The War of Attrition: Three Wars, One Story

Dov Tamari

2019 marked the the fiftieth anniversary of the War of Attrition, which was fought mainly against Egypt, and on a smaller scale, was waged along the ceasefire lines with Jordan and Syria. This article refers to the mindset in the IDF and within the General Staff during the six years between the Six Day War (1967) and the Yom Kippur War (1973), and to the nature of the discourse between the military and the government. The War of Attrition against Egypt enables three wars to be merged into one story, due to the decisive prominence of Egypt in these wars against Israel. The focus is on the military echelon and the interactions between the military echelon and the political echelon during the years of the War of Attrition, and the impact of military thinking on political thinking between the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War, while focusing on the years of the War of Attrition in the Egyptian theater.
Introduction

In 2019, the Israeli media covered the fiftieth anniversary of the War of Attrition, which was fought mainly against Egypt, and on a smaller scale, was waged along the ceasefire lines with Jordan and Syria. The War of Attrition resulted in 968 fatalities and 3,730 wounded, 260 of whom were combatants in the Suez Canal arena. On June 16, 2019, four former IDF Chiefs of Staff were interviewed on the Israeli television channel Kan, and recalled their memories of that war. All four men, who are deserving of much esteem for their military service and their dedication to the State of Israel, fought during the War of Attrition as junior officers, and their stories were replete with the nostalgia typical of those recalling painful past experiences. However, during the program, none of the four addressed the question of the relevance of that war to the present day.

This article refers to the mindset in the IDF and within the General Staff during the six years between the Six Day War (1967) and the Yom Kippur War (1973), and to the nature of the discourse between the military and the government. Within this context, the article focuses on the nature of the fighting in the Egyptian arena during the War of Attrition, which differed from the fighting against Jordan and Syria. More specifically, the War of Attrition against Egypt enables three wars to be merged into one story, due to the decisive prominence of Egypt in these wars against Israel. The questions addressed include: Did the way in which the General Staff interpreted the War of Attrition and its modus operandi derive from its interpretation of the Six Day War and from the idea of expansionism that evolved within the IDF following the War of Independence? Were both of these wars the direct precursor of the Yom Kippur War? What remains relevant from the War of Attrition today?

This article does not survey the international environment, the positions of the world powers, or their involvement and influence in the War of Attrition and during those six years, and does not refer to the arguments within the Israeli governments over the six years of intensive conflict. Rather, the focus is on the military echelon and the interactions between the military echelon and the political echelon during the years of the War of Attrition, and the impact of military thinking on political thinking between the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War, while focusing on the years of the War of Attrition in the Egyptian theater.

Interpretive and Formative Concepts

My interest in the three wars, and primarily in the War of Attrition, focuses more on what the political and military leadership were thinking during those six years and less on what they did. My research on “how they thought” includes analyses of the deliberations in the various echelons and analyses of plans of action and the evolution of the thought processes during those six years. All of these present a series of concepts, most of which evolved from past experience, previous political baggage, and cognitive baggage of identifiable origin.

No person is capable of comprehending his environment and reality without interpretive concepts; the same is true of any social organization. In this context, “concepts” are not mere terms, but rather conceptions or approaches used to interpret reality and prompt toward action. Although the Agranat Commission decided that “conception” is a dirty word and should be avoided, without this or that conception, there is nothing, and we are left at the starting line. Therefore, the important questions are: Is the conception that we have—i.e., the set of concepts used to interpret reality—indeed relevant to reality? And, are individuals capable of discerning—and if so, when—that their conceptions are no longer relevant to interpretation of emergent reality?

Among the familiar concepts routinely used in studies about national security are: existential threat; warning; deterrence; decision; strategic depth (and the lack of strategic depth); endurance; “crushing” capability; offensive
defense strategy; shift of the war to enemy territory; security borders; air supremacy; and many more, up to personal security, which replaced the concepts of general security and safe peace. These concepts are still awaiting proof of viability.

A review of the history of the relations between statesmen and the military in Israel shows that the political leadership’s conceptual horizon relating to security and war was almost always supplied or designed by the senior military echelon. This means that discussions between the echelons almost exclusively tapped concepts used by the IDF to interpret reality and understand threats and crises (Tamari, 2012).

It follows, therefore, that the governmental-organizational structure called the “political echelon”—and the “military echelon” that is subordinate to it and receives directives from it—is operating properly in terms of the hierarchy needed to underpin the running of a democratic state. But the thinking, the understanding, the concepts, and the language created in the IDF and the extent of the transformation and internalization of these concepts in governments, and vice versa, is uncertain and vague, as long as the members of the government and the prime minister are not systematically engaged in the development of knowledge relating to security and the crises that require the operation of military force.

Another assumption, based on decades-long observation of the IDF, is that the IDF’s interpretive concepts are deeply affected by tactical language and concepts, given the impact of the tactical level on the levels above it. The fireworks of every war are the tactical achievements, because they are more critical to the fighting capability of every individual soldier, unit, and formation. They are a significant generator of the socialization of the individual and of society in relation to that particular war. Over the years, the tactical excellence of IDF was outstanding and surpassed that of its enemies. Consequently, “tactics” became the interpretive conceptual anchor of the military experience and of military thinking, sometimes up to the highest level.

When tactical conceptual language is applied to the strategic and operative thinking environments, a crisis will almost certainly occur, because the logic underlying these spheres of knowledge is very different; tactical thinking is a natural response, a matter of incidents and responses, while the logic underlying strategic and operative thinking engages in creating conceptions for the near or distant future, providing guidance in force buildup processes, and deciding modes of future force deployment in scenarios that are difficult to foresee. Because switching between

---

**When tactical conceptual language is applied to the strategic and operative thinking environments, a crisis will almost certainly occur, because the logic underlying these spheres of knowledge is very different.**

---

When the strategic to the tactical and vice versa is problematic, as Yehoshafat Harkabi described in his book *War and Strategy* (1992), the imposition of tactical thinking and its adoption at higher echelons is liable to transform the strategy and the campaigns being planned into a mere set of incidents and responses.

**The Onset of Indecision regarding the Outcomes of War**

The Six Day War of June 1967 ended after Israel defeated three neighboring Arab armies. The Israeli government, the public, and possibly also the IDF were surprised by the achievements of such a short war and its relatively few casualties, compared to the prevalent public gloom before the war.

In the wake of the unexpected new reality, disagreements arose on June 18–19, one week after the ceasefire on all fronts, at a meeting of Israel’s first national unity government, regarding some of the decisions that were made. The purpose of the deliberations was
to formulate and clarify Israel’s position with regard to the outcomes of the war in preparation for the debate at the UN and toward clarifications that were sent secretly to the American administration. Subsequently, the discussions engaged in a series of material issues in this newly emerging reality, such as the status of previous agreements with neighboring countries; changes in the armistice lines; the future of the West Bank and a possible annexation of territories; the unification of Jerusalem; the possibility of a binational state, and more.

