The IDF's Middle Tier: Israel's Expeditionary Answer

I. A Breakdown in the Conceptzia

October 7th forced Israel into a reckoning over the structural failures that left the nation exposed. The collapse of the conceptzia—the outdated assumptions guiding military posture—revealed a defense doctrine degraded from its earlier generations: too static, slow to adapt, and reliant on foreign support. As the war winds down and regional balances harden, Israel will be compelled to innovate its strategy to confront enemies who have studied and absorbed its tactics of the past two years. Most acute are the threats of a resurgent, neo-Ottoman Turkey flexing its considerable muscle, and an Iranian regime, wounded but already plotting its next jihad. The sense of historical inevitability that once favored Israeli maneuver has inverted: adversaries have adapted, precision strike capabilities have proliferated, and the margin for error has narrowed.

Historically, Israel's strategic doctrine stood on four pillars: defensibility, pre-emption, limited war, and decisive victory. Those pillars enabled survival in an older era but now underwrite a posture that is no longer suited to the present threat environment. The classic playbook—the lightning attacks that delivered initiative in '56 and '67, the daring crossing that re-set momentum in '73, the rapid operations that kept conflicts short—has been diluted by the rise of hybrid warfare, long-range fire, and the theatre of information that stretch conflict without producing closure. Israel's military and political leadership have yet to conduct a thorough accounting of the glaring and hidden mistakes that led to this two-year war. The absence of such reflection has generated policy paralysis—an inability to adapt or to reimagine a new strategic framework, force structure, and battle doctrine that could prevent repetition. While no singular policy has yet emerged, there is broad consensus on several critical points that must shape a successor doctrine calibrated to the existing threat complex.

First, Israel's national security strategy requires strategic overhaul. The IDF, shaped by decades of withdrawals—from Sinai, Lebanon, Gaza, Judea, and Samaria—has gradually become a reactive, garrisoned force, suited more to static defense than to strategic initiative. The shift from maneuver to monitoring, from operational daring to technological reassurance, created a subtle but consequential drift: sensors replaced scouts, fences substituted for forward presence, and missile defense began to masquerade as grand

strategy. This framework led to over-reliance on foreign allies, especially Western powers, for arms and political cover, which this war proves is no longer a tenable policy.

Second, Israel's next doctrine will rise or fall on whether it can turn movement and sustainment into tempo. Churchill once warned that victory may appear as a brilliant flower, but its stem is transport—a truth military students often overlook in their fascination with tactics. Logistics is not secondary but structural, the hidden discipline of tempo.

Israel must dramatically improve its logistical capabilities—the ability to move and sustain troops, equipment, and aid operations. Gray-zone warfare has proven effective in countering Israeli power. Quick victories, once Israel's hallmark, can no longer be relied upon. The tempo of hybrid conflict forces a scaling logic different from past campaigns: instead of a single decisive blow, Israel needs serial operational advantages stitched together by logistics that are agile, redundant, and survivable under attack. To engage extra-military forces on the ground—whether through civilian aid operations, support for paramilitary partners, or missions beyond its borders—the IDF must possess the logistical resilience to remain maneuverable and enduring. This implies modular stockpiles, hardened forward nodes, autonomous resupply, and pre-positioned kits that convert hours of movement into minutes of employment.

Third, the proliferation of drones and missiles demands a redefinition of how Israel projects power beyond its borders. The ability to move the battlefield away from the home front is paramount. What this war made painfully clear is that missile defense cannot substitute for strategy. For much of the conflict, it was treated as such—a costly lesson underscored by barrages from Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iran, as Israel's skies were flooded with thousands of missiles. Missile defense is a tactic; it cannot remain the spine of national strategy. Passive shield without active maneuver becomes attrition by another name. A modern doctrine must pair layered defense with the outward projection that compels adversaries to defend their own centers of gravity—ports, logistical corridors, training hubs, financial arteries, and the maritime choke points that connect their expeditions to their economies.

The task, then, is not to abandon Israel's heritage of maneuver but to translate it into a force that can survive in the age of persistent surveillance, precision strike, and global narrative battles. That translation is the core project of the coming decade. It demands a doctrine that converts Israel's geographic

narrowness into operational reach, transforms vulnerability into organizational ingenuity, and treats the sea as a maneuver system rather than a moat.

II. Strategic Compression and the Emergence of a New Threat Landscape

Strategic compression describes the gradual narrowing of Israel's freedom to maneuver—not through conventional invasion but through coordinated, multi-vector encirclement, driven by evolving patterns of cooperation that coalesce around the goal of choking Israel militarily, politically, and economically. It is existential in potential, uses time to its advantage, exploits pre-10/7 operating assumptions, and—as a phenomenon of a complex adaptive system—is more than the sum of its parts. Under this dynamic, Israel is the center of gravity around which proxies, partner states, and distant great powers align; — In contrast, Israel' s center of gravity is dynamic and highly dependent on the prevailing, however short-term, strategic ordering of alliances. Given this asymmetry, Israel must face outward and seize initiative, shaping the contact geometry before it is shaped by others.

