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Control and Military Adaptability**

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, the author highlights that while civilian leadership may help to drive top-down military innovation in peacetime, a civil-military relationship characterised by directive civilian control breeds a culture of deference and thus negatively affects a military's spontaneity in adapting to current realities. By examining the changes in civil-military relations in Israel from 1985 to 2006 and its corresponding effects on the Israel Defense Force's adaptation in dealing with Hezbollah, the author aims to illustrate that heightened civilian constraints on the military impinge on the military's ability to strategically and operationally adapt to the character of the Second Lebanon War. The author concludes that civilian and military leaders should seek a balanced and supportive civil-military relationship and foster a conducive culture of initiative and independent thinking to enable better integration of top-down innovation and bottom-up adaptation.

Keywords: *Characterised; Innovation; Organisational; Dominant; Effectiveness*

INTRODUCTION

'It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent... It is the one that is most adaptable to change.'¹ Indeed, wars, characterised by Clausewitz as the dynamic interactive duels on a larger scale between two parties, typically reward the side that most readily adapts its strategy, operational employment, and tactics to suit the nature of battle and exploit the vulnerabilities of the adversary.² Hence, military effectiveness depends not only on the military's numerical, technological and material superiority, but more importantly, on its ability to innovatively conceptualise the use of its available resources and to adapt its strategy according to battlefield realities as the war develops.³ However, militaries, thriving on standardised operating procedures with a self-selection bias for norm conformance behaviors, are seen as inherently resistant to innovations and adaptations except in the face of existential crises.⁴

How then can militaries successfully innovate and adapt in order to improve their chances of battlefield success? The preponderance of literature on military innovation identifies civil-military relations, organisational culture, and inter-service and intra-service competition as the predominant influences

driving military innovation.⁵ While these are useful for explaining peacetime top-down innovations focused on anticipations of future challenges and threats, their effects on the military's readiness for bottom-up adaptations to real-time changes are seldom explored. Conditions benefiting top-down innovation will likely negatively impact a military's ability to adapt since an overemphasis on deductive anticipatory processes might hamper bottom-up inductive and reactive initiatives.⁶

In particular, this essay hypothesises that while civilian leadership may help to drive top-down military innovation in peacetime, a civil-military relationship characterised by directive civilian control breeds a culture of deference and thus negatively affects a military's spontaneity in adapting to current realities. By examining the changes in civil-military relations in Israel from 1985 to 2006 and its corresponding effects on the Israel Defense Force (IDF)'s adaptation in dealing with Hezbollah, this essay aims to illustrate that heightened civilian constraints on the military impinged on the military's ability to strategically and operationally adapt to the character of the Second Lebanon War. Hence, civilian and military leaders should seek a balanced and supportive civil-military relationship and foster a

conducive culture of initiative and independent thinking to enable better integration of top-down innovation and bottom-up adaptation.

This essay will briefly review the relevant literature on military innovation and civil-military relations in the first section. In the second section, it summarises the relevant background information on the Israeli civil-military relations and IDF's operational adaptations to the Hezbollah threat from 1985 to 2006. By adopting a within-country approach focusing on the same adversary, this study aims to limit extraneous cross-national effects on the IDF's readiness for adaptations. In addition, because the IDF's and the Israeli culture are widely recognised as highly innovative, it will be informative to examine the IDF's adaptability in the face of changing civil-military relations. The third section analyses the case study in relation to the hypothesis, and finally concludes with implications for military leaders facing the conundrum of preparing for future conflicts while contending with current security dilemmas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Top-Down Innovation and Bottom-Up Adaptation

