**Summary**

**The Negative Impacts of Israel’s “Campaign Between Wars” on its Next War**

1. **Background**

For the past eight years, Israel’s Air Force has been engaged in a “Campaign Between Wars” (CBW) of varying intensity. Each year, the window of opportunity for action in the CBW appears to be shrinking. However, at the end of every year, the Air Force announces that it has carried out a larger number of operations than the previous year. There is a widespread opinion throughout the chain of command that the CBW offers an advantage in that daily operational conflict builds the strength of the military corps. The CBW has been integrated into the daily activities of the Air Force, and has become the current routine.

The essential difference between the CBW, ongoing security activities, and a war, is that the first is a battle against the enemy’s ability to build up their military forces, while the other two involve fighting an enemy’s existing forces. Naturally, preventing the expansion of the enemy’s military force has distinctive characteristics, primarily the freedom to decide how, when, and to what extent action will be taken. Faced with the distinctive characteristics of the CBW, the Air Force has developed patterns of action attributed to it.

Much has been written about the transition to wartime. One interesting phenomenon investigated in this study is the effect that an ongoing routine has on the first days of a war, particularly an inability to shed routine patterns during the war. This phenomenon characterizes all levels of the military corps, from Air Force headquarters to flight crews. The adoption of routine thinking and patterns of action during a war affect decision-making processes at all levels, and may lead to significant disparities in the functioning of the military in the first few days of a war.

This study addresses the system of perceptions that has been assimilated among the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) regarding a future war, and will outline the level of awareness of this among the military corps. The study sheds light on the patterns of thinking or action during the CBW that are being ascribed to the next war. These thinking patterns, expressed among individuals within the group at the beginning of the war, may become a problematic factor.

1. **The relationship between the CBW and war**

Regarding the ability of the CBW to improve the IDF’s readiness for war, conducting this campaign has advantages alongside calculated risks. The advantages of the CBW are that it sharpens certain operational capabilities, and under certain conditions it creates conflict that leads to gaining experience and an improved level of operation. However, most of the IDF’s order of battle personnel (armed forces participating in the military operation) are not involved in the CBW, which is the realm of certain groups within the Air Force, intelligence units, the General Staff, and certain niches in the Navy and ground forces. Therefore, there can be an illusion that the IDF is active, successful, sophisticated, and increasing its knowledge. However, these benefits are only applicable to specific sectors of the IDF.

In addition, even among those involved in the CBW, the focused operations of the Air Force and intelligence units who are involved in a targeted military operation, in which all its attention and abilities and consequences are concentrated, is not comparable with the conditions of a war, which include rapid decision-making processes, chaos, only partial attention of senior command, and more. Therefore, we need to be cautious in evaluating the contributions of the CBW and what it indicates regarding our military capability in general and our readiness for war in particular. Further, the CBW relies on two components: one is deterring the enemy from responding, and the second component is the IDF’s high level of preparedness, as expressed in the perspective that “the aim of the CBW is to be ready for war”.[[1]](#footnote-1) These two components and the goals of the CBW indicate the desire to carry out operations that inflict high damage on the enemy without bringing harm to our forces.

1. **Distinctive characteristics of the CBW**

The CBW is a battle against the enemies’ force-building capabilities. In contrast, in ongoing security operations or a war, the enemy’s existing forces are fought. Naturally, combatting force-buildup has various distinctive characteristics:

* 1. **Different combat norms**: the CBW is an initiated offensive activity. It allows Israel to put considerations of the safety of its forces above the execution of the mission, for example. This is unlike a war or ongoing security operations, in which fighters are required to strive for contact with the enemy, and prioritize the execution of the mission over their own survival.
  2. **High complexity**: both sides gain information and carry out a dialogue of equivalence of responses to each action. Managing a complex military activity below the threshold of war requires the involvement of the senior echelons. Any CBW activity requires the approval of the senior political echelon and sometimes also international coordination. Naturally in such situations, great attention is required from the General Staff and its headquarters.

