



The Development of Hezbollah's Deterrence Strategy Toward Israel

Yoram Schweitzer, Orna Mizrahi, and Anat Shapira

Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) – Tel Aviv University

2022 marked 40 years since Hezbollah's establishment and 30 years since Nasrallah became the leader of the organization. Over the years Hezbollah has developed from a classic terrorist organization into a multifaceted and multi-identity organization that is a military force with conventional capabilities and the spearhead of the Shiite "axis of resistance." Throughout these years, and especially since the Second Lebanon War (2006), the organization has gained military strength but refrained from exercising its offensive capabilities against Israel; its activity is driven by the goal of maintaining and consolidating its balance of deterrence with Israel, in the interest of avoiding deterioration into another full-scale war. This article examines the elements that have shaped the "deterrence equation" between Hezbollah and Israel, which combines kinetic military activity and cognitive warfare, its gradual development over the course of the 40 years of conflict, and the nature of the current balance of deterrence; this is the background to assess how Israel might best deal with the challenge posed by the organization. The article contends that the balance of deterrence is rooted in Hezbollah's origins and evolution and constitutes a central component of the organization's current strategy. However, given Nasrallah's tendency to take risks and the changing regional reality, this does not guarantee the prevention of a future large-scale conflict between the organization and the IDF, which could develop into a multi-arena war.

Keywords: Hezbollah, Nasrallah, Iran, Shiite axis, Lebanon, terrorism, guerrilla warfare, convergence of arenas, northern front, missiles, deterrence equation

Introduction

Hezbollah has recently demonstrated increasing confidence and greater audacity vis-à-vis Israel. This is reflected primarily in the combined kinetic-cognitive campaign waged by the organization surrounding the natural gas agreement signed between Israel and Lebanon, the attempted attack at Megiddo Junction in March 2023, the license to Palestinian

organizations to fire Katyushas from southern Lebanon (2021-2022), and the increasing friction with the IDF along the border. It seems that Hezbollah perceives an opportunity to change the balance of deterrence with Israel in its favor, and to create new rules of the game.

This article examines the sources of Hezbollah's current strategy toward Israel and its patterns of development, with an emphasis

on Hezbollah's balance of deterrence. First it examines the elements that have shaped the organization's action strategy, and then reviews the historical development of the balance of deterrence between Hezbollah and Israel. The combination of these two aspects lays the basis for understanding the current balance of deterrence between Hezbollah and Israel, examined in the final part of this article, which also discusses the significance for Israel and the risks entailed.

In the military sphere Hezbollah evolved into a guerrilla force and later into a military force, which thanks to an intensive buildup effort with the help of Iran, is the force with conventional military capabilities that poses the greatest threat to Israel today.

Hezbollah began as a classic terrorist organization, but since its establishment has become a multifaceted organization with multiple identities. In the military sphere it evolved into a guerrilla force and later into a military force, which thanks to an intensive buildup effort with the help of Iran, is the force with conventional military capabilities that poses the greatest threat to Israel today. Moreover, the organization is seen today as the spearhead of the wider "axis of resistance" (the Shiite axis led by Iran, along with Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad). The axis's capabilities could be used by Iran and others to create a reality in which the threat of convergent arenas materializes in the case of a violent conflict with Israel, which would lead to a situation where an outbreak on one front leads to an attack on Israel from other arenas as well. Since the Second Lebanon War, Hezbollah has refrained from using all its military capabilities, especially the firepower that it possesses and in particular its precision firepower, which can reach the entire Israeli home front. However, given the organization's newly increased audacity, it is not clear if this restraint will hold.

At the base of the organization's strategy for contending with Israel today is the so-called mutual deterrence equation, rooted in the organization's origins.

In order to understand this equation in depth, we first present the elements that influence the shaping of Hezbollah's combat strategy and deterrence doctrine. These elements are headed first and foremost by the organization's relations with Iran, alongside considerations relating to Lebanon, given its standing and its entrenchment in the Lebanese system. Additional elements affecting the organization's doctrine include its survival imperative, the balance of power with Israel, regional developments, and its need for international legitimacy. From there we examine the chronological development of the deterrence equation between the organization and Israel, concentrating on four main periods: the first decade of the organization's existence; from the assassination of Hezbollah Secretary General al-Musawi and the beginning of Nasrallah's leadership to Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon; from the withdrawal from Lebanon to the Second Lebanon War; and from the Second Lebanon War until today. Understanding the historical perspective of the development of the deterrence equation and the ways in which Hezbollah has acted to expand it lays the basis for the final section of the article, which presents the current balance of deterrence between Hezbollah and Israel and considers the advantages in maintaining it and the risk of one of the sides violating it.

