

## Chapter 5

# The Challenge Faced by the Civilian Arena

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This chapter<sup>11</sup> is based on the assumption that the conflict will take place on two parallel fronts, the military front and the civilian front. Compared to previous conflicts, the civilian front is expected to sustain heavy and repeated fire, including some precision strikes, especially in the initial stages of the war. At the same time, as in previous conflicts, non-guided rockets can be expected at numerous civilian targets in Israel, though at a higher rate than in past conflicts with Hezbollah and Hamas. The extent of damage – human casualties and property damages – could be far greater than what we have seen before, since the number of incidents per day will be much higher – and this will present a huge challenge to the first-response system. In other words, it is anticipated that the civilian front will face threats from a number of directions that may shake Israelis' sense of security. These might include:

- The capture of territory populated by civilians in the Galilee and the Golan;
- Strikes on strategic infrastructures and vital facilities (power stations and other energy-producing facilities, air and sea ports, transportation, communications, water facilities) that will disrupt the ability of the country's economic system to support the war effort;
- Strikes on symbols of government;
- Damage to the ongoing functioning of critical components of the economy (financial and society); and/or
- Physical damage to population centers to exhaust and erode Israel's staying power.

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In such a conflict, maintaining reasonable functional continuity of the economy, and of the public, will be very difficult, especially if the conflict is protracted. This situation will certainly test national resilience, which is fundamental to Israelis' ability to successfully overcome a security crisis of the first degree.

The following is an analysis of the ability of the civilian front to deal with a multi-level threat of this nature, its limitations and implications, with regard to both the way the campaign is managed and its practical and cognitive results.

A number of factors will influence the functioning of the civilian front, primary among them: the level of damage sustained; the duration of the conflict; the level of preparedness; how the conflict is managed at the national and local levels; the perceived level of success of IDF operations; how the public conducts itself in the face of the security challenge; and the way the media (through its various channels) portrays events to the public. The Israeli establishment can control only a few of these factors, and in some of them, advance preparation is not sufficient:

**The level of civilian preparedness** for a broad and ongoing conflict is not uniform in Israel's various sectors. This is a very important point, as it is reasonable to assume that most populated areas in Israel will be threatened by various kinds of rocket fire at various intensities. If the preparedness level – physical and mental – of the communities near the border with Gaza is used as a yardstick of reasonable preparedness, in view of the repeated security events there over the years and the drafting of a well thought-out civilian plan to cope with such incidents, then all other areas in Israel, in particular the north, are at far lower levels of preparedness for the expected threat. A clear example of this is in the field of **passive protection**, which is sorely lacking, as government decisions to carry out multi-year protection programs have not been implemented. Another example pertains to the possible **evacuation** of populations under attack – a move that is likely in an emergency situation: the planning and logistical preparedness to implement evacuation are limited and do not meet needs in the communities along the northern border, and certainly not in other areas in Israel that might also suffer massive and sustained attacks.

**Management of the campaign:** The coronavirus crisis is different to a war, but in Israel its ramifications have highlighted the country's limitations

in management (or perhaps improvisation) and exposed grave systemic organizational disorder. While on the face of it, Israel is very experienced in security crises, the scale, duration, and scope of damage that is expected in the civilian arena in the event of a conflict in the north necessitate addressing it as a significant and unprecedented event. This is especially so on the civilian front, as the Israeli population is not aware of the magnitude of the threat and therefore does not understand the potential grave implications at the personal, social, and economic levels. Put simply, the public is not prepared for such an event, and thus the surprise, if war does erupt, could intensify the damage to social resilience. For that reason, management of the campaign is critical and necessitates a different and upgraded preparation approach than is currently the case, and at a number of levels:

- **The national level:** Renewed organization is needed that will allow decisions to be made regarding the civilian front in parallel with those required for the management of the military and political campaigns. A special mechanism should be established under the security-political cabinet that will focus on urgent and critical civic issues, as well as the ability to coordinate, oversee, and make decisions in an informed manner and based on data from the various civic agencies entrusted with caring for citizens and addressing their needs in an emergency.
- **The Ministry of Defense** is in charge of the civilian front through the National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA). The authority's ability to function and the scope of its powers were severely impaired following the decision to adopt some important recommendations of the Mizrahi Commission, which was appointed by the defense minister in 2018 to regulate the division of responsibilities between NEMA and the IDF's Home Front Command. As a result, the Emergency Economy Committee was transferred to the Home Front Command, despite previously being a vital component of NEMA. It is not yet clear how this essential system will function under fire during a protracted war, which will likely challenge the critical infrastructures needed to operate all aspects of the economy. The COVID-19 crisis revealed that NEMA's ability to oversee coordination between the government ministries has been undermined and requires repair (perhaps it would have been preferable to transfer its

powers and responsibilities to the administrative body that was proposed at the national level).