In his publication “‘Between the Poles’: Ongoing Security, The Campaign Between the Wars, Part III,” Meir Finkel describes the CBW as “the ongoing security operations of the General Staff.” He claims that making this parallel is important because it indicates a redistribution of the General Staff's organizational attention between preparations for war and the daily management of the CBW. Since the contribution to the CBW towards the IDF’s readiness for war is limited, this is a cautionary note to the IDF, which must, during the continuation of the CBW, identify the inherent risk of focusing the senior officers’ attention on this pattern of action, at the expense of strategic planning and staff work in preparation for another war in Lebanon… IDF must not repeat its mistake on the eve of the Second Lebanon War, in which the important and urgent preoccupation with the war on Palestinian terror and also with the disengagement came at the expense of thinking about war and preparing for it.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In addition to the high level of involvement of the General Staff in the approval of CBW operations, ongoing security actions in the various sectors and in conflicts with the enemy can also have a broad impact on the CBW and vice versa. Therefore, a high level of involvement of the military commanders and division commanders in the activities of the CBW is required. In fact, the level of independence of the commanders in the ongoing security activities has decreased, and the General Staff is required to be more involved in the ongoing security activities in the various sectors, in order to decrease or increase their impact on the CBW. In the Air Force, this this translates into the involvement of the Air Force commander in providing a flight policy for all cross-border activities, in the days before and after CBW attacks.

3.3 **Using a centralized command and control method**: As stated, conducting a real-time CBW operation elicits responses from the enemy, whether in self-defense (if the planned attack is uncovered beforehand), or as a response immediately or shortly after the incident. The complexity of this arena is high and the players are diverse. In view of the fact that the reactions of any given player cannot be anticipated, the operation is carried out under central command, and the decision makers are in the control room at the time of execution. Sometimes, a complex activity is carried out which requires a decision at a national level, and this involves the commander in the control room in real time. In light of this, the natural chain of field command chain in ongoing security operations becomes redundant, and decision makers work closely with those carrying out the operations.

3.4. **Use of the most advanced weapons available**: At the beginning of the CBW, its actions were undertaken using military means that were designed for war, and constituted a generic response. Over the years, as a result of what the enemy has learned and also as a result of the changing strategic and operational conditions in this arena, adjustments have been made to major power-building processes of the CBW. Still, power-building dedicated to CBW is limited. Naturally, the need to ensure the security of the military forces while performing precise kinetic military operations leads to the use of the best tools available to the IDF. During a war, the IDF’s ability to use the tools that are used in the CBW are limited, and the IDF must use a variety of tools, some of which are less advanced.

3.5 **Using the most elite units**: Carrying out complex operations without bringing harm to our forces requires a high level of tactical skill and professionalism among the combat teams. Hence, in selecting the operating units, the IDF selects the most elite units who have experience in combat and in the arena of execution. A limited number of units and squadrons take part in CBW activities.[[3]](#footnote-3)

3.6 **Competitive strategic learning:** The former Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot likened the CBW to a “race along two parallel tracks, with a screen that hides the enemy (on the parallel track) so it is impossible to see where the enemy is and how they are progressing, except for a few holes in the screen, provided by [military] intelligence.” Every few years, a military conflict erupts, which allows both sides to understand their situation, where they stand, and where the enemy is. Then they continue to race ahead.” The CBW takes place within a framework of strategic competition and rules of the game. Thus, for example, CBW activity can teach the enemy to act from different places that are more comfortable for them, present us with greater difficulties in terms of intelligence, and so on. The CBW is a non-war conflict with the enemy. Due to the fact that it is continuous and ongoing, it encourages intensification by both sides. It tests which side functions better between wars, and allows the enemy to gain advantages.

3.7 **Blurring between situations of “routine/emergency/war”[[4]](#footnote-4) in IDF:** According to Israel’s perception of security, every campaign should have an end state that expresses the desired reality for Israel: to end hostilities, achieve deterrence, and preserve a calm situation for as long as possible. However, in the CBW, there are no end states; rather, it strives to achieve a desirable ongoing trend. This creates a blurring of the situation for us and for our enemy, which can affect the ability to be alert for a war. In recent years, the IDF has gone into prolonged standby periods, waiting for a response after operations.

4. **The CBW and the Air Force**

As mentioned, the Air Force commander is appointed by the Chief of Staff to lead certain components within the CBW. The Air Force, as the “commander of implementation,” is involved in all the kinetic operations carried out within it. The Air Force has carried out numerous attacks on targets in Syrian territory and against weapons convoys to Hezbollah. In March 2018, Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot said that during his tenure, the IDF carried out more than a thousand operations outside of Israel’s borders. The Air Force is constantly involved with the CBW and intensifying its activity within it. This activity involves the operational units, the Air Force headquarters, and the forum of the General Staff. Each operation is presented to senior military officers, to be personally approved and overseen by the Air Force commander. Throughout the years of the CBW, the Air Force has managed to achieve first-class operational outputs while staying below the threshold of war, with virtually no harm to our forces.[[5]](#footnote-5) The unprecedented success of the Air Force throughout the years, and the boldness of its operations, is perceived within the Air Force as contributing to its sense of high operational capability.[[6]](#footnote-6) Along with amplifying this feeling, there are negative consequences for the Air Force on two levels: impact on the next war and risk-taking in the face of the strength of their achievements.

