

Israeli Ground Forces

Israeli Defense Forces or IDF are among of the World's most developed and sophisticated military forces. The Israeli defense industry is famous for its high-energy laser weapons capable of disabling rockets while also developing high-tech armor. However, at the beginning of the Jewish independence in the forties and fifties the military didn't have the needed technology to fight the neighboring Arab states, instead the IDF relied on its citizens and their fervor to fight for the newly created Jewish state in the Middle East. Today, despite having modern armament, Israeli citizens are still obliged to serve in the IDF for two or three years thus raising the overall defensive capabilities of the entire society.

The IDF strategic framework is governed by two main aspects: national goals and threat factors. National goals include:

- securing the existence of the state while protecting its territorial integrity and sovereignty
- preserving the values of the State of Israel;
- securing the state's economic and social stability while strengthening regional and international status of the State of Israel.

Threat factors are divided between:

- states - Iran, Lebanon and Syria;
- sub-state organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah;
- terrorist organizations with no specific connection to a state or a community - Al Qaeda, Islamic State, Global Jihad etc.¹

These aspects also serve as guidelines to the IDF for developing its assets for future engagements.

Besides strategic framework, there is also a strategic doctrine that contains important political and military elements which serve as guiding principles both for the government and for the military of Israel. These elements include deterrence, *casus belli*, military victory, acceptable costs, strategic autonomy and defensible borders. The IDF can easily achieve strong **deterrence** thanks to their military technology and military superiority despite being in a hostile region. However, strong deterrence doesn't make war impossible. An event that can cause a justified war or a large scale military operation can be put into term of *casus belli*, in other words Israeli military can justify its engagement if it deems it necessary to protect its state interests. This was especially important during the seventies and the eighties when relations with the Arab neighbors were always on the edge. **Military victory** is similar to deterrence as Shimon Peres stated:

¹ *The IDF Strategy* p.9 (<https://www.idfblog.com/s/Desktop/IDF%20Strategy.pdf>)

"Deterrent power - the power to deter the enemy from attacking is also the power to vanquish him if he should fail to be deterred".

In other words army that is capable of winning is also a good deterrence force. **Acceptable costs** refers to casualties or costs that the military is ready to accept in order to gain victory. A small military with a limited number of personnel such as IDF cannot afford large-scale offensives which can potentially cripple their troops. Therefore "acceptable costs" must be minimal. This is achieved primarily by quick and decisive military operations that are strictly focused on completing assigned objectives.² **Strategic autonomy** refers to producing defensive systems and developing defensive capabilities independently. Israel was heavily relying on US weapons and systems in the past, although the US has one of the best military technologies it was important for the Jewish state to develop an autonomous weapon industry according to its needs and geographic conditions. Finally, **defensible borders** are a concept which encompasses: better safety in case of a surprise attack; making Israel a tougher target thus increasing deterrence; better and wider range of potential operational activities. The concept of defensible borders is one of the main reasons why the Israeli government doesn't accept a pre-1967 border arrangement.³ These elements have shaped the overall strategic and political doctrine of the Jewish state in the last sixty years. Furthermore they have directed the development of the IDF and its approach to the neighboring states.

The Israeli ground forces are highly mechanized, the personnel in these mechanized brigades almost equal the combined numbers of those in the armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria. The trend of mechanization was also boosted by strong artillery which can be quickly deployed along the ground forces. One of the primary duties of the ground forces is guarding the border with Jordan, Syria and Lebanon where they have been deployed since the end of the eighties.

Despite being a highly modernized and effective force, the Israeli army isn't capable of destroying threats such as Hamas or Hezbollah but rather contain them. In recent years some governmental officials are purposing significant cuts for the ground forces. The main reason behind this is that IDF wants to boost its intelligence, cyber and special forces while conventional ground forces are deemed as outdated.⁴ Reasoning behind this decision is that unique capabilities of the ground forces are becoming less relevant for defeating future threats, therefore there is no need for a large and costly army. Although this is in line with the global military trends of reducing conventional armies and focusing on smaller and highly trained forces capable of defeating asymmetrical threats and effectively participating in hybrid warfare, the State of Israel can still potentially be threatened by its neighbors with a conventional ground force. The proposition of cutting Israeli's ground forces has raised many eyebrows in all spheres

² The cost of manpower has always been a very sensible issue in Israel that can often lead to public discontent.

³ Yoav Ben Horin and Barry Posen, *Israeli's Strategic Doctrine*, RAND p. 12-28 (<https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2007/R2845.pdf>)

⁴ Dr. Eitan Shamir and Dr. Eado Hecht, *Neglect of IDF Ground Forces: A Risk to Israel's Security*, BESA Perspectives p. 1-2 (<https://besacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/perspectives225.pdf>)

of public life. Some military analysts who are strongly opposing this proposition are pointing out a very important issue: cutting the ground forces order of battle is easy but rebuilding them is hard and time-consuming, furthermore training troops requires months while training officers usually takes years.

Israeli Ground Forces

Israeli Army has 26,000 active and 107,000 conscripts and 400,000 + (on mobilization) reserve personnel.

Army Bases:

- Beit Leav Army Base
- Hadera Northern Infantry Training Base
- Mishmar HaNegev Army Base
- Shomron Southern Infantry Training Base
- Shurgah Army Base
- Shizafon Armor Corps Training Base

FORCES BY ROLE

COMMAND

3 regional command corps HQ

2 armored divisions HQ

4 territorial infantry divisions HQ

3 special forces battalions

MANOEUVRE

1 independent reconnaissance battalion

3 armored brigades

3 mechanized infantry brigades

1 mechanized infantry brigade

1 independent mechanized infantry battalion

1 independent light infantry battalion

1 paratrooper brigade

1 armored training brigade

COMBAT SUPPORT

3 artillery brigades

3 engineering battalions

1 explosive ordinance disposal company

1 chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosive battalion

1 intelligence brigade

2 military police battalions

EQUPEMENT BY TYPE

MBT 500: 120 *Merkava* MkII; 160 *Mekrava* MkIII; 220 *Merkava* MkIV

RECCE 308: 300 RBY-1 RAMTA; 8 TPz-1 *Fuchs* NBC

APC (T) 1,165: 65 *Namer*; 200 *Achzarit*; 500 M113A2; 400 *Nagmachon*

APC (W) 100 *Ze'ev*

ARTY 530 **SP** 250: **155mm** 250 M109A5 **TOWED:** **122mm** 5 D-30; **130mm** 100 M-46;
155mm 171:40 M-46; 50 M-68/M-71; 81 M-839P/M-845P **MRL** 30: **227mm** 30 M270 MLRS

AT **MSL** SP M113 with *Spike*; *Tamuz*; *Magach* mod with *Spike* **MANPATS** IMI
MAPATS; *Spike* MR/LR/ER

AD **SAM** SP 20 *Machbet* **MANPAD** FIM-92A *Stinger*

RADAR **LAND** AN/PPS-15; AN/TPQ-37 *Firefinder*

MSL 100 **STRATEGIC** 100 *Jericho* 1 SRBM/*Jericho* 2 IRBM **TACTICAL** **SSM** 7
Lance

AEV D9R; *Puma*

ARV *Centurion* Mk2; *Eyal*; *Merkava*; M88A1; M113 ARV

VLB *Alligator* MAB; M48/60; MTU

Other sources used for the article also include Global Security as well as The Military Balance 2015.

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