The article presents three main arguments. First, the organization's current deterrence doctrine is firmly rooted in its strategy over the years. The second deals with Hezbollah's combined use of (kinetic) military means and cognitive warfare, and maintains that over the years the ratio between these two components has changed: at the outset, due to the organization's weakness, the cognitive aspect had greater weight alongside acts of terrorism, but as the organization gained

strength, its willingness to engage in military activity also increased, with the cognitive campaign becoming “combat support.” Third, in the last few years, the process of Hezbollah’s institutionalization and its integration in the Lebanese state have gained increasing importance relative to other elements that influence the organization’s strategy. These processes have contributed to restraining the organization, which dedicates considerable attention to its survival and standing in Lebanon. This trend of restraint is also bolstered by additional factors that shape the organization’s strategy, including its involvement in the civil war in Syria and its desire for international legitimacy.

These processes, of Hezbollah pushing the boundaries in order to improve the balance of deterrence in its favor on the one hand, and exercising restraint on the other hand, maintain the risk of short and limited conflicts that could develop into a full-scale war, contrary to the basic interest of Israel and Hezbollah at this time. Indeed, they undermine the certainty that the deterrence equation provided in the past and subvert the “strategic clarity” that has enabled each of the sides to anticipate the other’s actions.

The article focuses on Hezbollah’s balance of power with Israel and on the shaping of the deterrence equation between the sides. Consequently, it is not a comprehensive historical survey of the organization’s development or of Nasrallah’s personal contribution. In addition, the article does not seek to present strategic recommendations on how best to act vis-à-vis Hezbollah’s conduct, but focuses on understanding the elements that help shape the organization’s deterrence strategy toward Israel and the development of the strategy.

The Different Elements Affecting Hezbollah’s Deterrence Strategy

Hezbollah’s combat and deterrence approach toward Israel crystallized over the years, and over

time became the organization’s leading strategy toward Israel, as it is perceived today. Here it is important to understand the main elements that have influenced the evolution of this approach and the organization’s policy on the utilization of force. Thus far most of the literature has focused on the Iranian influence on Hezbollah and/or the organization’s Lebanese identity, excluding other factors that influence the decision making processes and the interactions between them. The following section surveys broadly the elements that influence Hezbollah’s decision making processes under Nasrallah’s leadership with respect to the conflict with Israel.

Hezbollah as a tool in the service of Iran: Hezbollah is deeply committed to Iran, which is a guide and a principal influence in all its considerations, in particular regarding Israel. The organization is inextricably linked to the regime of the ayatollahs, under whose auspices and with whose aid it was established in 1982 as a first step in the framework of the Iranian effort to export the Islamic revolution, while exploiting the chaotic situation following the civil war in Lebanon and the First Lebanon War with Israel (Kurz et al., 1993; Shay, 2001; Shapira, 2000, 2020, 2021). From the organization’s beginnings, Iran, shaped by a Shiite religious identity and the political-religious ideology of clerical rule (*wilayat al-faqih*), has been a source of inspiration and a role model (Kanaaneh, 2021; Kizilkaya, 2019). Over the years Iran has been the organization’s primary economic and military mainstay. Most of Hezbollah’s official budget comes from Iran (in recent years it is estimated at around \$700 million per year, out of an official budget of around \$1 billion), along with the military aid that regularly flows to Hezbollah in every possible way. The aid continues even in times of internal difficulties and budgetary hardship in Iran. Tehran ensures that the organization is trained and armed with the most advanced weapons at its disposal (various missiles and rockets, including precision; unmanned aerial vehicles; and air defense systems) (Levitt, 2013, 2021).

Israel's efforts to stop these deliveries as part of the campaign between wars have been only partially successful and have not weakened the determination of the organization and Iran.

