Chapter 1

Threats against Israel in the Coming Decade

What has changed since the 2006 Second Lebanon War?

The underlying assumption of this memorandum is that the next campaign in the northern arena will present Israel with new and tougher challenges than those it has known in the past. This view is based on the emergence in recent years of new types of threats against Israel that will impact the nature of the war – if and when it erupts.

First and foremost, the **conventional military threat**, until now the most significant threat faced by Israel, has grown and is expected to further intensify in the coming years. Iran took advantage of the civil wars in Iraq and Syria to advance its aspiration to create a Shi'ite axis under its leadership, and in recent years this axis has become a cohesive coalition of entities with military capabilities, acting directly under Iran's command and serving it. It should be emphasized that this memorandum deals entirely with the conventional threat in the next war; it does not address Iran's nuclear capabilities.[2]
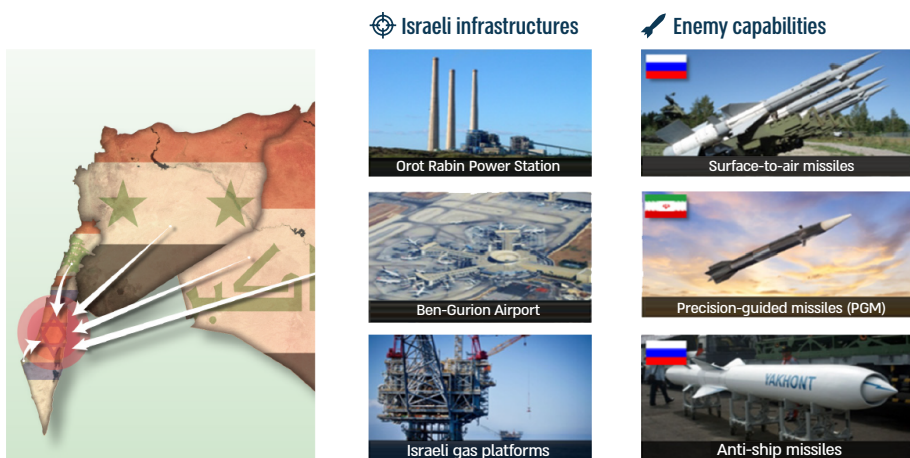
A major component of this threat is the **military force buildup by Hezbollah**, which has obtained considerable fire capabilities and amassed a diverse range of weaponry. It is widely believed today that the organization possesses some 150,000 missiles and rockets of all ranges (short, medium, and long) that can cover almost the entire territory of Israel. This threat has grown more acute in recent years due to Hezbollah's efforts, with the assistance of Iran, to expand its precision-missile project, which includes

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2 Although in the last year the Shi'ite axis has been suffering from severe distress internally and increasing pressure on it from outside, its motivation and ability to act against Israel remain the same.

ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and land-to-sea missiles, and offensive unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The organization purportedly has dozens of precision missiles and UAVs, and in the coming years Hezbollah and Iran are likely try and boost these numbers further. Israel will find it hard to completely prevent Hezbollah from building up a large arsenal of precision missiles solely through what is known as the "campaign between the wars," which lies below the threshold of actual war.

Over the past decade, Hezbollah has also invested efforts in devising a **ground attack option** against Israel. The organization has a well-trained commando force with thousands of fighters, called the Radwan Force, that gained substantive experience participating in the war in Syria. Hezbollah plans to deploy the force in any conflict with Israel to capture key territories in the north of the country where there are civilian population centers and military assets. Even after the exposure and demolition, during Operation Northern Shield (January 2019), of tunnels along the northern border, through which the Radwan Force had planned to infiltrate into Israel, the option of above-ground incursion attempts still exists; Hezbollah is preparing that option, along with other advanced measures in the organization's possession, to be used in the face of threats at sea and in the air, including cyber capabilities.

■ THE THREAT TO STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURES[3]

⊕ Israeli infrastructures

Orot Rabin Power Station

Ben-Gurion Airport

Israeli gas platforms

✈ Enemy capabilities

Surface-to-air missiles

Precision-guided missiles (PGM)

Anti-ship missiles

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3   The illustration is taken from an unclassified presentation made by Major General Yaakov Banjo (November 2019).