The current study starts from the premise that the beginning of the next war, if it happens, will most likely develop as a result of the dynamics of intensification or entanglement in CBW operations,[[7]](#footnote-7) and not from a clear declaration of a war in which Israel will choose to engage as a surprise attack.

1. **Research Questions**

How does the routine of the CBW shape perceptions held by Air Force corps regarding the characteristics of the next war?

How might these perceptions affect the ability to clarify the situation and decision-making processes in the early days of a future war?

In the years leading up to the CBW, the Air Force implemented ongoing security operations. The distinction between the framework of ongoing security operations and a war was relatively clear. The characteristics of the patterns of action during ongoing security operations and during war were fundamentally similar. However, the ongoing security operations influenced the patterns of action during a transition to war. In recent years, the CBW has become a routine with its own distinctive patterns of action, which significantly affect the perceptions of war among the military corps. These perceptions may deepen already-existing gaps during a transition to war.

The research hypothesis proposes that the CBW is largely shaping perceptions of the next war among the military corps.

In light of this, it is predicted that in the first days of an upcoming war, the Air Force will experience a period during which it will have difficulty understanding and ascertaining the situation, will face challenges in adapting to the situation, and during the first days it will fight the previous war - the “Campaign Between Wars”. This can lead to damage in decision-making processes, which in turn will harm the military corps’ performance.

1. **Transition from routine operations to war**

In all the wars that the Israeli Air Force has fought, there have been difficulties in transitioning between routine operations and war. This is reflected in the difficulty of undoing deep-set patterns shaped by routine operations, in neglecting situation-assessment mechanisms and decision-making processes in the early days of the war, and looking at war through the perspective of the routine, or through the terms and insights of the previous war. It is conceivable that the next war on the northern front will suffer the same difficulties in its early days. The patterns of the CBW, which are fundamentally different from the patterns of the ongoing security activities that were undertaken in the past, can intensify this gap and adversely affect the functioning of individuals, the system, and the conduct of the campaign.

The examples given in this work indicate three levels of difficulty in moving from routine operations to war, which the Air Force may face at the beginning of the next war:

The first level involves the tactical difficulty in translating guidelines and policies for the implementation of behaviors that are different from what individuals are accustomed to during routine times, along with the influence of micro-tactical decisions on the campaign. The second level is the difference between expectations and results, which may lead to frustration along the entire chain of commanders and among soldiers. The third level is a misperception regarding the war, due to viewing the next war through the perceptions of the previous war or through the perceptions of the ongoing routine. Accordingly, there may be errors in decision-making processes and a collapse of the mechanisms of decision-making processes.

1. **Conclusions and Discussion**

This study into the perceptions of Air Force service personnel yielded the following insights:

1. At the strategic level, there is an awareness that the next war will not be easy. The mission of defending the country’s airspace will, to a significant extent, fail, and national infrastructures will be damaged. The probably that we will defeat the enemy is moderate.
2. At the operational level, a perception has been formed that the Air Force will be better able to cope with the war, that it will succeed in realizing its goals with extremely high rates of performance, and will be minimally affected by issues of functional continuity.
3. At the tactical level, despite the clear statement that there is a difference in the use of force between the CBW and a war, the implementation of tactics and conduct during a war is generally quite similar to that of the CBW.
4. All military personnel assess that the activities of the CBW contributes to their competence more than it harms their preparation for war. The intelligence division of the military is unusual in that they perceive that the contribution of the CBW and its harm to their competence to be equivalent.
5. An attitudinal survey shows that the perceptions among the military corps can be understood in a systemic way. Throughout the results of virtually the entire survey, cross-disciplinary gaps in the perceptions of war can be discerned.
6. The fighting units emphasize survival of troops over the execution of the war mission.
7. Of the Air Force aviator units, the fighting units prefer to begin a mission with a partial picture of the intelligence information.
8. Those in the command and intelligence divisions anticipate that the chain of command during a war will provide the flight crews with security and intelligence at a level of detail similar to that provided during the CBW. Those in the fighting units, on the other hand, better differentiate between the chain of command in the CBW and in a war.
9. Until the last war, protecting the country’s airspace was clearly seen as the Air Force’s primary mission, sharply defined as zero infiltrations. Currently, this is seen as a mission in which the Air Force cannot succeed.
10. The military personnel anticipate that the situation leading to the next war and the enemy’s familiarity with the Air Force’s methods of operation will harm the Air Force, and are a result of the CBW.

