THE NEXT WAR IN THE NORTH

Scenarios, Strategic Alternatives, and Recommendations for Israel

Orna Mizrahi, Udi Dekel, and Yuval Bazak

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המכון למחקרי ביטחון לאומי
THE INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES
TEL AVIV אוניברסיטת
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תרחישים, חלופות אסטרטגיות והמלצות למדיניות הישראלית

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אורנה מזרחי, אודי דקל ויובל בזק

# Contents

Executive Summary

In this memorandum we present a summary of a long process of strategic planning (beginning in early 2019) conducted at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) to examine and analyze the gamut of issues that require consideration in advance of the next war in northern Israel. The aim of the project was to assist the defense establishment and decision makers in Israel to prepare for such a war, and to examine developing threats. It should be emphasized that in this study the reference is to threats against Israel and the overall need to prepare for those threats, without addressing the likelihood of war erupting, or when.

Recent years have seen the northern arena become Israel's primary military challenge. The threat on this front intensified with the emergence of the Shi'ite axis led by Iran and the creation of a "land bridge" from Tehran to Lebanon, and the growing friction between this axis and Israel. Iran was adept at exploiting the regional upheaval and turned Syria and western Iraq into areas where it could base its military capabilities, while also ensuring that Hezbollah continues to strengthen militarily as a key member of the Shi'ite axis against Israel; Iran made explicit efforts to equip Hezbollah with precision-guided missiles, with the intent that they would have a major impact on neutralizing Israel's strategic capabilities.

The current research was based on the assumption that, although it is in Israel's interests to prevent the next war – and it seems that Hezbollah and Iran currently have no desire to enter into a broad conflict with Israel either – a widespread war could erupt as a result of a deterioration triggered by a limited pinpoint event and/or a miscalculation by either of the sides and, therefore, it is necessary to discuss these issues ahead of time.

This memorandum includes an outline of the conventional military challenge to Israel, in the wake of the geopolitical changes and developments on the battlefield in recent years. It presents a description of the worst-case

scenario of the next war (henceforth referred to as the Northern War), which is likely to be a multi-theater war, or at least a two-theater war (Lebanon and Syria), i.e., not limited to Israel vs. Lebanon. It also offers an analysis of the strategic alternatives that Israel has: maintaining the current policy, known as "the campaign between the wars" – a limited operation to reduce the threat of precision missiles and core capabilities – or initiating a general war to remove the threat and bring about fundamental strategic change. In addition, it maps the main dilemmas at the strategic level. It concludes with a list of recommendations regarding how to prepare for the war, how to conduct the campaign, and how to formulate exit strategies for ending it.
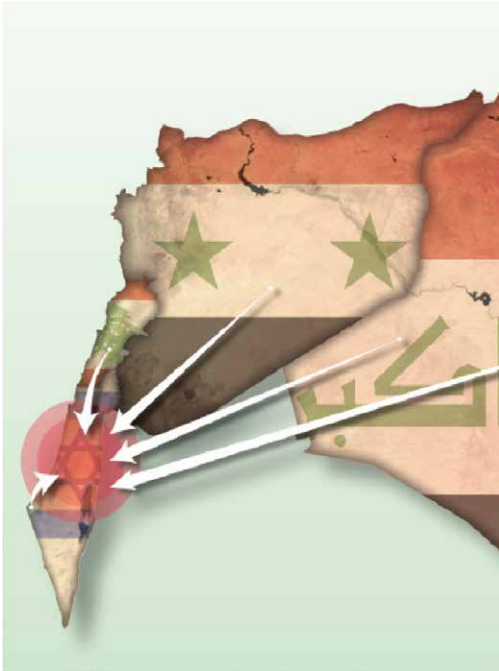
A key conclusion that runs through the entirety of this study is that **the next Northern War will be different and more difficult than its predecessors.** It will be a multi-front war in which we can expect missile and rocket salvos, some of them precision guided, and drone attacks on military and civilian targets on the home front, in a way that may reduce the IDF's freedom of action and could cause considerable harm to the economy and national resilience. Further challenges will be posed by the enemy's advanced air defense systems and by anticipated attempts by enemy forces to infiltrate Israeli territory from Lebanon and Syria.

In light of this assessment, Israel must prepare for this war militarily, economically, and politically, while specifying a multi-arena war against the Shi'ite axis, as analyzed in this memorandum, as the "threat reference" for the coming years.

The following is a summary of the recommendations presented in the memorandum:

In the military arena[1]**:** In order to ensure the destruction of most of the enemy's qualitative power, and thus to achieve victory, the IDF must proceed on the basis of accurate intelligence, offensive precision capabilities, and multi-layer defensive capabilities, and to strengthen and prepare its ground forces for ground maneuvering in the next war. This is for the purpose of conducting both a defensive battle in a limited campaign and an offensive ground maneuver against the enemy (preferably a short, limited and forceful ground maneuver operation). Due to the constraints of Israel's defense budget, we recommend focusing on augmenting lethal capabilities, exploiting to the full the IDF's offensive precision capabilities, improving air defense capabilities and especially increasing the number of interceptors, as well as utilizing new technology-based capabilities (laser, cyber, robotics) against the possibility of surprises and new threats. With regard to operation plans, there is a need to draft a defensive plan along the front lines, as Hezbollah has demonstrated that it is determined to launch a ground offensive to create a precedent of occupying a community or military outpost inside Israeli territory.

On the civilian front: Special consideration should be given to preparing the public for war and developing the home front's resilience and functional continuity. This will require organizational changes. In this context, and drawing on the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis as a lesson, we recommend that a dedicated decision-making body be established at the national level to coordinate the management of all urgent and critical civilian issues and integrate activities between the various civic agencies, local and national, in order to provide a response to the needs of the population during the war (see further details in chapter 5).

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1   The issue of precision-guided missiles threatening the Israeli home front was also examined, but due the sensitivity of the issue, our conclusions were presented separately to the relevant authorities within the Israeli establishment.

At the diplomatic level: The scenario of a possible wide-scale war in the north should be discussed with Israel's major partners, particularly the United States and also Russia, to alert them to the risk of war given the current circumstances and to establish channels of communication and coordination with them for during and after the war. With regard to the US, prior coordination is important so as to ensure military assistance during the course of the war and diplomatic support and intervention whenever Israel needs it. As for Russia, it is advisable, in advance, to formulate understandings and to neutralize its involvement during the war, and to call on it to find a way to end the war and use its influence to help draft a post-war agreement that is suited to Israel.

Regarding the exit strategy: The war scenario suggests that Israel will find it difficult to bring about a quick end to the fighting, or to terminate it at a time or in the circumstances that it would like, without defeating Hezbollah. Therefore, Israel should bring about an end to the war by exacting a heavy price from Lebanon and from Syria (by attacking infrastructures). Offensive actions of this nature are likely to lead to international pressure for an immediate end to hostilities. It is imperative that Israel demand, during negotiations to end the war, the creation of **stability and inspection mechanisms** that will prevent the rebuilding of the offensive capabilities of Hezbollah, Iran, and its proxies in the region – Lebanon, Syria and western Iraq – and that the Lebanese and Syrian state systems take responsibility for their domains, while establishing rules of the game and a border regime that will include international monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, as well as coordination and liaison options with the participation of UN forces. The topmost demand should be for an agreement that can enforce the dismantling of Hezbollah as an independent militia, or at least block all arms transfer routes from Iran to Syria and Lebanon, and remove the military capabilities of Iran and its proxies from Lebanon and Syria (see chapter 7).

The cognitive angle: A strategy needs to be devised in advance that is suited to various target audiences: the Israeli public, Hezbollah and the other members of the Shi'ite axis, the Lebanese population and establishment, and regional and international entities (see chapter 6).

Finally, although the focus of this memorandum is the necessity to prepare ahead of the next war in the north, it is also extremely important to keep the discussion going on the question, **Is wide-scale war in the north**

inevitable? The complexity of the situation and the high price war will exact from all sides requires it. While Israel may not be able to prevent a war that is forced upon it, before it decides on initiating one it should first exhaust all options to prevent a confrontation, and even try open or covert diplomatic tracks. This includes making the most of the recent development in Israeli-Lebanese relations as the two sides met to negotiate the demarcation of their shared maritime border (mid-October 2020); however, the chances of progress on this matter are considered low, as long as Hezbollah retains its status as an independent military force that wields power over decision making in Lebanon.

Introduction

May 2020 marked 20 years since the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) withdrew from southern Lebanon after an 18-year presence in the country. The unilateral withdrawal did not lead to the intended calm, but instead to the entrenchment of Hezbollah along the Israeli-Lebanese border, which eventually led to the Second Lebanon War (2006). Following the war, Israel pulled out of Lebanon and on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) deployed along the two countries' shared border and a border regime was established together with the LAF and UN forces, which has managed to maintain a stable security reality. Nevertheless, in the same period, Hezbollah continued to shore up its capabilities and activities in southern Lebanon, including creeping expansion near the border, in contravention of the UN Security Council resolution.

Hezbollah has taken advantage of the passing years since the Second Lebanon War, with the backing of its patron Iran, to reinforce its status in Lebanon and its influence on decision-making processes in the country and, worse yet from Israel's perspective, to increase its military strength and build advanced military offensive capabilities. In this way, Hezbollah has emerged as the primary military threat against Israel, and is capable of operating against it at any time. As a key member of the Iran-led Shi'ite axis, Hezbollah can act in Tehran's interests as a proxy in its pursuit for regional hegemony. There is also concern that Hezbollah could operate against Israel as a Lebanese-Shi'ite terror organization driven by a radical religious ideology, out of its own local interests and due to internal Lebanese power struggles.

Meanwhile, Iran has built and empowered the Shi'ite axis to spread its influence in the region, exploiting the opportunity created by the civil wars in Syria and Iraq, and turned territory in Syria and western Iraq into military bases to serve this axis. There is an Iranian presence at these bases,

alongside Shi'ite militia forces that stand at Tehran's disposal. The land bridge that Iran has constructed, stretching from Tehran to Lebanon, as well as outposts it has set up near Israel's borders, constitute a new and significant threat to Israel's national security, which goes beyond that posed directly by Hezbollah in Lebanon. Thus, despite the fact that the civil war in Syria seemingly diminished the threat posed to Israel by the Syrian army, the evolving situation has yielded a new threat – a triple-theater front, involving the forces of the Shi'ite axis in Lebanon, in Syria (the "first circle"), and in western Iraq, or a multi-theater war that could include the Gaza Strip and perhaps even other arenas in the "second circle" (Iraq) and the "third circle" (Iran and Yemen).