The geography of compression resembles Halford Mackinder's Heartland dilemma inverted for a small maritime state. Landlocked powers are constrained by access; maritime powers thrive on reach.[1] Israel's paradox is that it is neither fully continental nor fully maritime in its posture: chokepoints from the Red Sea to the Eastern Mediterranean act as levers adversaries can exploit at low cost, while domestic doctrine has under-weighted sea control relative to air power. Mahan's axiom about maritime primacy for trading states applies with special force: a state whose economic lifelines run on water must treat sea lanes, energy terminals, and ports as strategic organs, not civil afterthoughts.[2] Clausewitz reminds us that friction, learning, and uncertainty reign in war; therefore, Israel's design must internalize adaptation rather than bolt it on.[3] Schelling adds the grammar of deterrence and coercion: force must function as an instrument of bargaining, not merely punishment, if it is to shape adversary choices before fire meets fire.[4]

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[1] Mackinder 1919: World-Island/Heartland synthesis and land vs. sea power (common placements **pp. 150–180**, depending on edition).

[2] Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power* (1890), Intro., pp. 1–2; ch. I, pp. 26–28; and *Interest of America in Sea Power* (1897), "Isthmus and Sea Power."

[3] Clausewitz, *On War* (Howard/Paret, 1976), Bk I ch. 3, pp. 101–106; ch. 7, pp. 119–121

[4] Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (1966), pp. 1–34, 69–91; *Strategy of Conflict* (1960), pp. 21–52, 53–80

Today's encirclement is not the massed armies of the twentieth century; it is a weave of proxy networks, cyber intrusions, missile-and-drone saturation, maritime posturing, legal-political warfare, and information operations—engineered to constrain Israel's options, complicate alliance calculus, and impose economic pain without inviting outright escalation.

Iran's "Octopus Doctrine" synchronizes militia and drone activity across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Gaza. In the south, the Houthis strike commercial shipping at Bab el-Mandeb, directly disrupting Israeli trade and diverting maritime flow. To the west and north, Turkey advances its Blue Homeland strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean—testing maritime borders through naval presence and drilling claims and edging closer to Israel's northern borders via local proxies and sympathizers—while Egypt leverages control of Suez and Red Sea access with calculated ambiguity despite peace accords.

Recent movement sharpens the trend: in late September 2025, Turkey and Egypt staged their first joint naval drill in thirteen years ("Friendship Sea")[5], signaling a thaw. If routinized, two of the largest Eastern Mediterranean navies training together, a partnership that would further compress Israel's maritime options—tightening presence around chokepoints, especially in combination with Ankara's Blue Homeland posture and Cairo's Suez leverage.

Meanwhile, outside powers layer in—China through infrastructure investment, port stakes, and defense signaling with Egypt; Russia by supplying arms and maintaining a constant naval presence in the Mediterranean. The net effect is a theater where presence is power and influence is asserted by persistent engagement.

The symptoms of compression are not theoretical. Eilat's trade flows cratered under Houthi pressure;[6] Turkish naval activity rose;[7] Egyptian deployments crept into zones once demilitarized.[8] Israel's singular reliance on maritime trade and offshore energy magnifies these pressures. From the closure of the Straits of Tiran in 1967, to Turkish interference with Cypriot offshore drilling since 2018, to current Red Sea interdictions, adversaries have demonstrated how cheaply chokepoints can be weaponized. Unlike on land—where Israel's

[5] Egyptian MoD notice (23 Sept 2025)

[6] *Marine Insight*, "Israel's Transport Ministry Seeking To Clarify COSCO's Position on Shipping to Israel" (2024)

[7] Indicative of the rise in activity are Turkey's large-scale "Mavi Vatan 2025" naval exercise spanning the Aegean, Eastern Mediterranean, and Black Sea (Defense News, 16 Jan 2025)

[8] INSS, Amira Oron, *Egyptian Military Buildup and its Expanded Presence in Sinai – Implications for Israel* (Mar. 26, 2025)

classic answer was speed, surprise, and deep thrust—at sea the IDF has lacked the breadth to guarantee freedom of maneuver without external cushions.

Compression works by denial: of access, legitimacy and agency. It uses drones and missiles to saturate air defenses, cyber tools to disorient logistics, media campaigns to erode diplomatic space, and legal tactics to constrain coalition partners. To survive and maintain deterrence in this environment, Israel requires forces that project power outward—breaking siege logic, widening the front, and creating “strategic oxygen.” That outward turn must be deliberate: it cannot be episodic raids alone, nor a default to occupation. It must be maneuver calibrated to keep operations short, reversible, and politically legible, while being operationally punishing, strategically dislocating, and economically protective.