**Discussion of Conclusions**

1. From Conclusions 1 and 2, a distinction between the strategic level and the operational level in individuals’ perceptions can be seen. This may attest to a supervised view among the military corps regarding the achievements of the air strikes.[[8]](#footnote-8) The military personnel believe that the Air Force will excel at this stage and succeed in carrying out the operational plans, however, the home front may be harmed and the citizens of the country will not be completely protected. This can stem from an understanding among military personnel regarding the limitations of the Air Force and the necessity of a complex combination of strikes, maneuvers, and defense in order to subdue the enemy.
2. The CBW is perceived by military personnel as a major contributor to the readiness of individuals and the Air Force for war. This is most likely due to the perception that operational friction helps build up the military forces. Conclusion 3 reinforces the similarities that most military personnel attribute to the CBW and war.

\*\* The military intelligence corps is the only division that perceives the CBW as harming its competence more than it contributes to it. This may be because those working in intelligence understand that different skills are needed in war, and that war is different from the CBW.

1. Differences in perceptions of war between the various military departments are clearly evident in the survey. These differences indicate that the perceptions held by Air Force personnel are directly related to the way in which the division to which they belong is supervised, informed, and investigated. This can be due to a lack of knowledge sharing between divisions. In light of the major inter-departmental influences that exist in war, these varying perceptions can harm the military corps. This indicates another aspect that needs to be addressed regarding the military’s readiness for war.
2. Conclusion 6 most likely stems from the influence of the flight policy in the CBW. It seems that the CBW policy has been well-assimilated among the fighting units, and this may affect the fighters’ ability to shed the patterns of CBW actions during the first days of a war. Conclusion 7 may derive from the flight security envelope provided in the CBW, to which the flight crews have become accustomed.
3. Conclusion 8 reinforces the tactical similarity between the CBW and war in the interpretation of the military personnel. In war, the differing information that is passed along the chain of command is essential. During a war, the chain of command will not provide the flight crews with information in exactly the same manner and level of intimacy as during the CBW. A direct connection can be seen between the implementation of the modes of operation during the CBW and the design of the concept of the chain of command during a war.
4. No significant gaps were observed between divisions regarding Conclusion 9, and it is evident that this is the perception among the military personnel. The reasons for this may be due to a change in the discourse in the Air Force from “zero infiltrations” to “defense zones.” This may have caused a change in the Air Force’s ethos regarding their mission of defending the country’s airspace. The change may be rooted in the enemy’s processes of building up their forces, which affects the military corps’ assessment of the Air Force’s ability to deal with the threat.
5. Conclusion 10 expresses virtually the only criticism of Air Force personnel towards the Air Force. The military personnel are currently seeing the side effects of the CBW: the development of threats in the northern arena and the enemy’s familiarity with the Air Force’s methods of operation.
6. The simulation shows a gap in the group’s ability to define the situation in relation to the variegated war situations. This difficulty in defining the situation can stem from the fact that there is no end state of operations of the CBW and the CBW routine is characterized by states of varying conflict. The “combat days” that are part of the variegated war situations created by the General Staff can further deepen the confusion in defining the situation. In addition to the gap in defining the situation, another gap is that it appears that a combat strike is the simplest solution to most of the problems that arose in the simulation.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Perceptions of the next war among military personnel has largely been shaped during the CBW. It seems that many characteristics related to the CBW are associated with war by the military personnel. Since, as stated, CBW has unique and different characteristics from ongoing security operations or war, attributing characteristics of the CBW to the next war is likely to exacerbate the already-difficult transition to war.

Given the findings of this study, it appears that the Air Force will probably find it difficult to change the CBW patterns of operation. Its personnel will understand that they are in a different state, at the level of systemic awareness. However, at the level of individual awareness, they may expect that in war they will have successes and patterns of action that are similar to that of the CBW. This could create a crisis of confidence in the early days of the war. It is evident that the military personnel have not internalized the uncertainty that characterizes the first days of a war.