Iran's entrenchment in Syria and the deployment of its forces, as well as those of its proxies, near the Syrian border with Israel constitute a major strategic change Iran has made, exploiting President Bashar al-Assad's need for aid, to deepen its hold in Syria and, worse yet, to build up a new military threat against Israel from Syria. Although Israel has managed, through attacks in the ongoing campaign between the wars, to undermine Iran's efforts to establish military bases in the Syrian arena, it has not completely prevented the installation of surface-to-surface missile batteries and offensive UAVs or the presence of Iranian advisers and tens of thousands of Shi'ite militants under Iranian command, funded by Tehran and subject to its authority. This is in parallel to Hezbollah's efforts – also with Iranian backing – to build outposts on the Syrian Golan and to set up and operate local militias, deepening its presence there. Adding to this list one can see the beginning of a process of rehabilitation of the Syrian army, especially the strengthening of its aerial defense systems, and Iranian entrenchment in western Iraq under government auspices and in cooperation with Shi'ite militias in Iraq known as the Popular Mobilization Forces.

The presence of Russia in the area as a result of its involvement in the war in Syria also constitutes a significant change in the balance of forces. Its military presence includes the stationing of advanced aerial defense systems in Syria, which to date have not been used against Israel, due to considerations determined in Moscow. At the same time, the limited interest shown by the US and Western countries in Syria and their unwillingness to invest in the country's rehabilitation efforts are evident. Russia, which has naval and air forces, aerial defense systems, and even bases on Syrian territory and on its Mediterranean coast, has become a "neighbor" of Israel's, and thus an element with potentially greater influence than in the past in the event of a military confrontation.

The strategic challenges

The primary challenge that Israel needs to prepare for is a **multi-theater, multi-front campaign** that will include simultaneous combat in near and far arenas. This is assuming that the regime in Iran is striving for regional hegemony, and to undermine Israel's security stability along its borders, while continuing its efforts to cement the Shi'ite axis. In a multi-theater war, Israel will have to take decisions that will define the war zone, including the

primary and secondary fronts, and determine its priorities and distribution of attention and resources. But in a wide-scale campaign, Israel will find it hard to control the boundaries of the campaign and its duration. Should a broad military conflict develop in the north, Israel will not be able to prevent "Axis of Resistance" elements, located in other theaters, from joining the fray, under Iran's directive. For example, even if a conflict with Hezbollah were to start in Lebanon, the organization would try to operate from the Syrian Golan and Iran would almost certainly activate its proxies in the area, especially Shi'ite militias in Syria, and perhaps in western Iraq as well. One can also expect that in these circumstances Iran will try to mobilize or drag the Syrian regime into the fighting too, and there is the possibility of parallel rocket fire from the Gaza Strip, at least by the Iranian-funded Islamic Jihad, and possibly by Hamas as well.

Another major challenge to contend with in the next war is the military threat by Hezbollah and Iran's other proxies, not just against the army but against the Israeli home front too. Israel is expected to suffer widespread damage, at least in the initial stage of the war, in a number of areas: there is a possibility of attempts to harm Israel's vital capabilities, for example, by hitting IDF facilities (headquarters, air force bases, reserve recruitment centers); attacks on strategic infrastructures and vital services (sea and air ports, energy and water facilities, transportation); targeting of government assets; disruptions to the economy (upsetting functional continuity); and strikes on population centers. Such tactics will be aimed at undermining Israeli citizens' sense of security and national resilience. All this suggests that the next war will claim a high price – far higher than that seen in previous wars.

Beyond the enormous challenge faced by the IDF's air defenses, the coming decade will see its technological superiority tested too, due to advances by Hezbollah and Iran and its proxies in a wide range of fields: cyber, air defenses, electronic warfare, UAVs, and surface-to-sea missiles. The IDF will be called on to destroy the air defenses of Hezbollah and Syria, as well as of Iranian elements, while ensuring it does not damage Russian assets in the Syrian arena. The primary threat in this context results from technological developments that have brought down production costs and made more accessible precision capabilities that are effective enough to have an impact across the campaign. Furthermore, there is a need to consider strategic surprises that are difficult to predict at the present time.