III. Purpose: Introducing the Tzahal Expeditionary Command (TEC)

The Tzahal Expeditionary Command addresses the missing tier in Israel’s force structure and can enable it to more formidably address the strategic compression it faces. The TEC is conceived as a maritime-enabled maneuver arm that supplies capabilities Israel currently lacks—amphibious maneuver, coastal denial, and pre-emptive projection—so that risk shifts from the homeland to hostile terrain and fortress logic is replaced by initiative. TEC lives between surgical special operations and full divisional mobilization. It acts swiftly and autonomously in the decisive early phase of crises, scaling to blunt adversary mobilization, degrade command-and-control, and disrupt logistical and economic hubs if war expands. It evolves doctrine rather than displacing core requirements like air superiority, but it corrects the structural absence of an operational-scale, short-duration expeditionary tool.

Its operating logic draws on the asymmetric cunning of special forces—distributed cells, surprise, exploitation of terrain and sea corridors—integrated with organic logistics, amphibious insertion, and cyber-kinetic effects. It can act alone, pre-emptively, or as the operational hinge of larger campaigns. Missions range from urban seizure and coastal disruption to maritime denial and regional evacuation. It disperses to survive precision fires and concentrates for decisive blows, restoring tempo superiority, cognitive adaptation, and persistent ambiguity. Operations are deliberately short—on the order of three to ten days—creating decision dilemmas disproportionate to

footprint and shaping battlefields before divisions arrive. The aim is repeated, system-level shocks that outpace adaptation—not death by a thousand cuts, but by a hundred—imposing costs far beyond their footprint.

This directly addresses strategic compression. By projecting power from the sea, TEC forces adversaries to defend wide, exposed flanks and stretch assets across broader theaters. Siege logic collapses when met by a force that refuses to defend the center and maneuvers through edges. Mobility returns to a doctrine long trapped by territorial constraint; geographic narrowness is converted into operational flexibility. The purpose is not attrition or occupation but systemic disruption—imposing costs without automatic escalation, protecting trade arteries, and keeping lifelines viable under siege.

Adaptive Structure: Shaping Complex Compositional Brigades
Design follows purpose. Instead of an anchored order of battle, TEC is a distributed, modular combat architecture optimized for short, high-impact missions across domains, treating terrain as transient. Think of six interoperable task force brigades, each with a distinct problem-set and plug-compatible logistics.

1. The Amphibious Strike Brigade conducts offensive coastal raids and littoral penetrations, combining stealth boats, autonomous surface/under-surface craft, and precision rotor-lift to insert, shock, and extract under the umbrella of electronic deception and cyber-enabled confusion. Its task is to make coastlines porous where the enemy believes them sealed, to find and shatter launch corridors, and to create dilemmas that pull precision munitions away from Israeli cities.
2. The Littoral Warfare Brigade imposes tactical denial and coastal control: AI-directed minefields, mobile SHORAD and counter-UAS batteries, sensor-linked kill webs that can be emplaced quickly, masked, and abandoned without entanglement. It turns shallow waters and near-shore approaches into ambush geometry favorable to Israel, denying the enemy sanctuary while minimizing the footprint ashore.
3. The Red Sea and Suez Brigade secures maritime corridors with drone-assisted patrols, agile response flotillas, and convoy escort capability that can pre-empt Houthi launch zones and stabilize choke points without permanent stationing. It treats the Red Sea as a living artery—one that requires continuous but light-touch presence to deter interdiction and restore trade oxygen.
4. The Logistics and Combat Engineering Brigade sustains autonomous forward nodes—pre-fabricated fuel, ammunition, power, repair, and medical support—while sculpting temporary terrain effects, from trenchworks and subterranean shelters to hardened posts built in hours

by autonomous construction kits. It allows deliberate pauses without sliding into occupation and creates positional disruption when pure maneuver is insufficient.

5. The Aerial Assault Wing provides vertical lift, deep reconnaissance, air assault, precision resupply, CASEVAC, and rapid extraction under contested electromagnetic conditions. It is the tempo engine linking sea to shore, shore to inland, and inland back to sea.
6. The Unmanned Warfare Brigade integrates maritime and aerial ISR swarms, loitering munitions, subsea sabotage teams, and deception drones to shape the battlespace before, during, and after manned presence. It seeds persistent reach into denied space and leaves behind automated “ghost pressure” after manned pods withdraw.

   A maritime TEC would also depend heavily on unmanned systems. Swarms of underwater and aerial drones patrol littoral zones, seed ambushes, resupply pods, and even evacuate wounded. Manned submarines and surface ships serve as drone motherships while guarding the outer ring with strike and screening capabilities.

   Expendable swarms contest the shallows; blue-water assets secure the deep—turning the sea from barrier to maneuver system. By sustaining forces in denied environments, creating kill zones before insertion and after withdrawal, and lingering after combat units depart, unmanned systems magnify Israel’s ability to impose pressure at lower cost and with fewer risks to personnel. For a state facing long wars of attrition, this autonomy and persistence could be decisive.