Military innovation studies generally define military innovation as a significant change in the scope and impact in the manner in which a military functions, with the tacit implication that an innovation should produce a significant increase in the military's effectiveness in terms of battlefield outcomes.⁷ In addition, military innovation can be achieved through top-down or bottom-up processes, with the latter originating from short-term adaptations which eventually accrue into institutional and doctrinal changes.⁸ Top-down innovation involves a theoretical and deductive approach of imagining the future character of warfare during the interwar periods and outlining new theories of victory fuelled by a combination of shifts in geo-strategic calculations, technological imperatives, financial constraints, and civil-military collaboration.⁹ Bottom-up adaptation is inductive and reactive in nature and is typically born in the crucible of wartime experiences and lessons when gaps between theories of victories and battlefield realities require real-time strategic and operational

adjustments in doctrinal thinking and operational conduct.¹⁰ The processes of top-down innovation and bottom-up adaptation complement each other to maximise a military's effectiveness in the battlefield. Top-down innovation in the interwar period, driven by an accurate grasp of the future character of war, increases the chance of future success by focusing resource investment for the development of relevant doctrines and the corresponding technology and command structure. Bottom-up adaptations in the fog and friction of war allow a military to rapidly adjust its strategy and operations according to unforeseen developments. To harmonically foster both top-down innovation and bottom-up adaptation for increased military effectiveness, it is crucial to gain a better understanding of the factors that affect these processes.

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Civil-Military Relations and Military Innovation

Theories concerning military innovation can be generally categorised into three schools of thought: civil-military relations, organisational culture, and inter-service and intra-service competition.¹¹ The civil-military model, developed by Barry Posen, builds on the assumption that militaries are fundamentally resistant to innovations and hence requires civilian interference and direction to spur doctrinal and technological innovations in preparation of future wars, often in response to a realist perception of external threats.¹² The influence of civilian control in propelling military innovation was shown in the case of the United States (US) Air Force's development of the Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) programme in the 1950s. To kick-start this programme, President Truman established a

separate missile project development group and President Eisenhower placed high-ranking civilians who supported missile development in the Department of Defense to overcome the Air Force's institutional inertia fixated on the continued investment in strategic bombers as the main delivery means of atomic weapons.¹³ Strong civilian leadership is thus beneficial for overcoming inertia in driving top-down innovations during interwar periods.

Civil-military relations can exert a moderating influence on inter-service and intra-service competition directly by compelling services to work together to derive joint solutions or indirectly by the apportionment of budget and manpower resources. For example, inter-service competition, stiffened by a fear of budget cuts and status decline, spurred the US Army to innovate along the lines of Eisenhower's nuclear-centric doctrine and resulted in the development of tactical nuclear weapons such as the Davy Crockett and Little John rockets.¹⁴ Similarly, civil-military integration, through its effects on a military's organisational culture, can affect top-down military innovation by promoting certain policies and standards and creating an institutional bias.¹⁵ For example, Singapore's stable and unified civil-military relations help to foster an organisational culture predominated by centralised decision-making, which is beneficial for avoiding crippling competition on budget allocation through the development of coherent strategic guidance for innovation trajectories.¹⁶ This has allowed the Singapore military to continuously innovate in response to the evolving threat landscape amid resource constraints.

However, the dominant models tend to focus on explaining military innovation from a top-down perspective with little emphasis on how militaries can successfully breed bottom-up innovations.¹⁷ Given that both top-down innovation and bottom-up adaptations are critical to military effectiveness, there is strong impetus to investigate the effects of these top-down drivers on bottom-up innovation so as to discern the interplay between these two types of innovation. Stephen Rosen's work on bottom-up innovation provides an indication that a different type of civil-military relation might be useful for fostering an

environment conducive for generating military-led innovations.¹⁸ Rosen argued that top-down civilian intervention and direction were not necessary in the development of air defence in the Royal Air Force before World War II (WWII), the US Navy's development of carrier aviation doctrines and the US Marine Corps' creation of amphibious warfare in the interwar period.¹⁹ Instead, these interwar innovations successfully arose from the military organically because military leaders were able to foster a supportive and permissive civil-military partnership to reward military innovators in terms of professional progression and protect them from internal and external opposition.²⁰

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CIVILIAN CONTROL INFLUENCES BOTTOM-UP INNOVATION THROUGH ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

The existing literature provides reasonable ground to believe that the specific nature of civil-military relationship is an important factor in influencing the military's predominant organisational culture and hence affects its willingness to innovate and adapt. A civil-military relationship that is dominated by the civilian leaders will likely be accompanied with strong institutional processes, organisational structures and statutes that are meant to preserve the civilians' authority and subordinate the military as an instrument of national policy. In such relationships, decision-making is likely to be centralised and military officer selection and promotion are likely influenced by civilian leaders. This fosters an organisational culture of deference to

authority and while such a culture makes for efficient execution of top-down directions for institutional change, it will not benefit a military's bottom-up adaptability. Hence, this essay hypothesises that civil-military relations that are marked by directive civilian control and strong political constraints would foster deference to centralised decisions, and hence discourage bottom-up adaptations.