The government’s discussions and resolutions give us an idea of the conceptions held by members of the government even before the war—conceptions originating from the years since the War of Independence and the Sinai Campaign—that now had to be reexamined in light of a new reality. Striking during these discussions was the position of Minister of the Police Eliyahu Sasson, a longstanding Arabist since before 1948, who argued that if the ministers were discussing a new order in the vicinity, their understanding of Arab countries and their governments was inadequate.

The Security Concept

Israel’s security concept between the War of Independence and the Six Day War comprised several essentials: full recruitment of the resources of the state and the society toward the possibility of war; the need for the war to be short, be it initiated by Israel or launched as a preventive war or preemptive strike; and victory on the territory of neighboring countries.

The security concept was also summed up succinctly as a trifold strategy of deterrence, warning, and decision—an inherently erroneous approach that was never viable since it is paradoxical, because any deterrence dissipates at some point, warning is never guaranteed, and decision is transient by nature. This triad reflected a deterministic approach. These “essentials” were not sufficiently analyzed, and they were not revised if and when reality changed, sometimes to an extreme.

Subsequent to the Ben Gurion government, almost none of the Israeli governments forged or formulated any coherent security concept. The Israeli research literature addressing this important issue often presents security concepts that were formulated by researchers after the fact; i.e., researchers performed a retrospective analysis and formulated what in their opinion was a security concept, and sometimes, what should have been a security concept. It is unlikely that the relevant political and military leaderships formulated any idea of a security concept in the same way that researchers did after the fact and years later. It appears that in Israel, security concepts were formulated retrospectively in light of successful wars, and not before them. What was done between 1950 and until the First Lebanon War in 1982? The IDF, the General Staff, and the senior military leadership formulated approaches for deploying military forces that could be called security concepts. One can see in them “expansionist approaches” or “positioning Israel in the region.” In other words, some of Israel’s wars were designed to be expansionist, while others were caused as a consequence of the expansionist policy (Tamari, 2012).

Expansionism

From the War of Independence and until after the Yom Kippur War, the IDF was considered to be the most successful organization in Israeli society (Tamari, 2012). Successive governments related to the IDF as the entity that guarantees the state’s existence and is capable of providing the right response to any situation and conflict with enemy countries on the one hand, and on
the other hand, as a social entity that builds the nation and the society. The IDF, for its part, saw itself as hegemonic in relation to all national security issues and as the organization that must influence and also sometimes define the infrastructure development in the State of Israel during its nascent years in light of its security needs. The IDF also assumed the role of government tool, even beyond immediate security needs.

A methodical perusal of General Staff and regional command documents, multi-year plans, and various staff research studies of the General Staff between 1950 and 1973, and even until 1981, finds that the IDF cultivated unequivocal conceptions about expansionism, about demarcating completely new borders for the State of Israel, and about Israel’s positioning in the Middle East. At the same time, and notwithstanding the subversive nature of this conception, it was no secret and was not concealed from the prime ministers and defense ministers, though for their part, the governments did not delve into the conceptions of war adopted by the IDF.

The expansionist policy, as designed in the IDF, influenced the conduct and outcomes of the Sinai Campaign in 1956, the Six Day War, the War of Attrition and surrounding events in 1967-1970, the Yom Kippur War, the First Lebanon War, and, it appears, the occupation of the West Bank. All of the staff plans and research studies pertaining to expansionism were designed to create “forward strategic depth” in the hostile regions between Arab armies and Israel’s living space (Nevo Research, 1954). The Lavi strategic planning dossier of the Operations Branch/Planning Department, November 1953, clearly contains the idea of expansionism, with an advanced planning addendum that proposed the inclusion of the expansionist plans in the IDF’s multi-year plan; i.e., a prescribed directive for planning every war so that it would be capable of acquiring new territories for Israel. Planning for such a war, so it was written, must be coordinated for critical dates and opportunities that might emerge between 1954 and 1957. In addition, expansionism appears in all of the multi-year plans subsequent to the Sinai Campaign and until the Six Day War. The five-year Bnei Yaakov plan of 1958 stated that a war with one or more neighboring countries requires the conquering of territories of up to 250 kilometers from Israel’s borders. The five-year Bnei Or plan of December 1964, which was in effect until 1969 and retroactively also covered the Six Day War, stated that Israel must be proactive and occupy the West Bank until the borders are changed.

The expansionist ideas were what prompted the IDF to occupy territories in the Sinai Peninsula, in the West Bank, and in the Golan Heights in 1967. Subsequently, the IDF was tasked with defending them, but a defensive approach was not formulated, but rather only an approach for a continuation of expansionism. The objectives of the war defined by the General Staff headed by Lt. Gen. David Elazar in the summer of 1973 were to defeat Egypt and Syria in order to maintain the status quo achieved after the Six Day War and “to improve the ceasefire lines” at the end of the war (“The Yom Kippur War,” Doctrine and Training Division, 1980). The improvements were approved by Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan and included the occupation of territories not much smaller than those occupied in 1967.

The IDF’s expansionist policy was designed not only to eliminate imminent danger and deter an enemy by a show of Israel’s power, but also to effect a permanent change in the State of Israel’s geostrategic conditions. The Six Day War is clear evidence of this—the government had not issued any instructions to the IDF about which territories to occupy and for what purpose. The government’s only instruction to the IDF was “to remove the seal choking the State of Israel,” and indeed, this was removed in one day as a result of the Air Force’s achievements. All the rest—the occupation of the entire Sinai Peninsula up to the Suez Canal, contrary to the directives of the Minister of Defense, the
occupation of the West Bank and the Golan Heights—were an outcome of the expansionist approach, which was the prevalent mindset in the IDF that dominated easily, due to the absence of directives from the government, and superseded any government directive to moderate the scope of the occupation. After the Yom Kippur War and after the disengagement agreements, and also after the peace accord was signed with Egypt, the General Staff retained the desire to return to the Sinai, as is apparent from the Gates of Salvation operational plans and similar plans from 1981 that were formulated in case the agreements with Egypt were not fulfilled.¹

Examination of the IDF’s expansionist approach prompts the question: How would the IDF occupy extensive territories in the region? Decisive answers to this were provided in the form of the structure and organization of the IDF, the military force deployment concepts, and utilization of the overall Israeli potential for the possibility of war. A historical review shows that the question of how Israel would hold occupied regions was almost never addressed—a salient issue given that the neighboring countries would not be eager to accept the loss of territories and would do everything in their power to get them back.

