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# ‘While You’re Busy Making Other Plans’ – The ‘Other RMA’

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**ABSTRACT** This study argues that, in parallel to the developments in the West over the last three decades, several nations and organizations on ‘the other side of the hill’ have also undertaken a significant development in their military thought. This conceptual development is referred to in the study as the ‘Other RMA’ (‘O-RMA’). This study aims to identify and describe O-RMA, to analyze the learning process that led to it and to trace its intellectual origins. This ‘way of war’, whose roots lie in a series of dramatic and tumultuous events that took place in the Middle East between the years 1979 and 1982, is based on the following components: Improving absorption capability, in order to increase survivability and provide a breathing space for the ‘weaker side’, creating effective deterrence, in order to deter the ‘stronger side’ from attacking the ‘weaker side’ and shifting the war to more convenient areas in case this deterrent fails; and winning the war by not losing it, while creating an attrition effect. O-RMA is an exceptionally eclectic conception and its development was not intentional or systematic. This study claims that the main ideas that underlie this conceptual development evolved within the different elements, while maintaining a common image, concerning the military, technological, economic, social and political developments in the West during the 1990s.

**KEY WORDS:** Middle East, Military Thought, Changes in Warfare, Terrorism, Insurgency, Guerrilla, Revolution in Military Affairs

Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.  
John Lennon, *Beautiful Boy*, 1980

It is customary to assume that since the 1970s, there have been three major milestones of military innovation in the West. During the 1980s, military theory and practice revolved around concepts such as Air-Land Battle (ALB) and Follow-on Forces Attack (FOFA); in the 1990s, discussions revolved around the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) concept; and in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the discourse

on Transformation and its components, such as Effects-Based Operations (EBO) and Network Centric Warfare (NCW), has attracted the most attention. The hub of these conceptual discussions was in the US, yet the implications were broader and at the same time similar discussions were held in security establishments in other countries including Israel.

This study argues that, in parallel to the developments in the West over the last three decades, a number of nations and organizations on 'the other side of the hill' have also undertaken a significant development in their military thought. One version of the outcomes of this development was described in 2008 by Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hizballah, in the following way: 'A new school of warfare, it doesn't resemble anything we know'.<sup>1</sup> This conceptual development is referred to in the study as the 'Other RMA' or 'O-RMA'.<sup>2</sup> This study aims to identify and describe O-RMA, to analyze the learning process that led to it and to trace its intellectual origins. The study concentrates mainly on the Middle East and, more specifically, deals with a group of states, including Syria, Iraq and Iran, as well as a group of non-state entities, including Hizballah, Hamas and Al-Qa'eda.

Since the late 1990s, a comprehensive discussion relating to changes in the nature of the opponents and to the broader changes in the nature of warfare has been developed in the West. Nevertheless, it seems that a more systematic approach to the phenomenon referred to in this study as O-RMA is lacking. This study describes the unique 'learning community' that evolved around this innovation. It maintains that the current tactical patterns of these states and other entities share a broad common denominator that is not coincidental. These tactical patterns of warfare stem directly from common strategic and operational concepts that were developed during the 1990s, and have been evolving since then. The type of warfare Israel encountered in Lebanon (in 2006) and in the Gaza Strip (in 2009) is a

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<sup>1</sup>Hassan Nasrallah, speech, *Al-Manar* TV station, 22 Feb. 2008.

<sup>2</sup>I prefer the term, the 'Other RMA', which reflects the idea that it was a different and sometimes parallel development, rather than the term 'Counter-RMA', which was introduced by Ralph Peters. See Ralph Peters, 'The Counterrevolution in Military Affairs', *The Weekly Standard*, 11/20, 6 Feb. 2006. This study uses the term 'RMA (Revolution in Military Affairs)' as a general title for military innovations, without committing to the term 'revolution'. The study does not deal with the question whether the developments on the 'other side of the hill' were evolutionary or revolutionary in nature. However, it seems that the term 'evolution' fits the way this article describes the process of O-RMA development more accurately.

clear and challenging outcome of the conceptual development referred to in this study as O-RMA.

At the heart of this study stands the claim that the roots of O-RMA lie in a series of dramatic and tumultuous events that took place in the Middle East between the years 1979 and 1982. These events (the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the start of the Iran–Iraq War and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon) changed the political and social order in the region, and led to the formation of a ‘radical axis’ and a ‘learning community’ of states and organizations that are in conflict with the United States and Israel. Even though not all the elements in this radical axis share the same ideological and political vision, they do share the operational and strategic concepts that lie at the center of the conceptual development, and therefore they employ similar tactical patterns.

This study makes use of primary materials in Arabic and Farsi that reflect the development of O-RMA, the threat assessment underlying it and the perspective of its developers on the process that led to it. The study is based on a wide selection of statements, speeches, books, fatwas, letters and other documents that were released over the past three decades. The textual approach is complemented by a detailed analysis of the modes of operation and force design practiced by these elements. This enables an understanding of O-RMA, integrating theory and practice.

## **Upheaval and Crisis (1979–1991)**

### *Upheaval (1979–1982)*

Military historians and practitioners describe the influences of the Yom Kippur War, in October 1973, on the doctrinal developments in the US Army during the 1970s, and especially on the doctrine of ALB. Yet, it is clear nowadays that when General Donn Starry and other officers learned the lessons from the Israeli battles against the Syrians on the Golan Heights, winds of change were already blowing in the Middle East. These winds would, in turn, lead some regional elements to develop a form of warfare that would turn out to be very different from the one carried out by Syria in 1973. Between 1979 and 1982, when the ALB doctrine was formed and the FOFA concepts were articulated,<sup>3</sup> four dramatic events shook the Middle East.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran turned secular and pro-Western Iran into a radical Islamic Republic under the guidance of a Shi’ite cleric.

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<sup>3</sup>Richard Lock-Pullan, ‘How to Rethink War: Conceptual Innovation and AirLand Battle Doctrine’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28/4 (Aug. 2005), 679–702.

The government's policy separated Iran from its weapon and doctrine suppliers in the West, severed relations with the United States and Israel, and partly isolated Iran. These moves proved very costly in Iran's war with Iraq. The establishment of the revolutionary regime also incorporated the notion of 'exporting the revolution' as an important element in Iranian strategy. The revolution indeed inspired various Islamic movements, including Hizballah and Hamas, and it later established Iran in a leading position in the Middle Eastern 'radical axis'.

The Soviet war in Afghanistan began with the Red Army's invasion in December 1979, and ended in February 1989 with the defeat of the Soviet Union. The Soviet involvement transformed the internal conflict between the communist regime and the Islamic opposition into a war of independence against a foreign power, and according to the views of Muslims in the area, necessitated a 'Jihad' for the liberation of Afghanistan from a heathen regime and a foreign occupier. Numerous volunteers from all over the Muslim world joined this Jihad, and military and financial assistance was provided to the Mujahedin camps. The defeat of the Soviet Union generated a 'victory narrative' for the Mujahedin, who fought the regime and the Soviet occupiers and created a generation of skilled and highly motivated warriors. Al-Qa'eda and its associated movements are in many ways the outcome of this war.

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 led to the expulsion of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from Lebanon and consequently to a fundamental change in its stand regarding the armed struggle against Israel. The war also revealed to the Syrians their military inferiority, and temporarily undermined the Syrian hegemony in Lebanon. This state of affairs led to the vacuum that enabled Iran to take advantage of developments within the Shi'ite population in Lebanon, and to establish Hizballah. The war led the Syrians to adopt, for several years, the 'strategic parity' doctrine, during which the Syrian Army expanded significantly. Towards the mid-1980s, Syria was in the midst of a grave economic crisis, which stemmed, to a large extent, from the priority given to military investments in an attempt to close the gap with Israel's technological superiority.

