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The Role of the Israel Defense Forces in Safeguarding National Security

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) as a key defense institution in safeguarding Israel's national security following its conflict with Hamas, using defensive realism as the primary theoretical framework. This theory underscores the state's priority in preserving security without seeking hegemonic power. Within this framework, the IDF is viewed as playing a crucial role in maintaining national integrity through military preparedness and air defense strategies, notably the deployment of the Iron Dome system to counter rocket threats from Hamas. The analysis also highlights the significance of defense diplomacy, particularly strategic cooperation with the United States, in enhancing the IDF's operational capacity. By applying theoretical insights and case-based evidence, this paper demonstrates how the IDF effectively mitigates the impact of external threats and reinforces public security in a volatile post-conflict environment.

Key Words

Israel Defense Forces, Hamas, iron dome, defensive realism, conflict

1. Introduction

In the literature review that will be discussed this time, it will explain the role of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) as a defense organization in ensuring its national security after the Israel-Hamas conflict" and will even discuss in depth how the IDF contributes to maintaining Israel's security after the conflict with Hamas. As for the opening of this paper, it begins with a brief explanation of the theory of defensive realism; in this theory, it is explained that the state always prioritizes its defense and security. This article will focus on the application of the theory of defensive realism as a conceptual foundation for understanding the defense and security efforts implemented by the IDF. The main points to be explained include the defense strategy implemented by the IDF to protect the country from external threats, including its role as a military power and a means of diplomacy (Kristyawati, 2023).

2. Definition of Defensive Realism

In general, defensive realism argues that states seek to maximize their security—not their power—and aim to preserve the existing distribution of power while avoiding relative losses due

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to shifts in position. From the perspective of defensive realism, states prioritize defense and national security above the pursuit of dominance. According to this theory, a state's power should not be excessive, what is known as the balance of power, because disproportionate power may have negative consequences for the state itself and others, as explained in the balance of power theory. If a state seeks to maximize power, it risks provoking conflict or war with other states. Defensive realism refers to government actions focused on maintaining the status quo and national security rather than pursuing expansion or dominance. Israel exemplifies this through its establishment of separation walls and the Iron Dome missile defense system. Although the separation wall remains controversial, Israel claims it is a preventive measure against terrorist attacks (Lobell, 2017).

From the defensive realism viewpoint, there are four dangers associated with aggression, expansion, and conquest:

1. The pursuit of hegemony is often self-defeating, making a state weaker and less secure due to counterbalancing and resistance.
2. Conquest rarely yields benefits. The costs of expansion often outweigh the gains and are frequently explained by domestic factors or unit-level pathologies rather than systemic necessity.
3. The offense-defense balance in military strategy usually favors defenders, making defense more effective than offense.
4. Socialization and historical experience teach states that expansion and the pursuit of hegemony often provoke counterbalancing, rather than bandwagoning behavior.

3. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the Ongoing Gaza Conflict

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) serve as the official military organization of the State of Israel, comprising three main branches: the army, navy, and air force. Established on May 14, 1948, the IDF was created with the core mandate of safeguarding the security and sovereignty of Israel. Its primary responsibilities include protecting Israeli citizens from external threats, combating terrorism in all its forms, and preserving national independence. Additionally, the IDF is tasked with defending the state against any hostile forces that seek to disrupt the stability and normalcy of life within Israeli territory (Prasetyo, 2021).

In the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) ongoing efforts to safeguard national security, two key defense initiatives have been implemented: the construction of a separation barrier and the development of the Iron Dome air defense system. The large-scale assault by Hamas on October 7, 2023, compelled the IDF to launch immediate retaliatory measures, including targeted military operations against the Gaza Strip aimed at restoring deterrence and national stability. In response, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that Israel was now at war, emphasizing that the initial airstrikes on Gaza were merely the beginning, and warning that "this is a long war." Following these statements, the IDF surrounded the Gaza Strip, prompting senior Israeli officials to advocate for a ground invasion (MAHMOUDIAN, 2023).

4. Function and Operation of the Iron Dome in Enhancing National Security and Israel's Defense Diplomacy

Regarding the operational mechanism of Israel's air defense system, the Iron Dome is engineered to intercept and neutralize incoming short-range projectiles. It is fully functional in all weather conditions, ensuring uninterrupted protection. The system utilizes advanced radar technology to detect and track incoming rockets, effectively distinguishing between those that pose a threat to populated or critical infrastructure areas and those that do not. Interceptor missiles are launched only at rockets projected to strike built-up or strategic locations, optimizing resource efficiency.

