Chapter 4

Strategic Alternatives for Israeli Policy
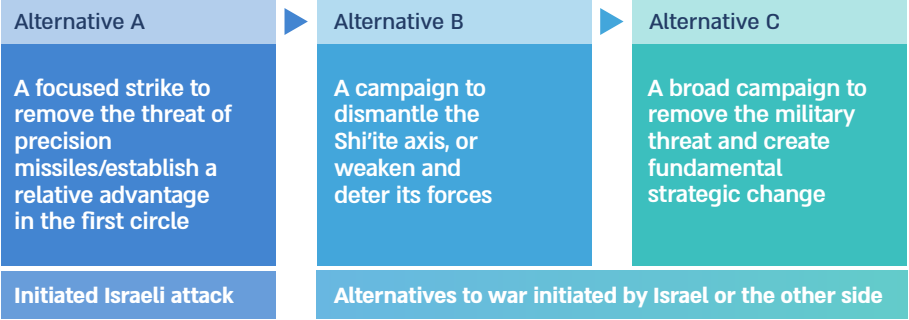
The range of alternatives and criteria to assess them

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

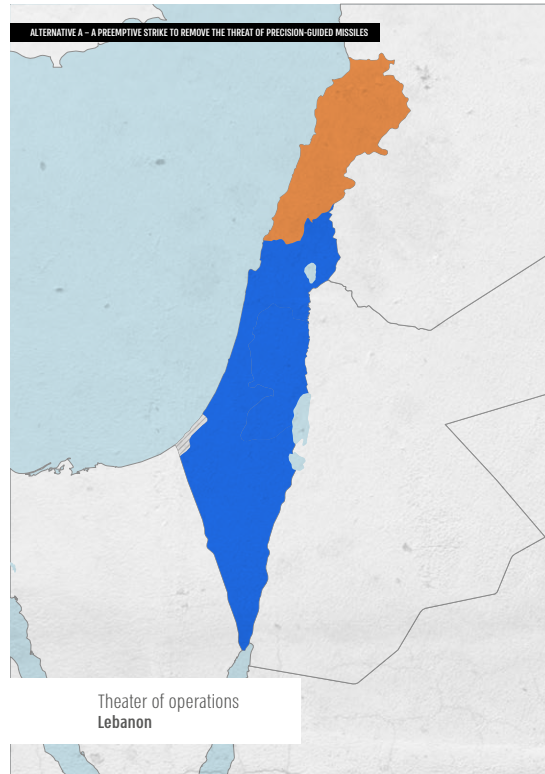| Alternative A		Alternative B		Alternative C
A focused strike to remove the threat of precision missiles/establish a relative advantage in the first circle	▶	A campaign to dismantle the Shi'ite axis, or weaken and deter its forces	▶	A broad campaign to remove the military threat and create fundamental 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

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

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
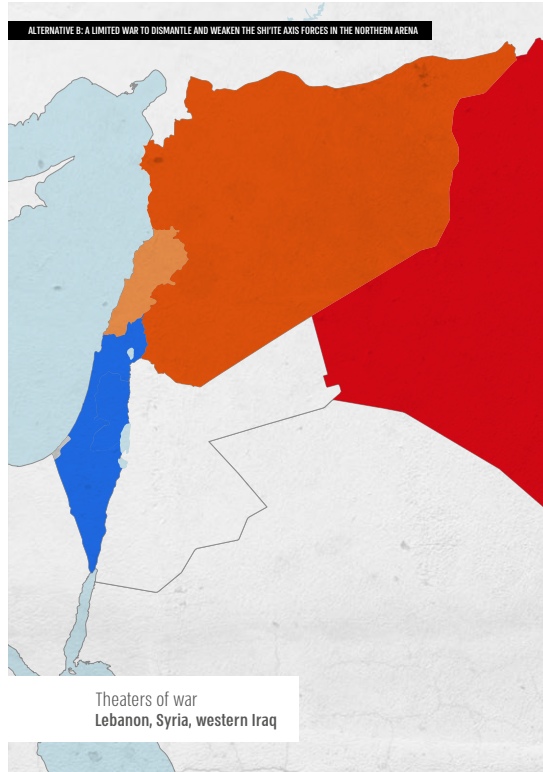
The reasoning behind this alternative is that Israel – against its will or at the initiative of the enemy – could be dragged into initiating a war on a number of fronts simultaneously, based on the assessment that there is a need to deal with the various elements of the Iranian-Shi'ite axis and to dismantle 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

ALTERNATIVE B – A 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

ALTERNATIVE C: A GENERAL WAR TO REMOVE THE STRATEGIC THREAT AND CREATE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE

Theaters of operations
Lebanon, Syria, western Iraq, Iran, Gaza Strip
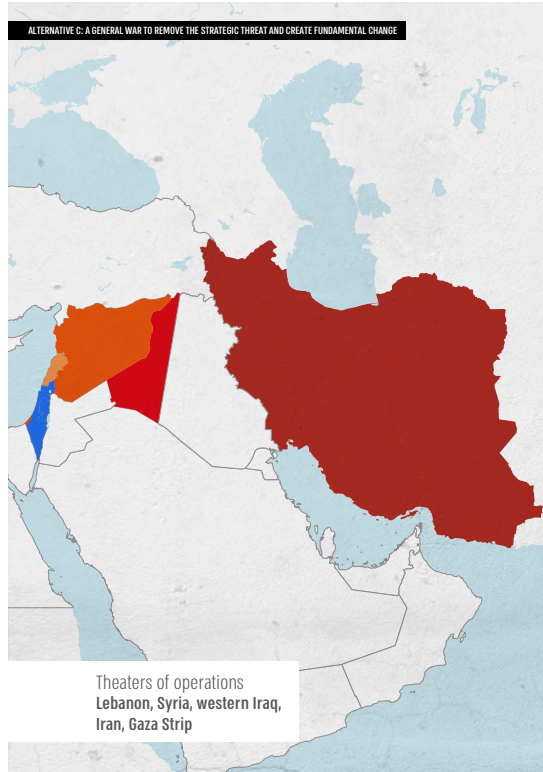
The rationale behind this alternative is that the scope of the campaign (alternatives A and B) could expand **as a result of a deterioration**, for example, following an Israeli or American strike on nuclear sites in Iran or, at the enemy's initiative, into a long, multi-theater war, including combat 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