The Iran-Iraq War between 1980 and 1988 shaped the Iranian strategy for the following two decades, and had a great influence on the buildup of its forces. The trauma caused by the War was the most significant factor that led Iran to invest great resources in the development of its strategic force, with an emphasis on unconventional capabilities and ballistic missiles. Iran's failures in the war against Iraq taught Iranian leaders the importance of military organization and

professionalism. The war greatly influenced Iraq's doctrine and force buildup as well. This was clearly manifested in the First Gulf War and the decade that followed.

Another meaningful event that took place during this period was the signing of the peace accord between Israel and Egypt on 26 March 1979. The signing of the accord removed the Egyptians from the war cycle with Israel and left Syria on its own. This feeling of solitude had a major influence on the Syrians, whose strategic concepts always relied on Arab solidarity as a foundation for their security doctrine.

On 7 June 1981, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) attacked the nuclear reactor that was built in Baghdad (Osiraq). The attack revealed Israel's precision attack capabilities and affirmed Israel's readiness to use its military force in the case of a threat to its national interests. The strategic Memorandum of Understanding, which was signed between Israel and the United States in the same year, had a great impact on the formation of the conception that the United States and Israel act in order to achieve similar interests, and that the two countries use similar weapons.

These events formed the strategic environment in which O-RMA evolved. In retrospect, a more profound examination of the biographies of players such as Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden,<sup>4</sup> Imad Mughniyah,<sup>5</sup> Abbas Musawi, Hassan Nasrallah,<sup>6</sup> Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and others reveals that the period between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s formed, to a large extent, their personal biography, and the worldview of a new generation of leaders, commanders and warriors who had great influence over the conceptual development on the 'other side of the hill'.

The years 1979–82 thus appear, in retrospect, as the years during which a fundamental upheaval took place, an upheaval that led to the development of O-RMA. When the FM 100-5 field manual of August 1982 was published in the United States, all of these events were already underway, and Saddam Hussein had been ruling Iraq since 1979. The ALB doctrine that stood at the core of the 1982 manual was

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<sup>4</sup>On Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri, see Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Knopf 2006); On Al-Zawahiri, in his own words, see also Ayman Al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner* (London: Al-Sharq Al-Awsat Dec. 2001).

<sup>5</sup>On Imad Mughniyah, see Ibrahim al-Amin, 'Things That can be Said About the Resistance Magician', *Al-Akbar newspaper*, 12 Feb. 2009.

<sup>6</sup>On Hassan Nasrallah and Abbas Musawi, see Eyal Zisser, *Lebanon: Blood in the Cedars* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad 2009) [in Hebrew]; Shimon Shapira, *Hizballah between Iran and Lebanon* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad 2000) [in Hebrew].

not related to any of these developments.<sup>7</sup> Instead, it addressed the European arena and the Soviet threat, which was identified by Starry and others in the 1970s as the major threat to the free world in the context of the Cold War.<sup>8</sup>

### *Crisis (1983–1991)*

The outcome of the dramatic events that took place between the years 1979 and 1982 was well evident during the 1980s and culminated towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. Indeed, at the beginning of the 1990s, when the first RMA memorandums were circulated,<sup>9</sup> the initial foundations for O-RMA had already been laid. By this time, the collapse of the Soviet Union was an established fact. The main militaries in the Middle East, most of which were equipped with Soviet weapons and Soviet doctrine, were under the impression of the way in which the US military was employed during the First Gulf War. These militaries were in the midst of a painful process, as a result of which they would be forced to drastically change their strategic and operational doctrines.<sup>10</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the collapse of Syria's national security strategy and ended its efforts to reach a strategic parity with Israel.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, the Syrians began to comprehend the technological and conceptual developments in the West. Israel's technological superiority over Syria had already been demonstrated in 1982, when the IAF waged a massive standoff precision attack, supported by advanced electronic warfare (EW), against the Syrian surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) in the Baqa'a valley.<sup>12</sup> At the end of the decade, Syrians dealt with the threat of precision-guided missiles

<sup>7</sup>US Dept. of the Army, *Field Manual 100-5: Operations* (Washington DC, 20 Aug. 1982).

<sup>8</sup>Gen. Donn A. Starry, 'A Tactical Evolution – FM 100-5', *Military Review* 58 (Aug. 1978), 2–11.

<sup>9</sup>Andrew Marshall, *Some Thoughts on Military Revolutions – Second Version* (Washington DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense 23 Aug. 1993).

<sup>10</sup>For Arab military strategy and operational doctrine prior to the 1990s, see Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Arab Strategies and Israel's Response* (New York: The Free Press 1977); Kenneth M. Pollack, *Arabs at War, Military Effectiveness 1948–1991* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press 1991).

<sup>11</sup>On the impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union on the Syrian national security strategy, see: Eyal Zisser, *Assad's Syria at a Crossroads* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad 1999), 65 [in Hebrew].

<sup>12</sup>Hafez al-Assad, 'A Message from the President of the Republic and the Supreme Commander to his Fighting Sons', 21 June 1982. Cited in Mustafa Tlas, *The Israeli Invasion to Lebanon*, 1988 [Hebrew translation], 19.

(PGM), with the help of their Soviet advisors. And yet, it was the participation of Syrian officers in the coalition in the First Gulf War that actually enabled them to acknowledge the real dimensions of the threat.<sup>13</sup>

The Iraqis were also aware, generally speaking, of the nature of the threat, on the eve of the First Gulf War. Yet, their force design and their thinking patterns, which were formed throughout the years in the image of industrial warfare, did not enable them to realize the full meaning of the developments in the West. Saddam's hope that the West's technological superiority would not hold against his forces during the ground war was smashed to pieces within 100 hours.<sup>14</sup> Saddam emerged from the war believing that he was able to take on the biggest power in the world and the coalition that joined it.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Iraq was indeed defeated in the First Gulf War. It lost a substantial part of its army, had to disarm its unconventional weapons and was placed under severe sanctions, including No-Fly zones that were established in the north and the south of Iraq.

The end of the Iran–Iraq War spelled defeat for Iran; after the war, Iran could not realize its ambitious plan to purchase conventional weapons, due to financial difficulties and American pressure on supplying countries. Even though Iran did not take an active part in the 1991 Gulf War, it stressed the lessons the Iranians had learned from the Iran–Iraq War. The superiority of Western armies over Third World armies was made perfectly clear to the Iranians<sup>16</sup>

The period lasting from the mid-1980s to the beginning of the 1990s represents the strategic and military weakness of the states (mainly Syria, Iraq and Iran) in the face of what appeared to be a new and problematic world order, which included an increasing military threat. With the military weakness of these states in the background, there were already three organizations in the foreground, organizations that were established in the 1980s, and which would lead the war against the United States and Israel in the first

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<sup>13</sup>See Zisser, *Assad's Syria at a Crossroads*.

<sup>14</sup>Saddam Hussein, 'A Speech to the Islamic Conference in Baghdad', 11 Jan. 1991.

<sup>15</sup>Kevin M. Woods, *The Iraqi Perspective Report – Saddam's Senior Leadership on Operation Iraqi Freedom from the Official US Joint Forces Command Report* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press 2006), 16.

<sup>16</sup>Ephraim Kam, *From Terror to Nuclear Bombs: The Significance of the Iranian Threat* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Press 2006), [in Hebrew], Chapters 1, 3.



decade of the twenty-first century: Hizballah,<sup>17</sup> Hamas<sup>18</sup> and Al-Qaeda.<sup>19</sup>

Hizballah was established in Lebanon in 1982, and a series of events turned it into the most dominant organization in the struggle against Israel. Towards the end of 1983, the organization began a series of terrorist attacks, which led to the removal of foreign forces from Lebanon in the spring of 1984, and later on to the Israeli withdrawal into the Security Zone in the summer of 1985.