Each brigade is modular and can be subdivided into autonomous pods of roughly 500–700 personnel—large enough to generate critical mass at the kinetic front but compact enough for rapid deployment, evacuation, and maneuver. Crucially, pods are composable: they may be task-organized across brigades or pooled together into ad hoc battlegroups to meet specific mission requirements, and commanders can surge additional pods into an engagement as the battlefield unfolds. Pods reconfigure forward logistics hubs into ambush zones using self-deploying drones, mobile artillery, and AI-targeting sensors; if compromised, built-in protocols trigger thermite destruction, data purging, and withdrawal. Mission command—clear intent, decentralized execution—governs pod action, while a standing operational-design cell continuously updates playbooks as adversaries adapt.

A Nervous System: Adaptive AI Learning Engine

What sustains such a force beyond initial surprise is not mass but real-time learning. Embedded across the force, a digital nervous system—Ma'arakhat Or (the "System of Light")—is the cognitive engine. Each modular unit integrates hardened edge-compute kits that process battlefield inputs—thermal signatures, drone behavior, signal anomalies—in real time, Micro-updates propagate within seconds across the force, recalibrating targeting logic, movement patterns, and force composition to maintain tempo and deny predictability. Maneuver, in this model, is not reactive repositioning but rhythmic evolution.

A predictive maneuver engine models adversary adaptation curves and inserts deception pathways before enemy adjustments mature. By shifting attack vectors, electronic profiles, and insertion sequences across engagements, TEC ensures operations do not repeat; enemy countermeasures are invalidated before they cohere, overloading decision cycles into systemic paralysis rather than mere delay. Supporting this, a training regimen rooted in adversarial learning and variant playbooks simulates future enemy behaviors and forces units to overcome synthetic adaptations before they arise. Where most militaries refine doctrine over years, TEC adjusts over days.

Survivability now depends as much on concealment and deception as on firepower—and retreat itself can be weaponized. Units use quick insertion/extraction as part of the kill chain: feigned withdrawals lure pursuit into prepared ambushes or mass-casualty traps. Systems embed data-wipe, self-destruct, and deception payloads; captured kit seeds Trojan data—false coordinates, baited signals, decoy movements—so enemy analysis becomes an ambush vector. This is maskirovka updated for the multi-domain era, echoing Israel's 1973 Suez deception: its impact is psychological as well as operational, forcing speculation instead of effective preparation. Doctrinally it pushes maneuver beyond borders—Inchon-like reversals reimagined for cyber, air, and space—aimed at collapsing the adversary's decision cycle.

IV. TEC in Action—Deploying New Capability Across Multiple Theaters

The strategic dividends for the IDF and its civil leadership are clear. A credible expeditionary corps gives Israeli leaders more than binary choices between limited precision strikes and nationwide mobilization. It creates a middle tier of

options that enhance statecraft. TEC allows Israel to carry conflict outward—without the baggage of long-term entanglement. These calibrated operations signal deterrence, demonstrate resolve, or compel concessions while remaining reversible. In political negotiations, such flexibility widens the menu of options and strengthens bargaining power.

TEC is well adapted to Middle Eastern power dynamics, generating deterrence through limited but decisive territorial control. Its “phantom footprint” keeps adversaries uncertain about Israel’s presence, timing, and intent. For regimes in Tehran, Ankara, and Sanaa that rely on mass propaganda to project strength, even brief disruption on their own ground carries outsized impact. TEC allows Israel to impose costs and challenge those narratives without being drawn into prolonged campaigns.

TEC is conceived as a limited expeditionary force—regional in scope, not global like the U.S.—with primary theaters in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Arabian Sea. Assume TEC were fielded.

Gaza, amphibious pods seize and clear coastal launch corridors while unmanned swarms establish pre- and post-operation kill zones. Vertical lift inserts and extracts forces within hours, collapsing logistics nodes and smuggling lines without prolonged entanglement. The objective is not to hold ground but to shatter connective tissue—tunnels that link storage to launch, workshops that turn components into rockets, relay points that turn radios into command. The result is disruption disproportionate to footprint and time on target.

Hezbollah in Lebanon, littoral raids and airborne seizures preempt coastal launch sites, sever key logistics corridors, and neutralize command nodes. The need to defend wide, exposed flanks forces Hezbollah to disperse precision assets away from Israeli cities, diluting saturation salvos and complicating launch cycles. By contesting the littoral and the coastline’s road net, Israel pressures the very arteries that feed medium- and long-range fires, and it does so with operations short enough to control escalation while long enough to force reallocation of enemy assets.

Syrian, interdiction of port-to-front transfers and IRGC ground lines of communication becomes a rhythm. Distributed pods strike, hold briefly where decisive, and withdraw before counter-mass can organize—imposing operational dilemmas at low footprint. Ports become unreliable; warehousing becomes risky; convoy discipline becomes impossible. TEC adds a maritime

claw to Israel's air-centric approach, producing combined-arms disruption that persists between strikes.