To maintain its relative dominance and ensure continued respect and support from the civilian government and society, the military needs to maintain its credibility as the protector of the nation against on-going security threats.

On the other hand, when the military exerts a dominant influence in the civil-military relations, it is likely to find itself well-supported in terms of national resources and latitude in policy decisions, personnel selection and promotion. To maintain its relative dominance and ensure continued respect and support from the civilian government and society, the military needs to maintain its credibility as the protector of the nation against on-going security threats. This focus will likely breed a culture that rewards practicality and tangible results in the battlefields and hence favors diversity of opinions and bottom-up initiatives from the officers with the most intimate knowledge of the on-going operations. Hence, this essay hypothesises that civil-military relations dominated by the military will foster a culture that emphasises and rewards military initiatives and hence encourages bottom-up adaptations.

CASE STUDY: THE IDF'S PROTRACTED CONFLICT WITH THE HEZBOLLAH FROM 1985-2006

Israel's civil-military relations have traditionally been characterised as an improvised 'semi-organised anarchy', in which the IDF enjoys a strong voice due to

its prestigious status in the Israeli society.²¹ Moreover, senior military commanders often take up political appointments after their military careers, hence allowing the military to influence political decisions through deep but informal ties with these political figures.²² The IDF's organisational culture is inherently beneficial for bottom-up adaptation. The IDF's open and informal culture encourages ground commanders to confront their superiors with their own initiatives, which is in line with the Israeli cultural attribute of 'chutzpah' (audacity).²³ The IDF also maintains strong preference for mission command and decentralised decision-making, advocating hands-on approach that favours quick practical outcomes.²⁴ In the words of Gen Moshe Dayan, Chief of General Staff under David Ben-Gurion, 'I prefer excessive initiative and action, even if it involves some mistakes... to the passivity of 'sit and do nothing' and covering yourself with paper and seven authorisations for an operation before its execution.'²⁵

However, the 1982 Lebanon War, being IDF's first 'war of choice' fought without national consensus, undermined the military's legitimacy and laid the foundations for increased political restraint in the protracted conflict in Lebanon.²⁶ The continued presence of Israeli troops in the post-war security zone met with the emergence of new terrorist groups, one of which was the Hezbollah.²⁷ In this period of 'routine security' operations in South Lebanon, the IDF was preoccupied with conventional threats elsewhere and viewed Hezbollah as a minor threat and relied on the use of air strikes as a deterrence strategy against Hezbollah's Katyusha rocket harassment.²⁸ This tit-for-tat situation escalated into the 1993 Operation Accountability in which the IDF's massive air operations against Hezbollah were hampered by political constraints imposed on the IDF due to on-going peace talks with Syria.²⁹

In 1994, Major General Amiram Levin, the new commander of Northern Command, rode on the 1993 operational setback to push back against civilian restrictions on the IDF's initiatives, and moved away from a passive concept of defensive 'routine security' against a disorganised terrorist group to a concept of counter-guerrilla warfare against a modern army.³⁰ With support from the Chief of Staff, he created the Egoz

counter-guerrilla unit. Instead of the disjointed employment of army and air assets, the Egoz unit, with its operational autonomy, could rapidly launch operations against Hezbollah and self-synchronise its operations with attack helicopters.³¹ Battle-proven tactics developed by Egoz were then spread horizontally across to units operating in Lebanon and institutionalised as the IDF's counter-insurgency doctrine.³²

Despite this episode of successful bottom-up innovation, the underlying civil-military relations were increasingly marred by a lack of political will for aggressive operations throughout the 1990s due to increasing societal discontent with the war in Lebanon, and ultimately led to a complete IDF withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, against the recommendations of the military.³³ In the face of increasing political and budget constraints imposed on the military and an increasing societal sensitivity to casualty count, the IDF established the Operational Theory Research Institute (OTRI) to transform its operational doctrine by capitalising on high-end technologies.³⁴ This culminated in a new Concept of Operations (CONOP) published in 2006—the same year of the Second Lebanon War. A fixation on the new technology-centric but doctrinally ambiguous

CONOP and an unwillingness to incur Israeli casualties through large-scale ground operations resulted in a continued reliance on stand-off firepower-based operations and limited ground action against the elusive Hezbollah rockets.³⁵ The lack of operational adaptability to the enemy's new combination of guerrilla and conventional tactics resulted in the IDF's inability to protect Northern Israel from rocket attacks right up to the UN-imposed ceasefire in August 2006.