The Hamas movement was established in Gaza by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, shortly after the outbreak of the First Intifada (the Palestinian uprising), on 15 December 1987. In December 1992, Israel deported hundreds of Hamas activists to Lebanon. Upon the return of the deportees, who had developed good relations with Hizballah personnel as well as with members of the Iranian Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution, the movement grew stronger and set up in opposition to the PLO.

Al-Qa'eda was founded in 1988. For the organization, and for an entire generation of Islamic youth, the war in Afghanistan, which ended in 1989, was a formative experience. They considered the Mujahidin's victory over the Soviet empire a cultural and ideological victory and a sign of their ability to stand against complex military challenges. For many Muslims, the collapse of the Soviet Union so soon after its defeat in Afghanistan was a direct outcome of this war.<sup>20</sup>

In the West, this state of affairs, from the end of the 1980s to the early 1990s, served as a background for an optimistic period, with Francis Fukuyama's 'End of History' thesis as its symbol.<sup>21</sup> Ideas of globalization and peace originating in economic interests also found their way to the Middle East, but were received with much less enthusiasm. The reality in the region pointed to another direction, one

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<sup>17</sup>On Hizballah's history and background, see Naim Qassem, *Hizbullab – The Story from Within* (London: Saqi Books 2005). See also Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton UP 2007); Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: the Changing Face of Terrorism* (London: I.B. Tauris 2005).

<sup>18</sup>On Hamas' history and background, see Matti Steinberg, *Facing their Fate* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot 2008) [in Hebrew]; Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas* (New York: Columbia UP 2000).

<sup>19</sup>On Al-Qa'eda's history and background, see: Wright, *The Looming Tower*; Mark E. Stout, Jessica M. Huckabey and John R. Schindler, *The Terrorist Perspective Project* (Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press 2008).

<sup>20</sup>On the linkage between winning the Afghanistan war and the collapse of the Soviet Union, see, for example: Ayman Al-zawahiri, letter to Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, dated 9 July 2005.

<sup>21</sup>Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press 1992).

that necessitated the formation of a new strategy and a different kind of warfare.

## Learning, Fighting and Evolving (1991–1999)

### *Methods of Learning*

Military historians describe the fascinating dialogue, in the 1970s and the 1980s, between American doctrines and the Soviet ones, as well as the impact of mutual learning on the conceptions in both super-powers.<sup>22</sup> O-RMA, the subject of this study, was not developed by such a systematic and thorough process. The American and Soviet conception had some impact on it, yet, in retrospect, it could be argued that this conception did not evolve as a result of studying the ALB doctrine, or of reading the RMA documents or the Soviet MTR concepts.

The development of O-RMA was the result of a deep crisis and of very limited possibilities. It was influenced by the reality that created the American (and the Israeli) conceptions, yet it was formed on the basis of a different, parallel, sometimes a radically different, interpretation of these conceptions. O-RMA was propagated by political leaders and military officers in the Middle East, who acted according to their cultural and historical heritage. Their point of view was also based on close observation of the military operations that had taken place in the 1990s. More than anything else, O-RMA was influenced by these political leaders and military officers' understanding of the social and political developments during the 1990s, in which their opponents, and especially the United States and Israel, had to conduct what David Halberstam referred to as 'war in a time of peace'.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the conception of the 'other side of the hill' was the product of three main learning techniques:<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: Comparing the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US and Israel* (Stanford UP 2010).

<sup>23</sup>David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York: Scribner 2001).

<sup>24</sup>For learning techniques, see e.g.: Abu Ubeida [spokesman for Hamas], Hamas website, 10 Jan. 2009 (learning through friction); Osama bin Laden, 'Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Lands of the Two Holy Places', 1996 (learning the West's weak points); Osama bin Laden [and others], 'Jihad against Jews and Crusaders', 1998 (parallel interpretation); Gholam Reza (head of the Iranian Passive Defense Authority), interview, *Sobhe-Sadeq*, 19 May 2008 (learning the West's military doctrines); Bashar al-Assad, interview, *As-Safir* newspaper, 22 Feb. 2002 (learning Israel's military doctrines).

- Learning the West's military doctrines. This was based mainly on observation of military operations in the 1990s as these were presented in the media (CNN). The study of military doctrines did not concern itself with in-depth details, but rather with understanding general developments and basic conceptions.
- Interpretation of the reality in the 1990s, from a religious, cultural and Islamic perspective. In this context, changes in the global and regional order were emphasized, as well as social and economic changes, changes in military and civilian technology, and ideological changes.
- Friction with opponents on battlefields in Lebanon, in the Palestinian arena, in Iraq and other locations. This learning method was clearly evolutionary and it led to the survival and development of warfare methods that proved to be more efficient.

### *Threat Assessment*

In many aspects, in the First Gulf War Iraq presented a basic, yet not too advanced, model of O-RMA. The concept was presented and elaborated by Saddam Hussein on the eve of the war. Saddam's central thesis was that technological progress did not substantially alter patterns of warfare. Saddam expected that proper deployment of his forces during the coalition air strikes would enable them to deal with attacks from the air, at the end of which the ground battle would start. Saddam hoped that the coalition forces would suffer a high number of casualties during the ground operations.<sup>25</sup>

The First Gulf War provided an initial and satisfying picture as to the future direction of the forthcoming Revolution in Military Affairs. The war exemplified the major progress that the United States had made in military affairs, and enabled different players in the Middle East to update their intelligence assessments regarding the threat they would have to face.

Regarding the coalition air power, it was made clear that its survivability and capability of penetration into enemy territory were greatly enhanced, due to developments in electronic warfare, stealth technology, unmanned air vehicles and standoff weapons. The striking capabilities of the coalition air forces were improved significantly, due to guided missiles, better intelligence assets, and new command and control systems. These developments enabled the coalition air forces to execute massive attacks on a large number of Iraqi targets, stationary as

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<sup>25</sup>Saddam Hussein, 'A Speech to the Islamic Conference in Baghdad', 11 Jan. 1991.

well as mobile, at any range, in any weather or light conditions, and in every arena.

Regarding the coalition ground forces, it appeared that their maneuvering capabilities into and within enemy territory improved significantly.

With the absence of quality intelligence and in light of the general conception regarding the linkage between the United States and Israel, the elements in the Middle East attributed American military capabilities to Israel as well, and formed their threat assessment accordingly.

Still, there were also some encouraging signs for those who were able to maintain an appropriate perspective. First and foremost, there was no clear-cut victory in the end. Saddam remained in power and Iraq maintained its territorial integrity. In many aspects, this was a clear example of what would be referred to years later by Western observers as 'victory by not losing'. In the more operational aspects, the war exemplified the importance of surface-to-surface missiles, and the West's lack of capability to cope with this challenge.

### *Conflicts (1992–1999)*

The First Gulf War was one of the first military conflicts in the 1990s, and it served as a testing ground (both theoretically and operationally) for future conflicts. In the discourse concerning the development of O-RMA, we can identify references to the following conflicts: the American operation in Mogadishu in 1993 ('Gothic Serpent'); the first war in Chechnya between 1994 and 1996; the punitive operations in Iraq following the First Gulf War and especially the 'Desert Strike' and 'Desert Fox' operations (1996 and 1998 respectively); the air strikes on the Bosnian Serbs in 1995 ('Deliberate Force'); the war in Kosovo ('Allied Force'); attacks in Sudan and Afghanistan in 1998, which took place as a reaction to the terrorist attacks on embassies in Kenya and Tanzania ('Infinite Reach'); the ongoing Israeli conflict in Lebanon with an emphasis on the military operations that took place in 1993 (Operation 'Accountability') and 1996 ('Grapes of Wrath'), and the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict, starting with the First Intifada at the end of 1987 and continuing with the terrorist attacks of the mid-1990s.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>For references to these events and their lessons by Osama bin Laden, see: Osama bin Laden, 'Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Lands of the Two Holy Places', 1996; Osama bin Laden [and others], 'Jihad against Jews and Crusaders', 1998; Osama bin Laden, interview, *ABC News*, 26 May 1998. For references to these events and their lessons as perceived by Saddam Hussein, see M. Woods, *The Iraqi*

