assets in the West Bank area first. All reserves were directed north to stop the Syrian push through the West Bank to the Israeli border. The principles of Surprise and Maneuver were utilized when Israeli forces swept west of the Suez Canal areas and attacked the Egyptians from behind. At war termination on 24 October 1973, the Israelis were in possession of lands west of the Suez canal. Luckily, Israel had been able to rebound from earlier losses and gain the military advantage.

As a result of the 1973 Yom Kippur war, political agreements, mediated by the U.S. Secretary of State, between the Mideast parties were reached. Israel agreed to return parts of the Sinai to Egypt in exchange for commercial use of the Suez Canal, and parts of the Golan to Syria in exchange for denial of Syrian soil to terrorists. A reduction in belligerence towards Israel and a promise that the U.S. would not recognize or negotiate with the PLO were also part of the agreements.

Equally attributed to the 1973 war was that the PLO was making its own political agenda known. An equally important factor in the Arab-Israeli political equation that took shape following the 1973 war was a dramatic improvement in the circumstances of the PLO.[13] In 1974 the Palestinian leaders met in Cairo and developed a ten point program calling for the Palestinian revolution to be implemented in stages and the

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[13] ibid, p. 481

formulation of the independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This marks the first time in PLO history that a goal short of the total "liberation of Palestine" was discussed, agreed to, and put to text and the possibility existed for a dialogue between a Palestinian State in the liberated territories and "progressive and peace-oriented forces" in Israel. During the remainder of the 1970's the PLO continued to gain international recognition and strength, particularly in Lebanon, Jordan and the occupied territories.

Finally, as a result of the 1973 war and successful follow on agreements, Egypt and Israel began dialogues on peace negotiations in the late 1970's. Israel returned nearly all of the Sinai to Egypt and the peace process continued until the Camp David Accords were signed in March of 1979. This was a momentous occasion that some say cost Egyptian President Anwar Sadat his life. The Palestinian question was introduced during Camp David, but resulted only in a "future for possible dialogue."

The 1982 Invasion of Lebanon

The Peace process between Israel and Egypt left Syria, Jordan, and the PLO out of the loop. Although Israel had taken a major step in formalizing peace in the region, they continued to regard the PLO as a terrorist organization, and was not prepared to deal with them. The PLO, with backing from Jordan and Syria, began to step up attacks on Israel from camps located in the south of Lebanon. In what became known as the "two week war", Israel and the PLO in Lebanon traded missile and bombing strikes

that ended with a U.S. mediated cease fire. The hostilities of July 1981 left Israel acutely aware of the firepower the PLO had amassed in Lebanon.[14] However, the most critical issue in this crisis is that it marks the first time that both the United States and Israel had ever entered into indirect negotiations with the PLO.

Less than a year later, on June 6 1982 Israel crossed the border enmasse into Lebanon in what was called Operation Peace for Galilee. The intent of the hostile action was clear: to eradicate the PLO from within striking distance of Israel. Originally, the Israelis considered three plans to deal with the PLO problem in Lebanon. The agreed upon plan called for the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) to push the PLO back 40 kilometers into Lebanon, and included no attacks on Syrian forces in the area. What actually happened was an increasingly aggressive campaign carried out by Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon to accomplish his own larger plan despite the strict guidelines set forth by the Israeli government. On numerous occasions, Sharon convinced the cabinet to approve additional actions under the auspices of "defensive posture positions." This is a prime example of mission creep brought about by Sharon's own personal agenda.

The Israelis did utilize the Principles of Offensive, Mass, and Unity of Effort in winning this war in Lebanon. The principle of Offensive was realized by simultaneous accomplishment of Air

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[14]ibid, p. 569

superiority, Naval supremacy, and rapid troop mobilization throughout the theater of operations. The Israeli Air Forces (IAF) attacked Syrian and PLO Surface to Air Missiles (SAM) sights with lightning ferocity and success. The Navy was successfully used in amphibious and coastal protection roles. In mobilizing the reserve Forces and being able to coordinate movements nearly into Beirut within four days, the principles of Mass and Offensive were achieved. The Israeli forces had accomplished the Cabinet directives in record time. With initial victory attained so quickly and with minimal losses, Sharon convinced the Cabinet to continue into Beirut, and the Syrian controlled Bekaa Valley. Israel quickly became overextended and the euphoria of earlier victories dulled in an expensive urban campaign into Beirut. What was supposed to be a limited operation caused more casualties than the Six-Day War.[15] In 1984 the Israeli forces were withdrawn from Lebanon.

As a result of the invasion, the PLO was eradicated from Lebanon however, they simply moved their headquarters to Tunisia. The situation in the Occupied Territories did not improve as the Israelis believed it would with the PLO no longer in Lebanon. Quite the opposite occurred, the Occupied Territories including the West Bank and the Gaza Strip became Israel next challenge. The military goals were achieved but at great cost in lives and public opinion. Once again Israel had suffered a political loss

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[15] Fernea, Elizabeth and mary E. Hocking, The Struggle for Peace:Israelis and Palestinians, University of Texas Press, 1992 p. 43

not only in the eyes of the international community, but at home as well.

