

# The Second Lebanon War: Lessons on the Strategic Level

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The following article touches on seven points that are conclusions of sorts from three central military episodes of recent years: Operation Defensive Shield in the West Bank in April 2002, the Second Lebanon War, and Operation Cast Lead. A comparison of these events allows us to formulate general conclusions relevant to similar events in the future. Six of the issues refer primarily to the past and the present, but have ramifications for the future. The seventh is an attempt to assess what would happen should a Third Lebanon War break out, and from Israel's perspective, what the right response would be.

The first issue is linked to the type of war we experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in our region – though elsewhere too, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan. In these contemporary wars there is a large inherent gap between expectations and capabilities. By “expectations” I mean the expectations of the political echelon, the media, and the public, and by “capabilities” I refer to the capabilities of the operational echelon to meet these expectations.

This gap is generally expressed in four ways. The first is the length of the battle. There is a logical assumption that says that because we are so much stronger than the other side, the battle has to be short. If we examine different examples from our history, such as the war of 1967, we are liable to ask: if in six days we managed to defeat so many Arab armies, why should it be so complicated to succeed quickly against an enemy so much weaker than we are in terms of conventional force.

The second element has to do with the number of casualties. If we are stronger and have more advanced technology than the enemy, then

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we should have fewer casualties because it would seem, at least on the surface, to be possible to conduct most operations from afar, using precision weapons and without endangering our troops. Therefore, there is the expectation of a sort of deluxe war in which we inflict heavy casualties but suffer few ourselves.

The third expectation concerns damage to civilian bystanders. We are fighting the bad guys – in this case Hizbollah, at other times Hamas – and therefore it is acceptable to kill them, but we are categorically unwilling to tolerate a situation in which we see pictures of dead women and children on TV. Therefore, the third expectation is: hurt the bad guys, but don't hurt those we don't have to.

The fourth point has to do with the expectation of victory. If this is a war, then – just like in a sports event – we want to see a victory; we expect the other side to surrender without preconditions or we expect the defeat to be so obvious that the answer to the question “who won” will be indisputably self-evident.

These four expectations are quite natural when undertaking a conventional situation assessment in which forces are compared in military terms alone. However, wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are usually not between states but between states and organizations. Most of the events take place within civilian populations, and this greatly limits the state in applying force with its utmost capability. Therefore, it is very difficult to meet the expectations of public opinion. In addition, the more the campaign is understood as a war of choice, the more we initiate it, and the more the political echelon aims to recruit support for its decision to act, so the threshold is raised for a suitable outcome, as expected by the public. The higher the expectations are at the beginning, the greater the gap between what we thought would happen and the reality afterwards.

This gap is natural and has been experienced by others. Nonetheless, it seems that Israel is especially characterized by the fragility of its systems, so that cracks appear in them very easily the moment we perceive the gaps between promises and reality. One of the problems of the Second Lebanon War was that it relatively quickly created fairly dangerous gaps in three dimensions: the first was within the army, between the different ranks. The war wasn't even over when the finger pointing began. This is very problematic for the IDF given its particular structure, especially the function of the reserves. The second gap was between the military

and the civilians. Given that in a war of this sort the home front is also under fire, a gap emerged between the impressive successes presented by the IDF, especially precision air strikes by the air force, and the fact that tens of thousands of citizens of the State of Israel were forced to stay in their bomb shelters for weeks at a time. This gap was tantamount to dissonance that caused pervasive dissatisfaction. The third gap, one that usually emerges sooner than the others, is the tension between the political echelon and the military, a tension we witnessed not only in this war but also in the Yom Kippur War in 1973 and the First Lebanon War in 1982.

In short, the first point we have to be aware of is the gap that exists between expectations and capabilities. Because this gap surfaces very easily, it is necessary to be careful, i.e., not to create expectations that exceed what we are capable of meeting, because this can backfire in a way that causes a great deal of damage without any relationship to the objective outcome of the war.