*The RMA's Weaknesses*

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of conflicts in the 1990s was the almost absolute priority that was given to airpower and the use of cruise missiles, while avoiding the use of ground forces. In the First Gulf War, there was a 39-day air campaign prior to the ground operations; only airplanes and missiles were used during the punitive operations in Iraq, and in attacks in Sudan, Afghanistan and Kosovo; in Lebanon, Israel also primarily used its air force. These operations reflected the impressive improvements that had been made in airpower abilities, yet they also highlighted the disadvantages that these abilities engendered. Airpower indeed has many advantages, but the decision to rely mainly on these abilities also revealed its shortcomings – especially the increasing reliance on precision weapons, and the dependency on precise intelligence and suitable weather conditions.<sup>27</sup>

In Iraq, Kosovo and Lebanon, it turned out that Western technology was sensitive, first and foremost, to target intelligence. The first signs of this already appeared in the utter failure to locate the surface-to-surface missiles in western Iraq in the First Gulf War. Israel had a similar difficulty with its attempts to locate Hizballah's rocket launchers throughout the decade, and especially during the intense military operations in 1993 and 1996.<sup>28</sup> Four days of consecutive air strikes in Iraq during Operation 'Desert Fox' made it clear that modern technology finds it hard to deal with an experienced opponent who has intelligence regarding the attack and acts in order to conceal his strategic assets. A similar situation was also apparent in the other punitive operations in Iraq during that decade, as well as the attacks by cruise missiles in Sudan and Afghanistan. Serbian military forces that retreated from Kosovo following the 'Allied Force' operation exemplified these difficulties and showed that, once an opponent was prepared for an air strike, it could minimize its effects.

The conflicts clearly reflected the weak points associated with Western leadership, which is highly sensitive to public opinion and is influenced by various elements, such as the number of casualties among the fighting forces and especially among civilians (on both sides), as well as the overall cost of military operations. The military operations

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*Perspective Report*, 15. For Hizballah's perspective, see Qassem, *Hezbollah*, 109–12, 114–18, and also many of Nasrallah's speeches.

<sup>27</sup>The weak points of air power are clearly specified in statements that were made by Saddam, Nasrallah, Bashar al-Assad and others. See, e.g. Saddam Hussein, 'A Speech to the Islamic Conference in Baghdad', 11 Jan. 1991; Hassan Nasrallah, interview, *Alhawadat*, 19 March 1999.

<sup>28</sup>Nasrallah, *ibid.*

in the 1990s showed clearly that the West preferred a quick war that ended with a conclusive victory and a minimum number of casualties. All of the military operations in the 1990s were carried out according to a strict policy that minimized the risk to the attacking forces. Such a policy led to the use of air forces during the hours of darkness; avoiding attacking in areas of high risk; giving priority to precision weapons launched from safe areas, and, especially, flying high above the threat areas.<sup>29</sup>

To a deeper extent, the military operations reflected an increasing gap between the traditional image concerning a military decision and the actual ability to resolve conflicts using the military doctrines that were formulated throughout the decade. Opponents realized that the West was held captive by its own image regarding the manner in which military operations ended, an image that was mostly created by the ceremonies of victory and surrender in the two World Wars and the early wars between Israel and the Arabs. The gap between the actual outcome of the wars and operations and the image that accompanied them had tremendous impact on the development of O-RMA.

### O-RMA

Thus, a military doctrine was shaped, with the underlying assumption that while one side is technologically superior, there could be parity and equality between the two sides in other areas, and the scales might also be turned to favor the technologically weaker side. The latter could, for example, have more territories and population and even enjoy some tactical and strategic advantages. Moreover, the asymmetry between the sides was not only limited to material issues. The underlying assumption of this military doctrine is that there could also be asymmetry in the importance of the interests each side has, the objectives of the war, the level of determination and resolution, willingness to take risks, and sensitivity to casualties. The technologically inferior side is also free from political and cultural constraints that technologically limit the stronger side.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>For the Iraqi perspective concerning the sensitivity of the West to casualties, see: Woods, *The Iraqi Perspective Report*. For Hizballah's perspective, see Qassem, *Hizballah*, 71. For Hamas' perspective, see Senior Officer of Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, interview, Hamas website, 6 Feb. 2007.

<sup>30</sup>One of the clear conclusions that can be derived from analyzing O-RMA rhetoric is the similarity between the way the different elements describe the technological gap and the ways they devise for offsetting their inferiority. See e.g. Bashar al-Assad, interview, *Al-Sharak al-Awsat*, 12 June 2000; Qassem, *Hizballah*, 73; Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas website, 5 Jan. 2009; Osama bin Laden, 'Declaration of War against the Americans

Towards the end of the 1990s, most of the central players in the Middle East were already undergoing an intensive process, in which they followed three main paths, as a result of the new military reality:

The first, the need to significantly improve their ability to withstand attacks in order to prolong their absorptive capacity and preserve their strength. This is due to their awareness of the lethality of precision weapons and the change they caused on the battlefield. From the start, the underlying assumption regarding the improvement of absorptive capacity was the Soviet doctrine, according to which appropriate preparedness for absorption would lead the West to waste its precision weapons, and would also lead to a situation in which the later stages of the conflict would be fought according to older patterns. Nevertheless, as time progressed, it appeared that sustainability and preservation of power had other advantages as well.<sup>31</sup>

The second, the need to establish a credible deterrence capability, first and foremost in order to prevent a comprehensive conflict that would be contrary to their interests and their capabilities. Deterrence capability also meant leading the stronger side to areas that are favorable for the weaker side, if basic deterrence fails. Such a move curtails some of the technological advantages of the attacker.<sup>32</sup>

The third, the need to move from a decisive win strategy to a strategy of attrition, which is considered by all the elements as a key to victory, due to Western sensitivity to continuous war and casualties.<sup>33</sup> Attrition is meant to lead the opponent to believe that the situation is at a dead end, and, consequently, he will give up and leave. This led to the concept of 'victory by not losing'.<sup>34</sup> According to this concept,

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Occupying the Lands of the Two Holy Places', 1996; Saddam Hussein to Yasser Arafat, April 1990, quoted in Woods, *The Iraqi Perspective Report*, 6; Mohammad Ali Aziz Jafari (IRGC commander), interview, *Mehr News*, 3 Sept. 2007.

<sup>31</sup>On absorption as a key element of O-RMA, see e.g.: Saddam Hussein, 'A Speech to the Islamic Conference in Baghdad', 11 Jan. 1991; Bashar al-Assad, interview, *As-Safir* newspaper, 22 Feb. 2002; Gholam Reza (head of the Iranian Passive Defense Authority), interview, *Mehr News*, 24 Aug. 2007; Mohammad Ali Aziz Jafari (IRGC commander), interview, *Iftab*, 27 Nov. 2007.

<sup>32</sup>On deterrence as a key element of O-RMA, see e.g. Hassan Nasrallah, interview, *Al-Jazeera* TV, 27 May 2003; Saddam Hussein, speech, April 1990; Rahim Safavi (Khamenei's advisor for Iran's armed forces), interview, *Mehr News*, 23 Sept. 2007; Ali Shamkhani (Iranian defense minister), interview, *Siyasat e-Ruz*, 18 Feb. 2003.

<sup>33</sup>On attrition as a key element of O-RMA, see e.g. Qassem, *Hizbullah*, 71; Muhamad Def [and other senior members of Hamas's military wing], interview, *Al-Jazeera* TV, 4 July 2006.

<sup>34</sup>On 'victory by not losing' as a key element of O-RMA, see e.g. Hassan Nasrallah, interview, *Al-Jazeera* TV, 21 July 2006; Mushir Al-Masri (Hamas spokesman),

surviving the conflict is a key factor in winning it, due to the West's inability to achieve a clear-cut and decisive victory.