The Iron Dome is composed of multiple batteries strategically positioned across Israel, with each battery containing three to four launchers, each capable of deploying up to 20 interceptor missiles. Additionally, the system is available in both fixed and mobile configurations, enhancing its flexibility and operational reach (BBC News Indonesia, 2023).

One of the key outcomes of Israel's defense diplomacy, particularly through its partnership with the United States, is the development of the Iron Dome, an advanced air defense system designed to bolster the capabilities of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). This collaboration enables the IDF to concentrate on strategic defense operations aimed at preserving national security and mitigating external threats. The construction of the Iron Dome commenced in 2006, largely in response to the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. Jointly developed by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries, the Iron Dome functions as an aerial shield, intercepting and neutralizing incoming rockets before they reach their intended targets, thereby serving as a critical line of defense against cross-border attacks (detikjabar, 2023).

According to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the Iron Dome missile defense system is capable of intercepting and neutralizing aerial threats, including rockets and missiles within a range of 4 to 70 kilometers, with a success rate of approximately 90 to 97 percent. Its strategic significance lies in its ability to counter frequent aerial assaults originating from regions such as Palestine and Lebanon. Since its deployment in 2011, the Iron Dome has played a crucial role in safeguarding Israeli territory and civilians. Notably, the development and continued operation of this advanced defense system have not relied solely on Israel's military budget; rather, it has been made possible through sustained defense cooperation with the United States, Israel's key ally (Restrepo, 2023).

On October 16, 2023, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that President Joe Biden would visit Israel on the following Wednesday, two days after the statement was made to engage in high-level discussions regarding defense cooperation. The visit was intended not only to evaluate Israel's defense needs but also to reaffirm the United States' unwavering commitment to Israel's security. The agenda included reiterating Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas, listening directly to Israeli leaders about the measures required to ensure national defense, and coordinating with the U.S. Congress to fulfill those requirements (Watson, 2023).

Coinciding with the visit of U.S. President Joe Biden to Israel on October 18, 2023, for a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli military asserted that there was minimal structural damage to hospitals in Gaza and dismissed claims of airstrikes. During a press conference that day, IDF spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari stated that as of 6:59 p.m., approximately ten rockets or missiles had been launched by Hamas toward Israel. Hagari further explained that it is not uncommon for rockets fired at Israel to malfunction and cause unintended casualties, noting that around 450 rockets launched by Hamas had failed and landed within Gaza itself over the course of the conflict (Tara Subramaniam A. R., 2023).

One of the most compelling demonstrations of the Iron Dome's effectiveness occurred on October 27, 2023, when several rockets launched by Hamas struck buildings in Tel Aviv, injuring at least three people. Notably, eight other rockets were successfully intercepted by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) through the Iron Dome system. Following extensive diplomatic efforts and advancements in air defense capabilities, the IDF has been able to significantly reduce the impact of external attacks. While some missiles launched by Hamas have managed to breach Israeli defenses, the absence of the Iron Dome would have resulted in a substantially higher number of casualties. The system has thus proven to be a crucial safeguard for Israeli civilians. In the aftermath of the attack, the United States provided assistance by supplying two additional units

to reinforce Israel's Iron Dome, further enhancing its anti-rocket defense infrastructure (Indonesia, 2023).

The Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) success in enhancing its defensive capabilities was further demonstrated on November 30, 2023, when the Iron Dome system, developed under IDF direction, successfully intercepted an aerial threat launched from Lebanon in the early hours of the morning. The launch triggered high-alert sirens across northern Israel, with the alarm audibly reaching the Lebanese side of the border. This incident reinforces the fact that, since the onset of Hamas's assault, Israel has significantly bolstered its national security through intensive efforts—most notably by deploying the Iron Dome system, which has proven instrumental in intercepting rockets and missiles launched from neighboring states such as Palestine, Iran, and Lebanon (Tara Subramaniam A. R., 2023).

5. Conclusion

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) play a pivotal role as the state's primary defense institution in ensuring national security and restoring a sense of safety for its citizens in the aftermath of the ongoing conflict. In response to the persistent threat of aerial assaults launched by Hamas, the IDF has implemented significant advancements in air defense capabilities, including strategic collaborations and technological enhancements. Central to these efforts is the expansion of the Iron Dome system, which has significantly bolstered Israel's ability to intercept and neutralize incoming threats. Through these measures, the IDF has demonstrated its critical function in safeguarding the nation against armed aggression and securing Israel's territorial integrity.

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