The second issue concerns the importance of defining goals. A military plan usually contains three sentences that form the core of every command and military undertaking. One is the goal, the second is the mission, and the third is the method. The goal is the answer to the question of what we want to accomplish, the purpose, why we are doing what we are doing; the mission answers the question of what we have to do in order to attain the goal; and the method is the answer to the question of how we have to carry out the mission. In military courses, students are graded on the level of cohesiveness or consistency between these three elements of goal, mission, and method. Usually when discussing tactical levels, even high tactical levels, it is not overly difficult to create a cohesive whole out of goal, mission, and method.

By contrast, it is very difficult to create this cohesiveness at the strategic level. When the goal is essentially political, which then somehow has to “match” a mission that spells out for the army what needs to be done and the method for doing it, the process of writing the operation order becomes more complex and less obvious. When matters are not clear enough or are not discussed thoroughly enough, as was the case in the Second Lebanon War (and to a certain extent also in Operation Cast Lead), problems will arise. When the starting point is not clear

to the upper echelons, it is very difficult to translate the goal into clear commands to the lower ranks.

If we go back to the meeting of the government on July 12, 2006, we can say that the government decided to go to war but did not carry out the requisite analysis with regard to the goals of the war, the chances for attaining them, and the connection between them and the missions delegated to the army. The correct way would have been the following: first, a short report about the event. (Usually a lot of time is wasted on a description of what happened, although most of the details have already been published by the media or are irrelevant to the political echelon. This is also the time when long-winded, unnecessary intelligence reports are presented.) In any case, after the short report, the government should have dealt with the real issue, at whose center lay the question: what is our goal. In this case, the goal could have been one of two (or more possibilities), and therefore it was important to clarify and decide what we really wanted to achieve.

The first possibility could have been a powerful retaliatory operation in Lebanon, and to this end, air force operations for two or three days. The cost to Hizbollah would at the initial stage have been steep, because on the first day high quality targets were exposed. An aggressive attack by the air force would also have caused some damage and destruction to Lebanon itself, Hizbollah's host. Two days after such an action, the whole world, including Hizbollah, would presumably have begged for a ceasefire – this is in fact what happened – and we would have agreed. True, such an operation would not have returned the captives and would not have sufficed to destroy Hizbollah, but it would have restored Israel's deterrence factor because of the high cost paid by the other side. Such an action would also have imposed new rules of the game and would have decreased the chances of such events recurring in the future. The goal of such an action would have been limited, and could have been defined as "restoring deterrence." Thus it is while the result would presumably have been limited, the cost we would have incurred would have been low, as the risk factor was low. That summarizes the first of the possible approaches.

The second possible approach argues that the problem was not the kidnapping itself but the very existence of Hizbollah as a strong, hostile, independent military organization, positioned along our northern border

and capable of harming the citizens of the state at any time. Therefore, the goal would have been more far reaching: to cause significant damage to Hizbollah's capabilities, at least in the south. Were this the goal, then we would have launched a very different type of operation, i.e., from day one, it would already have been necessary to call up three or four reserves divisions and carry out an operation that would last four to six weeks – not two days – and would consist primarily of a fairly extensive ground maneuver, e.g., as far as the Litani River. In this case, the goal would have been much broader and the achievement could have been much more significant, but the cost and the risk would naturally have been greater. In addition to these two possibilities, one may list two other goals or two different approaches that would translate into other types of military action; these lie beyond the scope of this analysis.

The focus of the discussion in the government on July 12 should have been the question of what we want to achieve: do we suffice ourselves with restoring our deterrence, or do we also want to slash Hizbollah's military capabilities. In practice, what emerged was, "Let's start by attacking Lebanon and see what happens." If this was the outcome of the discussion, there is no doubt that the goal was unclear. When it is unclear at the strategic level, it is very hard to translate it into operational objectives, from the level of the chief of staff down to the command echelon and from there to the division level, because the key sentence in every operation order, which is supposed to be the clearest – "what do we want to achieve" – was not straightforward. This is the locus of one of the central failures of the campaign in Lebanon.