Therefore, at the heart of O-RMA there is an acknowledgement of the technological supremacy of the opposing side. At the same time, it is based on the assumption that the stronger side also has its weak points, which can be targeted in order to offset its technological supremacy. Based on these assumptions, a type of warfare developed, with the following components:

- A strong emphasis on the survivability of the fighting forces and other systems, as part of the overall absorptive effort and sustainability. The improvement of survivability is achieved by the use of protective means (bunkers and especially tunnels), camouflage and deception, scattering military forces, deliberate obfuscation of military and civilian facilities, and conducting the war in an urban area filled with civilians and the media. There is also an extensive use of low-signature systems (personal anti-tank and anti-aircraft guided missiles, and surface-to-surface rockets, SSRs) and low signature forces (commando units, infantry, guerrilla warriors, paramilitary forces, suicide bombers), and the adoption of warfare methods that preserve such a signature (especially terror and guerrilla warfare).<sup>35</sup>
- A strong emphasis on high-trajectory ballistic weapons (SSMs and SSRs), whose advantage is their technical simplicity, low cost, and ability to penetrate deep into enemy territory without encountering an adequate response. It is also difficult to locate such launchers, owing to their low signature and vast numbers. Within this frame of reference, a variety of rockets and missiles were developed and purchased, ranging from simple and improvised rockets with a range of the few kilometers, to long-range missiles such as the Iraqi Al-Hussein missile (650 km) and the Iranian Shahab 3 (1,300 km). Rockets and missiles are operated from stationary and mobile launchers that are sometimes camouflaged in civilian facilities and vehicles. Rockets and missiles are important in terms of both deterrence and attrition efforts.<sup>36</sup>

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interview, *Qudspress* news agency, 11 Jan. 2009. See also Bashar al-Assad, 22 Feb. 2002.

<sup>35</sup>On increasing survivability as a tactical pattern related to the absorption element of O-RMA, see for example: Nasrallah, 19 March 1999.

<sup>36</sup>On the logic of using SSM and SSR as part of O-RMA, see e.g. Hamas's senior commander, *Al-Qassam* website, 1 Feb. 2009; Mohammad Ali Aziz Jafari (IRGC commander), interview, *Mehr News*, 3 Sept. 2007; Hassan Nasrallah, interview, *Al-Safir* newspaper, 17 May 2006.



- A strong emphasis on the use of weapons and methods of operation that can lead to a high number of casualties among civilians and army forces. Within this framework, suicide bombers and a variety of explosive devices and are used, as well as improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The choice of suicide bombers as a central component of asymmetrical warfare is a result of the high availability of volunteers, and the impact this method has on morale and on the media. The idea of inflicting casualties is a basic and longstanding one in warfare. Still, in asymmetrical warfare there is no intention of eliminating the opponent's forces, but of making use of its sensitivity to casualties in a manner that will create pressure to end the war, accompanied by a feeling of failure. The number of casualties is important in the context of deterrence as well as attrition.<sup>37</sup>
- A strong emphasis on media and propaganda efforts vis-à-vis the local population, the opponents' population and the international community. This kind of effort aims to challenge the legitimacy (internal and international) of the West's military operations. This is achieved by presenting the negative aspects of the opponents' actions (for example when it comes to killing civilians), and by demonstrating the heavy price that comes with this. The media efforts shape an internal and international agenda, present an alternative interpretative frame of reference, and, above all, undermine public resilience in the opponent's country.<sup>38</sup>
- A strong emphasis on the effort to force the war into 'close battle'. The underlying assumption of all the players is that in such battles the technological supremacy of the opponents will be significantly undermined.<sup>39</sup>
- A strong emphasis on confronting the opponent's aerial supremacy with the use of active means (aerial defense and attack systems) and passive ones (as part of the entire absorptive effort). The massive dominance of the West's airpower demands special preparations. This emphasis had a significant influence on the manner in which forces were deployed, and the way they operated. In this context, this issue has led some of the other players to invest in their power

<sup>37</sup>On the importance of inflicting pain and casualties as a main part of O-RMA, see e.g.: Hassan Nasrallah, speech, *Al-Manar* TV, 4 Aug. 2006; Saddam Hussein, speech, Baghdad domestic service, 17 Jan. 1991; Ali Larijani, interview, *Iran*, 29 Oct. 2008.

<sup>38</sup>On the role of the media within O-RMA, see e.g. Al-Zawahiri, 9 July 2005; Abu Ubeida [and other senior members of Hamas's military wing], interview, *Al-Jazeera* TV, 4 July 2006.

<sup>39</sup>On the logic of 'close battle' as part of O-RMA, see e.g. Saddam Hussein, 'A Speech to the Islamic Conference in Baghdad', 11 Jan. 1991; Nasrallah, speech, 16 July 2006.

structure, purchase new aerial defense systems and upgrade existing systems.<sup>40</sup>

A different direction, one that exceeds the scope of this study, but is closely related to it, is the non-conventional direction, with an emphasis on nuclear technology. Iraq was the pioneer in this area, already at the end of the 1970s, and it was followed by Iran, Libya and probably Syria.

## Roots

The strategic and operational concepts that evolved on the ‘other side of the hill’ stem from a variety of sources, as well as the tactical patterns that characterize the warfare methods of all of the relevant players. O-RMA is, in fact, an eclectic concept, whose origins can be traced to a variety of sources: religious and secular, Eastern and Western, theoretical as well as practical.

### *War in Islam and the Legacy of Jihad*

Warfare occupies a central position in Islam, in which the struggle between good and bad was traditionally translated into military and political dimensions.<sup>41</sup> Muhammad himself was not only a prophet and a teacher, like the founders of other religions – he was also a ruler and especially a warrior. And indeed, one of the points that becomes clear, on analyzing the rhetoric that accompanies O-RMA, is the central place held by concepts, quotes, events and ideas that originate in the Qur’an and in Islamic history and tradition. The image that became so prevalent in the final decade, of the suicide bomber holding the Qur’an, is a visual expression of this central phenomenon and reflects the three roles played by Islam in the development of O-RMA.

First, there is the use of religious texts in order to recruit fighters and to generate wide public sympathy concerning the entities and states involved.<sup>42</sup> Second, there is the use of religious texts in order to communicate with fighters, as well as instructions regarding tactical

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<sup>40</sup>On the importance of coping (passively) with air superiority as part of O-RMA, see e.g.: Nasrallah, 19 March 1999. On the need to also cope actively, with Air Defense systems, see Hassan Nasrallah, speech, 19 Feb. 2009.

<sup>41</sup>Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (London: Weidenfeld 2003).

<sup>42</sup>On using Islam as a tool for mobilization and for increasing legitimacy as part of O-RMA, see, e.g. Osama bin Laden, ‘Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Lands of the Two Holy Places’, 1996; Osama bin Laden [and others],

patterns of warfare and the ideas underlying them.<sup>43</sup> Third, there is the use of religious texts as a fundamental source of inspiration in the conception of warfare itself.<sup>44</sup>

The concept around which the development of O-RMA mainly revolved was 'Jihad'. This concept received a new interpretation during the twentieth century. The interpretation was developed by a series of thinkers, who belonged, during different periods of time, to the Muslim Brotherhood movement. Among these thinkers, we should mention Hassan al-Banna (1906–49), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), al-Banna's follower in the Muslim Brotherhood movement, and Abdullah Yusuf Azzam (1941–89), one of the founders of Al-Qa'eda.<sup>45</sup>

### *The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Legacy*

Many of the roots of O-RMA, especially in its strategic aspects, are to be found in Palestinian armed resistance as it developed during the late 1950s and the early 1960s. This conception was revolutionary at the time. Contrary to the basic assumption of Nasserist strategy, according to which, as long as the Arabs were inferior in power to Israel, they should not act in a manner that might provoke Israel to retaliate, the founders of the Fatah claimed that Israel's technological supremacy would be undermined in a long process of attrition that was based upon guerrilla warfare. They also claimed that guerrilla operations would not provide Israel with a reason to wage an overall war.