This ongoing Iranian effort has made Hezbollah not only Iran's principal military proxy in the Middle East but also the spearhead of the Shiite axis led by Tehran. The organization's military strength is based on Iranian aid, as are its combat doctrines, which are shaped with the help of Iranian commanders, experts, and advisors. The most noteworthy of these advisors, Qasem Soleimani—especially during the last two decades before his death (in January 2020)—was the commander of the Revolutionary Guards Quds Force (which is responsible for exporting the revolution outside of Iran). He played a central role in formulating Hezbollah's strategy against Israel, and its policy on the utilization of force can be attributed to him (Levitt, 2021). For example, Soleimani came to Lebanon during the Second Lebanon War in 2006 to help Hezbollah, alongside Nasrallah and Imad Mughniyeh, wage the war (Shapira, 2021). Over the years, and the more Nasrallah consolidated his standing in the organization, the personal connection between him and the senior leadership in Tehran deepened, especially with Supreme Leader Khamenei, with whom he is in regular contact. With the strengthening of Nasrallah's standing, this discourse among leaders evolved from dictated policy to coordination and consultation, with Nasrallah deemed by Iran as the foremost expert on Israel whose advice should be taken seriously, rather than as a functionary merely carrying out orders (al-Salhy, 2020).

In the past decade, figures in Israel and in the international system have become convinced that Iran is arming and cultivating Hezbollah's military force so that it will be at its service when the order is given, i.e., it sees Hezbollah's main role as responding if and when Israel decides to launch a large-scale military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities. (Col. T. & Col. R., 2023). In the event of an Israeli attack on

Iran, Hezbollah will respond with a large-scale attack on the Israeli home front in order to ignite a multi-arena war between Israel and the Shiite axis and even beyond: in recent years the expanded axis of resistance has come to clearly include Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (INSS Israel, 2021). In this scenario, the main role of Hezbollah, which has become the entity with the conventional capabilities that are most threatening to Israel, dictates—to the organization and to the leadership in Tehran alike—greater caution in using military capabilities until the order is given, in order to preserve them for when they are needed. In our assessment, this approach fits the logic underlying the organization's aspiration of consolidating the balance of deterrence with Israel, and creates a comfort zone vis-à-vis the Iranian leadership, which does not demand that Hezbollah respond with actions along the Lebanese border in response to the frequent Israeli strikes against it, as part of the ongoing campaign underway between them.

Hezbollah's dominant standing in Lebanon: Joining its commitment to Iran, the organization has consolidated its stature in the Lebanese state over the years, and today Hezbollah is a central and influential power center in Lebanon. The deepening connection and identity between the organization and Lebanon, with all its ethnic groups, influences the organization's set of considerations and commands an important place in its priorities the more it is established and institutionalized within Lebanon. This is a gradual process that takes place on two dimensions concomitantly. On the one hand, Hezbollah is a power center that is integrated in the Lebanese political system and overall is the one leading it (especially throughout the presidency of Michel Aoun, due to Hezbollah's alliance with his Christian party). On the other hand, it is an independent body with autonomous organizational interests that, beyond its independent military capabilities, makes a critical contribution to the socioeconomic whole, especially the

Shiite population, in the framework of its *daw'a* activity. Hezbollah provides the Shiite population with economic assistance and all necessary services (education, health, employment, electricity, water, sanitation), which from the organization's perspective strengthens its ability to maintain their support for the "resistance" and the continued struggle against Israel (Kanaaneh, 2021). The importance of this aid has increased as the economic situation in Lebanon has worsened. Thus, Hezbollah has become the sole reliable supplier of services for this population, and it also attempts to expand its socioeconomic support to additional populations in Lebanon, who depend on it greatly (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2021; Ghaddar, 2020; Norton, 2018).

Although Hezbollah first ran in the Lebanese parliamentary elections in 1992, its influence on the decision making process in Lebanon increased mainly following its success in uniting a political camp around it, the "March 8 camp," starting in 2006. This framework granted Hezbollah the ability to influence internal politics, all the more so since 2016, when it became a central partner in the election of Christian President Michel Aoun and established a majority government with his partners, while controlling the government's agenda (Ghaddar, 2016). Nevertheless, the severe economic crisis plaguing Lebanon since 2019—leading to the state's economic collapse and bankruptcy, with over 80 percent of the population under the poverty line—has also affected Hezbollah's standing in Lebanon. The economic collapse, and in particular the trauma in Lebanon after the explosion at the Beirut port in August 2020 (with 218 killed, thousands injured, and extensive damage to buildings and property), has led to increased public criticism of Hezbollah regarding its responsibility for the dire situation (Mizrahi & Schweitzer, 2020).