Examination of the IDF’s expansionist approach prompts the question: How would the IDF occupy extensive territories in the region? Decisive answers to this were provided in the form of the structure and organization of the IDF, the military force deployment concepts, and utilization of the overall Israeli potential for the possibility of war. A historical review shows that the question of how Israel would hold occupied regions was almost never addressed—a salient issue given that the neighboring countries would not be eager to accept the loss of territories and would do everything in their power to get them back.

Defending the Sinai Peninsula after the Six Day War

Very briefly, in mid-June 1967, it appeared that Israel’s wars against its neighbors were over, after the Arab armies suffered such a crushing defeat. Yet very quickly it became evident that this was not the case. There are different ideas on when the War of Attrition began. While Israel and the IDF say it began in March 1969, it can also be understood as a war that started two weeks after the end of the Six Day War, launched unequivocally by Egyptian President Nasser (Kabha, 1995). Some researchers believe that it did not start before September-October 1968, while others assert that every war has a “maturation period” prior to its outbreak, and the War of Attrition against Egypt is an example of this. The Egyptian decision to launch the war was accompanied by a series of brutal attacks against the IDF along the Suez Canal and at sea. It began with seemingly sporadic incidents, such as the sinking of the Eilat battleship, which resulted in 34 fatalities, and two preplanned massive shelling attacks in September and October 1968, which resulted in the deaths of 25 soldiers. But until then the IDF did not understand what a war of attrition is, or how it should prepare for it. Prime Minister Eshkol, who was skeptical despite the victory in June 1967 and was concerned that the victory and the quiet were only temporary, did not know how to translate his concerns into clear directives to the government and to the IDF.

Until the Six Day War, the IDF did not lack basic military knowledge about defensive fighting as a strategic foundation, but for justified reasons it was deemed an unacceptable option. As long as it was necessary to defend the State of Israel at the ceasefire lines, the solution for defensive fighting was initiated war and preemptive strikes. This might be the reason for the inadequate engagement in defensive fighting until the Six Day War. After
the war, the thinking about defense of the newly occupied territories was adversely affected by the lack of prior knowledge about the concept of defensive fighting. After the Six Day War and the seizure of expansive territories three times larger than Israel at the ceasefire borders, one would expect that thought processes about strategic defense might be initiated, but this did not happen.

Upon his appointment as Chief of Staff, Haim Bar-Lev held a series of meetings on the subject of defending the Sinai. The basis of the discussions about defense should have relied on a conceptual system that clarified the concept of strategic depth, the volume of military forces and their availability relative to the region, the military capabilities of the adversary's army, and the government’s policy and its interpretation by the General Staff. During a General Staff meeting in September 1968, Chief of Staff Bar-Lev said (“The Yom Kippur War,” Doctrine and Training Division, 1980):

As for the question: Which war? I think that here too, if we hang onto some defensive conception, it’s an optical illusion because, in the final analysis, we have always said: we will stop the enemy’s attack and we will shift the war to its land. I think that this was valid during the period of the Green Line and it is also valid today. And our forces need to be trained to stop a surprise attack and switch to an offensive response. I think that the war—if there will be an all-out war—will be a war that they initiate. I see very little chance or likelihood that we will be the initiators.

The Chief of Staff developed his approach when he said that if a war erupts, it might become necessary to occupy targets, like Cairo or Alexandria or the hills surrounding Cairo; i.e., an optimal course of action, according to him. This would also be true for Amman and Damascus or Jabal al-Druze, the Litani River or Port Fouad, and the western side of the Suez Canal. To this end, Israel’s military force must also be prepared for the scenario that the force will accomplish a maximum achievement, which is a long term arrangement that might require Israel to remain in Cairo or in its vicinity for a month or two years—so he said. His statements contained a new twist, or perhaps were a return to the model recalled from the War of Independence—i.e., a war that opens with a defensive stance and, as soon as it succeeds, switches to an offensive stance to win the war and gain achievements at least as advantageous as those of the Six Day War.

A few weeks later, in November, during a meeting at the General Staff attended by Minister of Defense Dayan, OC Southern Command Maj. Gen. Yeshayahu Gavish clarified the defensive approach for the length of the Suez Canal line (ibid.):

The principles on which the plan is built are as follows: first—we must defend the canal line. The defense needs to enable us to prevent any crossing of the canal in places not under our control...Naturally, the significance of our deployment along the canal is an outcome of two considerations—military and political...There is no doubt that the vulnerable point of the forces crossing the canal is the preparation time before the crossing and their being in the water. We will achieve this advantage if we deploy along the shoreline.

The Chief of Staff summarized:

But like I said, we have all of the chances of stopping them on the canal line based on three elements: the defined areas, counterattacks, and air power. We hope that all three will work, because then it will be good.
Even if two of them work, this will also be good. (ibid.)

Therefore, the line of strongholds along the banks of the Suez Canal, whose construction began in the winter of 1968, was not designed solely for a war of attrition. This was a line that was designed to protect the Sinai region at its most western edge, in the event of a wide-scale war. The viewpoint of the Chief of Staff, the General Staff, and the Southern Command contradicted any basic military logic. The defensive holding line, which is the line that as long as is held fulfills its mission, was the most forward line possible, hundreds of meters from the Egyptian military forces. Therefore, there was no tactical depth and no systemic depth—which thwarts any defense in advance.

The viewpoint of the Chief of Staff, the General Staff, and the Southern Command contradicted any basic military logic. The defensive holding line, which is the line that as long as is held fulfills its mission, was the most forward line possible, hundreds of meters from the Egyptian military forces. Therefore, there was no tactical depth and no systemic depth—which thwarts any defense in advance.

The next Chief of Staff, David Elazar, did not revise his predecessor’s viewpoint, but added that he absolutely negated defensive fighting as a reasonable option in war. He considered an attack on the Suez Canal and on the Golan Heights as the opening position of the war, even though he admitted that the prospects of an Israeli preemptive strike were low. Regarding the possibility of war being initiated by Egypt, he said in the summer of 1973 (ibid.):

I don’t want to talk about the conception, about deployment at the canal in a defensive posture and about managing a defensive war. I think this will be a disaster....Don’t talk to me about the conception of the strongholds and the Bar-Lev Line....If war indeed breaks out, it must have one mission: to defeat the enemy’s army.

The Chief of Staff went further and essentially buried defensive fighting as a basic scenario in a war: “The Sela defensive plan [the code name for the Sinai defensive plan] must give us an alert for a rapid switch to the offense... and to gain major and substantial achievements immediately.”