The relations that were established by Iranian elements that opposed the Shah and the PLO, alongside the transfer to Hizballah of Lebanese fighters who were members of the PLO, led to Hizballah's adoption of Palestinian warfare methods. Imad Mughniyah, who was a member of the PLO's elite unit ('Force 17'), played a central role in this regard.

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'Jihad against Jews and Crusaders', 1988. See also Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Iraq – Political Discourse and the Language of Power* (Tel Aviv UP 1999) [in Hebrew].

<sup>43</sup>On using Islam as a mean of communication for explaining both the elements of O-RMA and the relevant patterns, see e.g. Nasrallah, 19 Feb. 2009. See also Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*.

<sup>44</sup>On using Islam as an intellectual source of O-RMA, see S. K. Malik, *The Qur'anic Concept of War* (Delhi: Adam Publisher 1992).

<sup>45</sup>On 'Jihad', see Hassan Al-Banna, 'Jihad' [from 1949], in Jim Lacey (ed.), *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists' Strategy for Defeating America* (Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press 2008), 4–10; Sayyid Qutb, 'Milestones' [from 1966], in Lacey, *The Canons of Jihad*, 11–34; Abdullah Azzam, 'Defense of the Muslim Land: The First Obligation after Iman' (1984 fatwa).

*The Guerrilla Legacy (and the 'Muqawama')*

In a more operational context, many of the relevant entities characterize their warfare method as guerrilla warfare. Some studied guerrilla warfare independently, but in this context it seems that some of the origins of guerrilla warfare are related to its heyday in the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, in China, Cuba, Algeria and particularly Vietnam. The Palestinians translated guerrilla literature into Arabic and were influenced by the ideas expressed in it. History proved that guerrilla warfare was a method that could bridge the gaps between a superior opponent and a local, low-budget independence movement.<sup>46</sup>

The concept that connects the guerrilla legacy with the more general ideas that stand at the center of O-RMA is 'Muqawama' ('El-Muqawama') – Resistance. Over the past few decades, the concept gained unprecedented influence in the Middle East. Within this frame of reference, there was an almost total overlap between the concept of resistance and fundamentalist Islam, and resistance gained in popularity along with fundamentalism.

The Muqawama became more attractive due to a series of achievements, among which were violent clashes between Israel and the Palestinians in September 2000 (the al-Aqsa or the Second Intifada); the armed conflict that evolved against the United States in Iraq after the Second Gulf War in 2003; the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2005; and the Second Lebanon War in July–August 2006.

*Foreign Influences*

The influence of more institutionalized military thinking on the 'other side of the hill' can also be detected. The Soviet Union was the main munitions and military knowledge provider to Middle East countries, and especially to Syria and Egypt (up until the Yom Kippur War).<sup>47</sup> And yet, as O-RMA began to evolve, the Soviet Union was already heading towards its collapse.

Therefore, Soviet military doctrine, and later on the Russian doctrine, only influenced the Syrians for a relatively brief period at

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<sup>46</sup>On classic 'guerrilla' as a source of O-RMA, see e.g. Nasrallah, 26 July 2006. In 1995, one of Saddam's generals, Hamdany, offered to transform the Iraqi military to a guerrilla-like force. See Woods, *The Iraqi Perspective Report*.

<sup>47</sup>Michael Eisenstadt and Kenneth M. Pollack, 'Armies of Snow and Armies of Sand: the Impact of Soviet Military Doctrine on Arab Militaries', *Middle East Journal* 55/4 (Winter 2001), 549–70.

the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. Prior to the First Gulf War, Soviet counselors taught the Syrians about the fundamental change that took place in the battlefield with the entrance of precision weapons.

The Soviet response, which included both active components of targeting precision weapons and passive ones, such as camouflage, deception, defense and the dispersion of military forces, had a great influence over the Syrians and other regional players.

The export of weapons from North Korea to the Middle East began in the 1980s; it included the provision of weapons to various countries, especially Iran and Syria. North Korea had a great influence on the missile and rocket systems of these countries. It provided Iran with Scud missiles during its war with Iraq, and after that it played a central part in the establishment of Iran's missile infrastructure, as well as developing its missile systems. Similar aid was also given to the Syrians, and there are also reports concerning shipments of weapons to Hizballah. It is likely that, along with such shipments, the relevant knowledge was also transferred regarding the operation of such weapons and the manner by which they can be assimilated into the overall warfare conception.

### *Lessons from the Yom Kippur War*

Another significant source for O-RMA concerns the more institutionalized lessons that were learned by Arab countries from the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The Arabs were less impressed by the heroic tales of Generals Tal, Eitan and Peled, tales that stirred the minds of Donn Starry and other Americans.<sup>48</sup> After three humiliating defeats, the Arabs considered the Yom Kippur War a clear victory. Two conflicting lessons were learned from the War: first, a war can be waged on Israel with significant achievements; and second, despite the ideal conditions at the beginning of the war, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) could not be defeated.

The war strengthened the Arab understanding that Israel's weaknesses could be capitalized on in three main areas: causing as many casualties as possible, due to Israel's sensitivity to human lives;

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<sup>48</sup>Donn A. Starry, 'The Legacy of Drummers, Warriors and Storytellers', *Army Magazine* 52 (July 2002). See also Saul Bronfeld, 'Fighting Outnumbered: The Impact of the Yom Kippur War on the US Army', *Journal of Military History* 71/2 (April 2007), 465-98; George F. Hofmann and Donn A. Starry, *Camp Colt to Desert Storm: The History of US Armored Forces* (Lawrence: UP of Kentucky 1999); Robert H. Scales, *Certain Victory: The US Army in the Gulf War* (Washington DC/London: Brassey's 1994).

undermining its home front and by so doing influencing the operational battlefield; and prolonging the war as long as possible, while maintaining the initial military achievements in a manner that would lead the IDF to make use of its means of protection rather than its means of attack.<sup>49</sup>

### *Lessons from the First Lebanon War*

The lessons learned from the First Lebanon War, in 1982, stressed the conclusions of the Yom Kippur War regarding the Syrian ground forces. They also highlighted the significant inferiority of the Syrian air force and air defense, compared with the IAF. The lessons learned from the war strengthened the conception that against Israel's maneuvering abilities a big and complex set of obstacles should be put in place, from the border up to the outskirts of Damascus. Such obstacles would include outposts, anti-tank ditches, landmines, ramparts, etc., with the support of huge quantities of anti-tank weapons. The results of the First Lebanon War showed the Syrians that their ground forces were well structured and well operated and that appropriate use of anti-tank weapons against tank brigades could have strategic implications.<sup>50</sup>

### *Lessons from Afghanistan and the Iran–Iraq War*

However, the wars that had the greatest impact on O-RMA were the one in Afghanistan and the Iran–Iraq War.

During the war in Afghanistan, Mujahidin forces applied guerrilla methods, setting up ambushes and waging surprise attacks, especially on main transportation routes and secluded outposts. During their stay in Afghanistan, Mujahidin volunteers underwent military training and acquired vast experience in guerrilla warfare.<sup>51</sup>

The Iran–Iraq War with Iraq was the source of many of the components that comprise O-RMA. These forms of warfare were learned and practiced by Iran and Iraq during the 1990s. The war

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<sup>49</sup>See Amos Gilboa, 'The Arab Security Strategies Following the Yom Kippur War', *Maarchoth*, No. 361, (Nov. 1998) [in Hebrew].

<sup>50</sup>On lessons from the First Lebanon War as a source for O-RMA, see e.g. Abu Ubeida, 10 Jan. 2009; Bashar al-Assad, interview, *Asharq al-Awsat Newspaper*, 12 June 2000.