Results of the latest parliamentary elections in May 2022 testified to this sentiment, when the number of seats gained by the Hezbollah

camp dropped from 71 to 60. In addition, there were more opponents demanding change, although not to a sufficient extent to remove Hezbollah from the center of decision making, and there was no clear leadership among the new opposition, beyond its familiar opponents from the Christian sector (Mizrahi & Schweitzer, 2022). In particular, cracks have apparently emerged in the past year between Hezbollah and the Christian Free Patriotic Movement, which cooperated with it until now, and the organization is hard pressed to see the formation of a government to its liking and the election of its candidate for president, Suleiman Frangieh (Mizrahi, 2022a).

Hezbollah's dominant standing in Lebanon, which was built gradually over the years, alongside its commitment to the population in general and the dependent Shiite sector in particular, has enhanced its level of responsibility for the Lebanese state and the population at large.

Hezbollah's dominant standing in Lebanon, which was built gradually over the years, alongside its commitment to the population in general and the dependent Shiite sector in particular, has enhanced its level of responsibility for the Lebanese state and the population at large. This influences its considerations and dictates greater caution and restraint in its policy toward Israel. This is also reinforced by the prevailing conception in Israel expressed publicly by senior government and IDF officials, that the Lebanese state will be held responsible for any act against Israel by the organization, and that very serious damage to infrastructure and to the population in Lebanon is expected in any conflict between Israel and Hezbollah (in part due to the organization's use of the civilian population as a human shield) (Eichner, 2022; Eichner & Zeitun, 2020; Hacoheh, 2022). Therefore, Hezbollah cannot but take these Israeli threats into account, especially today, when there are increasingly serious charges

among large populations in Lebanon, even among some Shiites, regarding the negative impact of Hezbollah's struggle with Israel on Lebanon's situation. On the other hand, in face of these claims, Nasrallah is compelled to consolidate the organization's standing as the "defender of Lebanon," which pushes him to ignite friction with Israel to the point of taking risks that could lead to results that are not desirable from his perspective. A major recent test case was Nasrallah's conduct on the maritime border agreement between Israel and Lebanon, signed in October 2022. The dire situation in Lebanon and the internal criticism of Hezbollah led to the organization's decision to advance the signing of the agreement, with the expectation that it would produce economic benefits for Lebanon in the future. Yet the organization accompanied the negotiations on the agreement with threats to use aggressive military force toward Israel, not only in order to pressure it to sign the agreement under conditions that are beneficial to Lebanon, but also implicitly to restore Hezbollah's controversial standing in the eyes of the Lebanese public as the "defender of Lebanon" (Schweitzer et al., 2022).

Organizational survival: In the past three decades, Hezbollah has succeeded in evolving from a militia into the only military force in Lebanon whose weapons are far stronger than the capabilities of the weak and limited Lebanese Army. Aside from the military force of the organization and its fighters, the movement has tens of thousands of members and workers who earn a living thanks to the organization in a political-social-economic state-like framework that it leads and funds as a "state" within Lebanon. At the same time, the organization's buildup and expansion have increased its degree of vulnerability and its level of responsibility toward its operatives in order to maintain their loyalty, in particular given Lebanon's dire situation in recent years. For example, since its involvement in the war in Syria, Hezbollah's expenses now include

aid to the families of its combatants killed in the war and medical treatment needed by the thousands injured.

Consequently, the ramifications of any action by the organization for its survival are an important consideration, particularly given the internal and external threats it faces. Within Lebanon and as part of the increasing criticism toward the organization, recent contentions have been sounded, especially on the part of figures in the Christian camp and among the new change bloc in parliament, regarding the need to disarm Hezbollah (Mizrahi & Schweitzer, 2022; "Lebanon," 2022). They see this as a necessary step in the efforts toward Lebanon's economic, political, and social reconstruction, first and foremost given Israel's proven military capabilities and the intensity of the severe blow that Lebanon and its citizens are expected to suffer, beyond the harm to the organization's assets, in the scenario of a large-scale conflict. This is a leading consideration due to the bitter experience of Lebanon in general and Nasrallah in particular, who at the end of the Second Lebanon War admitted that had he foreseen its results, he would have refrained from initiating the action that prompted Israel's decision to go to war (Nahmias, 2006).

The balance of power with Israel: The developments in Israel and the IDF constitute a central and important component of Hezbollah's considerations in shaping its struggle against Israel. Hezbollah sees itself as an organization that is on the defensive against Israel, which it casts as aggressive, unpredictable, and aspiring to exert influence in Lebanon. Therefore, Nasrallah fears that if he does not respond to an Israeli violation of the deterrence equation, this will upset the equation and enable Israel to continue to undermine it, and consequently he responds to what he sees as a violation, in order to maintain this equation and prevent its erosion (Ish Maas, 2017).

