

Chapter 7

The Exit Strategy

Any discussion on an exit strategy from the next war in the north must center on the following issues: the optimal time for an end to hostilities in order to maximize the achievements gained up to that point and to reduce the costs of continued fighting; **endgame mechanisms** that may help end the war; **boundary lines** – the scale of the depth of penetration of Israeli forces into Lebanese and Syrian territory to ensure that the results of the war are clear and less susceptible to manipulation by the enemy; and security and stability arrangements after the war, with the intent of creating an improved reality in comparison to that achieved following the Second Lebanon War, based on UN Security Council Resolution 1701. This resolution did not achieve the desired result for Israel, i.e., dismantling Hezbollah as an independent military militia, closing the border crossings between Syria and Lebanon to prevent the transfer of weapons, and the imposition of Lebanese sovereignty in southern Lebanon. Instead it enabled Hezbollah's continued control over southern Lebanon and its military buildup, despite the presence of UNIFIL forces in the area.

How can the war be shortened?

In contemporary military research there is a debate over the question of whether it is possible or desirable to determine an exit strategy before a campaign even begins. The accepted approach is that it is not advisable to enter a war without planning an exit strategy and termination model in advance. It impacts the goals of the war and the ability to calculate how to realize those goals. This approach should also apply to the next war in the north according to the scenario discussed above: a war that may develop in several theaters simultaneously and involving many actors. In this scenario,

Israel will likely face difficulties in bringing about an end to the war at a time and in circumstances that suit it, while controlling the logic of all those involved. For these reasons and due to the anticipated extensive damage to the Israeli home front, it can be assumed that in the next war Israel will have a greater interest than in the past in a short and well-focused campaign.

The desire to **shorten the duration of the fighting** should be considered when formulating both the goals of the war and the operational concepts and plans for achieving them. These particularly affect the issue of **ground maneuvers**. When devising the IDF's operational plans, the need and ability to conduct a swift ground operation deep inside Lebanese territory that will ensure that the stated goals are met should be reassessed. On the one hand, in light of the lessons learned from past wars in Lebanon, the avoidance of such an operation means the IDF's achievements against Hezbollah will be more limited, and it could be very difficult to impose a ceasefire on the enemy under Israeli conditions, but on the other hand, the IDF's improved firepower capabilities today could in certain scenarios be sufficient to deal a severely harsh blow to Hezbollah even in a short campaign, and to bring it to want to end the war, even without an Israeli ground maneuver. In any event, we should not ignore the importance of the presence of IDF troops in enemy territory as a means of pressure during talks to end the war and determine a border and security arrangements after the war. The desire to shorten the war may also influence Israel's preferences for endgame and stability mechanisms.

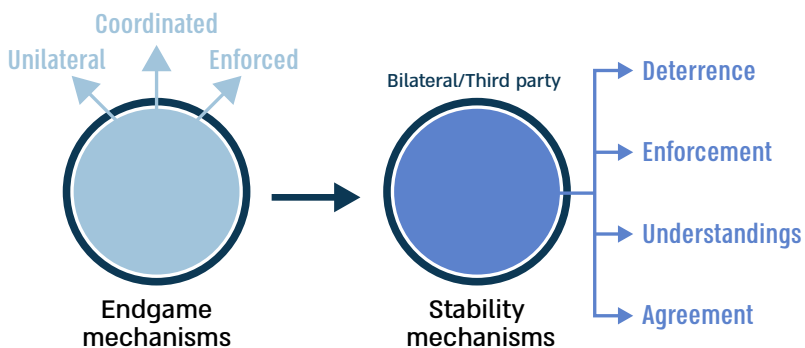
Endgame and stability mechanisms

Beyond the optimal possibility in which Israel creates a difficult reality for the enemy, which leads it to call for a ceasefire, theoretically there are three relevant groups of **endgame mechanisms** for the next war in the north:

- **Unilateral cessation** of fighting: Israel could announce a cessation of hostilities at a time that it chooses, after weighing its chances of maximizing its achievements thus far vis-à-vis the costs expected if the fighting continues. The main advantage of a unilateral decision is Israeli control, ostensibly, over its own desired point in time for ending the war. On the other hand, this mechanism has clear weaknesses, as an Israeli decision is not necessarily binding on the other side, and in ending the

war unilaterally there is an inherent risk of weakening its leverage to exploit military achievements and translate them into political successes.

- **An enforced end** to the war: The events of the war and associated complications may lead to a situation in which Israel will have to stop the fighting out of a lack of choice or due to difficulties on the battlefield and heavy losses to either side, or following a political move at the UN or by the world's powers to bring about an end to the fighting by threatening Israeli interests. From Israel's perspective it is desirable to avoid such a situation.
- Termination of the war in a **coordinated** manner: There are several possibilities within this option. **Bilateral cessation** of fighting without external intervention is one. The likelihood of this alternative is relatively low, due to the absence of direct channels of communication between Israel and the Shi'ite axis components, not to mention their mutual lack of trust. One option here is the use of the military channel developed under the auspices of UNIFIL between IDF liaison officers and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), to convey messages to the Lebanese government and Hezbollah – but its feasibility is not at all clear. Nevertheless, from Israel's perspective it is preferable not to rely on this channel, which is unable to secure a broad agreement after the war. Another possibility is the **cessation of fighting through international mediation**, whereby both sides respond to an international call for an end to the war and in this way an agreement is reached. This alternative has a higher chance of some level of success that will translate the military results of the war into a new and improved reality regarding Lebanese-Israeli relations and/or lead to the dissolution of Hezbollah (despite the low chance of its success), or at least to the imposition of new restrictions on the organization.