Operation Cast Lead also lacked an optimal definition of goals. When the operation began and when the first strike by the air force was carried out – a strike that was very successful in and of itself – it was still unclear what it was we wanted to achieve. The definition given by the political echelon was a definition along the lines of "creating better security conditions." This is a vague formulation, which may be rephrased more simply as "we want things to be better." This is not a definition of goals that lends itself to translation into concrete military terms.

It was only three days after the beginning of Operation Cast Lead that a real discussion began at the political echelon and between the political echelon and the senior military echelon about what we wanted to achieve. Here three possible goals presented themselves: one, we want

to create deterrence for the future. Were this the goal, it would have been a fairly modest aim and there would have been no need to carry out a large action, certainly not a large ground maneuver, in order to attain it. There would simply have been no reason to continue the action. In the most extreme scenario, it might have been enough to start and complete the operation with the same first strike by the air force, since it seems that deterrence was achieved as early as that.

A second possible goal would have been to strike a severe blow to Hamas' military capabilities, i.e., to damage all its military capabilities, launchers, tunnels, and most of its fighters – not just to deter Hamas but also to make sure that the organization would not undertake any military operation against us for a long time to come. There were those who favored a third, even more ambitious option: toppling the Hamas government. Were this the goal, it would have been necessary to conquer all of the Gaza Strip in order to create a new reality wherein Hamas would be unable to govern.

What was the goal when Operation Cast Lead was embarked upon? It was not defined. The discussions about the goal only started three or four days into the operation, and continued for at least ten days, without any direct relationship to what was happening on the ground. Defense Minister Ehud Barak often states, "First think, then act." In this case, "first think, then act" means that there should have been a very clear definition of the goal before embarking on the operation.

Naturally, the government must appeal to the public. It is only proper that the government decision presented to the public be formulated in general terms and that its objective be to justify the very existence of the operation. Yet it is a mistake to assume that the explanation of the decision for public consumption would suffice for the army to translate it into a concrete battle plan. Thus it is necessary to distinguish between the government's announcement to the public and the definition of the goals of the operation (the war) as given to the army. It is imperative that there be no contradiction between them, but the level of detail must be different.

Thus both in the Second Lebanon War and in Operation Cast Lead the goals were unclear. In contrast, in Operation Defensive Shield (2002) there was a very pointed discussion about the goal of the operation. At least in this case, the army insisted that the political echelon discuss the

question of what we want to achieve. The straw that broke the camel's back, impelling Israel to embark on the operation, was Hamas' terrorist attack on the Park Hotel on the night of the Passover seder in April 2002. Consequently there were those who called for an uncompromising, all out declaration of war against Hamas. The chief of staff thought it would be impossible to fight Hamas while ignoring the presence of the Palestinian Authority and without hurting it or without undertaking actions that might cause it to collapse. As a result, not only did the question of the goal become more pointed but with it the question of whom were we fighting. The army pushed for a decision to wage a real war – though not a comprehensive one – also against the PA, including by means of damaging everything that may have served it as symbols: from the Muqata (Arafat's presidential compound in Ramallah) to the refugee camps. It is also important to note that the discussion about the goals occurred – appropriately so – at the beginning of Operation Defensive Shield and not several days or weeks afterwards.

The third issue is the question of how the political echelon and the military conduct their dialogue during a battle of this kind. Clearly, the dialogue must start before embarking on the action. In this context, it is important to stress an often overlooked point, namely, the political echelon's understanding of the army's capabilities. There is an exaggerated tendency on the part of the upper ranks of the political leadership, in particular those who are privy to intelligence reports, to focus on understanding the adversary. At times it seems that when a prime minister or a defense minister reads raw intelligence data he or she suddenly has a blazing revelation or tremendous insight. The importance of intelligence material is rather limited, if it exists at all, and is often liable to be downright harmful. It is much more important that the leadership know its army's capabilities, and if you prefer to put this in military terms: to know the ratios of forces, what we can do, and what they can do.