These developments pose a serious challenge to Israel's national security and require the formulation of an appropriate strategy and game plan. Our study centers on the Shi'ite axis, led by Iran, as the threat reference for the next war, with an emphasis on the direct threat posed by the axis' "military outposts" around Israel's borders with Syria and Lebanon. It also considers how to end the conflict with a swift victory, without it becoming a protracted, multi-arena war.

This memorandum is the summation of a project conducted at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) aimed at evaluating what the next war in the north could look like. It does not claim that war is unavoidable, but rather that action must be taken to avoid it. Still, one cannot always control the level of escalation: the code of conduct that exists in our environment is such that each side is obligated to respond to the action of its enemy – and the dominant language is the use of force, not diplomacy. There is thus a possibility that localized incidents or developments connected to the expansion of Iran and Hezbollah's capabilities will lead Israel to war in the north. The purpose of the project is to analyze the circumstances that could cause the realization of this scenario and to examine what the desired results (what is commonly known as victory) would be for Israel if war does break out. The main yardstick that guided the analysis was Israel's ability to enforce upon its enemies its own terms for an end to the war. The ultimate goal of the project is to encourage and inspire the strategic planning process among those dealing with this weighty issue – the decision makers and the defense establishment – as part of the preparations for the next war, which one can assume will be unlike any that came before.

The project entailed an independent process with the participation of INSS researchers, experts, and former high-ranking IDF commanders in an effort to reach insights, conclusions, and recommendations that can creatively support the IDF and the defense establishment's strategic and operational thinking and planning, as well as inform decision making in the political echelon. It does this by highlighting prominent blind spots and dilemmas and delineating the possible alternatives and opportunities that exist for Israel.

The following working assumptions formed the basis of the project:

- The time factor: We related to the possibility of a war erupting within the coming decade. The current circumstances do not necessarily portend war in the near future, but Israel must prepare in advance for the possibility of a wide-scale war against the Shi'ite axis;
- Regionally, we focused on the northern arena since Lebanon and Syria are today considered the frontline branches of the Shi'ite axis led by Iran, which constitutes the main threat to Israel; and
- Conceptually, the analysis is based on a plausible worst-case scenario, taking into account the existing and emerging capabilities of the enemy, and assuming that the enemy will unleash all means available to inflict on Israel the greatest possible damage from its perspective.

This project commenced prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, and its conclusions relate to the level of preparedness Israel needs to attain to meet the possibility of a war erupting in the north, without determining the likelihood of that happening. Our evaluation at this stage is that COVID-19 and the economic and other hardships experienced by the various members of the Shi'ite axis may delay the possibility of a wide-scale war. But circumstances may change, and it is clear that this crisis does not annul the emerging threat faced by Israel and the need to discuss and prepare for it now.

A special section dealt with preempting the buildup of the enemy's precision-guided missile and offensive unmanned aerial vehicle capabilities. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, its findings were submitted to the Israeli security establishment as a classified appendix.

The team of experts that participated in the project, helping to formulate insights and conclusions, included Lieutenant General (ret.) Gadi Eisenkot, Major General (ret.) Amos Yadlin, Major General (ret.) Giora Eiland, Major General (ret.) Ido Nehushtan, Major General (ret.) Nitzan Alon, Major

General (ret.) Tal Russo, Brigadier General (ret.) Dr. Meir Elran, Brigadier General (ret.) Itai Brun, Brigadier General (ret.) Assaf Orion, Dr. Shmuel Harlap, Dr. Anat Kurz, Yoram Schweitzer, and Sima Shine.

Chapter 1

Threats against Israel in the Coming Decade

What has changed since the 2006 Second Lebanon War?

The underlying assumption of this memorandum is that the next campaign in the northern arena will present Israel with new and tougher challenges than those it has known in the past. This view is based on the emergence in recent years of new types of threats against Israel that will impact the nature of the war – if and when it erupts.

First and foremost, the **conventional military threat**, until now the most significant threat faced by Israel, has grown and is expected to further intensify in the coming years. Iran took advantage of the civil wars in Iraq and Syria to advance its aspiration to create a Shi'ite axis under its leadership, and in recent years this axis has become a cohesive coalition of entities with military capabilities, acting directly under Iran's command and serving it. It should be emphasized that this memorandum deals entirely with the conventional threat in the next war; it does not address Iran's nuclear capabilities.[2]

A major component of this threat is the **military force buildup by Hezbollah**, which has obtained considerable fire capabilities and amassed a diverse range of weaponry. It is widely believed today that the organization possesses some 150,000 missiles and rockets of all ranges (short, medium, and long) that can cover almost the entire territory of Israel. This threat has grown more acute in recent years due to Hezbollah's efforts, with the assistance of Iran, to expand its precision-missile project, which includes

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2   Although in the last year the Shi'ite axis has been suffering from severe distress internally and increasing pressure on it from outside, its motivation and ability to act against Israel remain the same.

ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and land-to-sea missiles, and offensive unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The organization purportedly has dozens of precision missiles and UAVs, and in the coming years Hezbollah and Iran are likely try and boost these numbers further. Israel will find it hard to completely prevent Hezbollah from building up a large arsenal of precision missiles solely through what is known as the "campaign between the wars," which lies below the threshold of actual war.

■ THE THREAT TO STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURES[3]

🚀 Enemy capabilities	🎯 Israeli infrastructures
Surface-to-air missiles	Orot Rabin Power Station
Precision-guided missiles (PGM)	Ben-Gurion Airport
Anti-ship missiles	Israeli gas platforms

Over the past decade, Hezbollah has also invested efforts in devising a **ground attack option** against Israel. The organization has a well-trained commando force with thousands of fighters, called the Radwan Force, that gained substantive experience participating in the war in Syria. Hezbollah plans to

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3   The image is taken from an unclassified presentation made by Major General Yaakov Banjo (November 2019).

deploy the force in any conflict with Israel to capture key territories in the north of the country where there are civilian population centers and military assets. Even after the exposure and demolition, during Operation Northern Shield (January 2019), of tunnels along the northern border, through which the Radwan Force had planned to infiltrate into Israel, the option of above-ground incursion attempts still exists; Hezbollah is preparing that option, along with other advanced measures in the organization's possession, to be used in the face of threats at sea and in the air, including cyber capabilities.

Iran's entrenchment in Syria and the deployment of its forces, as well as those of its proxies, near the Syrian border with Israel constitute a major strategic change Iran has made, exploiting President Bashar al-Assad's need for aid, to deepen its hold in Syria and, worse yet, to build up a new military threat against Israel from Syria. Although Israel has managed, through attacks in the ongoing campaign between the wars, to undermine Iran's efforts to establish military bases in the Syrian arena, it has not completely prevented the installation of surface-to-surface missile batteries and offensive UAVs or the presence of Iranian advisers and tens of thousands of Shi'ite militants under Iranian command, funded by Tehran and subject to its authority. This is in parallel to Hezbollah's efforts – also with Iranian backing – to build outposts on the Syrian Golan and to set up and operate local militias, deepening its presence there. Adding to this list one can see the beginning of a process of rehabilitation of the Syrian army, especially the strengthening of its aerial defense systems, and Iranian entrenchment in western Iraq under government auspices and in cooperation with Shi'ite militias in Iraq known as the Popular Mobilization Forces.

The presence of Russia in the area as a result of its involvement in the war in Syria also constitutes a significant change in the balance of forces. Its military presence includes the stationing of advanced aerial defense systems in Syria, which to date have not been used against Israel, due to considerations determined in Moscow. At the same time, the limited interest shown by the US and Western countries in Syria and their unwillingness to invest in the country's rehabilitation efforts are evident. Russia, which has naval and air forces, aerial defense systems, and even bases on Syrian territory and on its Mediterranean coast, has become a "neighbor" of Israel's, and thus an element with potentially greater influence than in the past in the event of a military confrontation.

The strategic challenges

The primary challenge that Israel needs to prepare for is a **multi-theater, multi-front campaign** that will include simultaneous combat in near and far arenas. This is assuming that the regime in Iran is striving for regional hegemony, and to undermine Israel's security stability along its borders, while continuing its efforts to cement the Shi'ite axis. In a multi-theater war, Israel will have to take decisions that will define the war zone, including the primary and secondary fronts, and determine its priorities and distribution of attention and resources. But in a wide-scale campaign, Israel will find it hard to control the boundaries of the campaign and its duration. Should a broad military conflict develop in the north, Israel will not be able to prevent "Axis of Resistance" elements, located in other theaters, from joining the fray, under Iran's directive. For example, even if a conflict with Hezbollah were to start in Lebanon, the organization would try to operate from the Syrian Golan and Iran would almost certainly activate its proxies in the area, especially Shi'ite militias in Syria, and perhaps in western Iraq as well. One can also expect that in these circumstances Iran will try to mobilize or drag the Syrian regime into the fighting too, and there is the possibility of parallel rocket fire from the Gaza Strip, at least by the Iranian-funded Islamic Jihad, and possibly by Hamas as well.

Another major challenge to contend with in the next war is the military threat by Hezbollah and Iran's other proxies, not just against the army but against the Israeli home front too. Israel is expected to suffer widespread damage, at least in the initial stage of the war, in a number of areas: there is a possibility of attempts to harm Israel's vital capabilities, for example, by hitting IDF facilities (headquarters, air force bases, reserve recruitment centers); attacks on strategic infrastructures and vital services (sea and air ports, energy and water facilities, transportation); targeting of government assets; disruptions to the economy (upsetting functional continuity); and strikes on population centers. Such tactics will be aimed at undermining Israeli citizens' sense of security and national resilience. All this suggests that the next war will claim a high price – far higher than that seen in previous wars.

Beyond the enormous challenge faced by the IDF's air defenses, the coming decade will see its technological superiority tested too, due to advances by Hezbollah and Iran and its proxies in a wide range of fields: cyber, air defenses, electronic warfare, UAVs, and surface-to-sea missiles.

The IDF will be called on to destroy the air defenses of Hezbollah and Syria, as well as of Iranian elements, while ensuring it does not damage Russian assets in the Syrian arena. The primary threat in this context results from technological developments that have brought down production costs and made more accessible precision capabilities that are effective enough to have an impact across the campaign. Furthermore, there is a need to consider strategic surprises that are difficult to predict at the present time.