<sup>51</sup>Ali Ahmad Jalali and Lester W. Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet–Afghan war* (Ft Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office/US Army Command and Staff College 1995). On lessons from the war in Afghanistan as a source for O-RMA, see e.g. Al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*; Bin Laden, 'Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Lands of the Two Holy Places'.

served as the main catalyst to the development of a series of short and mid-range rockets. Some of them were developed and activated during the war, while some were developed and activated afterwards. During the 1990s, Iranian military industries developed the Fajr 3 and the Fajr 5 rockets that were delivered to Hizballah. The war with Iraq was also the reason for purchasing ballistic missiles, as well as the huge investments that were made in their subsequent development.<sup>52</sup>

## Reality Check (2000–2009)

### *Achievements (2000–2001)*

During the 1990s, the elements with which this study deals did not achieve significant accomplishments. This state of affairs began to change in 2000 and 2001, when some significant events took place, events that were perceived by these elements as the realization or implementation of O-RMA. These events led to a series of statements in which O-RMA was presented as an efficient response to the technological supremacy of the United States and Israel.

The IDF's withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 was considered to be a great success for Hizballah, and its spokesmen presented it as a turning point and a dramatic and historic event in the Arab–Israel struggle. The organization was perceived as having achieved the impossible – the humiliating expulsion of the IDF from southern Lebanon without any rewards for Israel. Following the IDF's retreat, the Secretary General of Hizballah, Hassan Nasrallah delivered a series of speeches, in which he presented the ideas that underlie Hizballah's warfare patterns, as a new and efficient strategy in the struggle against Israel and as a historic turning point in the struggle.<sup>53</sup>

The terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York and on the Pentagon on 11 September 2001, were also considered a successful manifestation of the warfare patterns that had evolved during the 1990s. The fact that a few individuals, equipped with primitive means, turned passenger airplanes into guided bombs and hit important locations in the United States, excited many in the Muslim world.

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<sup>52</sup>On Lessons from the Iran–Iraq War as a source for O-RMA, see e.g.: Ali Shamkhani (Iranian defense minister), interview, *Siyasat e-Ruz*, 18 Feb. 2003. See also Fariborz Haghshenass, *Iran's Asymmetric Naval Warfare*, Policy Focus No. 87 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy 2008); William D. Bryant, *The Iranian Way of War* (Montgomery, ALA: Air Univ. 2007).

<sup>53</sup>Nasrallah spoke on the components of O-RMA in numerous speeches and interviews that were quoted in previous notes. For a more comprehensive description of O-RMA by Nasrallah, see e.g. Nasrallah, 22 Feb. 2008.

The attacks left the United States shocked, bewildered and in a state of collective pain.

The outbreak of the Second Intifada, in September 2000, and the activities that took place during its first years were also perceived as a success. A year after the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada, the Hamas journal published a series of articles that analyzed the strategic significance of suicide bombings. These articles stressed the fact that suicide bombings not only created a 'balance of terror' with Israel, but also provided advantages to the Palestinians. Israel is described in these articles as lacking any deterrence or offensive capabilities. These articles also claimed that Israeli technological supremacy could not come to terms with the Palestinians' determination and willingness to sacrifice their men and women. A year later, Khaled Mashal defined the strategic objectives of Hamas in the conflict as 'attrition' that was meant to 'make the Zionists doubt their own future'.<sup>54</sup>

### *Iraq (2003)*

After failing to prevent the war, Saddam Hussein estimated that the key to his survivability was to conduct a long war with numerous casualties, which would arouse debate in the United States and would lead other states to call for its end. Like others, Saddam probably expected a scenario similar to the First Gulf War, in which there was a preparatory air strike prior to the entrance of the coalition ground forces.<sup>55</sup>

Saddam acknowledged the absolute technological superiority of the United States, yet his basic assumption was that an air campaign was not a sufficient move and would not achieve the strategic objectives of the war. Therefore, the key aspect was the necessity of preserving Iraqi forces during the air strike phase.

Another underlying assumption of Iraq's strategy concerned its desire to channel the ground operations to the outskirts of its cities, and to conduct the war while assimilating its forces into civilian society and civilian facilities. Saddam's irregular forces were meant to conduct guerrilla warfare and create pockets of resistance, even in areas that were conquered by American soldiers.

The third component in the strategy was the need to conduct the war for public opinion in the media vis-à-vis three target audiences: The Iraqis themselves, the American population back home, and the international community, with an emphasis on Europe and citizens of

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<sup>54</sup>Quoted in Steinberg, *Facing their Fate*.

<sup>55</sup>On the Iraqi perspective toward the Second Gulf War, see Woods, *The Iraqi Perspective Report*.



Arab countries. Saddam hoped that the image of a victim facing a savage attack against its civilians and its basic infrastructure would lead to international intervention and the end of the war, before its main strategic objective was achieved.

Contrary to Saddam's expectations, the Americans made use of a strategy that did not necessitate a preliminary air strike. The American ground forces crossed more than 500 kilometers in less than 20 days, with the loss of only 60 soldiers. Their arrival in Baghdad resulted in Saddam's defeat and demonstrated the utter failure of his warfare conception.

Nevertheless, the War did not end with the conquest of Baghdad, and soon the American forces in Iraq had to deal with a much more sophisticated version of O-RMA, which was carried out by a large number of groups and organizations.

### *The Second Lebanon War (2006)*

Syria's and Iran's support of Hizballah led to a situation in which Hizballah, on the eve of the Second Lebanon War, was a unique example of a terrorist organization with significant military capabilities. At the beginning of the war, it had a large stock of long-range rockets (up to 250 km); a very large quantity (13,000) of short-range rockets; an air force (attack UAVs), as well as naval capabilities (anti-ship missiles), and large ground forces (about 10,000 fighters) that operated like guerrilla forces and were armed with anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles. Hizballah had erected special facilities in southern Lebanon, in which it placed anti-tank weapons; underground bunkers were built, and a logistical infrastructure was created with the aim of carrying out lengthy attacks. Some of Hizballah's facilities and buildings were on the outskirts of Shi'ite villages or in the villages themselves.

Hizballah was indeed surprised that the kidnapping of the IDF soldiers on 12 July 2006 led to war. Yet it had prepared itself for just such a conflict.<sup>56</sup> The assumption underlying Hizballah's force structure and its preparations for a possible conflict with Israel was 'victory by not losing'. This is a variation of the attrition concept, based on a deep understanding of Israel's core conceptions regarding its military and security. Israel needed a clear-cut victory in a quick war,

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<sup>56</sup>On Hizballah's preparation for the second Lebanon war, and its activities during the war, see e.g.: Andrew Exum, *Hezbollah at War: A Military Assessment*, Policy Focus No. 63 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Dec. 2006); Amir Kulick, 'The IDF's Combat Approach vs. Hezbollah', *Strategic Assessment* 9/3 (The Institute for National Security Studies, Nov. 2006).

and all that Hizballah needed was to survive and demonstrate its survivability. This survivability was demonstrated by an ongoing barrage of rockets into Israeli territory, which was intended to cause the highest number of civilian casualties, while impeding the progress of the Israeli forces, in order to be able to continue to fire rockets.

Israel had enjoyed a few quiet years on its northern border, a fact that is undoubtedly connected to the positive strategic outcome of the war. Nevertheless, general opinion in Israel considered this war to have been a missed opportunity. This is due to the feeling regarding the expectations gap that was created at the beginning of the war, and the manner in which the war ended. The IDF, in spite of its highly advanced capabilities, could not stop the rockets that were fired into northern Israel, and Hizballah was not defeated. The 4,100 rockets that were fired into Israeli territory demonstrated the limits of military might, as well as the complexity of O-RMA challenge.<sup>57</sup>

### *Gaza (2009)*

After Hamas took over the Gaza strip in June 2007, Iran and the Hizballah passed on the operational knowledge they had gained as a result of the war in Lebanon. Hizballah's method of operation was a role model for Hamas. Iranian aid to Hamas between 2007 and 2009 consisted of the provision of various weapons that were smuggled into the Gaza Strip (especially rockets with a range of 20–40 km, and anti-tank missiles) and technological skills that enabled the installation of explosive devices similar to the ones Hizballah had used in the Second Lebanon War. Hundreds of Hamas members left the Gaza Strip and underwent advanced training in Iran, Syria and Lebanon. In addition, thousands of new recruits underwent training in the Gaza Strip itself.

