Chapter 3

Design of the Campaign at the Strategic Level

In light of the evolving threat in the northern arena, decision makers should periodically reassess the strategy for dealing with it, with consideration given to the following options:

1. Maintaining the current strategy, which is three-pronged: **delaying and disrupting** the pace of the enemy's buildup by military means (the campaign between the wars) and political means; building **deterrence** by developing lethal military power; and developing **defensive** capabilities;

2. Launching a **limited military operation** to diminish the threat, taking a chance that the situation will deteriorate into a broader war; or

3. **Initiating a wide-scale war** that could devolve into the worst-case scenario, as described above.

In any event, the political echelon should be primed to instruct the defense establishment to prepare for war, which could erupt without Israel choosing it or wanting it (in scenarios of deterioration or an initiative by the enemy, as described in chapter 2).

■ **DECISION AND INTERVENTION POINTS FOR THE POLITICAL ECHELON**

In this section we address the basic assumptions regarding the interests and goals the political echelon will present to the IDF that will result in the formulation of alternatives for "military acts," which are also outlined here. In addition, Israel's desired end state and the central dilemmas that the political echelon will have to deal with just before and during the campaign are discussed.

Israel's interests

After presenting the challenges and before examining Israel's alternatives in dealing with the threats on the northern front, we need to define what its interests are at the strategic level, interests that will serve as a **compass**, guiding Israeli decision makers to formulate policy on this complex challenge. Below are definitions of these interests, in light of which our analysis and conclusions were formulated.

- Defense of borders, of the Israeli home front, and of the state's strategic assets.
- Maintaining Israel's military superiority and strength, and its international and regional standing.
- Improvement of the security reality – removal of threats and the creation of Israeli deterrence, including:
  - Neutralizing the enemy's ability to undermine Israel's edge, with an emphasis on the enemy's precision capabilities;
  - Lowering the military threat to Israel from the Shi'ite axis; and
  - Distancing Iran from Israel's borders and diminishing its influence in Lebanon and Syria.
- Maintaining the functional continuity of the Israeli economy, as well as social cohesion.
- Achieving regional calm and stability and the capability to enforce long-term stabilizing diplomatic agreements.
- Strengthening Israel's standing in the regional arena (vis-à-vis the states with which it has peace treaties and other partners) and the international arena (with an emphasis on US support).
- Maintaining legitimacy for Israel's policies and military moves.

Goals of the war

In strategic planning methodology, the goals of war derive from Israel's interests and strategic objectives, taking into account the circumstances (especially Israel's political-economic situation and its military capabilities versus the enemy's status and capabilities), and are set by the political echelon as a directive to the IDF. These goals serve the IDF as guidelines for formulating its plans for war.

The definition proposed in this analysis for Israel's **strategic objective** is: Neutralizing the military threat posed by the Shi'ite axis around Israel's borders; diminishing the influence of Iran; and weakening Hezbollah in Lebanon from a military and political perspective.

Therefore, the goals of the war are: achieving victory, which means enforcing Israel's terms for an end to the war, thereby preventing the Shi'ite axis from attaining a strategic-military achievement; defeating the axis' military force in Syria and Lebanon by destroying its military capabilities and infrastructure; and creating the conditions to prevent its rehabilitation for a long time.

From these goals we derive the **required strategic achievements**:

- Multi-dimensional defense – on the ground, in the air, naval, and cyber arenas – to minimize damage to the home front and maintain Israel's functional continuity.
- Removing, or at least neutralizing, the threat as early as possible:
  - Causing severe damage to **Hezbollah's** capabilities: in Lebanon, defeating it south of the Awali River and destroying its centers of gravity in the Beirut area and in the Lebanon Valley; and in Syria, eliminating its strongholds in the Syrian Golan.
  - Destruction of Lebanese infrastructures that aid Hezbollah's war effort.
  - In the event of an attack from Syria (by Shi'ite militias and/or the Syrian army), striking Shi'ite axis elements in Syria (infrastructure and forces) with the express goal of destroying Syria's military industry.
- Deterring **Iran** from getting involved in the war and attempting to prevent a direct exchange of blows between Iran and Israel.
- Creating conditions that will prevent the restoration of the enemy capabilities.