When this point is insufficiently addressed, not just by the government but by all decision makers in the executive branches – in the government and the cabinet – the result is a large gap not only between expectations and performance, but also between an understanding of what is achievable and what is not. Many have spoken about this phenomenon with regard to the Yom Kippur War, but not with regard

to the Second Lebanon War. In this context, a critical factor that was not considered when the government authorized the action was the army's level of preparedness.

The issue of the army's preparedness is directly linked to the IDF's budget. When the army formulated its multi-year situation assessment in 2003, it concluded that in order to provide a reasonable response to the threats faced by the State of Israel it needed a certain amount of money. The multi-year plan, based on this figure, was presented to the government and approved in principle. Between 2003 and 2006, the security budget was cut by 1-2 billion NIS a year compared with the sum determined by the plan. Incidentally, the height of the cuts came in May 2006, two months before the war, when I believe a sum of 1.5 billion NIS was cut from the army's budget.

In light of these budgetary constraints, the army was forced to decide where to invest more resources and where to invest fewer. Of all the topics examined, the army decided – and in my opinion, with a certain amount of justification – that the area worthy of receiving fewer resources was the level of preparedness. “Level of preparedness” means the scope of training, the level of inventory (of ammunition and spare parts), and technical fitness or competence. Why was this decision made over another? The answer is on the one hand the drive not to spare anything in fighting Palestinian terrorism, and on the other hand, the geo-strategic reality of that point in time in the Middle East. This included the American presence in Iraq and the understanding that the war between us and our neighbors could happen in only one of two situations: one – the occurrence of an essential strategic change, which it was safe to assume we would notice so that we would have a “strategic alert” of several months in which to improve our level of preparedness, and the other – were we to decide to embark on a previously planned action, in which case we would certainly have enough time to bring our competence up to snuff.

Whether or not the government understood this situation when it met on the fateful day of July 12, 2006, its decision to go war surprised itself and surprised the army. By the way, in the past a similar process occurred, but then the decision went the other way. That was in the summer of 1981, when the government made a strategic decision removed from the tactical level. At the tactical level, the government decided not to put its

decision into practice right away but to wait for the right opportunity. In the meantime, for an entire year, from the summer of 1981 until the summer of 1982, the army prepared and trained rigorously for battle. At the time, I was a battalion commander, and I can testify to the rigor of the exercises, models, and concrete training carried out before the operation. In clear contrast from 1981, the government decided on July 12, 2006 that the IDF would immediately embark on an operation without examining the possibility of distinguishing between the strategic decision (to embark on an extensive operation against Hizbollah) and the tactical one (when to do so).

Another example that demonstrates the nature of the dialogue that prevailed in the Second Lebanon War between the political echelon and the military was the prime minister's answer, some two or three weeks after the beginning of the war, to the question, "Why did you not authorize the army to conduct a ground maneuver?" Ehud Olmert's response was: "I didn't authorize? The army didn't present me with a plan. There is no action the army presented to me that I did not authorize." A strange phenomenon emerges here, whereby the dialogue between the political leadership and the army is such that the encounter between them happens only when the army needs authorization for a different or additional action than what is already authorized. In wars of the kind we are dealing with, in which almost every military action is likely to have political ramifications and every political action is likely to limit or expand the military's scope of operation, it is impossible to conduct a campaign without a real dialogue. A real dialogue means that once every two or three days a limited forum composed of the prime minister, the minister of defense, the minister of foreign affairs, the chief of staff, and another four or five people meets in order to coordinate their views of the situation and afterwards decide on what action to take.

Discussions of this sort did not take place during the Second Lebanon War, or certainly not in the way described here. Therefore, gaps emerged between the military and political echelon in terms of their respective understandings of reality and the decisions made. A short time after Operation Defensive Shield, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Shimon Peres said before a small forum of political and military leaders: "Eighty percent of the topics we touch on are not purely political or military issues. They have elements of both, and therefore we have no choice but

to meet frequently and make sure that we understand reality the same way.” In my opinion, this statement is true, yet this coordination was lacking in the Second Lebanon War.