During the next war, we can also expect changes in the nature of the international community's involvement. Russia is likely to wield great influence due to its continued presence in Syria and the Mediterranean. In an effort to maintain its interests in the region, Russia will try to limit the IDF's freedom of action, so that the IDF will have to take Moscow's position into account – more so than in the past – with regard to its goals from the war (for example, preventing a threat to the regime in Damascus). It can be assumed that the US will provide at least diplomatic support and military assistance to Israel, but it is likely that any administration, Republican or Democratic, will seek to avoid active intervention in the fighting and will demand that Israel weigh any possible consequences for US forces as long as they are deployed in Iraq and eastern Syria. Israel is also expected to face challenges in the international arena where the legitimacy it receives for its moves will depend on the correlation between the damage sustained by its civilian population and that inflicted by the IDF on civilian infrastructures in Syria and Lebanon. Legitimization for Israeli actions will be diminished in the case of an Israeli initiative or "preemptive strike" aimed at stopping the buildup of precision-missile capabilities in Lebanon, in view of the widespread damage expected to the Lebanese people.

Furthermore, there may be adverse changes in the regional order, which is expected to remain dynamic and unstable, and this too could bring new threats. The possibility of a change to the rules of the game in the region remains, should there be further deterioration in the internal stability of regimes in the Middle East; change in the fabric of relations and interests of the states; and/or the emergence of new focuses of power that will affect the course of the campaign, for example, the possibility that Turkey's influence in shaping reality in the northern arena will increase.

In this complex and multi-player campaign it will be difficult to devise a way out that will serve Israeli interests. Therefore, an exit strategy should

be formulated in advance to enable a rapid termination of the war, and that strategy should be aligned with Israel's goals – translating military achievement into a security-political advantage.

The operational threats

In a multi-theater war, attacks with conventional weapons could constitute a threat across Israel's entire military and civilian front (from Lebanon and the Syrian Golan, western Iraq, the Gaza Strip, and possibly from the Sinai Peninsula and the Red Sea); the Shi'ite axis possesses a diverse range of capabilities – high-trajectory weapons of various ranges, warhead sizes and levels of precision. The new and advanced capabilities available to the enemy must be acknowledged, including the long-range capabilities of improved missiles that will enable surface-to-surface missiles to be fired into Israel's strategic home front from the second circle (Iraq) and, though highly unlikely, even from the third circle (Iran, Yemen); the development of precision capabilities that will enable accurate strikes during the opening moves of the war; advanced defensive and offensive capabilities (air defenses, drones, shore-to-sea anti-ship missiles), as well as advanced technologies for disrupting IDF systems (cyber, magnetic spectrum, jammers).

In view of the fact that the enemy has precision-guided missiles, in the next war, the IDF will have to deal with far more significant maneuvers than in the past. Launching of the missiles will be aimed at disrupting IDF operational activities – for example, limiting its ability to exploit its firepower to the full; disrupting the accumulation of forces and their movement to the fronts, particularly the mobilization of reserve forces; disrupting operations at air force bases and seaports; and hindering efforts to defend the home front and, later, its recovery. Casting a shadow over all this is the difficulty in dealing with endless barrages of rockets and missiles, identifying the precision missiles, and for Israel to maintain a sufficient number of interceptors in case of a protracted war and the need to intercept threats from all arenas.

The IDF will also have to contend with Hezbollah's plans for a **ground operation** to capture and hold territory in northern Israel, with the intent of notching up a significant achievement during the fighting (foiling an IDF maneuver or ensuring the ability to maintain constant fire on the Israeli home front are examples), and achieving a "victory image" by the unprecedented feat of capturing sovereign Israeli territory. In the coming years, Hezbollah

is likely continue to strive for this, i.e., to plan such a maneuver along the Lebanese border or from the direction of the Syrian Golan. The IDF's ability to accumulate significant achievements in the first days of the war will also be affected to a great degree by the question of who initiates the war. On the assumption that it is possible that **the war could start with a surprise attack** by the enemy, the IDF needs to plan for a scenario in which the initiative and the opening moves will not necessarily be in its hands.

To summarize, the anticipated enhancement of the capabilities of the Shi'ite axis will create difficulties for the IDF, leading to the following possible threats:

- Several events requiring a response developing in parallel at a rapid pace;
- The difficulty in dividing attention between efforts and theaters;
- Threats to the air force's freedom of action;
- Threats to the navy's freedom of action;
- A decline in the IDF's technological superiority and the development of means to neutralize/sabotage IDF capabilities;
- The ability to disrupt the IDF's command and control systems at the tactical and operational levels; and
- Strikes on IDF bases and war reserve warehouses.

Chapter 2

Scenarios for the Northern War

Range of possible scenarios

Within the framework of the project, we examined a diverse range of scenarios, in particular the following three:

A third Lebanon War, which will be similar in nature to the two previous wars Israel waged against a one-front threat – the Lebanese front (1982, 2006).

The Northern War, which will differ from its forerunners in two main ways: 1. **The enemy –** Hezbollah is the principal enemy, but other members of the Shi'ite axis, which have entrenched themselves in the northern arena, will be full partners in the hostilities (Shi'ite militias in Syria and Iraq; the Syrian army, which is in a process of rehabilitation; and Iranian military capabilities in Syria and western Iraq); and 2. **The war arena –** Lebanon, Syria, and western Iraq. In this scenario, Iran activates its proxies in the region and there is a possibility of missiles being fired from western Iraq, but its forces are still not involved in the fighting from Iranian territory.

A general war against Iran: Iran is involved directly and not just through its proxies; it launches ballistic and cruise missiles from its territory toward targets in Israel; and the Iranian army and the Revolutionary Guards take an active part in the fighting against Israel.

In this project, we decided to focus on analyzing the second scenario, namely, the Northern War, in view of the shared assessment of all team members that this is the more plausible scenario and the one that requires attention at this time.

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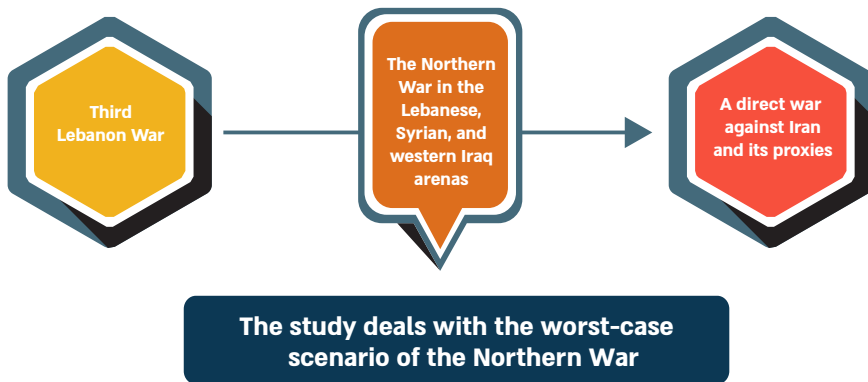
Triggers of war: Deterioration or proactive war

What could trigger the outbreak of the Northern War?

War in the north could erupt following a deterioration in the wake of a limited conflict or a miscalculation by either of the sides. Deterioration scenarios are possible in any of the following arenas:

The Lebanese arena: There is a high potential for escalation between Israel and Hezbollah, which could flare up quickly into wide-scale war. Hezbollah is sensitive to the situation, and though it shows a readiness to play by the "rules of the game," it views the "mutual deterrence" that has existed since 2006 as important to uphold. Indeed, it makes sure to respond to every Israeli action that it perceives as a violation of this mutual deterrence, as seen in its response to IDF movements in the Lebanese and Syrian arenas. This approach could lead to escalation in a number of circumstances, be it friction along the border or a developing incident in the wake of a limited campaign-between-the-wars operation conducted by the IDF or in response to a pinpoint military operation initiated by either of the sides. An example of an event with potential for escalation occurred in August-September 2019: Hezbollah fired a Kornet anti-tank missile at an IDF vehicle, following what the organization described as a drone strike by Israel in a Hezbollah compound in Beirut and a strike on Hezbollah operatives in Syria. Israel chose to contain its response in this instance, in which there were no casualties, and make do with a minor response, but things could have ended differently. Since September 2019, Hezbollah has been trying to extend the "equation of deterrence" to the Syrian arena, as reflected in its attempt to act against the IDF on the Lebanese border (July 27, 2020) that

came following the killing of a Hezbollah operative near Damascus in a strike attributed to Israel a week earlier. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said following that attempt, which failed, that a response would be forthcoming. Even after a massive explosion at Beirut Port (August 4, 2020), where the organization was accused of stockpiling its weapons among the civilian population, Hezbollah is sticking to its strategy, as seen in another (failed) attempt by the organization to hit an IDF force near the border with sniper fire (August 25). This strategy exacerbates the friction between the sides, and the chances of escalation as well.

The Syrian arena: Syria has become an arena of conflict between Israel and the Shi'ite axis, especially since the Assad regime has allowed the military entrenchment of Iran and its proxies – Shi'ite militias, including Hezbollah – that came to the regime's assistance in its war against the rebels. This reality has created ongoing and persistent military friction with Israel, which routinely acts to diminish the threats against it through the campaign between the wars strategy. Escalation into a wider war in the Syrian arena could thus stem from an act against Israel, even if limited, by a member of the Shi'ite axis, such as a terrorist attack along the border, missile fire into Israeli territory or the launching of a drone; or following an Israeli action, as part of the campaign between the wars, to strike infrastructure belonging to Iran and its proxies, including Assad's army (precision-missile project, unconventional weapons, air defense); to stop the transfer of advanced weaponry to Hezbollah; or to foil missile fire and terrorist attacks against Israel.

An escalation of the direct military conflict with **Iran**: The catalyst for escalation in this instance would be a military move by Israel or Iran against the other or a decision by Iran to galvanize Hezbollah and other members of the Shi'ite axis against Israel, without being involved in this war directly from Iranian territory. Causes may include, for example, an American strike on infrastructure or sites in Iran (including the extreme option of an attack on its nuclear facilities), a limited military move by Iran against Israel as a result of Tehran's strategic distress created by growing US pressure (with the aim of bringing Iran back to the negotiating table to discuss a new nuclear agreement), domestic social-political unrest, or as a response to repeated or intensified IDF actions against Iranian outposts in Syria.