OC Southern Command Maj. Gen. Ariel Sharon promptly came to the support of the Chief of Staff: “We are not presenting Sela at all, because we have Sela overlapping the maximum offensive plan.” The Operations Branch officer added: “Sela is general, while we have two additional divisions at the front line—162 in the northern sector and 143 in the Refidim sector on the arteries and um-Machtsa in the direction of the central sector...when the operation is being built in order to launch Operation Desert Cat” (ibid.).

It appears that after the Six Day War, both Chiefs of Staff and three OCs Southern Command nearly completely ruled out the defensive fighting designed to maintain Sinai under Israel’s absolute control. The set of conceptions that the IDF designed and followed prior to 1967 remained as it had been—a strategic attack to win the war immediately after it erupts, despite the possibility that an intelligence warning of imminent war was not guaranteed, while the possibility of an Israeli preemptive strike similar to the Six Day War was not plausible. A similar situation also existed on the northern front opposite Syria.

The military outcomes of the Six Day War cemented the strategic thinking in the IDF. After the reality drastically changed in the entire region, the approach toward deploying military force (or perhaps the security concept) remained as it was between 1956 and 1967: with the same sets of concepts, and the
same approaches toward force deployment. The security paradigm was not reviewed or challenged by a new paradigm. The preparation for the next war was a replay of the Six Day War. The complete set of military conceptions that was relevant prior to 1967 was imposed on an entirely different reality, which did not undergo any paradigmatic scrutiny. The War of Attrition, mainly along the Suez Canal—which ended in August 1970 without Israel relinquishing any territorial gain—strengthened this fixation.

If we examine the foundation for the discussion about defensive fighting designed to hold the territory occupied by the IDF, which is supposed to be based for the most part on a set of conceptions that clarify the “strategic depth,” the volume of the military forces and their availability relative to the region, the national potential from which military capabilities can be tapped for the new reality, the military capabilities of the enemy army, and the government’s policy and its interpretation by the General Staff, it appears that the error or perhaps the cognitive fixation was quite profound.

The War of Attrition in the Egyptian Arena, June 1967-August 1970

In retrospect, it can be argued that the War of Attrition, particularly in the Egyptian arena, was the cognitive link between the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War. It was an outcome of the former and its repercussions forged the beginning of the latter.

The IDF and the political echelon failed to delve into the question of how Israel will hold on indefinitely to the expansive territories it occupied in 1967. The test of both the lack of understanding and the ability to retain occupied territories was the Yom Kippur War. However, the failure in the IDF and in the government to consider the question did not begin the day after the Six Day War. Its roots can be seen in the plans for holding onto Sinai (one of the objectives of 1956), and continued in the six years between 1967 and 1973, Israel’s 18-year presence in Lebanon, and its occupation of the West Bank since 1967 to this day.

One of the essential rules of thought in large organizations, and certainly in military organizations, is that every change of guard requires the leader (the Chief of Staff, in this case, or the Minister of Defense) to analyze the extent of the relevance of the existing paradigm and of the dominant cognitive conception, and to challenge them with a new external paradigm.

The most prominent situation to emerge from the Six Day War is paradoxically a rare military achievement and a cognitive inability to contend with the outcomes of the war. The fixation that prevailed after the war originated in the assumption that Israel had designed a permanent reality, and that all that was left for it to do is to preserve it. As for the IDF, which at that time was an organization lacking any multidimensional strategic discourse, there was no government above it that could balance or challenge the policy and the one-dimensional conception that characterized the Israeli military.

The War of Attrition against Egypt enabled and even mandated a re-examination of the
security concept, of the outcome of the war, and of the IDF’s approaches to deployment. Up until October 6, 1973, this did not happen.

Theoretical Perspective on the War of Attrition

Every war in every location in the world differs from other wars, but nevertheless there are some common characteristics. With regard to wars of attrition, the objectives of the war are limited, and the initiator’s intention is to motivate a change in the existing reality, while the responding side exerts efforts to preserve it; the term “decision,” which is always ambiguous, does not suit a war of attrition in which the parties are not looking to be victorious, but rather, are looking to “move toward” an innovative change or “revert to the previous situation.” One assumption of the initiating side is that the rival country will not respond with all-out war, either because it does not want to launch it or it is incapable of doing so; the initiating side must assess the rival side’s capabilities to withstand prolonged attrition and, to the same extent, it must assess its own stamina, since a war of attrition affects both sides. The initiating side must assess the speed of the initiated operations intended to wear the enemy down, because if they are not swift enough, the enemy might have an opening to launch an all-out war; each side looks for military, economic, and social targets that are painful to the enemy, but not devastating and decisive. For the most part, both sides are forced to prefer being capable of maintaining stable defense over an offensive, in order to avoid deterioration into all-out war; a war of attrition is never short and sometimes persists over many years. This requires both sides to begin a learning process. There is no point to defining a clear plan, including its long range future stages, and then operating according to it: both sides undergo a learning process that enables changes of direction and actions. The end of a war of attrition, if a permanent arrangement has not been achieved, requires a new learning process in order to understand if the war of attribution has forged a different reality or one that is about to change, and what is now needed in political, military, and social spheres. Within this context, a question arises comparing a battle between countries to a battle between a country and a non-state organization, which currently characterizes the battle between Israel and terrorist organizations. It appears that similarities may be found between both cases, but this question must be analyzed fully in a separate research study.

IDF Conduct during the War of Attrition

The Bar-Lev report that the outgoing Chief of Staff submitted to the Prime Minister, to the Minister of Defense, and to incoming Chief of Staff Elazar (Bar-Lev, 1972) allows a window into the thinking in the General Staff throughout the War of Attribution against Egypt. Most of the report, about 300 pages, was written by the relevant departments in the General Staff, while the first 27 pages were written and signed personally by the Chief of Staff and are the essence of the report. The Chief of Staff divided his term of office into three periods: until the War of Attrition at the Suez Canal; the period of the War of Attrition; and following the War of Attrition, until the end of his term on January 1, 1972. The events in the Jordanian, Syrian, Lebanese, and international arenas were similarly described. Bar-Lev also wrote about force buildup in the IDF, manpower, a summary, and conclusions.

According to the report, as soon as it became evident to the General Staff that the Egyptians began a war of attrition, and this, only in September or October 1968, the following objectives were defined:

a. To prevent Egypt from gaining any ground achievements
b. To create pressure that will force the Egyptians to agree to a ceasefire
c. To avoid mutual escalation in the use of heavy war materials, such as aircraft
d. To carry out singular strikes in order to moderate Egypt’s activity

e. To deploy minimum forces along the Suez Canal

f. To demonstrate to the Egyptian government that it is incapable of changing the territorial reality created after June 1967

g. To compel Egypt to comply with the ceasefire agreed upon the day after the Six Day War (Bar-Lev, 1972).