- **The IDF's main mission** on the civilian front is to provide overall security through its active defense and border protection systems. However, it seems that, due to the priorities set for the Iron Dome defense system, in view of the many and varied missions it will have to contend with in the expected conflict, population centers will only be in third place for protection, after IDF compounds and vital national infrastructures. This means that we could see far more civilian casualties and greater destruction than in previous conflicts, which will generate demoralization and fear, undermine the functional continuity of the economy, and will have a detrimental effect on social resilience. Furthermore, the IDF's attention to civilian needs, including at the logistical level, is expected to be lower than was acceptable in previous conflicts. This too highlights the need for an inclusive national-level civic body. The IDF will be required not only to deter the conflict, but also to try and shorten it as far as possible, potentially at the expense of a clear victory, due to the difficulty of the civilian front to withstand a harsh conflict over time.
- **The Home Front Command** is the military body designated to prepare and manage the effort on the civilian front. It has significant resources, plentiful, well-trained and experienced manpower, is well organized and has a cohesive doctrine, and has broad representation within local authorities. The main limitations of the Home Front Command pertain to the magnitude of the expected challenge, its limited ability to rely on the IDF, whose efforts will be focused on tackling the military front, and its unknown ability to operate the Emergency Economy Committee under the new regulations. The mission of the Home Front Command is critical to the functioning of the entire economy; it is highly complex and requires sensitivity, experience, and understanding of complex civic issues. Furthermore, all this will take place amid difficult scenarios that, while familiar to it, are likely to challenge the Home Front Command in coordinating responses with other bodies – the police, the fire and rescue services, and the Magen David Adom ambulance service – particularly in circumstances of multiple and parallel strikes in diverse and complex arenas. All this underscores the need to enact a law addressing the management of the civilian front (which has been raised in the past)

that will provide the required clarity regarding the responsibilities and powers of the various bodies, and certainly of the body managing a civilian emergency.

- **The local authorities** present an uneven picture of their emergency preparedness and management capabilities. In general, the stronger authorities are better prepared for emergencies compared to the weaker ones, of which there are many, though in fact it is unclear whether any of them are adequately prepared for a worst-case scenario. Since it is assumed that the local authorities are meant to function as the “bedrock” of the civilian front in an emergency, they should be provided with the tools that will allow them to do so in a reasonable manner. That, however, is not currently the case.
- **The cognitive aspect** will greatly affect the behavior of the civilian population, especially given the fact that the public will likely be exposed to a significant propaganda effort by the enemy. The circumstances of the opening of hostilities and in particular the way they are presented will shape the civilian reaction to the conflict and to the damage to property and life that will be incurred. The more the conflict is seen as necessary and justified by large sections of the public, the more positively this will affect its trust in the leadership of the country and its attitude toward the conflict. The length of the conflict, the IDF’s success (or struggles), the number of casualties among soldiers, and the civilian damage sustained will greatly influence national morale, the sense of social solidarity, and the ability of civic bodies to cope with the difficulties inherent in an emergency situation. Therefore, there must be a professional and ongoing public information effort, which should include the mainstream media, especially if the conflict is protracted and reaches a stalemate situation.

All the above factors will have a crucial impact on national resilience in its most basic sense, reflecting the ability of the state and all its components to adapt to severe disruption, to maintain reasonable functional continuity in an emergency as a basis for rapid recovery when the conflict is over (and hopefully at a higher level than when it began). In the past, Israel has demonstrated a high level of national resilience amid security conflicts. However, the disruption on the civilian front during the next conflict in the northern arena is expected to be very severe and more prolonged than in the

past (the Second Lebanon War lasted 33 days and Operation Protective Edge in Gaza lasted 51 days – far longer than the Yom Kippur War, which lasted 19 days), and the damage – psychological, property, and vital infrastructures – will be far more extensive and more severe than that seen before.

This scenario has grave implications on the challenge to national resilience. In the absence of sufficient preparedness and if the IDF's performance does not reflect victory or at least clear superiority over the enemy, then the threat to the public's mental state should be addressed, along with the public's ability to maintain reasonable functional continuity, and, consequently, to recover after the conflict; that is, without adding to the equation the harsh socio-economic effects of the coronavirus crisis. This situation can also challenge the public perception of victory in the conflict. Therefore, examining the implications of war on the northern front necessitates drawing conclusions about the advance preparedness of the civilian front, while still trying to avoid such a conflict.