■ DETERIORATION SCENARIOS IN DIFFERENT ARENAS

	Vis-à-vis Hezbollah	Escalation could follow: - A strike on precision missile infrastructures - A Hezbollah attack spurred by Iranian or internal Lebanese needs - An operation in the campaign-between-the-wars realm or a border incident
	Vis-à-vis Syria	A deterioration could follow a broad Israeli operation in Syria as part of the campaign between the wars: - Against precision missile infrastructures - Against weapons transfers to Hezbollah - An action against Iranian forces or a strike on Syrian military infrastructures (non-conventional weapons or air defenses) in response to a strike on Israel (by Iran's proxies)
	Vis-à-vis Iran	A limited Iranian military operation against Israel could be launched: - Due to strategic distress stemming from immense pressure on Iran - In response to an Israeli strike on Iranian forces or proxies in Syria - In response to an Israeli/American attack on Iranian nuclear infrastructures

Alongside the deterioration scenarios, a **proactive war** by either of the involved parties is a possibility in the coming years:

- Initiated by **Israel**, stemming from an understanding of the gravity of the threat developing against it, primarily Hezbollah's amassing of advanced weaponry, such as precision-guided missiles, and/or based on an assessment that the opportunity is ripe for a military move, while Iran and Hezbollah are in strategic distress. Both are currently subject to internal and external pressures, which are expected to continue to grow. This means that in parallel with the growing threat, an opportunity may also have been created – and both could influence the scope of a war initiated by Israel, depending on shifting circumstances. The options include a limited preemptive strike to diminish the threat or a broad war aimed at inflicting wide-scale damage on Hezbollah, with the intention of creating strategic change in the north.

- Initiated by **Hezbollah in coordination with Iran**. This could occur as a result of two seemingly contradictory situations: first, due to the difficulties the organization is experiencing as a result of pressure, as noted above, particularly since the Beirut Port explosion, it may choose to divert attention by spotlighting the struggle against Israel and its role as the "defender of Lebanon"; and second, if Hezbollah feels that it has strengthened militarily to the point that it can inflict significant damage on the IDF and the Israeli home front, weaken Israel, and change the rules of the game.

- **Iran**, for its part, may initiate a wide-scale campaign in the northern arena by sending Hezbollah and its proxies against Israel if it decides that a war, though without its own direct participation, would serve its domestic and regional interests, and distract international attention which is centered on pressuring Iran over the nuclear issue.

■ PROACTIVE WAR SCENARIOS

- Due to strategic distress
- In the service of Iranian interests
- Driven by a sense of power

- Preemptive strike against precision capabilities

- Preventive war – Inflicting severe damage on Hezbollah to change the balance of power in Lebanon

- A direct Iranian attack on Israel
- Iran marshals its own abilities, and its proxies (mainly Hezbollah), following an escalation of the conflict between it and Israel and/or the US

Worst-case scenario

A worst-case scenario for war in the north is based on the following assumptions:

- The outbreak of a multi-theater war, with the fighting in the first few days concentrated on two fronts: **Lebanon and Syria**.
- The main enemy facing the IDF is the **Shi'ite axis**,[4] which might include the following forces (directly or indirectly):

  – Hezbollah in the Lebanese arena
  – Hezbollah in the territory between the Golan Heights and Damascus
  – Shi'ite militias in Syria
  – Syrian army forces, including in the territory between the Golan Heights and Damascus, and missile launches from deep in Syrian territory
  – Missiles fired by Shi'ite militias in Iraq.

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4   It is important to note that in this scenario the Iranian army is not directly involved in hostilities.

- The war could erupt at short notice or without warning, with the IDF not fully prepared for it.[5]
- It is highly possible that in the case of a broad campaign in the north, the IDF will also be required to deal with the Palestinian front: rockets and missiles fired from the Gaza Strip and growing unrest and/or increased terrorist attacks in the West Bank.
- The government and the IDF will have the support of the population in Israel with regard to all its decision and operations, at least in the initial stages of the war.
- During the initial stages of fighting, the IDF's movements will be met with understanding by the international community, which is not expected to intervene.

### *Threats that can be anticipated in case of war:*

- Barrages of some 1,000 statistical missiles will be fired from Lebanon into Israel every day, along with hundreds of precision-guided missiles. This figure is not based on intelligence, but is a result of an analysis of Hezbollah's launch patterns during the Second Lebanon War. In that war, Hezbollah launched some 14,000 rockets and missiles, which constituted around a third of its arsenal (some 40,000 missiles). Thus in the next war, it is expected that Hezbollah will launch some 50,000 rockets and missiles, representing around a third of its current arsenal, estimated at 150,000 statistical missiles.
- Possible long-range missile fire from Syria and from Iraq must also be considered.
- Precision-guided missiles will be fired at high-value strategic targets: airports; vital infrastructures: energy (power stations, gas facilities, Haifa refineries) and water sources; symbols of government (the Knesset, the government complex); IDF headquarters; air defense batteries, military bases and command centers.

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5   The worst-case scenario is based on the assumption that the IDF will have only a short warning or will be surprised. It was formulated in order to assist thinking on how best to respond to such extremely grave situations.

- Ballistic missiles will be aimed at population centers simultaneous with precision missiles, to disrupt the air defense systems' efficacy and to make it hard for the IDF's air defense forces to pinpoint targets for interception.
- Missile fire toward the Israeli home front will continue during the Israeli ground operation deep into Lebanese territory.
- As well as missiles, swarms of attack drones will be launched against high-value and soft Israeli targets.
- Hezbollah commandoes (Radwan Force) from southern Lebanon and Shi'ite militias from the Syrian Golan will carry out ground operations, with the aim of capturing territory in Israel. Thus, attacks can be expected on military assets and civilian areas.
- Cyber attacks will be launched on critical infrastructures in Israel, specifically command and control centers and vital infrastructures, with the aim of disrupting the economy and security systems.
- Cognitive campaigns will be launched via the media and social networks to unsettle Israeli attitudes and undermine morale.
- The Israeli economy will shift to emergency mode. All related activities are expected to be affected and vital civilian services damaged, the water and electricity supply in particular.
- Significant disruption is expected to air and sea ports, limiting accessibility. The longer this situation persists, the more it will affect military and civilian resilience.
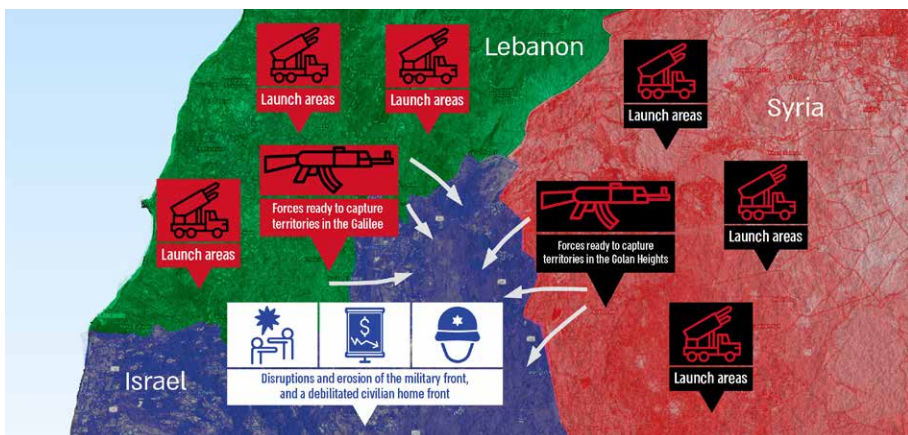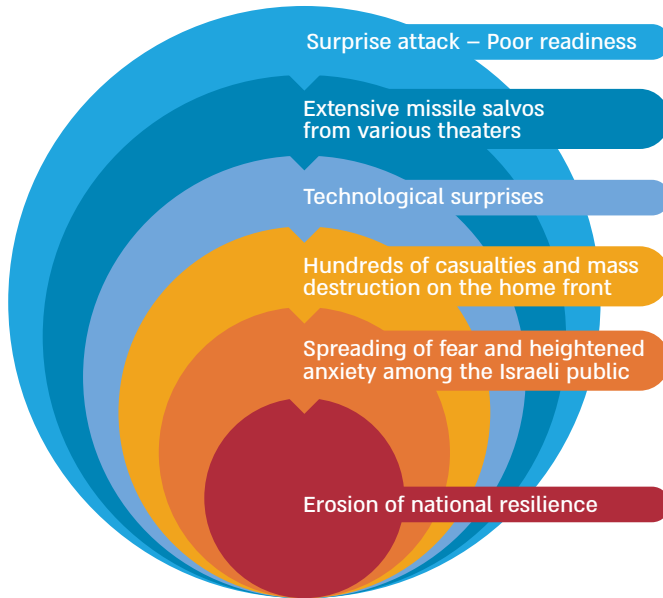
The operative implications of a worst-case scenario

Such a severe operational situation would have the following implications for the IDF:

- The IDF will have to call for a full mobilization of reserves and its entire operations – mobilization of reserves, amassing and deployment of forces, combat on the frontlines – would take place under fire. It will take 48-96 hours for the IDF to complete its defensive deployment on the two fronts (Lebanon and Syria), before moving to the offensive.

- **Defense of the home front:** Initially, the IDF will have to focus on the enemy's advanced missile systems and will not be able to deal with its statistical rockets and missiles. The air force is expected to be relatively limited in its ability to respond to fire on the home front; therefore, the civilian population will benefit from the IDF's missile interceptions only in the second stage, though some level of interceptions will be needed in the face of extensive salvos, as will the need to protect vital assets for the continuation of the war.

- **On the front:** IDF forces will operate under intense fire in the close operations area, and disruptions are expected to the mobilization of reserves and amassing of forces in the combat zones. It is also possible that operations at command and control centers will be disrupted.

- **In the aerial operations theater:** The air force will operate in a number of arenas simultaneously under the threat of the enemy's air defense systems. Its main mission at the beginning of the war will be to achieve aerial superiority in the combat theater, foiling threats from the air against the Israeli home front and neutralizing Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria's strategic launch systems in Lebanon and Syria. It will have to deal with threats to its bases and its command centers. Due to its multiple missions, the air force will likely be limited in its ability to offer air support to ground forces in the defensive phase or to the navy that will be contending with shore-to-sea missiles.

- **In the naval theater:** The navy too will face a challenging environment. Its main effort will be to defending strategic assets at sea; defense of ports; maintaining freedom of movement for maritime routes; preventing use of the naval arena for hostile activities; and to achieve naval superiority by striking the enemy's capabilities.

