Chapter 8

Summary and Recommendations

The underlying premise of this project was the assumption that the threat to Israel from the Iran-led Shi'ite axis is likely to persist in the decade to come. The coronavirus pandemic has not stopped Iran and Hezbollah's longtime efforts to invest in their military buildup: Iran continues to entrench itself in Syria and transfer advanced weapons to Syria and Hezbollah, which in turn continues to move goods and people from Iran into Lebanon, ignoring the risk of infecting the Lebanese population with Covid-19. Despite the damage to Iran and Hezbollah's capabilities and means following both internal and external pressures of late, notably the August 2020 blast at Beirut Port, they remain motivated by a Shi'ite religious ideology and view Israel and the US as the source of evil, and will continue their efforts to harm and weaken Israel. They are also likely to act against American forces in Iraq and eastern Syria in order to accelerate their departure and establish Iranian control over the land bridge that connects Iran, via Iraq and Syria, to Lebanon. Recently, Iran has even launched precedent-setting attacks on vital Israeli infrastructure, such as a cyber attack attributed to it against water facilities in Israel (May 2020) and it vows to respond to incidents attributed in the media to Israel aimed at facilities and infrastructures in Iran.

Certainly, Israel should strive to prevent the next war, and in the current circumstances it appears that Hezbollah and Iran have no interest in advancing a broad military conflict with Israel either. And yet, war may develop as a result of a deterioration following a limited local event and/or a miscalculation by either side. Therefore, Israel should continue to prepare for the possibility of a broad conflict, notwithstanding the assessment that war is not likely to erupt in the near future.

The analysis focused on the worst-case scenario, not another war against Hezbollah in Lebanon, but rather **a dire multi-theater war against the Shi'ite axis**. A war of this nature could develop from two situations – deterioration and escalation following a strike initiated by Israel to foil the buildup of precision arms of Iran and its proxies, primarily in Lebanon but also in Syria and western Iraq, or success by the enemy in surprising Israel with rocket attacks, including the use of precision missiles, before the IDF has prepared properly for war. In both situations Israel will be required to fight **on at least two fronts** simultaneously – the Lebanese and Syrian fronts – and may also have to deal with missile launches from western Iraq.

Add to this the improved weapons now in the hands of Hezbollah (precision missiles, UAVs, surface-to-sea missiles) and other members of the Shi'ite axis, as well as Hezbollah's enhanced ground warfare capabilities (the Radwan Force), which somewhat offset Israel's qualitative edge and are capable of causing serious damage to the Israeli home front, to essential strategic assets, and to the functional continuity of the army and the civilian front. Israel's ability to recover and rehabilitate after the war will also be affected.

A key conclusion that runs throughout this memorandum is that the next war in the north of Israel will be different and much harsher than its predecessors. Therefore, it is imperative that the political echelon deal with all associated issues urgently and that it discuss both Israel's preferred strategy in the face of the developing threats in the northern arena and the steps needed to prepare to meet this challenge. Our recommendation is to define this potential multi-theater war, the Northern War, as the threat reference for the next war in the north, and to advance efforts to address it on two parallel tracks: first, by examining the conditions and steps required to prevent it; and second, fast-tracking preparations for the war, both on the military and civilian fronts.
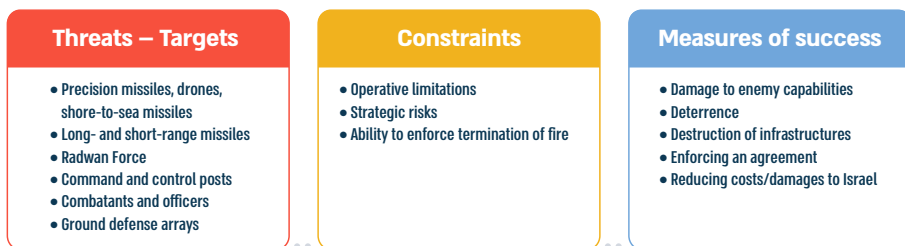
The preferred strategy: The government of Israel should decide immediately what its preferred policy is regarding the developing threat. There are three options:

The campaign between the wars (current policy)	Preventive war (limited)	Full-scale war