As an avid consumer of the Israeli media, Nasrallah regularly examines Israel's strengths and weaknesses, and in his speeches refers

to Israel's military capabilities; its security concept; its economic situation; its relations with the United States and its standing in the international arena; its regional policy; and the level of resilience of Israeli society. As part of the cognitive campaign, Nasrallah dedicates extensive portions of his addresses to Israel's weaknesses, as was prominently expressed with his mockery of Israeli society with the spider web image, which he first used in his victory speech at Bint Jbeil (May 26, 2000) following the IDF withdrawal from the security zone. Nasrallah then compared Israel's strength to a cobweb and claimed that while Israel ostensibly has military strength and technological superiority, Israeli society, tired of wars, will not be able to withstand further terrorist attacks, is not capable of suffering casualties, and will ultimately implode.

In addition to bolstering the cognitive struggle, it seems that monitoring the situation in Israel is intended first and foremost for understanding the balance of power vis-à-vis Israel and identifying risks and opportunities for Hezbollah. A prominent recent example is Nasrallah's observing the ramifications of Israel's vehement internal dispute surrounding the proposed judicial overhaul and the large-scale protests; these have strengthened his false sense that the internal dispute impairs Israel's military capabilities to cope with external threats, and have encouraged him to take greater risks than in the past. In his speech on March 10, 2023, Nasrallah referred to the internal conflicts in Israel following the large-scale protests, claiming that these events will lead to Israel's disappearance and the country will not complete its eightieth year. His overconfidence was behind his unusual advancement of a terrorist attack inside Israeli territory (March 13, 2023), although here too, Hezbollah was careful not to claim official responsibility for the incident, fearing the Israeli response (Mizrahi & Schweitzer, 2023a).

Ofek Ish Maas explains that Hezbollah's behavior toward Israel is dynamic and responds

to the context created by Israeli policy. In order to contend with Israeli policy, Hezbollah operates according to three principles: reactivism—carrying out actions in response to actions by Israel, whereas it is Israel that determines the specific context; proportionality—exactng a price from Israel that corresponds with the results of the Israeli action against it; and clarity—seeking to achieve strategic clarity with respect to its actions, in order to reach agreements that will prevent escalation. This pattern of behavior is true of both the tactical level and the strategic level, because actions that do not meet these requirements carry considerable risk of snowballing into escalation (Ish Maas, 2017).

Hezbollah's commitment to the axis of resistance: Hezbollah's central standing in the Shiite axis exposes it to consequences that stem from regional developments, especially internal events among its partners. These influence the design of the organization's strategy and its considerations in using its force against Israel. In the case of full-scale war between Israel and Hezbollah, which could expand to include Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, which host the Shiite axis of resistance organizations, regional and possibly even global consequences are expected, and this likely influences Hezbollah's and Iran's considerations in critical ways (Levitt, 2021):

- a. Hezbollah's assistance to its axis partners: The influence of Hezbollah's many years of involvement in the civil war in Syria to save the Assad regime is especially significant. In this context with respect to the level of restraint that it adopted vis-à-vis Israel, Hezbollah's serious involvement in the Syrian civil war occurred in the first half of 2013, given Iran and Hezbollah's assessment that the threats to the survival of the Assad regime had increased, along with the threats to their ethnic-religious interests in Syria. Hezbollah sent several thousand operatives and paid a heavy price over the years: approximately 1,300

Hezbollah operatives were killed in Syria and several thousand were injured (Albo & Lt. Col. A., 2021; Daher, 2015; Caldwell, 2022; al-Aloosy, 2020). The organization's involvement in the civil war in Syria exacted a heavy toll not only in human resources, but also negatively affected its relations with members of the Sunni community in Lebanon (Daher, 2019). Hezbollah's willingness to pay these heavy prices signals the extent of its commitment to its partners in the axis. The organization's involvement in Iraq and on behalf of the Houthis in Yemen, apparently at Iran's request, should also be seen in this framework. This involvement drew its operatives into distant wars that do not serve the organization's direct interests at all, at the expense of attention to the struggle with Israel (although its involvement in Yemen and Iraq was more limited than its involvement in the fighting in Syria) (Levitt, 2021). Hezbollah's participation in the regional wars of its Shiite axis partners aroused resentment and criticism within Lebanon and it was forced, especially in the Syrian case, to find justifications for the importance of its participation in the fighting there as part of the struggle against the United States and Israel. In the case of Yemen, the organization tried to downplay the importance of its level of involvement. For example, following accusations against him due to the deaths of Lebanese in Yemen, Nasrallah claimed in a public speech (June 29, 2018): "I neither deny nor confirm that our personnel are in Yemen, but whether we have a presence there or not, the report on Hezbollah martyrs in Yemen is a lie."