The initial deployment along the Suez Canal was in outposts that had poor endurance potential. The rear camps were also in vulnerable positions and were still within Egyptian artillery range, which was far superior to that of the IDF. After two devastating Egyptian shellings in September and October 1968 that were meticulously planned in advance, the General Staff initiated a retaliatory response that quickly proved to be a great success: destruction of two bridges on the Nile River in Upper Egypt and the bombing of a critical transformer substation in the Aswan-Cairo power grid and on the Nile Delta. The damage was not very substantial, but the Egyptian government was taken by surprise. It turned out that the Suez Canal arena was defended, but the rear and critical infrastructure in Egypt were not. The Israeli course of action compelled the Egyptian government to halt its military operations for five months in order to prepare to defend its territories deep inside Egypt—time that was sufficient for the IDF to build about thirty fortified positions along the banks of the Suez Canal along 160 kilometers, which provided reasonable cover against artillery fire. In the IDF, they were called “strongholds” (“Micha Study,” Operations Branch, 1956). The capability of these strongholds of harassing the Egyptians on the other side of the canal or of defending themselves against a small or massive crossing by Egyptian forces was negligible. They were nothing more than demonstration of an Israeli presence, which required substantial investment. A stronghold-outpost could barely defend itself.

Because the strongholds were spread over a distance of 160 kilometers, and sometimes the distance between them was about 10 kilometers, armored forces and mobile forces were deployed in the intervening spaces. Armored forces would be deployed at a particular distance from the shoreline that would be capable of reaching every stronghold and every point along the canal within a short time. Artillery corps units would be deployed at a particular depth and would be able to assist the forces along the canal line and hit targets on the other side of the canal. The planning team headed by Brig. Gen. Avraham Eden, the commander of the armored corps in Sinai, presented fortified company camps at the depth of several kilometers from the banks of the canal forming divisional camps that were to fulfill these objectives—a firm defensive line reinforced by tank, artillery, infantry, and engineering units. The rear line of fortified camps that were supposed to help hold the frontline was never built.

Chief of Staff Bar-Lev’s report (Bar-Lev, 1972) reveals the thought processes of the General Staff during the War of Attrition. This report has almost never been analyzed in research studies about the War of Attrition. What follows are its central points.

As soon as the War of Attrition reached substantive dimensions, the IDF’s goals were to prevent Egypt from gaining any ground and to pressure it until it agreed to a ceasefire; i.e., to revert to the situation as it was the day after the Six Day War. However, in June and July 1969, it became evident that the line of strongholds would not survive without the involvement of the Air Force, in order to compensate for the lack of artillery capable of contending against the Egyptian artillery power. The first goal was accomplished in late 1969, but the second goal was not, and therefore, the decision was made to launch an aerial attack deep inside Egypt, at the risk of the Soviet Union becoming directly involved. The Chief of Staff added:
Today, it appears that during that period, we failed to analyze thoroughly the significance of the impact of the deep attacks on the Soviet involvement. But in retrospect, it appears to me that we were correct—even if intuitively—in our decision to launch a deep attack, because as a result, the fighting intensified until it reached a particular boiling point that put a stop to this process, and finally to a ceasefire....The deep attacks began on January 7 and ended on April 13, 1970, when it became evident that the Russians took it upon themselves to defend the interior of Egypt with rockets and aircraft operated by them.

The Chief of Staff explained that pressure on Egypt presented one serious problem: the Russians. But “if we thought that refraining from action (deep inside Egypt) would cause greater damage, then we confronted the Russians in Egypt.”

The Chief of Staff summarized the end of the War of Attrition against Egypt using short sentences: the Sinai Peninsula is fortified and adequately organized in terms of fortifications, roads, barriers, posts, water supply, communications, landing strips, and everything needed for fighting. The Chief of Staff did not specify which type of fighting.

And indeed, the Red Army took a very active part in defending the battleground at the frontline and deep inside Egypt. The ceasefire in August 1970, which called for a standstill (a freeze on the deployment of forces) by both sides, was immediately violated by Egypt, which advanced its ground-to-air missile batteries. The IDF’s response did not produce any results but, as the Chief of Staff said, “Our main consideration regarding an attack on the batteries was the concern that if we don’t respond, an entire array of missiles would be deployed adjacent to the west bank of the canal, which would impede us when the fighting resumes”; in other words, if the War of Attrition resumes.

The Chief of Staff summarized the end of the War of Attrition against Egypt using short sentences: the Sinai Peninsula is fortified and adequately organized in terms of fortifications, roads, barriers, posts, water supply, communications, landing strips, and everything needed for fighting. The Chief of Staff did not specify which type of fighting—resumption of a war of attrition or all-out war between Egypt and Israel. It appears that his intention was the possibility of attrition: “preventing Egypt from gaining any ground achievement and achieving a ceasefire as soon as possible.”

What were the achievements of the War of Attrition for Israel, according to the Chief of Staff’s assessment? “Egypt’s leaders, who saw themselves as responsible for a solution in all of the territories, including the problem of the Palestinian people, are not adhering to this daily like they did in the past.” And, “Egypt of today is not enthusiastic about fighting.” Even two years after the ceasefire at the Suez Canal, clearly the thought processes at the General Staff focused on the possibility of resumption of the War of Attrition, and almost never on the possibility that Egypt would launch an all-out war against Israel.

The War of Attrition persisted until July 1969. The Egyptian army began with night incursions by small forces, which raided Israeli strongholds and planted mines on the access roads to them. Both sides persisted with raids from air and sea and with incursions by small forces that crossed the Suez Canal. Egypt had superior artillery power, and the Egyptian army launched incursions deep inside Israeli territory.\(^5\) Not even a few months elapsed before it became clear that Israel’s fortified strongholds were beginning to collapse. Nevertheless, not one of them was abandoned.
On July 21, 1969, the Israeli Air Force launched a massive aerial attack west of the canal on the artillery batteries, antiaircraft missile batteries, and the Egyptian forces close to the canal. The attacks were accompanied by frequent aerial skirmishes, during which Israel demonstrated clear superiority. The deployment of the Israeli Air Force in the war was more a matter of no other choice, and, despite this, it was not enough to compel the Egyptian government to stop the fighting. On the contrary, the heavy aerial bombardments deep inside Egyptian territory prompted Egypt to call up the Soviet Union, which began to take an active part in the fighting, mainly by adding massive reinforcements of ground-to-air missile batteries and combat planes. Some of the battle campaigns were manned by Red Army troops (Adamsky, 2006).