Iran Here, the logic is pressure without automatic escalation. Rather than plunging deep into the heartland, TEC projects outward—from the Strait of Hormuz to forward maritime hubs—paralyzing logistics, complicating naval signaling, and demonstrating reach. It can degrade long-range strike enablers, pressure expeditionary Quds Force nodes, and force Tehran's planners to choose between coastal defense and regional projection. As Schelling argued, coercion works when force is a bargaining instrument: TEC's brief seizures, interdictions, and rapid withdrawals create costly signals without demanding occupation.

Turkey Here, the presence of TEC complicates Blue Homeland planning by threatening coastal vulnerabilities, reinforcing Greek and Cypriot partners, and spoiling ambitions in Libya—calibrated signalling rather than a prescription for confrontation. The aim is to raise the opportunity cost of aggressive naval postures and to reassure partners that Israel can shape the maritime commons in coalition, not merely respond to its militarization.

Yemen and the Red Sea: Here, convoy escort, pre-emption of Houthi launch zones, and persistent unmanned swarms restore maritime oxygen to Israel's economy while blue-water guardians act as motherships. The outer ring secures depth; the inner ring hunts launch cells; the connective ring keeps trade flowing. Siege becomes counter-siege in a contest of persistence rather than mass.

At the system level in the Eastern Mediterranean, TEC broadens target sets from enemy formations to the scaffolding of logistics, C2, and maritime trade. The shift is from reactive strikes to systemic disruption. British expeditionary raids across the Mediterranean in World War II offer precedent: small, mobile, relentless operations forced Axis powers to defend coasts far beyond capacity, diverting resources from decisive fronts. TEC supplies Israel a similar asymmetric lever against overstretched maritime strategies, doing so with twenty-first-century swarms, precision vertical lift, and cyber-electromagnetic dislocation layered into every sortie.

The regional order is in flux. After two years of war, the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean are being reshaped by proxy networks, shifting alliances, and declining faith in U.S. primacy. TEC is Israel's opportunity to re-anchor sovereignty in this unsettled environment. It visibly secures maritime

lifelines, reassures partners like Greece, Egypt, and the Gulf states, and deters adversaries who rely on encirclement strategies. A force able to challenge Turkey's "Blue Homeland" ambitions in Cyprus and Libya, or to counter Houthi disruption in the Red Sea, is also a force that strengthens Israel's hand diplomatically—demonstrating that Jerusalem can act independently, and position Israel as a stabilizing force in a shifting regional balance.

V. Requirements

This is an act of statecraft, industrial policy, and alliance design, not merely an ORBAT tweak. Politically, the project must be anchored in law, bipartisan oversight, and multi-year budget instruments so doctrine and procurement survive coalition churn. That requires statutory guardrails, independent audit mechanisms, and cross-party compacts that protect procurement timelines and training cycles from electoral turbulence.

Fiscally, Israel faces a choice not of affordability but of direction. With pre-war GDP near $540B and defense outlays already steady at roughly 6–6.5% without destabilizing the macroeconomy[9], a credible TEC force structure would imply a ten-year expenditure of ₪312–424B ($84–115B). This estimate derives from comparative analysis of Israel's historical defense-to-GDP ratios, current outlays and analogous expeditionary procurement programs by mid-sized powers such as Italy, Japan, France, South Korea and Taiwan.[10] Benchmarks from NATO naval acquisitions and OECD industrial multipliers provide the scaling logic. When spread over the course of a decade, the burden is material but within precedent for sustained modernization drives.[11]

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[9] World Bank GDP (current US$) for Israel: $513.6B (2023) and $540.38B (2024), bounding the "~$540B" figure; military outlays as % of GDP (SIPRI series via World Bank) ran ~6–6.5% in the early 2010s and measured ~5.3% in 2023; IMF's 2023 Article IV notes solid macro fundamentals with public debt projected below ~60% of GDP, consistent with such defense burdens not destabilizing the economy; Israel MoF reports public debt 60.5% (2022) and 62.1% (2023)

[10] Comparative anchors: mid-power expeditionary models bound cost and phasing—France's amphibious groups built around *Mistral*-class LHDs with organic aviation/C2 (capital + aviation + C2 cost stack) [French Ministry of the Armed Forces, Loi de programmation militaire 2024–2030, annexes on Mistral/OPEX]; Italy's Brigata Marina "San Marco" paired with LHD/LHA (*Trieste*, *Cavour*) (littoral-control mix, O&M profile) [NADEF 2024; Italian MoD program docs]; Japan's Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade with MV-22/LCAC/LPD/DD support (phased IOC → iterative capability) [Japan MOD, Defense of Japan 2024]; South Korea's ROKN/ROKMC with *Dokdo/Marado* LPHs and robust littoral ISR/MCM sustained by co-production (predictable O&M, export spillovers) [ROK MND, Defense White Paper 2022; program notes on *Dokdo/Marado*]—together bounding the platform triad / unmanned mass / sustainment cost drivers and justifying the ₪312–424B / 10-year TEC phasing.