The Infitada

The 1987 Infitada or Palestinian uprising in Gaza, and the occupied territories presented a situation that the Israeli's had not had to deal with in the past. It can be more appropriately described from the Israeli perspective in the Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) category. From the Palestinian perspective, the Infitada unblocked a "peace process" frozen for almost a decade, pushed the PLO leadership to moderate its position, and brought the U.S. government into a dialogue with it.[16] This "revolution" was began by the young men within the poorer communities of the occupied territories but quickly spread and became PLO supported and oriented.

Attempting to apply the principles of war in this case or even the principles of Military Operations Other Than War to this situation reveals why the Israelis were unsuccessful. In this situation there is no armed conflict, and no military weaponry used by the street crowds so a "war" by definition does not exist. Of the six MOOTW principles: Security, Legitimacy, Unity of Effort, Restraint, Perseverance, and Objective, Perseverance is the only principle that can be displayed by the Israelis.

As a result of the Infitada, the Palestinians capitalized on civil disobedience and nightly news coverage of Israeli

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[16] F. Robert Hunter, The Palestinian Uprising: A War by Other Means, University of California Press, 1993 p. 4

mistreatment in the occupied territories even as PLO positions traded missile attacks with the Israelis in other geographic locations in Israel. The Palestinian people of the occupied territories gained vast international support during this critical period even when the Gulf War arose and "there were visible displays of solidarity with Iraq by Arafat and other PLO leaders."[17] As a result of Israel having its hands tied by the U.S. to maintain the Coalition against Iraq, this crisis probably marks the first time that Israel did not seek retribution for Arab (albeit Iraqi) attacks on its sovereign territory. In addition to this, The Gulf War crisis combined with the Infitada in the Occupied territories resulted in yet another political defeat and embarrassment for the Israelis.

Chapter III

Cumulative Principles of War

The principles of war are traditionally applied in the context of when a war begins and ends. Many historians and military analysts have defined the military conflicts in Israel over the past 50 years as individual wars. The Israelis and the Palestinians say they have been in a state of war since Israel's existence. If indeed a state of war between Arab nations and Israel has existed for 50 years, then application of the principles of war should be valid over the entire period. Even if the individual battles were technically wars, a cumulative

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[17] Mark Tessler, A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Indiana University Press, 1994. p. 737

application of the principles of war should not change the outcome. Viewing each of the wars that the Israelis have had in the last 50 years as individual battles in support of one campaign, and applying a cumulative effect on the principles of war to the entire spectrum might give us some insight into how the Israeli - Palestinian issue developed into what it is today.

The principle of Economy of Force would clearly be an advantage of the Israelis, because they have always been successful in utilizing their forces in the most effective manner. The principles of Offensive, Maneuver, Security, Surprise, Simplicity, and Unity of Command would equally belong on the side of the Israelis. Superior intelligence gathering, tactics in war fighting, and the will of national survival has allowed the Israelis to succeed militarily in all past battles.

What is left are the principles of Mass and Objective. Although at specific points in time the Israelis have made prudent use of these principles, the cumulative advantage belongs to the Arab states. Israel has never had the numbers required to fight for extended periods on more than two fronts simultaneously (as was seen in the 1973 war), comparatively, the Arab states have always out numbered the Israelis. Additionally, taking a cumulative view at the number of losses in military actions other than war for Israel is costly. The cumulative effect of 50 years even worsens the case. The principle of Objective requires that every military operation be directed towards clear defined and obtainable goals. Israel began to lose sight of this as the years

of quick victory and military superiority passed.

If we assume that Israel has lost this cumulative struggle based on her recent concessions to the Palestinians, then a case can be made that there was a culminating point somewhere along the way. A quick review would show that the 1947 conflict established Israel and was a sound victory. The 1956 conflict proved equally victorious and well executed by the Israeli coalition. The 1967 conflict proved to be Israel's finest military hour. The 1973 conflict began to show erosion in Israeli preparedness, the 1982 invasion of Lebanon a costly change in direction and objectives from the self defense mode. The infitada left Israelis confused for lack of a solution. An argument can be made that a culminating point exists between the 1967 and the 1973 conflicts. Although militarily Israel was the victor in 1973 bad assumptions and resistance to change nearly brought about their defeat. Additionally, the costly 1982 invasion of Lebanon showed how de-railed from the role of self defense the country had become.

Conclusions

Adhering to the principles of war can help ensure victory as we have seen in the case of each of the battles between Israel and its Arab neighbors. However, without clear objectives and an overall strategy, victory in the campaign can be elusive. It was an erosion in Israel's sense of objective and direction that cumulatively affected the countries ability to win. Although Israel capitalized on most of the principles of war and soundly

won the military battles, they have agreed to return Gaza and much of the occupied territories to the Palestinians. The cumulative effect of 50 years of war in Israel combined with an ever changing political alignment throughout the Middle East and the world is responsible. Security through occupation has become too costly politically and militarily, and is a debt that can no longer be paid by Israel.

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