The General Staff assessed that after about 10 months of continuous fighting, the first part of the goal was achieved; i.e., that the Egyptians had no chance of holding onto the eastern bank of the Suez Canal. However, the ceasefire did not appear to be achievable using the modus operandi applied until then. In order to increase the pressure, the Israeli Air Force began attacking deep inside Egyptian territory and, although it did increase the pressure on the Egyptian government, the Egyptian anti-aircraft defense system improved and developed concurrently until it achieved superiority over the Israeli Air Force during the Yom Kippur War.

Much has been written about the special operations deep inside Egyptian territory during the War of Attrition (for example, Nadal, 2015), and this was a flourishing period of special IDF operations that has not been repeated since. Suffice it here to emphasize one conclusion about the achievements of the special operations: the first three operations on October 31-November 1, 1968, forced the Egyptian government into a temporary halt in the War of Attrition, for those who believe that the War of Attrition had already started, or even before then. This lull in the fighting enabled Israel to build the 30 strongholds on the banks of the Suez Canal. All the rest, as successful as they might have been, did not change the conduct of the two rivals. This was a multi-round boxing match with the achievements recorded in points and not by a knock-out.

**Domestic Criticism of Israel’s Conduct during the War of Attrition**

In cognitive and practical terms, the Israeli government and the IDF entered the War of Attrition against Egypt after a delay of more than one year. Israeli intelligence did not discern the Egyptians’ preparations for a war of a type that neither Egypt nor Israel had ever experienced. The starting position of the government and the IDF was that the defeat of Egypt in 1967 would oblige the Egyptians to accede to exaggerated concessions that would enable an arrangement with Israel. The “three nos” of the Khartoum Resolution in late August—no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel, and no peace with Israel—justified, from the perspective of Israeli governments, its decision not to offer the Egyptians an arrangement that could be satisfactory to Israel and Egypt alike, even though it was not certain that any Israeli proposed arrangement would be acceptable to Egypt at that time (although President Sadat proposed a possible arrangement to Israel in 1971 through the United States).

On the Israeli side, the War of Attrition was not accompanied by a learning process in the systemic and strategic environment, but only in the narrow military sense. However, the military learning was successful in relation to several aspects: the investment of relatively few manpower resources enabled the IDF to focus on other arenas and engage in military force buildup; the number of casualties was tolerable, considering the intensity of the Egyptian firepower; the IDF succeeded in limiting the forces deployed on the Suez Canal line to the minimum necessary: along the canal line it deployed a few hundred soldiers, about 100 tanks, and five artillery battalions, as well as
engineering corps of one to two battalions. This was not the case with regard to budgets. The canal line, inclusive of its military posts, access roads, and critical infrastructures across the length and breadth of the arena were very expensive for those days; the use of the Air Force, which was not easy or inexpensive, enabled the strongholds along the canal line to survive. In relation to all matters pertaining to a political and military learning process, it is hard to point to an Israeli achievement or to substantive strategic thinking. The line of defense of the canal, from the moment it was established, constrained any other possible Israeli direction, whether at that time or in the future.

It appears that the War of Attribution was perceived by the IDF and by Israel as the last day of the Six Day War, while in Egypt, it was perceived as the first day of the next war.

After a ceasefire was achieved in August 1970, and during the three-month trial period, considerable resources were invested in preparing the line of strongholds for a resumption of the War of Attrition, and strengthening the existing line became the ultimate objective. No brainstorming was held to consider the possibility of an all-out war in the future, which differs from a war of attrition, and the future value of the existing canal line was not evaluated, which was suitable for the War of Attrition that had ended. It appears that the War of Attribution was perceived by the IDF and by Israel as the last day of the Six Day War, while in Egypt, it was perceived as the first day of the next war.

Although the aerial bombardments deep inside Egyptian territory produced immediate achievements and applied intense pressure on Egypt, they were the catalyst for Egypt’s reinforcement of its anti-aircraft capabilities against the Air Force already during the War of Attrition itself and provided a significant learning process for the Egyptians, and the harsh outcomes of that process on the IDF were evident during the Yom Kippur War. Perusal of the Bar-Lev Report and the letter of Maj. Gen. Israel Tal, Elazar’s Deputy Chief of Staff, about the defense of Sinai (Tal, 1970), shows that no analytical process was initiated in the General Staff after the War of Attrition for the purpose of understanding the development of Egypt’s intentions regarding a new war after its defeat. One cannot say that the IDF did not plan for war since the end of the War of Attrition, but the fixed conceptions originating in the Suez Canal line caused extreme operational problems during the Yom Kippur War.

The phenomenon evident in the War of Attrition influences the current attrition in the Gaza Strip to this day, notwithstanding the tremendous difference between the two phenomena. Israel has operated under a problematic paradigm for more than fifty years: in times of relative quiet, like after the Six Day War, or when the threat to Israeli society is not imminent, the government does not take any political and military initiative designed to moderate the conflict. The policy is to maintain the status quo: “fight and then do nothing.” From Israel’s perspective, the ball is in the Arab/Palestinian court and they are expected to compromise and agree to an arrangement that is desirable and comfortable for Israel. When instead of compromising with Israel, the adversary’s policy is to use force, then Israel is not prepared to negotiate or to accede to policy initiatives. The past and current logic underlying this mindset and conduct paradigm is that Israel does not concede one iota, if the concession is deemed to be the outcome of the use of force by the rival, so that Israel’s dominant position is not eroded. How that will end is anybody’s guess. On the other hand, when the hostilities are discontinued, Israel reverts to refraining from initiating any moderating policy or from working out any arrangements. This was Israel’s mode of conduct between 1967 and 1973, in Lebanon between 1985 and 2000, and today, between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.
and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. This mode of conduct can be deemed the Israeli governments’ security concept.

After the three-month ceasefire that began in August 1970 and the renewal of the ceasefire for another three months, Defense Minister Dayan began to change his mindset. He tried to break this cycle, but within the government he alone was of this opinion, and the IDF opposed this idea vehemently. The outcome was the Yom Kippur War, which resulted in Israel being forced to relinquish its hold on the Suez Canal. This is how the correlation between the War of Attrition and the Yom Kippur War should be understood. An analysis of the Israeli modus operandi suggests that only a deep and severe crisis is capable of triggering a change in the Israeli mindset. Since the Sinai Campaign and perhaps to this day, the IDF and the Israeli public have a sense of military, political, and national superiority over the hostile countries in the region. This belief was initially punctured during the War of Attribution and was uprooted during the Yom Kippur War. Nevertheless, this belief was retained by the Israeli leadership during the period of the First Lebanon War.