[11] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *Military Expenditure Database* (2023); Bank of Israel, *Annual Report 2022* (Jerusalem: 2023), esp. ch. 5 on defense burden; Efraim Inbar

The cost is best phased: rising in the early and tapering over time. For the wider economy, this trajectory would lift defense spending by roughly 1.5–2% of GDP—significant, but not unprecedented in Israel's history.[12] By comparison, the ongoing war has already cost some ₪540B ($150B).[13]

The real question is not whether Israel can finance innovation, but whether it can continue to pay the compound costs of attrition without acquiring the instruments that shorten wars and shift violence away from its cities. TEC is best understood as risk mitigation: it reduces attritional drains, secures factors of production (trade arteries, energy lifelines, logistics flows), and converts defense shekels into industrial leverage.[14]

Macroeconomically, the imperative is to platformize Israeli technology—migrating from siloed boutique innovation to interoperable national platforms that scale. Shared standards, open architectures, and common interfaces would allow small firms to plug into national stacks without producing one-off prototypes that die after demonstration. Haifa, Ashdod, and Eilat could evolve into hubs for modular naval production, catalyzing sectors from robotics and propulsion to AI and cyber security. OECD benchmarks suggest each billion invested in advanced maritime infrastructure yields thousands of high-skill jobs and second-order growth in aerospace and manufacturing.[15] Supply chains must also be diversified and hardened: subterranean facilities for

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and Eitan Shamir, *Maturing Out of Dependence: Israel's Military and the Challenge of Strategic Autonomy* (Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2022); Eric Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.–China Military Scorecard* (RAND, 2015), pp. 79–86, for comparative naval procurement scaling; Ministry of National Defense (Republic of Korea), *Defense White Paper* (Seoul: 2022), for South Korean naval acquisition costs; Michael Beckley, "Economic Development and Military Effectiveness," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33:1 (2010), pp. 43–79, for methodology linking GDP shares to sustained force build-ups.

[12] Efraim Inbar and Eitan Shamir, *Maturing Out of Dependence: Israel's Military and the Challenge of Strategic Autonomy* (Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2022); Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "Military Expenditure Database" (2023).

[13] Bank of Israel, "The Economic Impact of the Ongoing War" (Jerusalem: 2024); see also Yaakov Katz, "Counting the Shekels of War," *Jerusalem Post*, February 2024.

[14] Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Vintage, 1987), esp. ch. 2–3 on the linkage between sustained military expenditure, industrial leverage, and long-term strategic autonomy; Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 181–190.

[15] OECD, *The Ocean Economy in 2030* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016), esp. ch. 3, pp. 101–118, which models job multipliers in maritime infrastructure and identifies spillovers into adjacent sectors such as aerospace and advanced manufacturing; OECD, *Maritime Transport and Economic Development* (2021), pp. 56–72, which provides empirical evidence that every €1B of maritime infrastructure investment generates several thousand direct and indirect high-skill jobs in OECD economies. See also Dani Rodrik, *The Globalization Paradox* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 178–186, on the mechanism of industrial spillovers.

production, dispersed logistics, and hardened storage nodes reduce the vulnerability of a visible industrial base to precision strikes or sabotage.

Historical precedent offers both warnings and opportunities. After the Yom Kippur War, Israel's rushed reliance on external procurement triggered inflationary spirals and dependency. Defense spending soared from 20% to 30.5% of GDP without sustainable returns.[16] Heavy borrowing and the absence of domestic industrial capacity deepened economic vulnerability. Smaller nations have shown alternative paths: South Korea turned shipbuilding into a growth engine; Taiwan pursued an indigenous submarine program despite immense pressure; the Netherlands sustained a maritime-industrial base long after its empire. Israel, often dismissed as too small or resource-poor for such ambitions, could follow a similar trajectory by marrying high-tech innovation with industrial robotics to overcome manpower shortages. Israel need not build every platform alone; it can focus on drones, stealth fast-attack craft, missile and mine systems, while sourcing large surface vessels and submarines from trusted partners. Yet even in such external procurements, taking a page from India's procurement strategy, Israel's long-term resilience depends on embedding co-production and technology-transfer provisions into strategic naval contracts. Incremental localization—beginning with modular sections, propulsion systems, and combat suites, then expanding toward hull integration and systems sustainment—would gradually increase Israel's industrial share while preserving interoperability. Such arrangements ensure that every procurement deal also strengthens the domestic maritime base, reducing future dependency and enabling Israel to sustain TEC independently in protracted conflict.

Autonomy in defense production and deployment is now not merely prudent but essential to sovereignty. Sovereignty, in this decade, will correlate to domestic sustainment, diversified procurement, and the ability to fight sustained multi-front campaigns without waiting for resupply that may be delayed, diluted, or conditioned by external politics.