- b. The effort to demonstrate a contribution to the Palestinian struggle: Developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also affect the strategy of the organization, which since its beginnings has attempted to credit itself with a significant role in the struggle over Jerusalem and the liberation of Palestine by the Palestinian people. As early as the

1990s, Hezbollah established Unit 1800, which aimed to support the Palestinian terrorist organizations and to insert Hezbollah operatives into Israeli territory for the purpose of gathering information and carrying out attacks. The unit's personnel trained Palestinian terrorists in various tactics, including kidnapping, assassination, and intelligence gathering (Shay, 2017).

Recently, the importance the organization attributes to unity of ranks of the resistance front as a force multiplier in the struggle against Israel has become more prominent. Especially since Operation Guardian of the Walls (May 2021), there have been more and more public statements on the coordination and cooperation among members of the "expanded resistance front," which, in addition to the members of the Shiite axis, includes the Palestinian resistance groups, chiefly Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In this context, in the past two years Beirut has become the site of a joint war room of the members of the front, and leaders of Palestinian resistance groups and senior Iranian officials meet there for consultations and coordination, reflecting Hezbollah's special standing within the axis and its central role in creating a multi-arena campaign against Israel. For example, during the Ramadan incidents of April 2023, the commander of Iran's Quds Force and leaders of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad were in Beirut together (Dekel, 2023).

This cooperation intensifies the threat to Israel due to the possible convergence of arenas, and serves Hezbollah's interests in its struggle against Israel, but it also creates a challenge for Hezbollah due to the need to prove its contribution to the Palestinian struggle. The attempts by Palestinian factions to open a front against Israel from southern Lebanon highlight the organization's dilemma in this context. Last Ramadan, the 34 rockets fired from southern Lebanon to Israel (April 6, 2023) posed a dilemma for the organization: on the one hand, this could help weaken Israel and deter it, as well as give an answer, even if only partial, to those

who demand that the organization resume proactive operations against Israel. On the other hand, it poses a threat to the organization's level of control in this area, which raises fears of escalation under circumstances and at a time that are not convenient for Hezbollah.

Hezbollah's standing in the international arena: Hezbollah's institutionalization in the Lebanese system has also heightened the importance that the organization attributes to its standing and its image in the international arena as a legitimate political movement, and not only as a terrorist organization. Although the organization is more sensitive to criticism toward it in the international arena and is interested in establishing the legitimacy of its activities, in recent years other major countries in the West (Germany, the UK) have joined the United States and defined the entire organization (and not only its military arm) as a terrorist organization. From the organization's perspective, its standing in the international arena also has economic ramifications. For example, its definition in the UK as a terrorist organization (January 2020) enabled the freezing of all its assets there. The relentless US effort to pursue Hezbollah operatives and put them on the sanctions list also has an economic price. In contrast, France's determination to maintain its relations with Hezbollah's representatives in the Lebanese political system helps preserve the organization's domestic standing and establish its legitimacy abroad. It therefore seems that the organization's international standing is also a consideration in its policy toward Israel, although its impact is undoubtedly much more limited than the other considerations (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2020).

Thus, Hezbollah's strategy and its force utilization policy are the product of thinking that includes relating to a wide range of considerations, and not only to its commitment to Tehran as an Iranian proxy. It would be a mistake to try to rank the importance of all the considerations presented, but it seems that in

Nasrallah's decision making process, the top consideration is the Iranian interest, alongside weighty considerations that relate to Lebanon's situation and the organization's survival, as well as its balance of power with Israel.

In any case, our argument, in contrast with some of the prevailing beliefs among researchers, is that the weight of considerations related to the organization's interests in Lebanon in general and to the Shiite community in particular has increased in recent years. Over the years, and the more the organization has established itself in the Lebanese system and become a central actor there, the interest of not harming the Lebanese state—especially since 2019, against the backdrop of the deepest economic crisis in its history—has become a more significant consideration for Hezbollah. Today, Hezbollah's standing in Lebanon is at least as important to the organization as considerations related to Iran's interests and ideological doctrine, and in addition, the organization's future and its survival are increasingly connected to Lebanon's situation.