CRITICAL FACTORS IN THE SCENARIO

Surprise attack – Poor readiness

Extensive missile salvos from various theaters

Technological surprises

Hundreds of casualties and mass destruction on the home front

Spreading of fear and heightened anxiety among the Israeli public

Erosion of national resilience

Chapter 3

Design of the Campaign at the Strategic Level

In light of the evolving threat in the northern arena, decision makers should periodically reassess the strategy for dealing with it, with consideration given to the following options:

1. Maintaining the current strategy, which is three-pronged: **delaying and disrupting** the pace of the enemy's buildup by military means (the campaign between the wars) and political means; building **deterrence** by developing lethal military power; and developing **defensive** capabilities;
2. Launching a **limited military operation** to diminish the threat, taking a chance that the situation will deteriorate into a broader war; or
3. **Initiating a wide-scale war** that could devolve into the worst-case scenario, as described above.

In any event, the political echelon should be primed to instruct the defense establishment to prepare for war, which could erupt without Israel choosing it or wanting it (in scenarios of deterioration or an initiative by the enemy, as described in chapter 2).

In this section we address the basic assumptions regarding the interests and goals the political echelon will present to the IDF that will result in the formulation of alternatives for "military acts," which are also outlined here. In addition, Israel's desired end state and the central dilemmas that the political echelon will have to deal with just before and during the campaign are discussed.

■ DECISION AND INTERVENTION POINTS FOR THE POLITICAL ECHELON

Israel's interests

After presenting the challenges and before examining Israel's alternatives in dealing with the threats on the northern front, we need to define what its interests are at the strategic level, interests that will serve as a **compass**, guiding Israeli decision makers to formulate policy on this complex challenge. Below are definitions of these interests, in light of which our analysis and conclusions were formulated.

- Defense of borders, of the Israeli home front, and of the state's strategic assets.
- Maintaining Israel's military superiority and strength, and its international and regional standing.
- Improvement of the security reality – removal of threats and the creation of Israeli deterrence, including:

  – Neutralizing the enemy's ability to undermine Israel's edge, with an emphasis on the enemy's precision capabilities;
  – Lowering the military threat to Israel from the Shi'ite axis; and
  – Distancing Iran from Israel's borders and diminishing its influence in Lebanon and Syria.

- Maintaining the functional continuity of the Israeli economy, as well as social cohesion.

- Achieving regional calm and stability and the capability to enforce long-term stabilizing diplomatic agreements.
- Strengthening Israel's standing in the regional arena (vis-à-vis the states with which it has peace treaties and other partners) and the international arena (with an emphasis on US support).
- Maintaining legitimacy for Israel's policies and military moves.

Goals of the war

In strategic planning methodology, the goals of war derive from Israel's interests and strategic objectives, taking into account the circumstances (especially Israel's political-economic situation and its military capabilities versus the enemy's status and capabilities), and are set by the political echelon as a directive to the IDF. These goals serve the IDF as guidelines for formulating its plans for war.

The definition proposed in this analysis for Israel's **strategic objective** is: Neutralizing the military threat posed by the Shi'ite axis around Israel's borders; diminishing the influence of Iran; and weakening Hezbollah in Lebanon from a military and political perspective.

Therefore, the goals of the war are: achieving victory, which means enforcing Israel's terms for an end to the war, thereby preventing the Shi'ite axis from attaining a strategic-military achievement; defeating the axis' military force in Syria and Lebanon by destroying its military capabilities and infrastructure; and creating the conditions to prevent its rehabilitation for a long time.

From these goals we derive the **required strategic achievements**:

- Multi-dimensional defense – on the ground, in the air, naval, and cyber arenas – to minimize damage to the home front and maintain Israel's functional continuity.
- Removing, or at least neutralizing, the threat as early as possible:
  – Causing severe damage to **Hezbollah's** capabilities: in Lebanon, defeating it south of the Awali River and destroying its centers of gravity in the Beirut area and in the Lebanon Valley; and in Syria, eliminating its strongholds in the Syrian Golan.
  – Destruction of Lebanese infrastructures that aid Hezbollah's war effort.

- In the event of an attack from Syria (by Shi'ite militias and/or the Syrian army), striking Shi'ite axis elements in Syria (infrastructure and forces) with the express goal of destroying Syria's military industry.

- Deterring **Iran** from getting involved in the war and attempting to prevent a direct exchange of blows between Iran and Israel.
- Creating conditions that will prevent the restoration of the enemy capabilities.

End-state scenarios – The sought-after security reality

The guidelines for forming strategy are based on the security reality needed at the end of the war:

- Ending the war within the shortest possible time, while applying Israel's terms for an end to the fighting and improved, effective, and stable security arrangements.
- Weakening the Shi'ite axis in Syria and Lebanon and creating the conditions to prevent its rehabilitation and entrenchment following the war.
- Dealing a severe blow to Hezbollah, so that it is defeated militarily[6] and weakened politically in Lebanon. The organization will retreat, leaving no military outposts south of the Awali, in the Syrian Golan or the crossings in the Hermon area.
- Achieving effective deterrence that will put off the next war by at least a decade.
- Swift rehabilitation of the Israeli home front and maintaining functional continuity.
- Maintaining the IDF's freedom of action at the end of the war, in order to prevent Iran's renewed entrenchment in the northern arena.
- Endorsing the responsibility of the state of Lebanon in all Lebanese territory.
- Blocking smuggling, infiltration, and weapons transfer routes from Syria to Lebanon.

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6   According to expert assessments, to achieve these goals Israel will have to deliver an effective blow to Hezbollah's ground-based launch and strike capabilities into Israeli territory (destroying at least 70 percent of Hezbollah's rocket/surface-to-surface missiles and hitting some 5,000 Radwan Force soldiers).

- Upending the attitude of the Syrian regime to Iran and leading it to the understanding that its ties with Tehran constitute a liability, not a strategic asset.
- Ensuring there is no friction between the IDF and Russian forces in Syria. At the same time, Russia gives guarantees and a commitment to prevent the renewed entrenchment of the Shi'ite axis in Syria.
- Israel attains international legitimacy for its military moves and a willingness on the part of world powers to provide guarantees for a ceasefire and improved security arrangements.

The main dilemmas faced by decision makers

Following are the main issues that will require debate prior to a decision:

Is the next war really inevitable? In view of the expected complexity of the next war and the high price it will exact from both sides, the question of whether and how it can be averted must first be examined. While Israel will not be able to prevent a war that is forced upon it, before it chooses to initiate a move, it should exhaust all ways to avoid it, and in doing so even opt for open or covert political measures. A key element in the effort to avoid war that Israel should continue to pursue is **building deterrence**, for example, by maintaining routine military operations (the campaign between the wars) and through an ongoing, concerted cognitive drive to stress the heavy cost the enemy can be expected to pay as a result of a war.

Should Israel initiate a military move? The growing threat in the northern arena as a result of the strengthening of the Shi'ite axis, of which Hezbollah is the spearhead, raises the dilemma of whether to diminish the threat or remove it by military means. Israel's strategy in almost all of its wars has been defensive, with the objective of maintaining the status quo or restoring it (with the exception of the Lebanon War 1982). However, even though the strategy was defensive, the doctrine was offensive. The objective was to quickly transfer the war to enemy territory, primarily due to Israel's lack of strategic depth, in order to decisively defeat the enemy's forces and shorten the war, create an improved strategic reality for Israel, and thus delay the next war and reinforce deterrence.

With regard to the next war in the north, there are two options for a preemptive strike, and the military benefits should be examined against their projected costs:

- **Preemptive counterstrike** (preemptive strike): An initiated strike that heads off the enemy's expected attack by some hours or days in order to disrupt its plans, to create a military advantage and hold the initiative. In this instance, the IDF would attack preemptively when it is clear that the Shi'ite axis is about to start a war.

- **Preemptive war:** An initiated offensive aimed at inflicting heavy damage on the enemy before it is ready for war and while it is working on its long-term military strength. It would seem that this is the most relevant yet difficult dilemma regarding the expected war against the Shi'ite axis. The question is, should Israel initiate a war against a developing threat? The core of the dilemma in this instance concerns the progress of Hezbollah's precision-guided missile program. We conducted performance analysis tests and simulations as part of this study, and reached the conclusion that **an arsenal of more than 500 precision-guided missiles constitutes a severe threat potential, and if it becomes clear that Hezbollah has in its possession a stockpile approaching that figure, Israel will have to consider launching a preemptive war** to significantly reduce Hezbollah's arsenal of precision munitions and prevent the organization from growing stronger.[7] Key considerations in such a decision will be whether this arsenal in the enemy's hands also neutralizes the IDF's freedom of action below the threshold of war, and what the probability is that the next war could develop out of a preemptive strike.

Can the war be shortened, and is it possible to control its scope? The wide-scale offensive expected against Israel's home front from a number of arenas in the next war, combined with the assessment that the IDF will not be able to stem such an offensive for the duration of the war, underscores the dilemma regarding the length of the war and its scope. There are a few schools of thought in this regard. One is that Israel should aim for a short and limited war, without a ground operation, even if its achievements will be extremely limited.[8] This is in view of the heavy price that can be expected in a

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7   The detailed conclusions of this performance analysis test will not be made public due to the sensitivity of the issue. It has been presented to the defense establishment in a separate confidential document.

8   Major General (ret.) Giora Eiland opines that keeping the war at a few days will serve the IDF's interests because its actions are usually most effective in the first days of a war, when it is possible to attack many targets on the basis of intelligence

long war, which could paralyze the Israeli economy, harm national resilience, cause cumulative damages to infrastructure and heavy casualties. Another view is that in any event a military operation will be costly and therefore Israel should set as an objective to thwart the development of the threat for a sustained period of time. The military solution to the dilemma is to create the conditions for a decisive resolution in a short time that will remove the threat to the home front, and a deep penetrating military operation aimed at undermining the enemy's military capabilities.

