



# Command in the IDF

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The war in Lebanon brought to the surface various failings in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Numerous committees have examined these failings from a variety of angles and viewpoints but have not focused directly on what appears to be the heart of the matter – the command-related quality of the IDF. An ominous pattern has been evident for years: command procedures in the IDF have become more and more like work procedures in bureaucratic civilian organizations, and less like those necessary in a military hierarchy environment. Why the military command concept is the foundation of any military achievement is beyond the scope of these remarks. It is worthwhile, however, to mention a number of key points, based on the understanding that the core of military activity is the *order (command)* to carry out a *mission*. Orders are the heart of military work and can be compared to blood in the human body; without them, military life cannot exist.

The first element to the order is the mission itself and its objective. In order to complete the mission, a military commander receives two additional elements: *resources* and the *authority* to use those resources for the purposes of accomplishing the mission. The legal authority given to the military commander is broader than any other legal authority and is designed to ensure that missions are fully completed. At the same time, the military command is inherently paradoxical. On the one hand, the commander's work does not end when the order is given, and the nature of war makes it necessary for the commander to accomplish the mission by any means necessary. It is a platitude that the commander must impose his will on the enemy; a preliminary condition for this is the commander's ability to impose his will on his own soldiers. On the other hand, it is understood that a commander who does exactly what he is told, down to the last detail and without showing any initiative or exercising any judgment, is a poor commander.

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The war in Lebanon brought to the fore an ominous pattern of commanders using processes of extended command, thereby causing deep command confusion. Some of the commanders in the war systematically avoided using an order as the exclusive formative tool, and refrained from exercising their full authority and from demanding from their men the exercise of authority in order to achieve their objectives and endeavor to defeat the enemy they were fighting. This is the final result of a deep and ongoing process of command erosion, whereby IDF commanders avoid exercising their authority fully. It appears that this process, which was copied from civilian life, seeped into rear IDF units and headquarters and subsequently also penetrated battle units and command posts. Here semantics have contributed to this process: the use of words such as guidelines, instructions, discussion summaries, recommendations, consultations, and proposals has come to blur the commander's authority. This situation is usually convenient for commanders who are not required to confront the failure to fulfill the missions that they themselves assigned to their men. In other words, there is no substitute for an order as a formative tool for military achievement.

The use of orders as the main tool for conducting military communication aimed at assigning missions to units and commanders should be reintroduced in the IDF. It is obligatory for an IDF commander to stand in front of his soldiers and demand that they fulfill missions (regardless of whether those missions are – battle missions or staff missions), while utilizing fully the powers given to them. The restoration in the IDF of command values through the use of the basic tools presented here is an essential precondition for any change that IDF commanders may seek to institute in the future. This change, which can be the opportunity and lever for a deep cultural change in the IDF, cannot be taken for granted. It is one of the main challenges facing the army. **All other conclusions drawn from the inquiries conducted following the war are insignificant in comparison.**