

Chapter Ten: Artificial Intelligence, National Security in Israel, and the IDF Strategy

In dealing with the issue of AI and national security, it is essential to understand not only the technology and its capabilities but also the concept of national security itself. This concept has been subject to controversy, which is mainly political, cultural, or environmental. This chapter describes the general concept and relates specifically to Israel's security concept.

What is National Security?

National security is the ability of a nation to protect its citizens and its internal values from threats, including hostile states and terrorist organizations.²¹⁶ In other words, national security is “ensuring national existence and protecting vital interests.”²¹⁷ A more expansive definition of national security is the “preservation of norms, rules of institutions and values of a society.”²¹⁸

Although the historical and theoretical reference to national security emphasizes military aspects, a broader approach is now widespread. Besides the external security–military threat, the United Nations, for example, includes seven layers in its definition of national security: (1) economic: creating employment and implementing measures to prevent poverty; (2) food: taking measures to prevent famine and a lack of food; (3) health: ensuring means to prevent diseases, contaminated food, malnutrition, and lack of access to basic medical care; (4) environmental: taking measures against environmental damage, depletion of resources, natural disasters, and pollution; (5) personal security: employing measures to prevent physical violence, crime, terrorism, domestic violence, and child slavery; (6) community: applying measures against ethnic, religious, and other identity-based tensions; and (7) political: taking measures against political repression and human rights violations.²¹⁹

It is possible to narrow the gap between theoretical definitions and reality by examining and analyzing a country's national security concept, which is usually expressed in its national goals in regards to its capability and the challenges that might hinder them, in addition to the methods and resources used for achieving these goals.

Israel's Security Concept

Unlike many countries in the world, Israel has not enshrined its security strategy in an official document approved by the Knesset (Israel's parliament) or the government. Today, the foundations of Israel's security are considered to be deterrence, early warning, and decisive defeat, with the fundamental principle of defense having been added over the years. The central goal of the security concept is to ensure the existence of the State of Israel, create effective deterrence, neutralize threats, and thwart confrontation. The role of thwarting confrontation has grown over the years, partially due to the increasing threat of terrorism and indirect fire at Israel's civilian front by hostile organizations along Israel's border.²²⁰

For the past two decades, the following five main dimensions have been included in the term "the national security of Israel": (1) internal and external security; (2) international affairs and Israel's international status; (3) the national economy and resources; (4) governability (expressed by the ability to make decisions and execute them); and (5) the strength of civil society.²²¹

Given the geopolitical changes in the Middle East and changes in the inner Israel arena that have taken place since the establishment of Israel, a government committee, led by Dan Meridor, was formed to address Israel's national security and presented its conclusions in 2006. The document produced by the Meridor Committee—much of which is still classified—is considered to be the closest Israel has to an official security concept, given that it was adopted by then minister of defense, Shaul Mofaz, and that parts of it actually have been implemented, although this concept was never approved by a cabinet or the entire government.²²²

The Meridor report lists the national goals upon which Israel's security concept is based as follows:

1. Ensuring the survival of the State of Israel and protecting its territorial integrity and the security of its citizens and inhabitants;

2. Protecting the values and national character of the State of Israel, as a Jewish and democratic state and as the home of the Jewish people;
3. Ensuring the State of Israel's ability to maintain its socioeconomic strength, like any other advanced country;
4. Reinforcing the State of Israel's international and regional standing and seeking peace with its neighbors.²²³

Similarly, the Meridor report also addresses various challenges facing Israel, such as non-conventional weapons, terrorism, and confrontation with regular armies, and emphasizes the policy of response.²²⁴ Furthermore, the report also relates to other key issues that form Israel's security agenda, including the Palestinian issue, the international-political arena, security resources, the "people's army," the quality advantage, and decision-making processes, in addition to the comments that the report raised regarding national military intelligence and the process of implementing and updating the security concept.²²⁵

In examining the Meridor Committee's report a decade after its publication, Dan Meridor and Ron Eldadi claim that the report's original conclusion—that a conventional military threat is unlikely, especially given Israel's military strength and superiority and the Arab world's increasing weakness—is still valid.²²⁶ At the same time, the Meridor report also refers to factors that have shifted greatly over the past decade, such as cyber, which has become a key factor of the highest degree in the security concept of deterrence, defense, and attack. Another factor is the increase in "soft" components, such as cognition, media, law, and others, in addition to the need to strengthen cooperation with key players in the international and regional arenas.²²⁷

In short, despite the absence of a government-approved official document, the general outlines of Israel's security concept are manifested in earlier documents, actual policy, and the Meridor Committee's report. This is in spite of the fact that the concept has shifted at times with changing regional or international policies. At the very least, the core foundations of the security concept are evident, some of which have not changed since the establishment of the state, and some that are newer but have been increasingly validated by their adoption, investment, and implementation in the past two decades.

How Can AI Affect National Security in Israel?

Rapid advances in technological development have re-enforced the belief that AI will extensively affect a country's national security. This is apparent from the assumptions of researchers and senior figures in the field as well as national programs and budgetary investments of leading countries, including the United States, China, and Russia. As a state with advanced capabilities in AI and broad security needs, Israel could benefit greatly from using AI and its applications to achieve and preserve its national security objectives.

For the past two decades, AI has significantly affected the following dimensions of Israel's national security: (1) foreign and domestic security—by using AI applications in military intelligence, weapon systems, and other military systems; (2) foreign relations and Israel's international reputation—by preserving the status of Israel as a technological leader and exporter of technology and knowledge; (3) the economy and the national resources—by developing and investing in AI as a leading field in Israel's economy, which greatly relies on technology (rather than on natural resources); (4) governability—by overseeing the making and implementation of decisions and support for decision making and simulations; and (5) the strength of civil society—by improving the quality of life of Israel's citizens.

An analysis of the four basic pillars of Israel's security concept—deterrence, early warning, decisive defeat, and defense—reveals that AI potentially could have a positive impact on achieving and maintaining each pillar, by integrating AI into the different military systems or by creating new ones.

AI can greatly assist in achieving many of the goals presented in the IDF Strategy (2018) by the Chief-of-Staff Gadi Eizenkot. The strategy comprises four basic efforts that are relevant to all military action: attacking, defensive, assisting, and enabling.²²⁸ Technological superiority is crucial to advance these efforts, with AI being central to this superiority.

For example, AI has been used in aerial defense systems, which have a considerable impact on the defensive effort. Also, extensive use of AI in military intelligence and telecommunications helps improve capabilities relevant to the warning systems. AI can also assist the IDF in operational learning and planning (also mentioned in the IDF strategy),²²⁹ whether by using planning and simulation systems or by using technologies. They can reach conclusions that were impossible to reach in the past with human efforts, due to the difficulties in handling and analyzing vast amounts of data.

In addition, Israel has a comparative advantage in technological fields, including unmanned systems and cyber, which are distinct security fields. Combining these fields with AI as a power multiplier can help Israel to preserve and expand its national security, whether done through military means or economic and international influence.