The defensive conception regarding the Gaza Strip, developed by Hamas using aid from Iran and Hizballah, was based on the idea of

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<sup>57</sup>On the debate concerning the outcome of the Second Lebanon War, see Shai Feldman, 'The Hezbollah-Israel War: A Preliminary Assessment', *Middle East Brief* (Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Waltham, MA, Sept. 2006); Avi Kober, 'The Israel Defense Forces in the Second Lebanon War: Why the Poor Performance?', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31/1 (Feb. 2008), 3–40; Edward Luttwak, 'Misreading the Lebanon War', *Jerusalem Post*, 20 Aug. 2006; David Makovsky and Jeffrey White, *Lessons and Implications of the Israel-Hezbollah War: A Preliminary Assessment*, Policy Focus No. 60, (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Oct. 2006); Shlomo Brom, 'Political and Military Objectives in a Limited War against a Guerilla Organization', in Shlomo Brom and Meir Elran (eds.), *The Second Lebanon War: Strategic Perspectives* (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies 2007); Zisser, 'The Battle for Lebanon: Lebanon and Syria in the Wake of the War', in Brom and Elran, *The Second Lebanon War*.

inflicting large numbers of casualties to the IDF, by minimizing the friction with the IDF in open areas and conducting urban warfare in a densely populated area. Within this area, the IDF would encounter landmines, snipers, anti-tank missiles, explosive devices and suicide bombers. Hamas made its disappearance techniques more sophisticated, when it made extensive use of tunnels and assimilated its fighters among the civilian population. At the same time, Hamas made preparations in order to wear out Israel's home front. By launching rockets even while the IDF continued its military operations; in addition, Hamas made extensive use of the media, in order to undermine the legitimacy of Israel's operation. Based on the Second Lebanon War, Hamas estimated that continuous firing would undermine Israel's sense of military achievement, and lead to frustration and the feeling that the IDF had failed in its mission.

It is clear that Hamas' achievements were not similar to those of Hizballah in Lebanon in 2006. The number of Israeli casualties was very low (10 soldiers and 3 civilians) and the damage inflicted on Israel was very limited. The IDF made a ground forces maneuver into the Gaza Strip and several hundred Hamas members were killed during the operation.

### *Institutionalization*

The present decade persuaded the elements dealing with O-RMA to institutionalize the development of knowledge, and this led to the creation of two sources of knowledge: One is in Iran; it deals with the development of operational knowledge and its distribution to elements such as Syria, Hizballah and Hamas. This is carried out alongside the transfer of weapons, as a meaningful partnership is created for the development of Hizballah's and Hamas' tactical patterns.<sup>58</sup> A second source operates within Al-Qa'eda; it is attempting to develop an overall contemporary theory concerning the nature of the war. This is a group of intellectuals who are developing an ideological as well as a political vision, and also tactical warfare patterns.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Within this institutionalization effort, the Iranians had to conceptualize O-RMA. They chose the Western term 'Asymmetric Warfare' for describing their concept. See Mohammad Ali Aziz Jafari [IRGC commander], interview, *Mehr News*, 3 Sept. 2007.

<sup>59</sup>The institutionalization of operational knowledge within Al-Qa'eda can be attributed to the unique characteristics of this movement, among them the absence of direct command and control, the decentralized structure and its global aspirations. Examples for these kinds of sources are the Jihad's journal *Al-Battar*, various encyclopedias of Jihad that were prepared by the Mujahidin of Afghanistan and the writings of Abu Musab al-Suri and Abu Bakr Naji.

## Conclusion

The acknowledgement by the ‘other side of the hill’ of their technological inferiority and the large military gap between these states and entities and the West lies at the center of O-RMA. In light of this gap, these elements have established a method of warfare that is based on the assumption that alongside of their superiority, the ‘stronger side’ also has weak points and vulnerabilities, which can be exploited in order to offset their technological superiority. This ‘way of war’ is based on the following components: Improving absorption capability, in order to increase survivability and provide a breathing space for the ‘weaker side’, creating effective deterrence, in order to deter the ‘stronger side’ from attacking the ‘weaker side’ and shifting the war to more convenient areas in case this deterrence fails; and winning the war by not losing it, while creating an attrition effect.

The implementation of this concept leads to tactical patterns that stress the survivability of the fighting force and other systems, the use of ballistic weapons, and the use of weapons and methods that can lead to a large number of casualties among civilians and armed forces. There is the desire to turn the war into a close battle, with the need to cope, actively and passively, with the stronger side’s aerial superiority. All of these elements have learned to make use of the media in order to increase the influence of their actions.

This innovation was not intentional or systematic. This study claims that the main ideas that underlie this conceptual development evolved within the different elements, while maintaining a common image. At the center of this image, generated mostly by CNN, stood the military, technological, economic, social and political developments in the West during the 1990s. These various elements learned their lessons from the military conflicts in the 1990s and implemented these lessons in the creation of their threat assessment. The ongoing friction between some of these elements and the United States and Israel contributed considerably to the evolution of both the strategic and operational concepts and the tactical patterns.

O-RMA is an exceptionally eclectic conception, whose sources include, among others, the classic guerrilla legacy, an institutionalized form of knowledge that developed within the PLO, especially during the time that it operated in Lebanon, the influence of foreign militaries, such as the Soviet Union and North Korea, lessons learned from the Arab–Israeli wars, the Iran–Iraq War and the War in Afghanistan. The Islamic view regarding war, which is reflected in both traditional and contemporary thought concerning Jihad, is also an important source of influence on O-RMA conception.

The complex outcomes of the conflicts in Lebanon (2006) and the Gaza Strip (2009) require paying special attention to the question of how the different elements analyze the effectiveness of O-RMA in light of these conflicts. Both organizations, Hamas and Hizballah, did survive the clashes with Israel and even though their military capabilities were harmed during the clashes they managed to restore them. Nevertheless, from a strategic point of view, both organizations were hit badly, a thing that led to a fundamental change in their policy. More than three years after the war Hizballah has avoided waging terror attacks on Israel, a policy that is still adhered to at the time these lines are written. Hamas came out as the clear loser and it appears that it adopts a policy that avoids launching any attacks on Israel in the near future.

The outcomes of those conflicts can lead to three different possible future trends that require careful study of those who are dealing with the conceptual developments in the West. One possible trend ('more of the same') might be the continuing of O-RMA in its current characteristics. If so, the basic components of O-RMA will continue to serve as the basis for the military thought of the relevant elements. A close but slightly different trend ('increasing lethality') might be the continuation of O-RMA's three major components, but a change in the tactical patterns that will develop in more lethal directions. A third trend ('a paradigm shift') might be a radical change of O-RMA in directions that can be contradictory for it. A possible change might be connected with the element of attrition.

So, what next? This study concentrated in the past, and as such it can tell us very little about the future. The question concerning the future of O-RMA is, therefore far beyond its scope and methodology. The only lesson that can be taken out from this study is the need to pay attention to the other side of the hill and to consider its possible developments. This attention might help to decrease the conceptual gaps of the type that characterized the decade of the 1990s. Those gaps were minimized after 9/11 in light of intensive study of opponents and their logics. But, it seems that after Lebanon (2006) and Gaza (2009), we are currently at another possible turning point that should not be missed. Listening to what the other side is saying (in private and in open sources) might help. Otherwise, life will continue to be what happens to us while we are busy making other plans ...

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