Conclusion
Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the state and its military have contended with wars at a frequency that could be defined as one long ongoing war. The interesting story is that the end of one war shapes the next war, and sometimes is the catalyst for the next war. Consequently, this article examines three consecutive wars: the Six Day War, the War of Attrition, and the Yom Kippur War. The question what remains relevant to us today from wars waged 52 or 46 years ago is perhaps troubling. Every war and campaign is ostensibly a new story—the reality is different, the context is different, and the people leading the state and the IDF are different—and yet it is still possible to identify similar phenomena in the Israeli context, and these should be scrutinized.

The War of Attrition against Egypt, and those against Jordan and Syria that ended at the end of 1970, provided the Israeli leadership with an opportunity to change its mindset, but it failed to do so, despite the fact that every conclusion of a round of warfare justifies and even dictates a critical examination for the future, even if and particularly when it might appear that the achievements and outcomes were favorable. During the early 1950s, a security concept and a concept of force buildup and deployment were forged that endured until the Six Day War. Subsequent to the Six Day War, a change in reality occurred—the most dramatic change since the War of Independence and the establishment of the State of Israel—but no significant change was made in the thought processes of the political and military leadership.
the territorial commands, and the functional commands travelled the entire route from the War of Independence to the Yom Kippur War. They had taken part in the design of the security concept, the military force deployment approach, and the design of the expansionist policy. It appears that this leadership failed to grasp two fundamental principles: the importance of constantly striving to prepare for the next round; and no less important, analysis of the implications of the outcomes of the previous war and those expected from a war in the future, and what changes in mindset and in actions they dictate for the future. A senior officer who is appointed the Chief of Staff, and a commander of a territorial or functional command, prior to assuming his post, must outline for himself the current paradigm in light of the mission, in light of the IDF’s structure, and the deployment approach whereby he is required to think and act, and to examine it using a new paradigm unlike the previous one. He must be able to disconnect from the dominant paradigm and to create something new. This does not purport to assert that a commander who does so will actually adopt the new paradigm. He might return to a previous one or turn to a third alternative, or at least, shift his mindset. But this will be a critical, objective examination that is free of the existing mindset. This is not a rule or universal principle, but rather an insight that military and political leaders should consider and implement. 

An investigation of the leaderships’ conceptualizations during the said period finds conceptions that were prevalent then and also today, when it is very doubtful that they offer any benefit, but instead, perhaps are rather quite damaging. The first conception is “deterrence”: from the media and from listening to political leaders and even to senior military officers, we find that “deterrence” is a mantra: it must be achieved at all cost, because personal and general security ostensibly depends on it. The State of Israel and its military indeed deter neighboring countries and neighboring forces, but up to a certain point, and largely in the immediate environment. If a military operation, from all-out war to local campaigns and operations, leads to rivals losing territory or up to the point of jeopardizing their existence or even their standing, then subsequently, the deterrence dissipates. This is a familiar paradox. The injured adversary who has been beaten and defeated cannot reconcile itself with its situation of having been deterred. Therefore, it will seek a new and sometimes surprising tactic in order to extricate itself from the status of having been deterred, even if this will require time, a change in approach, and enormous effort. After the Six Day War, Egypt could not reconcile itself with its loss of the Sinai. The outcome was an overhaul of its policies, its military, and its approach toward military deployment. In its competition against the Israeli government and the IDF, the Egyptian government gained an upper hand.

The question about the relevance of a war 52 years ago is still troubling. A war of attrition has persisted for over 14 years between Israel and...
the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Seemingly there is no basis for comparison. It is not the same enemy, not the same territory, not the same opposing army, and the context is entirely different. It also appears that it is also not the same Israeli society and leadership as back then. However, there are some ideas and conceptions that give rise to thought, back then and today too.

First, the expansionist culture still exists. This culture has supporters who are extremely influential in the Israeli political environment. The old term “border” as a region for expansion was gradually replaced with “Greater Israel.” In terms of security, the West Bank area is a relatively “soft environment” today, but the Gaza Strip is not. Between 1967 and 1973, Israeli expansionism hit a strong wall in the form of the Egyptian state and nation. Although the Egyptian army did not excel during the Sinai Campaign, and definitely not during the Six Day War, the Egyptian potential as a whole was very high and was incorrectly evaluated by the IDF and by Israeli governments. Viable expansionism can endure in soft regions; i.e., regions that do not belong to a country that has the potential of changing the reality forced upon it as a result of the operation of force. The chances of permanently occupying a region seized during a war will be low if it requires coping with a wall of resistance that could potentially exceed Israel’s capability of breaking it down. In the Gaza Strip, the wall is not the armed Hamas organization perse, but rather two million Palestinians, who will remain there even after the future major campaign to purify the Gaza Strip of the armed organizations that harass Israel using a strategy of wearing Israel down. Israel cannot drive out two million people; Israel cannot “educate” them to reconcile with Israel, and cannot rule over them similar to the practice in the West Bank.

Second, it appears that the General Staff today is more responsible and wiser than the General Staff during the War of Attrition. However, the IDF’s standing in Israeli statesmanship and in participating in the design of the security concept (if one exists) and in influencing the governments was significantly weakened as a result of the Yom Kippur War, the First Lebanon War, and the subsequent 18 years in Lebanon. On the other hand, the more that at issue are broader governments, composed of a coalition of more political parties, the more contradictory approaches and modus operandi there are. There is no clear political conception, apart from maintaining the status quo. The governments’ capacity for self-learning is practically nonexistent. Consequently, the major and minor rounds of violence are not changing the picture of attrition as a whole.

Third, contrary to the War of Attrition following the Six Day War, and after the War of Attrition, the three years until the Yom Kippur War, in the Gaza Strip and on the Lebanese border, a strategy of defensive fighting has been deemed preferable to an offensive strategy, and even as essential. It appears that the IDF and the governments have comprehended that an attack, after which you go home armed with a dubious arrangement, is less valuable than strategic defensive fighting that prevents recurring rounds of violence. However, this insight has not gained general acceptance, neither by the governments nor by the public.

Fourth is the physical barrier. In the past, the Suez Canal was considered a physical barrier that affords a substantive advantage and the defensive fighting was based on it. During the Yom Kippur War, it became evident that the barrier did not provide any advantage, due to the lack of adequate Israeli defense. In the Gaza Strip, the IDF erected physical barriers: a barrier that prevents infiltration tunnels and a fence that prevents terrorists from infiltrating and prevents mass border-crossings by Gazans. In addition to these, Israel’s excellent technological capabilities of intercepting missiles and rockets are some of the best and most impressive in the world. As an alternative, the Palestinian organizations shifted to torching fields and
communities, and apparently to attack drones and to additional tactics in the future that the existing barriers cannot block. This translates into a war of attrition that continues indefinitely with recurring rounds of violence. It could be that status quo now means a war of attrition that is a dead end.