End-state scenarios – The sought-after security reality

The guidelines for forming strategy are based on the security reality needed at the end of the war:

- Ending the war within the shortest possible time, while applying Israel's terms for an end to the fighting and improved, effective, and stable security arrangements.
- Weakening the Shi'ite axis in Syria and Lebanon and creating the conditions to prevent its rehabilitation and entrenchment following the war.
- Dealing a severe blow to Hezbollah, so that it is defeated militarily[6] and weakened politically in Lebanon. The organization will retreat, leaving no military outposts south of the Awali, in the Syrian Golan or the crossings in the Hermon area.
- Achieving effective deterrence that will put off the next war by at least a decade.
- Swift rehabilitation of the Israeli home front and maintaining functional continuity.
- Maintaining the IDF's freedom of action at the end of the war, in order to prevent Iran's renewed entrenchment in the northern arena.
- Endorsing the responsibility of the state of Lebanon in all Lebanese territory.
- Blocking smuggling, infiltration, and weapons transfer routes from Syria to Lebanon.
- Upending the attitude of the Syrian regime to Iran and leading it to the understanding that its ties with Tehran constitute a liability, not a strategic asset.
- Ensuring there is no friction between the IDF and Russian forces in Syria. At the same time, Russia gives guarantees and a commitment to prevent the renewed entrenchment of the Shi'ite axis in Syria.
- Israel attains international legitimacy for its military moves and a willingness on the part of world powers to provide guarantees for a ceasefire and improved security arrangements.

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6 According to expert assessments, to achieve these goals Israel will have to deliver an effective blow to Hezbollah's ground-based launch and strike capabilities into Israeli territory (destroying at least 70 percent of Hezbollah's rocket/surface-to-surface missiles and hitting some 5,000 Radwan Force soldiers).

The main dilemmas faced by decision makers

Following are the main issues that will require debate prior to a decision:

Is the next war really inevitable? In view of the expected complexity of the next war and the high price it will exact from both sides, the question of whether and how it can be averted must first be examined. While Israel will not be able to prevent a war that is forced upon it, before it chooses to initiate a move, it should exhaust all ways to avoid it, and in doing so even opt for open or covert political measures. A key element in the effort to avoid war that Israel should continue to pursue is **building deterrence**, for example, by maintaining routine military operations (the campaign between the wars) and through an ongoing, concerted cognitive drive to stress the heavy cost the enemy can be expected to pay as a result of a war.

Should Israel initiate a military move? The growing threat in the northern arena as a result of the strengthening of the Shi'ite axis, of which Hezbollah is the spearhead, raises the dilemma of whether to diminish the threat or remove it by military means. Israel's strategy in almost all of its wars has been defensive, with the objective of maintaining the status quo or restoring it (with the exception of the Lebanon War 1982). However, even though the strategy was defensive, the doctrine was offensive. The objective was to quickly transfer the war to enemy territory, primarily due to Israel's lack of strategic depth, in order to decisively defeat the enemy's forces and shorten the war, create an improved strategic reality for Israel, and thus delay the next war and reinforce deterrence.

With regard to the next war in the north, there are two options for a preemptive strike, and the military benefits should be examined against their projected costs:

- **Preemptive counterstrike** (preemptive strike): An initiated strike that heads off the enemy's expected attack by some hours or days in order to disrupt its plans, to create a military advantage and hold the initiative. In this instance, the IDF would attack preemptively when it is clear that the Shi'ite axis is about to start a war.
- **Preemptive war:** An initiated offensive aimed at inflicting heavy damage on the enemy before it is ready for war and while it is working on its long-term military strength. It would seem that this is the most relevant yet difficult dilemma regarding the expected war against the Shi'ite axis. The

question is, should Israel initiate a war against a developing threat? The core of the dilemma in this instance concerns the progress of Hezbollah's precision-guided missile program. We conducted performance analysis tests and simulations as part of this study, and reached the conclusion that **an arsenal of more than 500 precision-guided missiles constitutes a severe threat potential, and if it becomes clear that Hezbollah has in its possession a stockpile approaching that figure, Israel will have to consider launching a preemptive war** to significantly reduce Hezbollah's arsenal of precision munitions and prevent the organization from growing stronger.[7] Key considerations in such a decision will be whether this arsenal in the enemy's hands also neutralizes the IDF's freedom of action below the threshold of war, and what the probability is that the next war could develop out of a preemptive strike.

Can the war be shortened, and is it possible to control its scope? The wide-scale offensive expected against Israel's home front from a number of arenas in the next war, combined with the assessment that the IDF will not be able to stem such an offensive for the duration of the war, underscores the dilemma regarding the length of the war and its scope. There are a few schools of thought in this regard. One is that Israel should aim for a short and limited war, without a ground operation, even if its achievements will be extremely limited.[8] This is in view of the heavy price that can be expected in a long war, which could paralyze the Israeli economy, harm national resilience, cause cumulative damages to infrastructure and heavy casualties. Another view is that in any event a military operation will be costly and therefore Israel should set as an objective to thwart the development of the threat for a sustained period of time. The military solution to the dilemma is to create the conditions for a decisive resolution in a short time that will remove the

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7   The detailed conclusions of this performance analysis test will not be made public due to the sensitivity of the issue. It has been presented to the defense establishment in a separate confidential document.