A related question pertains to **advancing a ground maneuver** significant enough to affect the length of the war. Within the Israeli defense establishment, there are various approaches to this matter and whether it lengthens or shortens the war. There are those who claim that in the next war Israel will be able to achieve a decisive resolution through standoff firepower without a ground operation, which the IDF should seek to avoid because of the high anticipated cost of doing so. This contrasts with the historical approach, which suggests that it is possible to reach a resolution and shorten the war purely through a ground maneuver, and in the event of a war in the north through a massive maneuver in Lebanese territory, and perhaps in the Syrian Golan, in order to defeat the enemy and create improved conditions for the "day after." The political echelon will be required, in discourse with the IDF, to review the objectives of a ground maneuver – including how deep into enemy territory it should go – at a meeting on strategic alternatives. Three main possibilities will be on the table: first, limited movement into Lebanese territory with defensive goals, to disrupt the Radwan Force's plans to embark on a ground offensive and seize territory within Israel; second, a maneuver up to the Awali River to take control of Hezbollah's launch zone for short-range rockets and missiles; and third, a ground operation right up to Beirut to bring about a strategic change in Lebanon's situation.[9]

Is it right to attack the Lebanese state and not just Hezbollah's military force? On this issue as well, there are a few schools of thought. Some approaches believe defining the Lebanese state, and not just Hezbollah, as an enemy will help shorten the war. Major General (ret.) Giora Eiland claims that there is a political and moral justification for doing so, given
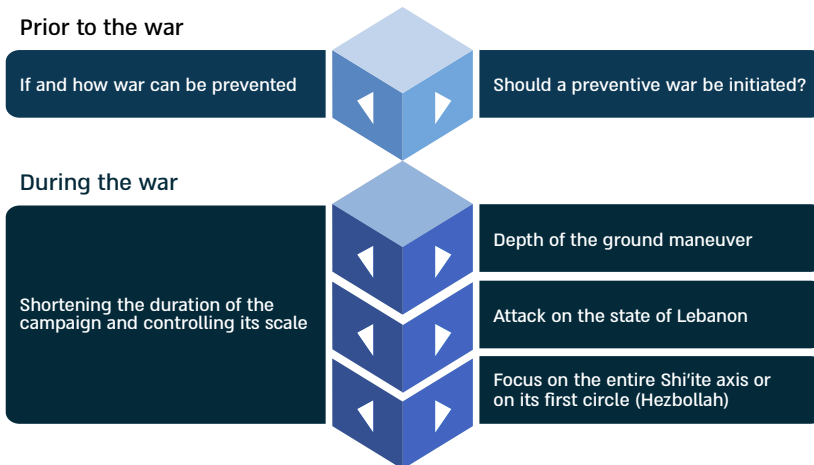
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gathered over years, and then they gradually decline over time. In his view, the opposite applies to Hezbollah – it sees every additional day of war as an achievement.

9   Our recommendations on this issue are presented in chapter 8.

Hezbollah's involvement in the Lebanese regime. In his opinion, an official declaration of a state of war with Lebanon in parallel with inflicting critical damage to the country's infrastructure (air and sea ports), its army, and government institutions will swiftly lead to heavy international pressure and demands for a ceasefire. This argument received added validation when the Lebanese government was formed (January 2020) by Hezbollah and its Christian and Sunni supporters.[10] Yet other experts claim that striking Lebanese infrastructures would have no value since the state has no sway over Iran or Hezbollah, and the destruction of an already-weak Lebanon would actually assist in spreading the influence of Iran, which would exploit the power vacuum created.

The allocation of resources to build up defensive and offensive capabilities is a major issue facing the political echelon, particularly in the context of budgetary discussions. This is because of the IDF's need for long-term planning of its force buildup, on the one hand, and the difficulty in boosting its budget, on the other, especially in light of the economic crisis that Israel faces as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

■ KEY DILEMMAS

Prior to the war

| If and how war can be prevented | Should a preventive war be initiated? |

During the war

Shortening the duration of the campaign and controlling its scale	Depth of the ground maneuver
	Attack on the state of Lebanon
	Focus on the entire Shi'ite axis or on its first circle (Hezbollah)

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10 It should be noted that this government was forced to resign following the Beirut Port disaster (August 4, 2020).
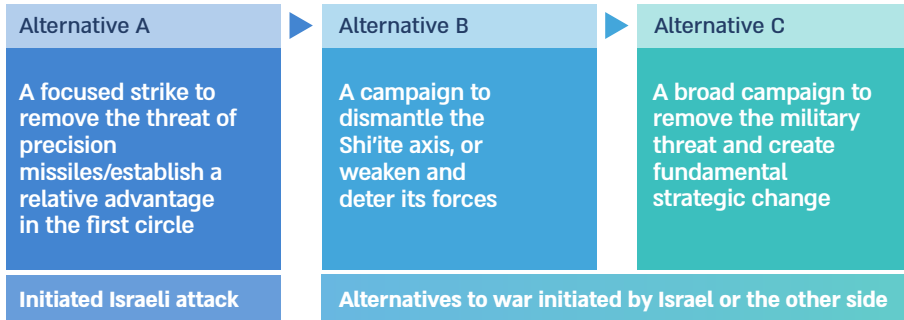
Chapter 4

Strategic Alternatives for Israeli Policy

The range of alternatives and criteria to assess them

We now present the strategic alternatives available to Israeli decision makers to attain the war goals and strategic objective outlined in chapter 3. Our analysis is based on the following key assumptions: there is a grave and developing threat against Israel in the northern arena; efforts to prevent war have been exhausted; and the campaign-between-the-wars strategy has not provided the required response. Therefore, Israel can no longer avoid a military operation in order to diminish or remove the threat against it and maintain the IDF's military superiority. **Three main courses of action** that may advance these goals were examined. They are differentiated from each other in their concrete objectives and the scope of the conflict required to achieve them. The alternatives are presented in a graded scale, from limited confrontation to a broad campaign. The duration of hostilities also differs between each alternative, from a short campaign (a few days) to a longer one (several weeks).

It should be emphasized that each of the alternatives can stand on its own, but that they could also be interchanged even while fighting, given the difficulty in controlling the scope and duration of a campaign.

The main alternatives formulated and presented for the consideration of the political echelon are outlined in the following figure:

■ ALTERNATIVES FOR ISRAEL'S STRATEGY

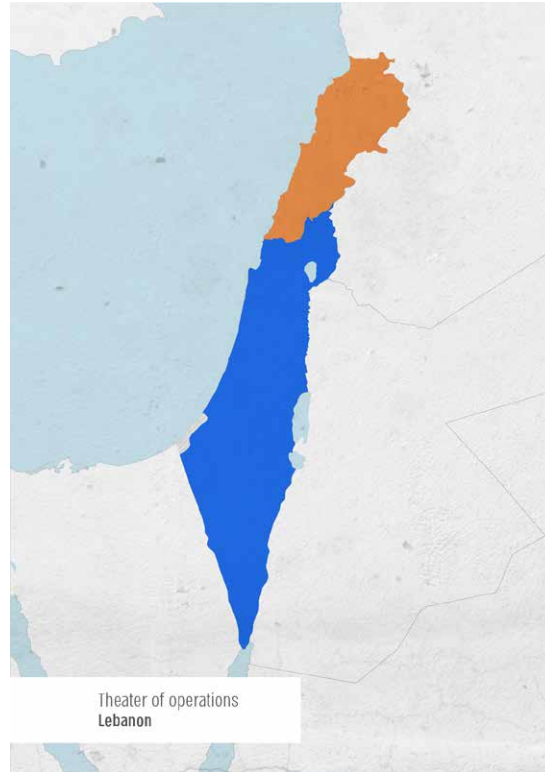| Alternative A		Alternative B		Alternative C
A focused strike to remove the threat of precision missiles/establish a relative advantage in the first circle		A campaign to dismantle the Shi'ite axis, or weaken and deter its forces		A broad campaign to remove the military threat and create fundamental strategic change
Initiated Israeli attack		Alternatives to war initiated by Israel or the other side		

The main criteria by which the alternatives were examined are:

- The ability to realize the goals of the war and the strategic objective of the military operations;
- Anticipated achievements versus the costs of the war;
- Israel's ability to control the scale of the campaign and the number of fronts on which it will have to operate;
- The time required to achieve the strategic objective in view of the grave threat expected to the Israeli home front as the fighting persists; and
- If and to what degree a military action will push back the next war.

Here follows a list of the rationales behind each of the alternatives, the key implications of adopting them as a course of action, and the risks and dilemmas for decision makers.

Alternative A: A preemptive strike to remove the threat of precision-guided missiles

Theater of operations
Lebanon

The premise underlying this alternative is that a grave threat is developing against Israel, and therefore Israel must act preemptively to eliminate it. The significant progress made in the Iran-led precision-missile program is the main issue here, especially if it bears fruit and Hezbollah comes to possess a large number of such missiles (in our estimation, over 500); that indeed would put strategic assets in Israel at great risk. The same applies to the development of other strategic capabilities that threaten Israel's relative and qualitative edge in the first circle around Israel, and which have the ability to change the balance of power. In these circumstances, according to Alternative A, Israel would initiate a limited military operation that would include a focused attack to remove this threat, while attempting to control the scale of escalation without being dragged into a broad conflict, and maintaining the IDF's freedom of action.

A preemptive action by Israel requires preparation for a targeted blow that can be ended within a few days, while inflicting heavy damage, mainly on Hezbollah, but that could also develop into a broad campaign. Despite the advantages in surprising the enemy it is important to be ready for the possibility of escalation, and therefore it is also necessary to mobilize and amass ground forces that will stop a ground offensive by Hezbollah; at the same time, the possibility of an immediate ground maneuver into Lebanese territory must be considered, as does ensuring full preparation of the home front.

The main risk in concentrating forces along the front lies in the high potential for deterioration into a broad campaign, due to Hezbollah's fears that this is what Israel is preparing for and the vulnerability of the forces in the army's emergency storage warehouses and assembly areas. In this situation it will be difficult for Israel to control the scale of escalation, and if it wishes to prevent exacerbation at any cost, it will need to show restraint, even if that means there will be strikes on the IDF and the home front. In the political arena, consideration should be given to the fact that Israel will be accused of aggression and responsibility for the harsh consequences expected of a wide-scale war.

■ **SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVE A – A PREEMPTIVE STRIKE TO REMOVE THE THREAT OF PRECISION-GUIDED MISSILES**

Strategic objective	• Removing the threat of precision missiles and additional capabilities detrimental to Israel's relative edge • Diminishing and distancing the threat, while maintaining the IDF's freedom of operation • Preventing deterioration to a full-scale war, while demonstrating determination
Military implications	• Preemptive strike/preemptive war • A targeted limited strike to destroy precision capabilities and core capabilities • Defensive military deployment in the northern arena in order to prevent escalation • Readiness for escalation scenarios – from "battle day" to full-scale war • Full emergency preparedness of the home front
Risks and dilemmas	• Surprise required – Assembly of forces and defensive deployment only after initiating an offensive strike • Great potential for deterioration – Limited control of scale of escalation • Containment and restraint even at the cost of absorbing hits on the civilian home front and at IDF bases • Promoting legitimacy for an operation • How can expansion of the campaign be prevented? Can the enemy's capabilities buildup be halted?