During the next war, we can also expect changes in the nature of the international community's involvement. Russia is likely to wield great influence due to its continued presence in Syria and the Mediterranean. In an effort to maintain its interests in the region, Russia will try to limit the IDF's freedom of action, so that the IDF will have to take Moscow's position into account – more so than in the past – with regard to its goals from the war (for example, preventing a threat to the regime in Damascus). It can be assumed that the US will provide at least diplomatic support and military assistance to Israel, but it is likely that any administration, Republican or Democratic, will seek to avoid active intervention in the fighting and will demand that Israel weigh any possible consequences for US forces as long as they are deployed in Iraq and eastern Syria. Israel is also expected to face challenges in the international arena where the legitimacy it receives for its moves will depend on the correlation between the damage sustained by its civilian population and that inflicted by the IDF on civilian infrastructures in Syria and Lebanon. Legitimization for Israeli actions will be diminished in the case of an Israeli initiative or "preemptive strike" aimed at stopping the buildup of precision-missile capabilities in Lebanon, in view of the widespread damage expected to the Lebanese people.

Furthermore, there may be adverse changes in the regional order, which is expected to remain dynamic and unstable, and this too could bring new threats. The possibility of a change to the rules of the game in the region remains, should there be further deterioration in the internal stability of regimes in the Middle East; change in the fabric of relations and interests of the states; and/or the emergence of new focuses of power that will affect the course of the campaign, for example, the possibility that Turkey's influence in shaping reality in the northern arena will increase.

In this complex and multi-player campaign it will be difficult to devise a way out that will serve Israeli interests. Therefore, an exit strategy should be formulated in advance to enable a rapid termination of the war, and that strategy should be aligned with Israel's goals – translating military achievement into a security-political advantage.

The operational threats

In a multi-theater war, attacks with conventional weapons could constitute a threat across Israel's entire military and civilian front (from Lebanon and

the Syrian Golan, western Iraq, the Gaza Strip, and possibly from the Sinai Peninsula and the Red Sea); the Shi'ite axis possesses a diverse range of capabilities – high-trajectory weapons of various ranges, warhead sizes and levels of precision. The new and advanced capabilities available to the enemy must be acknowledged, including the long-range capabilities of improved missiles that will enable surface-to-surface missiles to be fired into Israel's strategic home front from the second circle (Iraq) and, though highly unlikely, even from the third circle (Iran, Yemen); the development of precision capabilities that will enable accurate strikes during the opening moves of the war; advanced defensive and offensive capabilities (air defenses, drones, shore-to-sea anti-ship missiles), as well as advanced technologies for disrupting IDF systems (cyber, magnetic spectrum, jammers).

In view of the fact that the enemy has precision-guided missiles, in the next war, the IDF will have to deal with far more significant maneuvers than in the past. Launching of the missiles will be aimed at disrupting IDF operational activities – for example, limiting its ability to exploit its firepower to the full; disrupting the accumulation of forces and their movement to the fronts, particularly the mobilization of reserve forces; disrupting operations at air force bases and seaports; and hindering efforts to defend the home front and, later, its recovery. Casting a shadow over all this is the difficulty in dealing with endless barrages of rockets and missiles, identifying the precision missiles, and for Israel to maintain a sufficient number of interceptors in case of a protracted war and the need to intercept threats from all arenas.

The IDF will also have to contend with Hezbollah's plans for a **ground operation** to capture and hold territory in northern Israel, with the intent of notching up a significant achievement during the fighting (foiling an IDF maneuver or ensuring the ability to maintain constant fire on the Israeli home front are examples), and achieving a "victory image" by the unprecedented feat of capturing sovereign Israeli territory. In the coming years, Hezbollah is likely continue to strive for this, i.e., to plan such a maneuver along the Lebanese border or from the direction of the Syrian Golan. The IDF's ability to accumulate significant achievements in the first days of the war will also be affected to a great degree by the question of who initiates the war. On the assumption that it is possible that **the war could start with a surprise attack** by the enemy, the IDF needs to plan for a scenario in which the initiative and the opening moves will not necessarily be in its hands.

To summarize, the anticipated enhancement of the capabilities of the Shi'ite axis will create difficulties for the IDF, leading to the following possible threats:

- Several events requiring a response developing in parallel at a rapid pace;
- The difficulty in dividing attention between efforts and theaters;
- Threats to the air force's freedom of action;
- Threats to the navy's freedom of action;
- A decline in the IDF's technological superiority and the development of means to neutralize/sabotage IDF capabilities;
- The ability to disrupt the IDF's command and control systems at the tactical and operational levels; and
- Strikes on IDF bases and war reserve warehouses.