Clarification is required regarding the perception of the Air Force’s primary mission of defending the country's airspace because the CBW does not clearly address this mission. However, the enemy’s power-building processes in this area can be a factor influencing the perceptions held by the military personnel.

1. **Summary**

“Major military failures do not usually result from micro-tactical decisions, but rather from incorrect decisions at the strategic and operational level. In this case, however, it is precisely the incorrect tactical decisions that will determine the fate of the campaign ...”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Proceeding along the brink of war during the CBW requires the Air Force and the IDF to be ready for war at all times. The early days of fighting on the northern front will be an important component in the success of the entire war. Entering into a war in the appropriate mental state is an important component of combat, and will influence the decision-making processes regarding specific tactics. The CBW is a key part of the Air Force’s activity, both in terms of training and operations. Fighting in the CBW is characterized by privileged combat and has elements that differ from a war against enemy forces.

This study highlights internal factors in the Air Force that could negatively affect the mental state during the transition to war. It is appropriate for the Air Force to investigate in-depth the influence of the CBW in order to ensure a correct and timely mental transition, when required.

On a personal note: the highly positive reputation and prestige that CBW enjoys in the military corps pushed me out of my comfort zone, so I chose to explore its negative effects on military personnel. The basis of this is a focus on observing consciousness. Further study about other adverse effects that may be hidden from view is still necessary. I hope that this study will be innovative in providing another angle of observation to the commanders who perceive the CBW as fully preparing their soldiers for war.

Wishing for peace.

1. The ability to operate continuously and actively in the CBW requires maintaining competence and a high level of readiness for war. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dado Center for Interdisciplinary Military Thinking. (March 2018). *Between the Poles - Ongoing Security and The Campaign Between the Wars - Part I*. Editor's note, pp. 5-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. According to Air Force records, in the past year the number of units participating in the CBW has increased. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The acronym שח"מ is used to designate situations of routine/emergency/war [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On 10/2/2018, a fighter plane of Squadron One was hit by a 5-SA missile while carrying out a CBW operation. Investigation of the incident revealed that the crew did not defend itself as required. This was the only Air Force casualty as part of the activities of the CBW. IDF, M.A. (2018). *Summary of the operational investigation of the Air Force's activities*. From the summary of the operational investigation of the Air Force activity. Retrieved from: [https://www.idf.il/%D7%90%D7%AA%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9D/%D7%96%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%A2-%D7%94%D7%90%D7%95%D7%95%D7%99%D7%A8-%D7%95%D7%94%D7%97%D7%9C%D7%9C/%D7%A1%D7%99%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%9D-%D7%94%D7%AA%D7%97%D7%A7%D7%99%D7%A8-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%91%D7%A6%D7%A2%D7%99-%D7%A9%](https://www.idf.il/%D7%90%D7%AA%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9D/%D7%96%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%A2-%D7%94%D7%90%D7%95%D7%95%D7%99%D7%A8-%D7%95%D7%94%D7%97%D7%9C%D7%9C/%D7%A1%D7%99%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%9D-%D7%94%D7%AA%D7%97%D7%A7%D7%99%D7%A8-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%91%D7%A6%D7%A2%D7%99-%D7%A9%25) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The data came from a survey of soldiers' attitudes and an attitudes survey distributed as part of the current study. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This is in light of the assumption that the State of Israel has low motivation to initiate a war, and that the enemy, at the present time, is not advanced enough in terms of building a military force to engage in war on its own initiative. “Israel's deterrence is strong on all fronts and its enemies do not want to start a war against it, but the chance of deterioration getting out of control still exists and requires maintaining a high level of readiness.” From: Kurtz, A. B. (2021). Strategic assessment for Israel 2021-2020. Retrieved from Summary and Recommendations section in: <https://www.inss.org.il/en/publication/strategic-survey-summary/>

   [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The phase of live fire during the early days of the war. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The contents, findings, and analysis of the simulation are presented in full in Appendices B, C, and D. According to the research hypothesis, the purpose of the simulation was to observe the operational ability of the sample group to define the status of the Operations Division (is שחטיבת מבצעים the correct meaning of השח"מ ?) in which the Air Force is located and translate it into flight policy at the tactical level.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Gordon, S. (2008). 30 hours in October. *Maariv Archive*, p. 423 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)