Alternative B: A limited war to dismantle and weaken the Shi'ite axis forces in the northern arena

Theaters of war
Lebanon, Syria, western Iraq

The reasoning behind this alternative is that Israel – against its will or at the initiative of the enemy – could be dragged into initiating a war on a number of fronts simultaneously, based on the assessment that there is a need to deal with the various elements of the Iranian-Shi'ite axis and to dismantle it. Therefore, the objective to be determined for the campaign will center on the members of the axis, from Iraq through Syria and Lebanon, but not on the "snake's head," i.e., the regime of the ayatollahs in Iran. This will require a parallel military and diplomatic effort to expand the IDF's freedom of action and to foster international involvement that will lead at the end of hostilities to a regional agreement and to long-term stability and calm.

The military significance of this alternative is that there is a need to **prepare for an all-out war on at least two fronts.** The IDF will have to mobilize extensively and to prepare for the entire home front coming under

fire. Achieving this will require a campaign intended to inflict severe damage on the axis forces in Lebanon and Syria, and possibly Iraq as well, and especially to strike missile systems and military infrastructures. This is in addition to a defensive deployment on the front lines and capturing areas of strategic importance in southern Lebanon at distances of up to 10 kilometers from the border, so as to disrupt the enemy's plans to send forces into Israeli territory. In this alternative, a limited ground maneuver in southern Lebanon will be required and possibly (inevitably) in the Syrian Golan to remove the ground threat and reduce missile launches, thereby fast-tracking the end of the war. Israel will also need to turn to diplomatic channels to seek a mechanism to end the war with external intervention, at a time it desires and under conditions that will enable it to maintain its achievements.

The main risk for Israel in this alternative lies in the difficulty controlling the scope and duration of the war. There is a danger that the campaign will expand beyond two fronts, and in the absence of an endgame mechanism it will be a long and bitter war. There are a number of additional risks in the political-strategic arena, such as the erosion of Israel's international legitimacy due to the expected serious damage inflicted on the Lebanese state and its civilians, but this will be subject to the extent of damage inflicted on Israel's infrastructures and its civilians. The greater the damage Israel sustains, the more understanding the international community will be toward Israel's destructive response. In addition, weakening the Lebanese state may work against Israel if there is chaos in Lebanon and Hezbollah exploits that to continue to build up its military strength and to expand Iran's foothold in the country while axis members are further entrenching themselves in Syria. In this case, Israel will pay a heavy military-economic-political price, without achieving significant gains.

■ ALTERNATIVE B – GROUND MANEUVER IN AT LEAST TWO THEATERS OF OPERATIONS

■ SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVE B – A LIMITED WAR TO DISMANTLE THE SHI'ITE AXIS FORCES IN THE NORTHERN ARENA

Strategic objective	• Dismantling the Shi'ite axis, weakening and deterring its forces in the first circle • Expansion of IDF's freedom of action • Sparking international involvement that will lead to prolonged stability
Military implications	• Primary effort in Lebanon; broad mobilization; home front under fire • Defensive deployment along the border with Lebanon and in the Golan Heights to prevent enemy achievements • Campaign to inflict harm on the axis forces in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, with an emphasis on missile systems and military infrastructures • Limited ground maneuver to move the battlefield to enemy territory (southern Lebanon, northern Golan Heights) and determine victory • Endgame mechanism through external intervention (third party, international involvement)
⚠	• Difficulty controlling the duration of the war and its scale – risk of development of multi-arena war • Limited control over endgame mechanisms – potential for long war of attrition • Weakening of the Lebanese state, continued military entrenchment of the Shi'ite axis, strengthening of Hezbollah in Lebanon • A high price for a "strategic tie"; the dilemma over harming the Lebanese state

Alternative C: A general war to remove the strategic threat and create fundamental change

Theaters of operations
Lebanon, Syria, western Iraq,
Iran, Gaza Strip
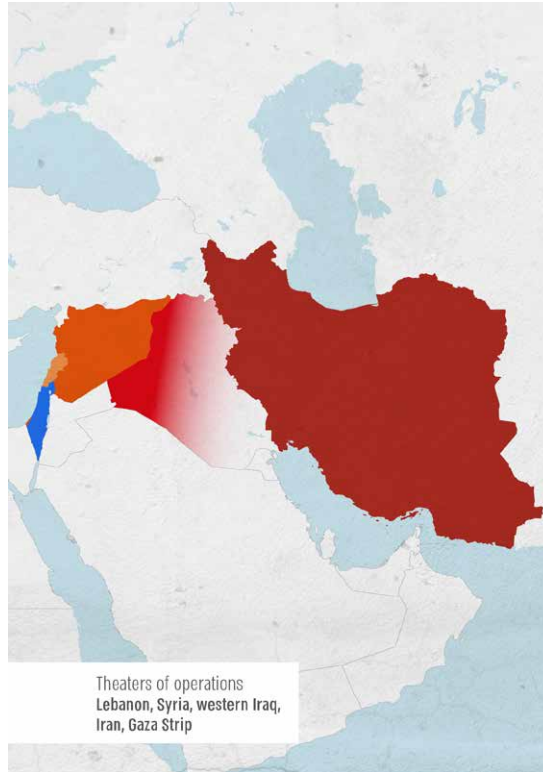
The rationale behind this alternative is that the scope of the campaign (alternatives A and B) could expand **as a result of a deterioration**, for example, following an Israeli or American strike on nuclear sites in Iran or, at the enemy's initiative, into a long, multi-theater war, including combat in Iran. Israel's goals, if the campaign develops in this way, should be to create a fundamental change in the political-security reality in the north. This would include a change in the rules of the game in order to lead to a long-term change in the balance of power between Israel and Iran as well, and a change in the nature of the threats from Lebanon and Syria. The objective from the IDF's perspective will be to defeat the military might of the Iranian-Shi'ite axis in the first circle around Israel, in Lebanon and Syria, leading to internal change in Lebanon; to release the Iranian grip on Lebanon and Syria; to remove Syria from Iran's claws; to damage strategic

infrastructures in Iran, thereby ruining Iran's strategy of using proxies while the Iranian homeland remains safe and protected. The aim of all this is to fortify Israel's political standing and military strength.

Alternative C has far-reaching military implications in view of the need to manage a war in up to four theaters concurrently. This would require a general mobilization and emergency preparedness on all fronts. The IDF would need to launch a preemptive strike to reduce damage to the home front; to deal with missile attacks and air strikes from multiple fronts, and to instigate a quick ground maneuver deep inside Lebanese territory, threatening Beirut. This would have to be done while allowing for the option of a limited maneuver in Syria, along with wide-scale strikes on military and dual-purpose infrastructures in Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. It should be remembered that throughout this protracted war the Israeli home front will be under fire, the scale of which will depend both on the IDF's success in harming the enemy's capabilities and the scope of air defense means available to it.

From a military perspective, the main difficulty with this alternative is the need to wage combat **in so many theaters simultaneously** with the added possibility that Iran will urge Hamas and Islamic Jihad to open a southern front by firing missiles into the Israeli communities that border the Gaza Strip and from the sea; in parallel, violent incidents can be expected in the West Bank. In other words, the entire home front could be under fire. Moreover, the situation could devolve into a **regional war** that will include combat in more distant territories – in the event that, for example, ballistic or cruise missiles will be fired into Israel from within Iran. The direct involvement of Iran in the fighting from within its territory will lead to a tough dilemma for Israel, begging a harsh response, such as an Israeli strike within Iranian territory, a move that would lead to an overstretching of the troops and their scope of operations.

On the political-strategic level, it will be extremely important to coordinate the campaign with the US to ensure the transfer of needed military assistance to the IDF; to receive diplomatic support throughout the war; to coordinate positions with regard to the termination of hostilities and assistance in formulating regional endgame mechanisms that will maintain Israeli military and political achievements and guarantee the change in the strategic reality, without the Shi'ite axis having the capability to recover and renew the threat. This is particularly relevant in circumstances under which the international

community would pressure Israel if it is perceived to be responsible for the deterioration into a regional war. Also, in the next war it is possible that Russia's involvement will be deeper, due to its presence in Syria and its interests in the region. Russia's involvement could be of a negative nature for Israel, and it will be needed to neutralize it. Maintaining a dialogue with Russia throughout the war and engaging it to establish and implement the mechanisms to end the war and restore stability are therefore of the utmost importance.

In conclusion, this alternative suggests a long war with many inherent risks in order to bring about a fundamental change in the northern arena, and it poses a difficult dilemma to the political echelon: is it worth paying such a heavy price on the northern front and the home front for an uncertain achievement?

■ SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVE C – FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE TO ISRAEL'S STRATEGIC SITUATION

Strategic objective	• Dismantling/breaking the military power of the Shi'ite axis in the first circle (Syria and Lebanon) • Creating conditions enabling fundamental change in the security-political reality in the northern arena: Internal change in Lebanon, pushing Iran and its proxies out of Syria and weakening Iran's influence in Lebanon, strengthening Israel's status in the region • Establishing long-term conditions for fundamental change in Israel's relations with Lebanon and Syria
Military implications	• General war on at least two fonts (Lebanon and Syria): General mobilization and emergency deployment in all arenas • Preemptive strike: A strike on strongholds of the Shi'ite axis – Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq • A rapid and deep ground maneuver in Lebanon (threat to Beirut) and a limited maneuver in Syria toward Damascus • A broad assault on military and dual-purpose infrastructures in Syria and Lebanon, primarily military infrastructures • The continuity of home front operations under fire for a significant period of time • Assistance from and coordination with the US will be required
Risks and dilemmas	• Possible deterioration into a regional war, including the third circle (missiles launched from Iraq or Iran) • Difficulties in fighting simultaneously in a multi-theater war, including the possibility of additional arenas being opened in the Gaza Strip & the West Bank • Superpower involvement, negative role played by Russia, and lack of support from the US throughout the campaign • Possibility of enforcement to end the war before achieving its objectives • Using the opportunity to attack Iran's nuclear infrastructures? • Effect on national resilience • Difficulty in creating endgame mechanisms; outline of the evacuation of forces and mechanisms to maintain achievements • Uncertain achievements vs. the risk of a high price on the military and civilian fronts

Chapter 5

The Challenge Faced by the Civilian Arena

This chapter[11] 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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11 This chapter was written by Brigadier General (ret.) Dr. Meir Elran and Dr. Carmit Padan.