4. **Continuation of the current policy** that centers on the ongoing **campaign between the wars**, which lies below the threshold of war; its objective is to disrupt, rebuff, and thwart the attempts by Iran and its proxies to embolden themselves against Israel, and to use deterrence as a primary means of undermining the motivation of the Shi'ite axis to start a war. In this context, Israel needs to demonstrate determination and persistence alongside creativity, though it risks losing control over the scale of escalation, which could result in a broad military conflict. In view of the mutual deterrence that exists between Hezbollah and Israel, due to which Israel refrains from destroying the precision-guided missile project in Lebanon, the likelihood of Hezbollah continuing its military buildup increases, the missile project in particular. Therefore, if it emerges that the existing policy is not sufficiently effective, and Hezbollah succeeds in attaining some 500 long-range precision missiles, and with them the potential to hit and paralyze critical systems and infrastructures in Israel, an initiated military move aimed at neutralizing these capabilities must be considered. Such a move would include numerous possible measures, from limited actions, even in Lebanon, that go beyond the "rules of the game" currently in place between Israel and Hezbollah to a preliminary strike and preemptive offensive (the second option, which now follows).

5. **A limited initiated military operation**, in this case a preemptive offensive against the precision-missile program in Lebanon, runs the risk of deteriorating into a broad war. The timing of the move should be determined according to the severity of the developing threat, based on the following parameters: the accuracy of the missiles (up to five meters); the number and distribution of precision missiles and attack drones; the IDF's ability to intercept the missiles when launched in combined hits of statistical missiles and rockets with precision and cruise missiles; the determination of Iran and Hezbollah to continue building their precision-missile arsenal; and the level of preparedness for a wide-scale war in light of the risk of escalation, since within the boundaries of the mutual deterrence with Hezbollah, the organization intends to respond to any Israeli move that it perceives as exceeding the "rules of the game."

6. **Initiating a broad war** with the aim of dismantling the Shi'ite axis and, more to the point, dealing a severe blow to Hezbollah and Iranian military outposts in Syria. This move would be guided by an assessment

that there is potential, and a reasonable chance, of improving Israel's strategic position, significantly diminishing the scope of the threat and creating long-term stability by tapping Israel's military superiority and national resilience. Initiative and surprise, when it comes to an enemy, have known advantages, and there are those who believe that this tactic should be used as early as possible, taking advantage of circumstances that are far from ideal for Iran and Hezbollah. However, the drawback of an initiated move is the heavy price that it will incur for Israel, the home front in particular. Furthermore, it is likely to make it harder to reach a rapid end to the war. If despite this the government decides to initiate a war, its strategic objective will be to improve Israel's long-term security-strategic situation.

Achieving the objectives of the campaign will require the dismantling of the enemy's operational systems by wrecking launch systems and secret warehouses housing precision missiles (long and short range, ballistic and cruise), UAVs and surface-to-sea missiles; destroying state infrastructures that support launch capabilities; neutralizing the Radwan Force – indeed, paralyzing it inside Lebanon before it manages to send squads to infiltrate Israeli territory (the same goes for Shi'ite militias operating in the Syrian Golan Heights), while conducting targeted interceptions of commanders and hitting Radwan Force combatants; paralyzing command and control systems; destroying symbols of Hezbollah's power in Lebanon and the Assad regime's in Syria; and destroying storage infrastructures and critical systems that support the enemy's war effort.

Threats – Targets	Constraints	Measures of success
• Precision missiles, drones, shore-to-sea missiles • Long- and short-range missiles • Radwan Force • Command and control posts • Combatants and officers • Ground defense arrays	• Operative limitations • Strategic risks • Ability to enforce termination of fire	• Damage to enemy capabilities • Deterrence • Destruction of infrastructures • Enforcing an agreement • Reducing costs/damages to Israel

The main military challenge is to ensure conditions for **victory:** this is achieved through control over the length of the war, control of the borders of the battlefield, and control over the intensity of the war. Another significant challenge is to identify, while the war is underway, the optimal exit point at

which Israel can translate its military gains into diplomatic achievements and to devise a strategic reality that is better than that which prevailed before the war. One of the elements of victory is the ability to impose on the enemy Israel's conditions for an end to hostilities (ceasefire, armistice, a break in fighting) and for stability and a post-war armistice mechanism. To achieve this, Israel must devastate most of the enemy's quality forces (precision and strategic missiles, unique capabilities) and cause heavy damage throughout its territory, to the extent that any recovery will be long and difficult. Overall in a war, it is essential that the enemy suffers far greater damage than Israel, that Israel maintain the functional continuity of vital systems on the home front, that the recovery of the economy and society be rapid, and all this without enabling the enemy to present its own image of victory. At the same time, Israel must avoid problematic situations, such as sinking into the Lebanese quagmire following a lengthy IDF stay in Lebanon, and must quickly prepare for the next war, drawing on lessons learned in the past.