Alongside these dominant elements in shaping Hezbollah's strategy are other interests and influences on the organization's policy. All these together come into play in the decision making process of the organization's leadership. Nasrallah, a rational actor who over the years has become the organization's main and almost exclusive decision maker, is influenced by these formative elements, and they underlie the organization's deterrence strategy. On the operational level too, the influence of all these considerations is evident, despite Nasrallah's tendency sometimes to live on the edge and to take risks, and in our understanding, this is what shapes Hezbollah's more restrained approach toward Israel at the current time.

The Development of Hezbollah's Deterrence Doctrine

The deterrence equation between Israel and Hezbollah was built gradually, comprising two main components. First are the developments

in the organization's force buildup and the demonstration of its capabilities through terrorist and guerrilla activity (as part of the overall concept of kinetics), preparations for and responses to Israel's military activity, the two sides' buildup efforts, and Israel's actions to thwart these efforts by Hezbollah; the second is the ongoing and developing cognitive campaign. Over the years, the ratio between these two components, the kinetic-operational and the cognitive, has shifted: the more that Hezbollah, alongside its military buildup, has adhered to the deterrence equation, the more the cognitive component has developed into a role of "combat support" for the military strength against its adversaries, chiefly Israel, in order to establish deterrence through soft measures, mainly media-based.

Hezbollah's initial limited military capabilities dictated the need for enhancement via cognitive warfare, similar to other terrorist organizations, that is, using the "force magnifiers" of external media coverage to project an image of strength far beyond its actual capabilities.

Hezbollah's initial limited military capabilities dictated the need for enhancement via cognitive warfare, similar to other terrorist organizations, that is, using the "force magnifiers" of external media coverage to project an image of strength far beyond its actual capabilities. Over the years, its military capabilities improved and strengthened, and it developed its own media capabilities, used to consolidate an image of strength and wage an intensive cognitive campaign against Israel alongside military operations. This helped the organization formulate and establish a deterrence equation that maintained relative stability and limited the scope of the conflict with Israel, due to the strategic clarity of the relations of mutual harm.

The first decade (1982-1992): Hezbollah, as a relatively small terrorist organization, focused on launching acts of terrorism with an extensive

cognitive impact, led by the first suicide attacks, which were innovative in nature and in the large numbers of victims and destruction that they caused, and therefore attracted large-scale global media attention for the perpetrating organization (Schweitzer, 2004). Series of suicide attacks were carried out against the Israeli security forces buildup in Tyre (1982 and 1983); against the US embassy in Beirut (1983 and 1984); and in a double suicide attack in Beirut on buildings housing US and French forces, part of the Multinational Force in Lebanon (1983). These actions allowed an organization that was then in its infancy—small, unknown, and with very limited operational capabilities—to achieve global media resonance in the context of the struggle against Israel, the United States, and European partners on the basis of the radical ideology that it absorbed from Iran, in order to export the ideas of the ayatollah regime and position itself as a more important, stronger, and more powerful organization than it actually was.

At the same time, the organization was involved in kidnapping citizens of Western countries and holding them hostage in order to extract concessions from their countries of origin, as well as to release the organization's personnel and Shiite operatives arrested due to involvement in terrorist activity. In 1984-1989, 55 citizens of foreign countries were kidnapped in Beirut by Hezbollah or organizations connected to it (Naveh, 2007). A considerable portion of these kidnappings were directed against the foreign powers that were active in Lebanon, as well as those that supported Iraq in its war against Iran, as part of the relationship between Hezbollah and Iran and its activity in the service of Iranian interests.

In 1985 Hezbollah began to cultivate guerrilla warfare against Israel, including suicide attacks against IDF vehicles and convoys and explosive charges against IDF forces in southern Lebanon and along the border. The objective was to inflict many Israeli casualties, with the aim of bringing about Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon. Meanwhile, the organization

attempted to capture Israeli soldiers and attack outposts of the South Lebanon Army (SLA), which collaborated with the IDF, in order to defeat it and to encourage Israel's withdrawal. Hezbollah, alongside the Lebanese Shiite organization Amal, initially focused on attacking SLA outposts, but in 1987 the organizations started to focus on detonating explosives along the roads traveled regularly by IDF and SLA forces (Modrik-Evroni, 2020). Nevertheless, from 1985 to 1990, Hezbollah played a smaller role than Amal in the total number of attacks against the IDF, in part due to Hezbollah's limited capabilities, which made it difficult for it to operate and to generate significant deterrence.