Israel's interest in restoring stability after the war includes a preference for certain **stability and regulation mechanisms** to be used vis-à-vis the government of Lebanon, while applying a measure of coercion and enforcement on Hezbollah (and ideally also on the other axis factors). In order to advance an agreement, Israel must have ready the main points it wants incorporated, including its demands. The preferred alternative is of course negotiations, or an agreement with the Lebanese government, however, due to Hezbollah's dominant position in the Lebanese political system, the chances of this are probably not high. The greater the damage to Hezbollah, the greater the ability to neutralize the power equation in Lebanon and enable the empowerment of the Lebanese government. To this end, the involvement of European countries (especially France) and the Gulf states is desirable, given the common interest of all to weaken the Shi'ite axis and bring Lebanon closer to the pragmatic camp.

In light of this, despite the limited achievements of Security Council Resolution 1701, one of the options worth reconsidering is the formulation of an improved resolution, this time based on Security Council Resolution 1559, which should include buttressing the LAF and neutralizing Hezbollah's monopoly on power, while granting UNIFIL the authority to implement the resolution. This could be achieved by establishing an improved mandate for its operations and dispatching an international force with suitable skills to supervise the border between Syria and Lebanon to prevent the smuggling of weapons and a renewed military buildup of Hezbollah.

The US should play a central role in assisting Israel to reach an agreement at the end of the war, but it should be kept in mind that due to the deep involvement of Russia in the region today, Moscow will strive to flex its muscles more than in the past regarding the details of any agreement. It is imperative to mobilize Russia to push Iran and its proxies out of Syria – especially their military capabilities and infrastructure – and to persuade the Syrian regime to extricate itself from Iran's clutches, otherwise its very survival will be in danger.

Termination lines: Israeli demands at the end of the war

Here follow our ideas on how to formulate, prior to a possible war, Israeli policy regarding the post-war agreement it would like to see, including suggestions for Israeli demands in each of the relevant arenas. This proposal includes

maximalist demands, aimed at diminishing future threats against Israel and shaping a new regional reality, especially when it comes to Iran. Needless to say, the chances of realizing all or even most of the Israeli goals depends to a great extent on what happens both during the war and its outcome. Still, this proposal can assist the planning officials to draft an opening position for Israel with which to enter diplomatic negotiations, enabling them to add or subtract items according to the circumstances in real time.

Vis-à-vis the Lebanese arena

- Responsibility for everything that falls within the Lebanese arena lies squarely with the government of Lebanon, and all contacts regarding an agreement with Lebanon should be held only with government officials, including the issue of Hezbollah.
- The key demand: A call for **an international effort to disarm Hezbollah** and quash its status as an independent military militia, with the possibility of – at most – integrating its remaining capabilities into the LAF, even if the chances of this are low. As to the weapons in Hezbollah’s possession, strategic munitions should be moved out of Lebanon (with an emphasis on long-range precision missiles); any remaining weapons should be transferred to the LAF, which will be designated as the exclusive military force of the Lebanese state. It will be demanded that all other channels enabling Hezbollah’s military buildup be blocked and to this end that an effective international system be set up to prevent the transfer of weapons to any group in Lebanon other than the LAF.
- Additional LAF troops will be deployed in southern Lebanon and will play an active role in preventing the infiltration of Hezbollah or any other force into this region, while ensuring a calm and stable border regime, based on active military cooperation with Israel.
- A stronger and augmented international force will be established to ensure the implementation of these demands, should they be accepted, which will also assist the LAF. This force will operate on the basis of an improved mandate, expanded manpower, and the weaponry and equipment needed to carry out its mission.
- Any agreement will include explicit demands to distance Iran from the Lebanese arena and prevent its involvement in the rehabilitation of Lebanon after the war.

- The Gulf States and the West will provide extensive assistance toward Lebanon's rehabilitation.

Vis-à-vis Syria

- The key demand: A call for **an end to the military presence of Iran** and all other members of the Shi'ite axis in Syria, particularly Lebanese Hezbollah forces and Shi'ite militias.
- The Syrian regime will be required to commit to removing the military forces of Iran and other axis groups from Syrian territory. The Syrian army will be redeployed as the exclusive force in the Syrian Golan on the basis of the separation of forces agreement that existed between Israel and Syria prior to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011.
- Israel will retain freedom of action to defend itself should a threat develop or any violation of the agreement reached with Syria and/or other Shi'ite axis groups occur.
- **The United States and Russia** will be partners to the post-war agreement and will assist in overseeing its implementation in the spirit of the demands/requirements outlined therein. The role of Russia, in particular, is of great importance in leading reform of the regime in Syria in order to limit Iran's influence there.
- The 1994 separation of forces agreement pertaining to the Golan Heights border should be updated and newly ratified.

Vis-à-vis Iran (subject to its direct involvement in hostilities)

- Israel will demand that the international community impose on Iran – on the basis of the IDF's achievements in the war – a long-term agreement regarding conventional weapons (in parallel to the ongoing international efforts to prevent Iran from attaining with nuclear weapons) that will include the following elements:
 - Limitations on Iran's long-term surface-to-surface missile program (ballistic and cruise);
 - Removal of Iran's military forces and its proxies from Syria and Iraq;
 - Cessation of all Iranian involvement in terrorism in the Middle East and in the international arena; and
 - The establishment of an international mechanism to implement and enforce these demands.