An exaggeration in the opposite direction took place during Operation Cast Lead. As the result of the trauma whereby the political echelon was seemingly insufficiently involved, a plethora of forums was created; in the end, these did not allow the military to conduct the war properly. During Operation Cast Lead, the chief of staff’s daily schedule included a 4:30 P.M. situation assessment, a 6:00 P.M. meeting with the minister of defense, and an 8:00-10:00 P.M. meeting with the prime minister. The number of participants was not limited to six to eight people, but typically featured more than twenty. Usually, information transmitted in such forums is identical. This whole ritual would end in the wee hours of the night, though most of the information was not relevant to the prime minister, minister of defense, or even the chief of staff. Thus in my opinion, most of the day to day issues could have been dealt with at the level of the head of the IDF Operations Division. The net result was the existence of many forums, creating a workload that not only failed to contribute anything to the conduct of the campaign but also interfered with the operational echelons’ ability to carry out their jobs. In this context, there is no doubt that it is necessary to find a proper balance.

A fourth essential issue concerns warfare in the urban landscape and the degree of our willingness to accept the rules of the game the enemy tries to impose on us. One of the most common phenomena of asymmetrical warfare, i.e., a war between a state and a sub-state entity such as Hamas or Hizbollah, is the activity within urban areas and among civilian populations, on the basis of the understanding that a densely populated environment – a Lebanese village, a refugee camp or a Gaza neighborhood – makes it harder for the IDF to fight and thus presents the organization with many advantages. Moreover, because there is a large civilian population in the vicinity of the fighting, the greater the force the army uses, the more civilian casualties there will be and with that, greater external pressure to stop the action.

This understanding on the part of the terrorist organizations is correct up to a point, and depends primarily on our willingness to play by the rules of the game laid down by the other side or conversely, on our willingness to assume a military, political-propaganda risk and decide to

fight using the requisite level of aggression within those built-up areas. Our experience with all three events – Operation Defensive Shield, the Second Lebanon War, and Operation Cast Lead – teaches us that we are capable of conducting intensive fighting within urban areas. From our perspective, this kind of warfare contains two possible benefits. The first is attaining the military achievement we wanted, such as what happened in Operation Defensive Shield and also, to a very great extent, in Operation Cast Lead; and the second is linked to the population's support of the terrorist organization. Eventually, once the dust has settled, the great damage to life and property caused by fighting in urban areas makes the local population, whether in Lebanon or in the territories, start asking the terrorist organizations that set up shop in their midst some tough questions. These questions are a millstone around the necks of Hizbollah and Hamas, and greatly affect the level of these organizations' willingness to renew the fire against Israel. Fighting in populated areas was conducted properly in Operation Defensive Shield and Operation Cast Lead, but with a great deal of hesitancy in the Second Lebanon War, thereby becoming one of the problems of that war.

The fifth issue concerns the important question of international legitimacy. It is clear that the army's scope of action is affected not only by military capabilities but also by what is said and done in the UN, the United States, the EU, and elsewhere. At the same time, it should also be remembered that the effect of public opinion and the international arena is usually short lived. As part of our military campaign, we must be capable of tolerating international pressure and even anger, including from close friends such as the United States, not just because of the need to attain the goal for which we undertook the operation to begin with, but also because international legitimacy is fluid, and when you present successes there is a tendency, at least among friendly nations, to forgive and forget times of disagreement. As for the international media, after a short period of time they are back covering other topics.