Domestically, incentives must align to foster co-development between prime contractors and start-ups. Intellectual property frameworks should encourage licensing rather than hoarding; test ranges and maritime proving grounds must compress iteration cycles; workforce policy should integrate naval

[16] Israel CBS, *National Accounts*—defense outlays ~19–20% of GDP pre-1973; ~28–29% in 1973–75; SIPRI (military expenditure, % of GDP) peak ~30.5% in 1975; Bank of Israel, *Annual Report 1986*,ch. 1

engineering, data science, electronic warfare, and autonomy into new professional pipelines. Education policy meets defense policy here: vocational academies for composite hull fabrication, battery systems, and maritime robotics; graduate programs pairing hydrodynamics with operations research and cyber-physical security.

At the same time, TEC's industrialization must contend with Israel's most important external partner: the United States. For decades, American aid has been both lifeline and leash—underwriting survival while constraining maneuver. If TEC is to mark a national pivot, the alliance must be reframed—not abandoned, but evolved from subsidy into co-industrial partnership. The narrative can be framed as "graduation": Israel shifts from dependency to mutual capacity, from subsidy to co-development and co-export. Aid is not eliminated but restructured into joint industrial projects, export pipelines, and shared deterrence architectures that strengthen both parties.

A phased ladder could structure this transition. In years 0–3, aid flows continue but are tied to co-production contracts with localization requirements. Beyond year 10 phase out, "aid" would exist only as alliance integration funding—joint R&D, exercises, interoperability—not procurement subsidies. This trajectory balances continuity with autonomy and signals maturity rather than rupture.

The U.S. can also serve as export guarantor for co-produced platforms, providing certification and political cover for Israeli systems in NATO, EU, Gulf, and Asian markets. In return, Israel can commit to STANAG (standardized agreements) and open-architecture standards that guarantee interoperability. Reciprocity clauses should be built in: once systems are co-developed, Washington cannot veto Israeli third-party sales that meet agreed export criteria. Such terms preserve U.S. credibility as a strategic ally while ensuring Israel retains freedom to scale, sell, and adapt TEC platforms without waiting on political clearance.

Alliance-building beyond Washington remains essential. TEC enables coalition security in the Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea with Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Gulf states, India, and selectively S. Korea and Japan—joint drills, shared ISR, interoperability protocols, and port access—positioning Israel as a guarantor of regional maritime order. A TEC force that projects stability into these corridors could form the backbone of new regional coalitions. U.S. participation adds legitimacy and market weight but without an outsized role that becomes leverage. The diplomatic dividend is twofold:

partners gain from Israel's disruptive agility, and Israel embeds its presence within a shared commercial-security narrative. In an age where perception constrains maneuver as surely as missiles, such narrative power matters.

Finally, governance structures must hedge against drift. A TEC Program Executive at the Major General (Aluf) rank could oversee deputies for Acquisition & Industry, Operations & Doctrine, and Alliances & Legal. Monthly acquisition boards, quarterly operational tests, and annual mixed public–classified reports could sustain rhythm and accountability. Public–private partnerships, if structured with export pipelines and multi-year roadmaps, may enable TEC to shift from boutique innovation to national industrial policy in uniform. Whether Israeli defense culture—so accustomed to improvisation and prototyping—can absorb the discipline of shipyards is perhaps the deepest cultural question of all. If it can, TEC will not merely be another corps but the embodiment of a civilizational pivot: sovereignty, industry, and strategy fused into a single national instrument.

VI. Challenges

Any bold grand strategy opens itself to critique; endurance depends on acknowledging vulnerabilities and weaving them into practice. Politically, Israel's greatest weakness is the churn of governments and the reflex for short fixes both politically and economically. TEC demands decades of steady budgets, doctrine, and training. Anchor it in statute; tie it explicitly to jobs, export revenue, and sovereign capacity so it becomes a national framework rather than a partisan trophy. Consider a cross-party "Maritime Sovereignty Act" that secures ten-year procurement lines, creates a National Maritime Industrial Base Authority, and mandates annual readiness reports to the Knesset Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee.

Industrial risk is real. Israel dazzles in prototypes but is brittle in production; start-ups proliferate, IP is siloed, and supply chains are fragile. The answer is export-oriented industrialization at scale—learning from South Korea's shipbuilding, Taiwan's indigenous submarine program, and the Netherlands' maritime base—absorbing successes and avoiding mistakes. It also means building a cadre of program officers who speak both engineering and operations—the translators who keep scope creep from drowning capability.

External pressure will be intense. Allies prefer dependency; inducements will tempt, as in the Lavi precedent—early access, discounted platforms, political cover today in exchange for tomorrow's leverage. Adversaries will cry

militarism and paint maritime projection as escalation.