Deterrence/Decisive outcome	Constraints	Measures of success
• Control over the duration and boundaries of the war, its theaters, and level of intensity • Inflicting far greater destruction on the enemy than that suffered by Israel • Inflicting irreversible damage • Lessons for the next campaign	• Ability to identify and intercept precision missiles • Functional continuity • Ability to withstand attacks and maintain national resilience • Avoiding sinking in the Lebanese quagmire • Preventing achievements by the enemy • Shaping a "victory image" • Evolution of future threats	• Preventing the enemy's military buildup • Israeli preparedness to prevent buildup and violations of agreements • International guarantees • Deterrence of the enemy

If Israel decides not to take the initiative for the time being, out of a desire to reduce both short- and medium-term risks, the IDF would best use this time to focus on strengthening its rocket- and missile-interception capabilities, its aerial munitions, and its ability to disrupt the enemy's capabilities (by kinetic and cybernetic means), while at the same time readying for two possible scenarios: an Israeli initiative, due to escalation, to carry out a preemptive strike to neutralize the enemy's precision capabilities, or being surprised by the enemy, which could attack Israel with ballistic and cruise missiles combined with UAVs, and could attempt a ground attack to penetrate into northern Israel from several arenas in parallel – namely, the worst-case scenario, as presented in this memorandum.

■ KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Invest efforts to prevent and distance the war**

2. **Make necessary adjustments to the IDF's force buildup**

3. **Formulate entrance and exit strategies**

4. **Ensure readiness of the civilian home front**

5. **Prepare for a preemptive strike/preventive war**

6. **Formulate strategy in the national security echelon**

7. **Prepare a cognitive warfare strategy**

Put simply, **Israel must anticipate and prepare for potential military, economic, and political challenges** and address the investment of resources needed to be ready for an appropriate response in the following areas:

In the military field

The threats posed in the Northern War scenario require that Israel's national security toolbox include a combination of accurate attack and rapid and deep ground maneuvering capabilities on several fronts simultaneously, along with the dual capacity for defense on the military front and in the civilian arena. In this context, the following efforts are required: it should invest in identifying targets and developing capabilities to operate multidimensional fire both offensively and defensively, in the air and on the ground. Similarly, efforts should also be made to reinforce the ground forces in order to undertake a defensive battle in a limited campaign and/or an offensive operation deep inside enemy territory, and to **prepare for a ground operation** that may be required to reach a decisive resolution of the campaign.

Due to the known constraints of the defense budget, it is important that priorities for the force buildup be set. We recommend focusing on reinforcing the IDF's lethal capabilities and precision capabilities; augmenting air defenses

and in particular increasing the stockpile of interceptors (laser capabilities); developing use of cyber, use of robotics, and further strengthening Israel's technology-based superiority. This will require, simultaneously, development of IDF firepower capabilities on the ground and the Unmanned Ground Combat Vehicle (UGVC) project with firepower capabilities, as well as ground attack robots.

With regard to **operative plans**: The actual formulation of plans falls under the purview of the IDF and thus we did not address this in detail; however, we do offer a few insights on the subject:

- In addition to plans for an offensive, there is a need for **defensive plans** along the close operations area, as Hezbollah is set on launching a ground offensive to create a precedent of capturing a community or military outpost inside Israel (even if limited). This is in spite of the IDF's achievements in exposing Hezbollah cross-border tunnels and in building a security barrier along the border with Lebanon.

- The IDF must include in its calculations the need to **shorten the campaign** in view of the ongoing threat to the home front. To that end, it should aim for significant and surprising achievements at the outset of the war, to facilitate a rapid termination to the fighting. Therefore, an operational plan for a **preemptive strike** and a **preemptive offensive** should be drafted, as emphasized in this memorandum.