8   Major General (ret.) Giora Eiland opines that keeping the war at a few days will serve the IDF's interests because its actions are usually most effective in the first days of a war, when it is possible to attack many targets on the basis of intelligence gathered over years, and then they gradually decline over time. In his view, the opposite applies to Hezbollah – it sees every additional day of war as an achievement.

threat to the home front, and a deep penetrating military operation aimed at undermining the enemy's military capabilities.

A related question pertains to **advancing a ground maneuver** significant enough to affect the length of the war. Within the Israeli defense establishment, there are various approaches to this matter and whether it lengthens or shortens the war. There are those who claim that in the next war Israel will be able to achieve a decisive resolution through standoff firepower without a ground operation, which the IDF should seek to avoid because of the high anticipated cost of doing so. This contrasts with the historical approach, which suggests that it is possible to reach a resolution and shorten the war purely through a ground maneuver, and in the event of a war in the north through a massive maneuver in Lebanese territory, and perhaps in the Syrian Golan, in order to defeat the enemy and create improved conditions for the "day after." The political echelon will be required, in discourse with the IDF, to review the objectives of a ground maneuver – including how deep into enemy territory it should go – at a meeting on strategic alternatives. Three main possibilities will be on the table: first, limited movement into Lebanese territory with defensive goals, to disrupt the Radwan Force's plans to embark on a ground offensive and seize territory within Israel; second, a maneuver up to the Awali River to take control of Hezbollah's launch zone for short-range rockets and missiles; and third, a ground operation right up to Beirut to bring about a strategic change in Lebanon's situation.[9]
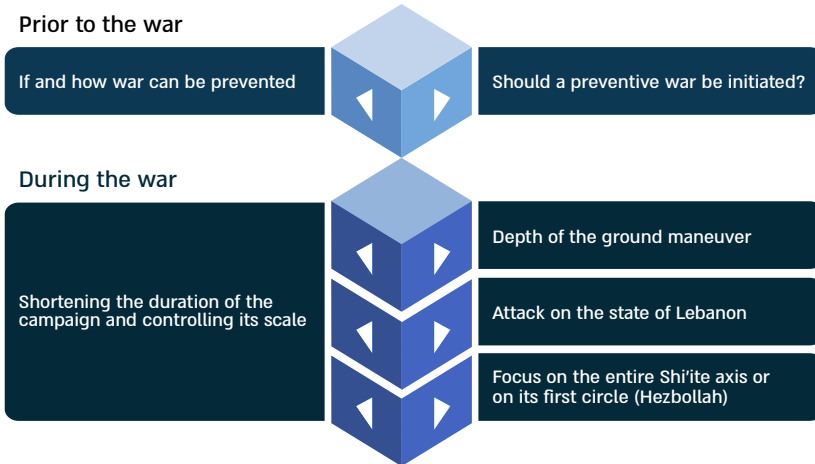
Is it right to attack the Lebanese state and not just Hezbollah's military force? On this issue as well, there are a few schools of thought. Some approaches believe defining the Lebanese state, and not just Hezbollah, as an enemy will help shorten the war. Major General (ret.) Giora Eiland claims that there is a political and moral justification for doing so, given Hezbollah's involvement in the Lebanese regime. In his opinion, an official declaration of a state of war with Lebanon in parallel with inflicting critical damage to the country's infrastructure (air and sea ports), its army, and government institutions will swiftly lead to heavy international pressure and demands for a ceasefire. This argument received added validation when the Lebanese government was formed (January 2020) by Hezbollah and

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9   Our recommendations on this issue are presented in chapter 8.

its Christian and Sunni supporters.[10] Yet other experts claim that striking Lebanese infrastructures would have no value since the state has no sway over Iran or Hezbollah, and the destruction of an already-weak Lebanon would actually assist in spreading the influence of Iran, which would exploit the power vacuum created.

The allocation of resources to build up defensive and offensive capabilities is a major issue facing the political echelon, particularly in the context of budgetary discussions. This is because of the IDF's need for long-term planning of its force buildup, on the one hand, and the difficulty in boosting its budget, on the other, especially in light of the economic crisis that Israel faces as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

■ **KEY DILEMMAS**

Prior to the war

| If and how war can be prevented | | Should a preventive war be initiated? |

During the war

Shortening the duration of the campaign and controlling its scale		Depth of the ground maneuver
		Attack on the state of Lebanon
		Focus on the entire Shi'ite axis or on its first circle (Hezbollah)

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10 It should be noted that this government was forced to resign following the Beirut Port disaster (August 4, 2020).