Preface

The Second Lebanon War broke out on July 12, 2006, without either Israel or Hezbollah intending this escalation. However, the abduction of IDF soldiers that day by a Hezbollah cell created a new reality in the north that prompted Israel to embark on a military operation, which ultimately became a war. The course of the war and its outcomes strongly affected subsequent internal and external Israeli, Lebanese, and regional processes.

Hindsight provides an opportunity to examine the war and its ramifications from a broader and more balanced perspective than is possible in the heat of the moment. Studying the past and learning its lessons allow a better understanding of the subsequent decade, shed light on the current state of Israel's northern sector, and contribute to an assessment of possible future scenarios.

For Israel, the Second Lebanon War was a milestone in several ways. It was the first war in which Israel was exposed to the massive use of high trajectory fire directed at its civilian population. The method, which Hamas adopted in Israel's three confrontations in the Gaza Strip since late 2008, forced the IDF to control the high trajectory fire and the consequent damage to the military and civilian front, making that goal a key component of its efforts. The central role played by the civilian front in the fighting brought some new critical issues to the fore, with the protection of national infrastructures, the level of national resilience, and the functional continuity of critical systems and the Israeli economy as a whole understood to be basic components of any future campaign.

The eve of the Second Lebanon War caught the IDF at a low level of preparedness and with a new operational doctrine that was not widely understood or assimilated by the fighting forces. After six years in which the IDF devoted its effort and attention primarily to fighting terrorism in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip, the army suddenly found itself in a new situation in Lebanon, which forced it, for the first time since the 1982 Lebanon War, to adapt and adjust rapidly to fighting a war in which it had

to combine ground maneuver with standoff fire. The Second Lebanon War compelled the IDF to reexamine its force buildup and operational doctrine, improve the army's basic skills, refresh the way in which the reserves are used, and give new thought to emergency storehouses.

Another aspect that was unique to the war was its exposure by the media. New technologies allowed the media to cover the war and provide public access to the events in near real time. There was round the clock coverage from the battlefield, often facilitated by the soldiers themselves. The depiction of the events in the media played a large role in the war of consciousness waged alongside the kinetic war. That depiction – the images of the war and the public's perception of the war that was crafted – often eclipsed the actual war. Today, a decade later, it is most illuminating to study how the media dealt with the events and their results, and to see if there have been any changes in how the media has portrayed the war since 2006.

The war was a milestone for Hezbollah as well. In the years leading up to 2006, it coasted on its popularity as the organization that managed to eject the IDF from southern Lebanon. During the war it scaled new heights, establishing itself as a military outfit with some features normally reserved for regular armies, capable of fighting the army usually considered the strongest in the Middle East over an extended period of time. However, Hezbollah's image as the protector of Lebanon was shattered as a result of the vast damage the war inflicted on the country. Furthermore, the war increased Iranian supervision of the organization, as Tehran was less than thrilled that an early "stray shot" led to the erosion of the strategic weapon Iran had given Hezbollah. The purpose of that weapon was to deter Israel and prevent it from attacking Iran's nuclear project while Iran was engaged in construction of the capabilities that would earn it regional hegemony.

In the decade since the war, Israel, Lebanon, and the Middle East overall have experienced dramatic events. Israel's confrontations with Hamas in the Gaza Strip often diverted attention away from the northern sector, even though it continues to represent a significant threat, especially given the fact that Hezbollah is Iran's front line in the latter's struggle against Israel. At the same time, the social protest movement that erupted in 2011 affected the security agenda and the resources allocated to the Israeli defense establishment to tackle the nation's security challenges.

Lebanon too experienced significant changes, both internal and external, especially the violent clashes in the country in 2008 and the dysfunctional nature of the Lebanese state in recent years. But it seems that the event with

the greatest impact is the civil war in Syria, with its vast flood of refugees, terrorism in both the urban and rural areas, Hezbollah's intervention to help Bashar Assad in the civil war, and the effect on Lebanon. As the war in Syria drags on, and as Hezbollah has managed to prevent it from trickling across the border into Lebanon, the organization's status has risen once again and its image as the protector of Lebanon has been restored.

It would therefore seem that Israel's northern arena has changed greatly. The Syrian civil war has resulted in fluctuating power balances and even a role reversal: the Golan Heights, which was Israel's calmest border over four decades, has become a highly volatile hive of activity on the other side of the fence, whereas southern Lebanon, which was a battlefield for several decades, has been calm since 2006 with a balance of deterrence that is hardly ever violated. The Second Lebanon War played a central role in creating the current equation between Israel and Hezbollah (and its allies), where the mutual desire is to prevent extensive escalation.

The starting assumption of many Israelis is that the countdown to the Third Lebanon War has already begun. The fact that Hezbollah is arming itself for a future war is indisputable. The organization is fine-tuning its capabilities and gaining combat experience on the battlefields of Syria. In parallel, the IDF of today is not the IDF of 2006, and a new war is liable to inflict on Lebanon much more extensive and intensive damage than it suffered in the Second Lebanon War. Therefore, the challenge facing Israel's decision makers is neither the number of missiles in Hezbollah's munitions stores, nor the need to repair the IDF's tarnished image and somehow make up for the widespread sense that an opportunity was missed. Rather, the challenge is to prevent another widespread confrontation, reduce Hezbollah's force construction, and build the capabilities needed to severely damage the organization when the opportunity presents itself.

The essays chosen for this compilation address topics that were previously explored. At this juncture, however, and using varied perspectives, they attempt to paint a deep and inclusive picture of the Second Lebanon War, its outcomes, and its ramifications. More than one decade later, studying the war and learning its lessons are critical for the State of Israel and its national security.

Udi Dekel, Gabi Siboni, and Omer Einav
May 2017

PRELUDE