IDF'S DECLINING STRATEGIC ADAPTABILITY AMID STRONGER CIVILIAN CONTROL

The empirical evidence from the IDF's protracted engagement with the Hezbollah after the 1982 Lebanon War right up to the Second Lebanon War showed an increasing lack of IDF's strategic adaptability amid a corresponding shift in the civil-military relations with the civilian leaders placing more constraints on the military. However, when military leaders were effective in engendering a permissive and supportive relationship, they successfully cultivated organisational culture that rewarded battlefield adaptations and implemented ground-up innovations to improve the IDF's effectiveness in combating Hezbollah's rocket attacks.

The 1982 Lebanon War marked the IDF's first involvement in a 'war of choice' and a departure from its image as a 'people's army' professed to defend Israel's status-quo survival.³⁶ This marked the beginning of a gradual decline in the IDF's legitimacy and status within the Israeli society. Emboldened by the public's resistance to the IDF's protracted war in Lebanon, the civilian leaders increasingly constrained the IDF's budget, preferring to divert budgetary resources to appease the public's demand for lower costs of living. The shift in dominance from the military to the civilian leaders was most apparent when the government ordered Israel's unilateral withdrawal against the impassioned recommendations of ground commanders. BG Erez Gerstein, commander of the IDF forces in Southern Lebanon, strongly believed that 'withdrawal from the security zone would bring the terror right up to Israel's borders.'³⁷ With this change in the civil-military relationship, the IDF was restricted to rely on the use of occasional airstrikes even when it was clearly ineffective



IDF military patrol near Ayshiyeh Lebanon (1993).

in halting the Hezbollah rocket attacks. To maintain legitimacy and prestige, the IDF focused its attention away from the thorny Hezbollah threat to the more familiar conventional threats in Syria and Iraq.³⁸ This resulted in a static strategic approach in the 18 years of security operations against an increasingly competent Hezbollah, demonstrating the negative impact of directive civilian control on IDF's strategic adaptability.³⁹

The negative effects of civilian control on the IDF's adaptability were perpetuated through a gradual change in the IDF's organisational culture. The civilian constraints conditioned the military leaders to be more conservative in their leadership approach and favoured greater degrees of top-down direction. This shifted the IDF culture away from one that promoted tactical adaptations as quick reactions to real-time development.⁴⁰ Pressured by societal aversion toward casualties, the military began to favour anticipatory institutional-level reforms to avoid the need for costly real-time tactical adaptations to battlefield realities. This cultural shift toward centralisation and anticipatory innovation manifested itself in the establishment of OTRI and the development of a technology-centric CONOP that borrowed heavily from the American concept of Effects Based Operations without sufficient clarity for tactical unit's operational applications. This supports the hypothesis that tightened civilian control tends to encourage a culture of deference to central authority and hence favours the development of top-down institutional change.

Placing heavy emphasis on institution-led decisions also eroded the IDF's traditional norm of questioning and confronting superiors. Despite the new CONOP's lack of operational clarity, few IDF officers were willing to highlight their concerns. Although they were convinced 'that the tailors were selling nonsense, that there were no new clothes, [they] were too embarrassed to say so out loud... Until the war came and pointed at the king's [nakedness].'⁴¹ This shift in organisational culture resulted in a loss of independent thinking and bottom-up initiatives even at the highest level of the IDF. Against an evolved Hezbollah threat, Chief of IDF General Staff, Lt Gen. Halutz obstinately relied on massive stand-off firepower and was unresponsive in adapting his strategic approach for a massive ground invasion. While stronger civilian

direction and constraints spurred the top-down institution of OTRI and nudged the IDF toward doctrinal reforms to exploit new high-end technologies, it stifled bottom-up initiatives and contributed to strong institutional inertia, which ultimately eroded the IDF's adaptability and effectiveness in dealing with a fast evolving Hezbollah. Hence, this is in line with the hypothesis that higher levels of civilian control and constraints lead to stronger institutional inertia and reduce incentives for independent thought and bottom-up adaptations.