So, for example, when Operation Defensive Shield began and our forces entered Palestinian towns in massive numbers, the question arose whether the Palestinian Authority would be able to continue functioning. This generated tremendous pressure from the United States, and I can testify firsthand to furious phone calls from Condoleezza Rice, then the head of the National Security Council, when she demanded that

the IDF withdraw from Palestinian towns within 48 hours. Afterwards, she displayed willingness to discuss a longer time frame, and finally agreements were reached with regard to specific locations eligible for operations or off limits. Israel's stance was that we embarked on the operation after living for years in an impossible situation, and we needed at least several weeks to attain the desired goal. In this we demonstrated determination, and in the end international pressure waned. To my mind, during the Second Lebanon War our decision makers were beset by exaggerated concerns bordering on anxiety regarding what was said around the world, and the army was not given enough time to do what we, at a certain point, understood needed doing.

This leads us to the sixth issue, the relationship between the outcome of a military action and the political achievement. The connection between the two differs from what we saw in the past. In World War II, for example, one side achieved a victory over the other side with no conditions, and accordingly was also in a position to dictate the political outcome, making it possible to describe what happened as an "unconditional surrender." This was likewise true of World War I and many other wars. In our region too, the nature of the military achievement – e.g., in the Yom Kippur War – to a large extent dictated the scope of the political accomplishment. Today the relationship between the military achievement and the political one is looser; the two may in fact differ greatly. In other words, there is no necessary link between the measure of success on the battlefield and the outcome of the political talks or the extent of one's ability to conclude the operation in the desired fashion.

Therefore, when it is clear that a campaign of this type is approaching, the political process must begin before the military one is launched. This did not occur in advance of the Second Lebanon War, even when it was clear that a confrontation with Hizbollah was only a matter of time. We did not present the Americans ahead of time with what was likely to happen. I am not referring to diplomatic manipulations here, rather a simple statement describing the factual situation, especially that once every few weeks or so Hizbollah carried out terrorist attacks along our northern border; that we could tolerate this as long as loss of life and damages to property were minimal; that a time might come when it would be impossible for us to tolerate it any longer and we would be forced to act in Lebanon; and when that happened, we would act in such a manner as to

damage not only Hizbollah but other elements as well in Lebanon. From our perspective, this is what ought to have been said to the Americans: that it was not a question of “if,” rather a question of “when.” In so doing, it would have been possible to coordinate the political conclusion with the Americans ahead of time, even before the outbreak of the war and without any direct correlation to its operational moves.

In April 2006, when newly elected Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was about to travel to the United States for his first official visit, a discussion was held about the topics to raise with the Americans. The Iranian issue and the Palestinian issue were obvious. There were those who said that this was an opportunity to present the reality of the Israeli-Lebanese border to the United States, just as I outlined above. Olmert felt that the issue was not a “burning” one and therefore need not be raised. The problem is that when a war breaks out it is already too late to enter into the sort of political discussions that can be effective earlier on.

In this sense Operation Cast Lead was a decided improvement over the Second Lebanon War, because not only were the army and the Israeli public prepared ahead of time, but so was the international community. This was clearly exemplified by the prime minister’s public and diplomatic statements that he was willing to give the residents of the Gaza Strip one more opportunity to stop the Qassam fire; otherwise we would have no choice but to put an end to the fire ourselves. The political consequences of this preparation were impressive, for the first time impelling all important European heads of state to fall in line with Israel a short time after the war began. Precisely because of this, it is important that the political initiative start before rather than after the military campaign.

The last essential issue relates to the question of what lies ahead. One may provocatively say that should the Third Lebanon War break out in the near future its outcomes would not be very different from those of the Second Lebanon War. True, impressive improvements have been made in the army’s preparedness. Many lessons have been learned and internalized, and very successful activity has also taken place in preparing the home front. One may assume that in everything concerning communication between the political echelon and the military, changes have been made that will make us more prepared and better suited to handle the next battle.