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.

Chapter 6

The Cognitive Campaign alongside the War

The role of a cognitive campaign in a war has long been recognized, and its place has grown with the increasing reach of new media.[12] Leaders of the Shi'ite axis know well how to exploit the media to influence public opinion. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah spends a lot of time and effort trying to influence the consciousness of the Israeli, Lebanese, and international publics. And this pattern is expected to continue during the next war, when he will likely claim victory over Israel – whether or not that reflects reality on the ground. Nasrallah can be expected to apply scare and deterrence tactics against the Israeli public and IDF soldiers via all types of media, including social networks, in an attempt to sow fear and amplify Hezbollah's successes regardless of the actual outcomes of the war.

Israel needs to prepare ahead of time in the cognitive field. In this section we present guidelines for **an Israeli cognitive strategy** that were formulated as part of our project, and offer suggestions for messages aimed at the various target audiences. The cognitive effort must be directed at those same four target audiences: the Israeli public, the Lebanese political system and residents, the enemy (i.e., Hezbollah and other members of the Shi'ite axis), and regional and international audiences. A distinction should be made between messaging prior to war and during a campaign; a further distinction should be made between overt and covert messaging.[13]

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12 This chapter was written with the assistance of David Siman-Tov.

13 The narrative and the messages in this section are presented in a generic way, and of course need to be adapted to the circumstances and the alternative ultimately chosen.

Vis-à-vis the Israeli public

The proposed narrative: Israel faces a grave and complex challenge and a significant threat to the home front, but the IDF can provide the necessary response.

Prior to war: It is important to expose the Israeli public in advance to the threat to the home front and to make it clear that in the next war a major attack on the home front is expected, though the magnitude remains unknown. If the circumstances suggest that the possibility of war is close, the public should be informed of Hezbollah's newest capabilities to help prepare for the severity of what might follow. At the same time it should be emphasized that the IDF's defensive capabilities are formidable, and that it has the skills to achieve victory in the campaign. The civilian population for its part will be required to heed the instructions of the Home Front Command.

During the campaign: It must be made clear to citizens that fulfilling Home Front Command instructions will help reduce damage, and that removing the threat requires time. The IDF's strength and its ability to overcome the threats must be highlighted time and again, but the message should also be conveyed that attaining victory will require patience on the part of the public. In parallel, it is also important to convey messages that refute the boastful statements of Hezbollah and others in the Shi'ite axis, making it clear that their claims of achievements are in fact baseless.

Vis-à-vis the Shi'ite axis

The proposed narrative: Israel has the military power and prowess, national resilience, and the determination to overcome threats to its security, and if there is no other choice it is ready to deal the enemy a severe blow even if that means that there will be extensive damage to infrastructure and civilians.

Prior to war: Israel should emphasize that it does not desire war against Hezbollah and Iran, but it will continue to work tirelessly to keep threats against it at bay. That said, a continued military buildup – for example, by Hezbollah and particularly its precision-guided missile project – is what will lead to war. Israel will not be deterred, and is preparing for confrontation

in that context. This war will exact a heavy price from Hezbollah and its partners in battle, including Iranian elements in Syria.

During the campaign: Israel should emphasize to Hezbollah that it has the ability and the staying power to continue fighting for as long as is needed to win the war, and any threats the organization makes about causing harm to Israelis will be met with a severe blow to the Lebanese home front. As for Iran and its other proxies, Israel should stress that it is aware that Tehran is posturing behind Hezbollah and other axis members attacking Israel, and warn it that any attack on Israel from Syria or Iraq will lead to a harsh Israeli response.

Vis-à-vis Lebanon – The Lebanese system and population

The proposed narrative: Israel has no interest in hurting the state of Lebanon and its residents; rather, it is interested in a prospering and stable Lebanon and in peaceful relations with it. It is Hezbollah and Iran, by repeatedly threatening Israel, that are leading the situation to war. Hezbollah does not care about Lebanon but is acting solely in the service of its Iranian masters, and it is responsible for Lebanon's precarious situation.

Prior to war: Israel should emphasize that Hezbollah is responsible for Lebanon's dire situation and is leading it to war for reasons that have nothing to do with Lebanon. The organization's connection to Iran should also be underlined, as well as the fact that Iran dictates Hezbollah policy in line with its own interests. Thus it is Iran that is dragging the region to war. Lebanon does not actually need Hezbollah to defend it, since Israel has no interest in acting against Lebanon per se and its only goal is to neutralize Hezbollah's threats against it. Hezbollah cynically uses the Lebanese population as a "human shield," concealing dangerous weapons within populated areas , which pose a serious threat to the public, as was proved in the August 2020 Beirut Port disaster.

During the campaign: Israel should emphasize that it is Iran and Hezbollah that are responsible for the destruction of Lebanon. Hezbollah is not the "protector of Lebanon," as it claims, but rather uses Lebanese civilians as a "human shield." Israel aspires to end the war by straightening out its relations with Lebanon, while removing the threat against it from Hezbollah. For that

reason, Israel demands an improved agreement with regard to UN Security Council Resolution 1701, passed in August 2006 at the end of the Second Lebanon War, that will ensure for the short term a cessation of Hezbollah's military buildup and the removal of the precision missiles from Lebanon, and calls for a long-term mechanism to be set up to disarm Hezbollah. Implementation of this arrangement will lead to the prosperity of Lebanon.

In the regional and international arenas

The proposed narrative: Israel's military operations are legitimate. Israel has no desire for war and is being dragged into it against its will due to the aggression of the Shi'ite axis against it and Hezbollah's continued military buildup. The responsibility for damages to infrastructures and the civilian population in Lebanon lies with Hezbollah and Iran.

Prior to war: Israel should send messages spotlighting Hezbollah's military buildup and in particular its precision-guided missile project, which threatens the security and stability of the entire region. Hezbollah, with the support of Iran, is pulling in the direction of a war that Israel does not want, but could be dragged into because of the military buildup and entrenchment of members of the Shi'ite axis. Israel will strive not to harm civilians and infrastructures, but if that does happen – it is Hezbollah that is responsible.

During the campaign: Israel should stress that it is under attack and taking all means necessary to defend itself. Strikes against civilian populations and infrastructures are being carried out as there is no choice, but it is Hezbollah and the Shi'ite axis that are responsible; Hezbollah uses the civilian population as "human shields," as seen in the Beirut Port disaster. The international community should be persuaded to intervene in order to assist in shortening the war (the actual time frame will be determined according to how events unfold during the course of the campaign). Israel should emphasize that international entities must step in early to stop the fighting, to help limit the destruction to Lebanon and to underscore the need for an improved agreement in relation to Security Council Resolution 1701, with an emphasis on realistic goals for the immediate term, above all halting Hezbollah's military buildup and its precision-missile program and, for the long term, as already noted, neutralizing Hezbollah as an independent militia.

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.
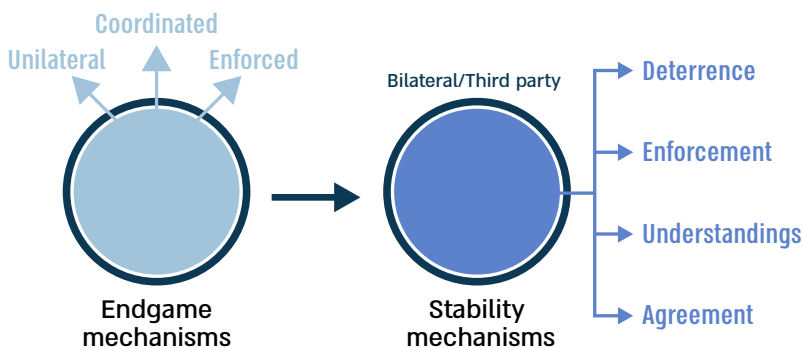
Israel's interest in restoring stability after the war includes a preference for certain **stability and regulation mechanisms** to be used vis-à-vis the government of Lebanon, while applying a measure of coercion and enforcement on Hezbollah (and ideally also on the other axis factors). In order to 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.

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.

About the Authors

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Udi Dekel, the managing director of the Institute for National Security Studies, has vast experience in the fields of intelligence, international military cooperation, and strategic planning. He headed the Israeli team to the negotiations with the Palestinians in the Annapolis process, prior to which he filled many senior IDF positions, including head of the Foreign Relations Division and, in the Air Force, commander of the Foreign Relations Unit and head of the Research Division. His last IDF post was head of Strategic Planning. Following the Second Lebanon War Brig. Gen. (res.) Dekel headed the Israel-UN-Lebanon committee. In addition, he served on the 2006 commission to update Israel's security concept.

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years in the IDF, he commanded the Samaria Brigade, the Hermon Brigade, and the Golani Brigade's 51st Battalion. His last position in the IDF was as the defense attaché to Central European countries.

In recent years, the northern arena has emerged as Israel's primary military challenge. The entrenchment of the Iranian-led Shi'ite axis in Syria and Lebanon, attempts by Iran and its proxies to make inroads toward Israel's border with Syria, and Hezbollah's growing strength in Lebanon are all factors contributing to increased friction and cause for concern regarding the next war in the north. One thing is certain: a war on the northern front will be unlike all previous wars. as the conflict is likely to include the Lebanese arena, Syria, and possibly even western Iraq.

This memorandum presents the findings of a project conducted by the Institute for National Security Studies with the participation of INSS researchers, military and intelligence experts, and former high-ranking IDF commanders who analyzed the gamut of issues that require consideration in advance of the next war in northern Israel. Taking a long-term perspective, it looks at how threats may emerge and outlines the dilemmas, possible alternatives, and opportunities that exist for Israel in the different scenarios, with the aim of assisting the defense establishment and decision makers in Israel in their strategic and operational planning.

The authors do not proclaim that war is nigh, nor do they suggest that war is inevitable. Indeed, the common assumption today is that Iran and Hezbollah do not have an interest in war with Israel in the near future. Nonetheless, it is essential that Israel prepare for the possibility of an escalation of the conflict, whether triggered by a change of circumstances, as the result of a deterioration, or due to an erroneous assessment by any side.