Other longstanding conceptions formulated during the 1950s and 1960s, like “a defensive strategy that is applied offensively,” “shifting the war to enemy territory,” and “security borders” were not reviewed during paradigmatic discussions after the Six Day War, which dramatically changed the reality. Moreover, the War of Attrition and its repercussions provided another opportunity for critical thinking that should have shaken up the existing conceptual system. This did not happen.

Every war that ends, actually or seemingly, requires an interpretation of the outcomes and their implications for the future. The War of Attrition was perceived by the IDF as the seventh day of the Six Day War, while Egypt perceived it as the first day of the next war.

Examination of the six year period during which three wars were waged raises the concern that Israel’s governments are not learning. They do not bother to investigate and develop knowledge that emerges in relation to security and military issues and then to set policies accordingly. Such a statement might appear odd, because prime ministers and ministers with military backgrounds and experience have served in Israel’s governments, but this does not negate this conclusion. The very existence of broad coalition governments—composed of political parties with diametrically opposed security and social conceptions—creates a situation whereby the broader and more politically stable a coalition government is, the more it spawns more vehement disagreements. The questions of what Israel’s borders should be, the fate of the Palestinians, and of the Palestinian state are at the heart of a profound disagreement that has not yet been resolved. Knowledge developed in Israel’s governments relating to security and the military imposes heavy responsibility on the entire government and on its prime minister. Israel’s governments are not always happy about bearing this responsibility.

The outcome is that the IDF is the only entity in Israel that regularly engages in the methodical development of knowledge about possible wars and violent confrontations. The governments do not develop relevant knowledge about conflicts and wars. The customary statement that “the government decides and the IDF executes” is allegedly correct. In fact, it is absolutely devoid of content, if the government does not think about the knowledge that is used to underpin resolutions, about the IDF’s deep involvement in the decision making process, or about the influence that it has in interpreting abstract decisions regarding operating principles. That is why the governments will always be surprised, not because of any lack of intelligence warning, but rather because the government lacks any rational knowledge-based foundation, which is essential for learning and clarifies and conceptualizes an emerging reality. Under these continuing circumstances, when a crisis arises, there will always be a gap between the reality as interpreted by the IDF and the way by which statesmen interpret that reality. A gap is not a disadvantage per se, and perhaps it is an advantage, because it should prompt investigation and clarification. The question is: On which knowledge is the gap based?

The historical outcome, and the outcome that is apparently expected in the future, is the acceptance of the opinions and proposals that the IDF formulates without any appropriate political interpretation. For the most part, at least until today, the IDF lacks any guiding political thinking, because governments do not customarily inform the IDF in a timely manner and concretely about expected crises. As a result, Israel’s governments often found themselves engaging in wars and military operations, whether preemptive or retaliatory, without having clarified for themselves for what
purpose and toward what end. The situation reached the point that, in most of the wars, it was the IDF that defined the immediate and long-range objectives and took care of convincing the governments to approve the objectives that it defined.

Finally, this article also hopes to inspire additional research studies. Much has been written about Israel’s security concept, and much is worthy of commendation, adding vital knowledge about national security issues. Israel has not had a security concept since 1967. There were wars and there were crises that required the use of military force and, for the most part, the governments and the IDF managed to cope. But it is highly doubtful that a security concept exists. Of course, such a statement depends on the definition of the term “security concept.” Therefore, further research is in order.

Brig. Gen. (ret.) Dr. Dov Tamari served as commander of the General Staff Reconnaissance Unit, commander of a standing armored brigade and of an armored division, chief intelligence officer, and commander of the Command and Staff College. He was awarded a Medal of Courage and two Chief of Staff Citations. He was formerly one of the executive directors of the Operational Theory Research Institute and the founder of the National Security and Home Front Defense Program at Beit Berl College, and is the author of And How Will We know? Intelligence, Operations, Statesmanship (2011) and The Armed Nation (2012).


Notes
1. See Operation Baal Zro’a: background and planning directives, February 1980, General Staff, Operations Branch, IDF Archives. Operational plan for an IDF attack on the western front to occupy critical targets in the Sinai Desert, economic and ground targets, and to destroy the Egyptian army. “Basic assumptions about the enemy: the Egyptians breached the peace accords by deploying forces in Sinai beyond the agreed numbers. Egypt decided to join a comprehensive Arab attack, before, concurrent with, or gradually on the eastern front ... all fighting on the western front requires an important achievement to be reached during every stage, with the priorities in the following order: seizure of the sources of oil; occupation of el-Arish; destruction of the Egyptian army; occupation of a section of the Suez Canal; occupation of the entire Sinai Peninsula.”
2. Two documents that head of the Intelligence Branch Maj. Gen. Aharon Yariv sent to the Chiefs of Staff cast doubt on the prospects of the warning of a war, the first on October 3, 1968 and the second in 1972. See IDF Archives. Regarding the second document, see Tal, National security: The few against the many, pp. 206-208.
3. Surprisingly, the Bar-Lev Report refers to the term “war” only once and not in the context of the past or the future.
4. Until the end of 1968, neither the Chief of Staff nor the General Staff realized that Israel was in a war of attrition in three arenas. The Intelligence Directorate, despite its achievements during that period, did not evaluate the phenomenon and failed to conceptualize it.
5. On July 29, 1969, Egyptians raided the Mezach armored corps stronghold, killed eight soldiers, wounded nine, and kidnapped one soldier, who died in captivity. Two tanks were destroyed. Egyptian marine commandos attacked three times through swimming and diving to the Eilat Port from a base that they received from the Jordanians at the adjacent Aqaba Port. In both

Sources
Archives
Israel State Archives
General Staff Archives / Doctrine and Training Division / History Department
The IDF and Defense Establishment Archives
Books
incursions—in November 1969 and in February 1970—the Egyptians succeeded in causing damage to ships.

6 In 1972, after it became clear that the War of Attrition would not resume, Minister of Defense Dayan visited the armored corps command post in the Sinai and lectured to the senior officers there. At that time, there were already reports that the American government was considering an arrangement between Egypt and Israel that might obligate Israel to withdraw from the Suez Canal by only a few dozen kilometers. When one of the officers asked the Minister up to what distance was Israel willing to withdraw, the answer was: “In exchange for an unlimited ceasefire, up to one hundred kilometers east of Refidim.” In other words, two thirds of the Sinai Peninsula. I was present during this lecture.

7 An examination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s writings finds that this appears to be the process that he underwent after Nasser’s death. See Sadat, On war and peace.

8 See the report of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee’s subcommittee on the examination of Israel’s security concept, 1986. The committee chairman was MK Dan Meridor. His efforts to hold discussions on the security concept in the government during the first decade of this century, as a member of the ruling political party, were unsuccessful.