Nonetheless, the results of a war depend not just on one side but also on the other. When we examine Hizbollah over the past three years we see that that the organization too has improved. The number of rockets at its disposal has grown and exceeds its arsenal on the eve of the Second Lebanon War. More importantly, the range of its rockets has grown and their efficiency has increased. If in the Second Lebanon War a quick ground maneuver to the Litani line would have neutralized most of the launching areas, the new reality is that a similar move in the Third Lebanon War would not suffice. Moreover, Hizbollah has improved in other fields as well, including its deployment in urban areas and its expansion in underground complexes, giving it clear tactical advantages over its capabilities of the summer of 2006. Generally speaking, one may say that tactically, the advantages and improvements on both sides since 2006 more or less offset one another, and therefore the outcome of the next confrontation will be similar. In other words, the army may be able to cause more damage to Hizbollah, but Hizbollah will also be able to cause more damage to Israel, especially to its civilian front.

Nonetheless, in my understanding there is one element that is likely to change the outcome of the next battle fundamentally, and may even prevent its outbreak to begin with. This element has to do with defining the enemy. This definition is no less important than the definition of the goal. In Operation Defensive Shield, the question of the enemy's identify arose in full force; the debate that raged was complex and pointed. While politically speaking the Labor Party could not accept the definition of the Palestinian Authority as the enemy, from the moment the decision was made, the military scope of operations widened and presented a broader field than would have been possible had the enemy been defined only as Hamas, as it would have been impossible to damage the symbols, institutions, forces, or anything belonging to the PA.

In the Second Lebanon War, Hizbollah was defined as the enemy. The world, of course, accepted this formulation without question. By contrast, the Lebanese population, the Lebanese state, and the Lebanese government were defined as "the good guys." Therefore, it was forbidden to harm them. However, it is impossible to achieve victory over a guerilla organization such as Hizbollah under the following three conditions: one, the organization is on one side of the border and we are on the other; two, the organization receives full protection from the state in which it

operates, in our case Lebanon, where Hizbollah is an inseparable part of the political system; and three, that state's immunity protects it from any military response on our part. When these three conditions prevail, the guerilla organization cannot be defeated. In my opinion, this is precisely the locus of the biggest mistake made in the Second Lebanon War – defining the enemy narrowly and in nonrealistic terms.

The right thing to do now, especially in light of what has been said regarding the political campaign that must be conducted before the military battle, is to explain to the world, to Lebanon's friends – France, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and any other relevant party – that the next time Israel is forced into combat against Hizbollah, the Republic of Lebanon will no longer enjoy any immunity. It must be clear from our point of view that anything that serves Hizbollah, including the infrastructures of the state, is a legitimate target for attack. The war will not be between Israel and Hizbollah, but between Israel and Lebanon.

Maintaining the unity of Lebanon is a common interest of the Arabs, including Syrian and Iran, and the West. On the basis of this common interest it is possible to conduct a dialogue with friendly parties and transmit a message to the Lebanese government that the next war will not be limited to a confrontation against Hizbollah alone but will bring about the destruction of the Lebanese state. Only a political statement of this sort, made consistently over an extended period of time, will ensure that the war is postponed, or if it nonetheless erupts, that its outcome is radically different from the outcome of the Second Lebanon War.

Should we attempt to identify the most effective operation carried out by the IDF, it would not be the impressive strikes against rockets, rather the decision to attack the Dahiya quarter in Beirut with massive force. To this day Hizbollah is still feeling the significant aftershocks of that action. Hizbollah leaders too understand that there is a limit to the amount of destruction they can inflict on Lebanon's Shiites and the country's infrastructures without having to provide a reasonable explanation for why it is all necessary. If a war does break out, it is in Israel's clear interest to position itself against a state entity that can be deterred rather than against an organization that enjoys political protection.

This relates to an advantage we enjoyed in Operation Cast Lead given Hamas' takeover of Gaza. To a large extent, Hamas has become a state entity. Before it seized power and it fired Qassams at Israel, the

Palestinian Authority was the official governing body, and we were forced to fight Hamas with one hand tied behind our backs because we could not damage government infrastructures in Gaza. In 2007, once Hamas became the governing party in the Gaza Strip, it also became responsible for what happens within its territory. In other words, we have a state entity before us, one that can be threatened and harmed, and as we have seen since the conclusion of the operation, can also be deterred.