Beyond bilateral procurement, TEC also positions Israel to anchor a coalition maritime order. The Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea are already becoming zones of shared security concern—whether for Greece facing Turkish pressure, Egypt managing the Suez, or Gulf states reliant on Bab el-Mandeb. A TEC force that projects stability into these corridors could form the backbone of new regional coalitions. Just as the U.S. Navy underpinned the post–WWII maritime order, Israel can play a regional version of that role—partnering with Gulf navies, aligning with Greek and Cypriot interests, and even integrating selectively with Asian partners like India or Japan. This coalition logic amplifies TEC's deterrent effect, while embedding Israel in a broader architecture of maritime security.

Overextension poses danger. Agility can tempt dispersal across too many fronts—Red Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, northern littorals—hollowing tempo into exhaustion. The cure is priorities anchored in national interests, layered readiness cycles that pre-assign formations to theaters on rotation, and pre-positioned hubs that sustain operations without fragmentation. Commanders must be rewarded for declining missions that fragment the force, not only for accepting every opportunity to strike.

Costs are substantial, but the alternative is worse. Attritional wars exact far higher social and economic tolls than deliberate investment. Ninety percent of world trade moves by sea; securing lanes is securing the economy. TEC aligns automation and robotics with Israel's educated labor force, offsetting manpower constraints and catalyzing exportable capacity. In macro terms, a shekel spent on maritime autonomy that yields an export line is not the same as a shekel spent on consumables that vanish in a salvo. The former compounds; the latter amortizes.

Visibility and vulnerability are not TEC inventions; ports, motherships, and industrial bases are targets today. Mitigation rests on dispersal at sea, depth on land, deception, redundancy, and rapid repair. Subterranean production lines, decoy ports, mobile fuel farms, and hardened fiber backbones reduce single points of failure. A national maritime cyber shield—monitoring shipboard control systems, port OT networks, and logistics software—is as vital as armor on a hull.

The narrative battlespace cannot be an afterthought. Every operation will unfold under global scrutiny. Embed TEC within coalitions and trade corridors;

frame presence as protection of commerce, not expansion. Pair kinetic activity with proactive legal work: draft standing dossiers on adversary maritime violations, maintain evidentiary chains for interdictions, and pre-brief partners so they are not surprised by the tempo of Israeli operations. Narrative coherence is a capability: it requires rehearsals, products, and teams, just like a raid.

Finally, opportunity cost. Skeptics ask why invest in TEC when missile defense, civil resilience, and airpower already strain resources. But the cost opportunity runs in reverse: without outward maneuver, Israel pays twice—once to absorb incoming, and again to repair what could have been prevented. The logic of TEC is to create the option set that reduces the demand signal on shields by pushing the fight outward, and to generate industrial returns that make shields and swords alike more sustainable.

Conclusion

History has now delivered Israel its longest war. The IDF pushes back effectively but struggles to secure decisive victories. Leadership decapitation strikes against Hezbollah, Iran, and the Houthis disrupt but do not dismantle. Strategic raids on Iranian nuclear and missile infrastructure buy time, not resolution. Even in Gaza, after two years of grinding war, external pressure and internal hesitation left Hamas diminished yet not destroyed. The IDF delays, “mows the lawn,” inflicts damage, but leaves adversaries intact to fight another day.

TEC is conceived not as the tip of the spear, like Israel’s current reliance on air assets or special forces, but as the sword that follows—widening the breaches they create. It would shape the opening phase of conflict, fracturing enemy cohesion before IDF large-scale divisions, that only mobilized after several days, can arrive. Its role is to condition the battlefield so that larger maneuvers unfold on Israel’s terms.

Israel has entered an era of strategic compression that punishes passivity and rewards outward initiative. The Tzahal Expeditionary Command is not a repudiation of Israel’s past strengths but their adaptation to a world of multi-domain, time-sensitive pressure. It is maneuver reborn: an expeditionary instrument that strikes faster than adversaries can deploy, learns faster than they can adapt, and disappears before retaliation can cohere—a maneuver corps with the mind of a commando and the muscle of a brigade.

TEC is more than a corps. It is a grand-strategy: from fortress defense to maritime maneuver; from reactive attrition to systemic disruption; from dependency to sovereign capability. It would alter Israel's battlefield geometry and re-anchor its role as a maritime power in a shifting regional order—securing lifelines, shaping diplomacy, and restoring strategic oxygen. As Schelling noted, coercion works when force is a bargaining instrument; as Boyd taught, advantage lies in collapsing the opponent's decision cycle; as Clausewitz warned, war is the realm of uncertainty and friction. TEC operationalizes those truths for Israel's moment.

At the highest level, TEC is not just about combat—it embodies Israel's civilizational turn. A nation long defined by borders, sieges, and short wars must now see the sea as the foundation of sovereignty, resilience, and depth. In doing so, Israel joins the lineage of maritime powers—from Athens to the Dutch Republic to postwar America—that viewed the ocean not only as a battlespace but as the infrastructure of independence and prosperity. TEC is the bridge to that tradition, and through it, Israel can transform deterrence into destiny.