IDF military patrol crossing the Khardala Bridge in south Lebanon (1988).

Amid the general trend of stifling civilian control and decline in bottom-up adaptability, the successful establishment of the Egoz unit in 1995 provides evidence that a permissive and supportive civil-military relationship encourages adaptability through a culture that values bottom-up initiatives. Excessive political intervention in the conduct of the 1993 Operation Accountability was widely thought to have contributed to the IDF's dismal performance in that operation, and Major General Levin successfully capitalised on this lesson learnt to push back on civilian intervention and lobbied for support for his re-conceptualisation of the Hezbollah threat as counter-guerilla warfare. Through his brilliant timing, he secured strong support from the Chief of Staff to establish a new unit in three months, drawing on excellent calibre soldiers and commanders from all infantry units.⁴² With the political headroom and support from his superiors, Levin was able to delegate command of the unit to experienced ground commanders to develop innovative tactics suited to the Lebanese terrain and the Hezbollah's vulnerabilities, thereby creating a culture that encouraged initiatives

and independent thinking.⁴³ In addition, the use of informal networks and opportunities to spread their battle-tested tactics to other infantry units operating in Lebanon demonstrated the prevalence of a culture that facilitated ground-up initiatives. The Egoz unit's innovative tactics and combat effectiveness lent support to Rosen's argument that bottom-up initiatives flourish when military officers are able to build supportive relationships with their civilian and military superiors to secure support in terms of freedom of action, resources, and talent distribution, and to build a culture that facilitates horizontal exchange of ideas and protects voicing of dissenting opinions. Hence, even in the face of growing civilian intervention, military leaders at the strategic and operational levels should continue to identify opportunities to build trusting and supportive relationships with their civilian leaders in order to preserve latitude for the military to exercise its professional and independent thinking in innovating and adapting to changes in its geostrategic threat environment.

CONCLUSION

An examination of Israel's civil-military relations between the two Lebanon wars demonstrated that the nature of civil-military relations has a far-reaching effect on a military's ability to strategically adapt to its changing threat environment and hence affects its effectiveness in deterring and defeating its adversaries. While strong civilian leadership and direction is generally thought to be beneficial for driving top-down military innovations in the interwar period, this case study demonstrated that increasing civilian intervention and policy constraints on the IDF bred a culture of deference to authority and led to strong institutional inertia in adopting a technologically-centric but

doctrinally ambiguous CONOP in the 2006 Second Lebanon War. On the contrary, forging a supportive and permissive civil-military relationship following the operational setback in 1993 afforded Major General Levin latitude and resources to foster a conducive culture for delegating authority to encourage bottom-up initiatives in enhancing the IDF's adaptability to Hezbollah's guerrilla warfare tactics. Hence, dynamics within the civil-military relations need to be carefully managed in order to achieve a balanced interplay between top-down institution-led innovations and ground-up initiatives and adaptations.

Fostering a culture that is conducive for both top-down innovations and bottom-up real-time adaptations is critical for a military's continued effectiveness amid shrinking budgets and the ever evolving threat landscape. Over-emphasis on future-oriented innovations may decrease a military's adaptability to its current security dilemmas, be it in the cyber or non-conventional domains, while an over-zealous focus on fighting today's battles may reduce its strategic preparedness for the new domains such as space and black swan technology. In a bid to encourage bottom-up initiatives, military leaders would do well to abstain from the tendency to institute new top-down structures as these will perpetuate a counter-productive culture of deference. Instead, military leaders should invest time and energy to forge supportive civil-military relationships to secure trust and resources. With freedom of action, the military can comprehensively review its organisational structure to create rewarding and protective progression pathways to retain and promote innovative officers who can in turn build a lasting organisational culture that is conducive for integrating top-down and bottom-up innovations.

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