- The issue of the **ground maneuver** needs to be discussed. The IDF may have to carry out a ground operation both for defensive and offensive purposes. The ground maneuver is a defensive tool to prevent the infiltration of enemy troops into Israeli territory and also to reduce the threat to the home front, and an offensive tool to maximize achievements – crush the enemy's military strength and capabilities, so that it will require prolonged rehabilitation – and to end the war. Therefore, this option must be ready for execution, though at the same time it should not be treated as an inevitable possibility; rather, its implementation should be regularly reviewed in line with circumstances. In light of the above, our recommendation is to prepare for a **short, limited, and powerful maneuver** that will achieve the desired results without prolonging the fighting. Similarly, the possibility of a ground operation on more than one front needs to be taken into account. As noted, a prolonged stay

in enemy territory should be avoided so as not to sink in the Lebanese quagmire, and we suggest using ground achievements as a "bargaining chip" in the framework of a post-war agreement. As to the timing of the operation, there are two main options: one is a swift operation near the start of the campaign to reach the centers of gravity that are critical points for Hezbollah to use its capabilities; the second is a maneuver towards the end of the fighting to demonstrate victory. In any case, it seems that a ground maneuver, even if short, will take around two weeks, and this will have an impact on the duration of the war.

Preparation of the civilian front: Special efforts must be made to prepare the public for war and to develop resilience and functional continuity of the home front. Furthermore, there is a need for a radical reform of the organizational dimension. In this context and as a lesson from the handling of the coronavirus crisis, we recommend that a designated body be established at the national level to make decisions, oversee the handling of urgent and critical civilian issues, including activities between the various relevant civilian entities, to ensure that the needs of the civilian population are met during the war.

On the political front

The issue must be raised with the relevant powers, especially the United States, Israel's key ally, and Russia, with which Israel has had an ongoing dialogue in recent years, to warn of the risk of a wide-scale war and to establish channels of communication and coordination during the war and in its aftermath. Prior coordination is needed with the US in particular to ensure military assistance during the course of the war, as well as diplomatic support and intervention when the need arises. In the case of Russia, Israel should formulate understandings to neutralize Russian involvement during the war and to limit its sway in the drafting of a post-war agreement regarding clauses that problematic for Israel.

Termination of the war: One of the conclusions reached in this study is that a short campaign is preferable for Israel, because of the rocket fire that can be expected during the period of fighting and the anticipated damage to the home front. On the other hand, the war scenario suggests that Israel will find it difficult to bring about an end to the war at a time and in the circumstances it would like. Therefore, Israel should strive to attain an

external demand for an end to the hostilities by exacting a heavy price (striking infrastructures) from Lebanon, and Syria too – heavy enough to result in international pressure for an immediate end to the war. It is our recommendation that Israel avoid being drawn into a campaign that will require prolonged deployment in enemy territory and will cause Israel to get caught up in the Lebanese quagmire.

In discussing the end of the war, it is essential that Israel demand that **stability mechanisms** be formulated to prevent further buildup of offensive capabilities by Hezbollah, Iran, and its proxies right after the war, and to ensure that the Lebanese and Syrian states are responsible for stability, while also establishing rules of the game and a border regime that will include international oversight and enforcement mechanisms, and coordination and liaison mechanisms with the participation of UN forces. An agreement should include elements that enable leverage of Israel's military achievements, translating them into diplomatic achievements – long-term stability and calm after the war. It is worth trying to reach an agreement with the Lebanese government, and to strive for an improved Security Council resolution that will include the ability to enforce the dismantling of Hezbollah as an independent militia, the blocking of all arms routes from Iran to Syria and Lebanon, and the removal of Iran's military presence, and that of its proxies, from Lebanon and Syria.

The cognitive effort

Israel should formulate ahead of time a strategy in the cognitive field for various target audiences: the Israeli public, Hezbollah and the other members of the Shi'ite axis, the Lebanese system and public, and regional and international circles. A distinction should be made between messages disseminated prior to a war and during it. Moreover, there is a difference between overt and covert (and kinetic) messages. A clear and unequivocal victory image must be presented, since it is likely that the enemy will present its own picture of victory that does not necessarily have any basis in reality.

Finally, though this memorandum focuses on the need for comprehensive preparation ahead of the next war in the north, it is equally important to continue to address the question: **Is a broad war in the north really inevitable?** This discussion is critical in view of the complexity of the situation and the terribly high price that a war will exact from all parties involved. While

Israel cannot prevent a war that is forced upon it, before deciding on taking the initiative itself, it is incumbent upon the decision-making echelons to exhaust all means to avoid combat – and even to try and lead a diplomatic effort, overt or covert, to prevent the eruption of hostilities.