A major element that contributed to the development of Hezbollah's independent capability was its defiance of the demand to disarm all the militias in Lebanon as stipulated by the Taif Agreement, which concluded Lebanon's second civil war (October 1989). Hezbollah retained its military force and exploited the disarming of the other militias to build its leading stature in the country and ensure its entrenchment in southern Lebanon. During these years, the organization did not attack civilians on the Israeli side of the border, but focused on an effort to remove the Israeli army from Lebanon, in contrast, for example, with the Palestinian organizations, which operated from Lebanon against Israeli territory and Israeli targets. In this sense, Hezbollah's action and response equations were focused inside Lebanese territory and remained within the military rules of the game (Naveh, 2007; Shapira, 2020).

In tandem, the organization began to pursue terrorist activity in the international arena. This included the hijacking of aircraft, including TWA Flight 847 from Athens to Rome, Iraqi Airways Flight 163, Air Afrique Flight 46 from Brazil to Paris, and Kuwait Airlines Flight 422 from Bangkok to Kuwait. The organization was also involved in terrorist attacks in Germany and France, and continued to kidnap foreigners in Lebanon, mainly attempting to influence these

countries' conduct toward Hezbollah personnel detained by them (Levitt, 2013).

Thus, already in its first decade and despite its very limited power, it was evident that the organization sought to forge action and response equations vis-à-vis Israel and the various powers. These equations included both reprisal actions by the organization in response to what it perceived as threats or activity against its ranks, and kinetic actions that were leveraged for cognitive warfare in order to strengthen the organization's deterrent capability.

From 1992 until the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000: Following the killing of Hezbollah Secretary General Abbas al-Musawi, his wife, and his son in February 1992, the organization changed its conduct on the strategic level. Musawi was replaced by Nasrallah, and in the three decades he has led the organization, Nasrallah has transformed it. He has adapted its activity to changing circumstances and events in Lebanon and in the external environment, as well as attributing greater importance to the cognitive campaign while exploiting his own impressive rhetorical capabilities, which have enabled him to leverage Hezbollah's military actions, big and small, toward consolidating the organization's image of strength.

In parallel, there was also a change in the nature of the organization's military activity: guerrilla operations to force Israel's complete exit from Lebanon, fire at northern Israel, and terrorism outside of Israel. The immediate response to al-Musawi's killing was the first Katyusha attack on northern Israel, but the organization did not stop there. About a month later, Hezbollah launched a retaliatory attack against the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires in which 29 people were killed, four of them Israeli Foreign Ministry workers. This act of terrorism aimed to serve as a warning to Israel and create a tangible and cognitive deterrent effect that positions Hezbollah as an organization with high-level operational capabilities and significant ability to cause damage, and a proven willingness and ability to perpetrate

deadly terrorism via suicide attackers in the international arena too.

This message was reinforced two years later, in July 1994, when the organization carried out a suicide attack against the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, killing 86 people. This followed an attack by Israel on Hezbollah's police academy graduation ceremony in Ein Dardara in Lebanon, killing 26 cadets. In these reprisal actions, Hezbollah succeeded to a great extent in setting a high deterrence level vis-à-vis Israeli targets outside of Israel, and since then has forced Israel to take into account the possibility that following each lethal attack on Hezbollah leaders or large-scale strikes on targets in Lebanon, it could suffer a more lethal blow, not at the border or in Israel itself but rather abroad, including against senior Israeli officials. The seeds of the deterrence equation in general and on the international front in particular were planted in these actions (Naveh, 2007).

Within Lebanon between 1992 and May 2000, when Israel withdrew from the security zone, the organization focused on increased semi-military guerrilla warfare against the IDF and its collaborators, which included frequent attacks on SLA and IDF outposts, ambushes of IDF convoys that traveled between the outposts as well as shelling and frontal attacks to capture outposts, and efforts to harm the morale of SLA personnel and the Israeli public, given the high number of casualties among IDF soldiers (Naveh, 2007). In this period, the organization adopted the characteristics and modus operandi of a classic guerrilla organization, such as focusing on harming the enemy's soldiers instead of attempting to capture territory (Schleifer, 2014). Hezbollah's guerrilla warfare and the development of its combat capabilities led to an improvement in its casualty ratio during the 1990s. The number of actions that Hezbollah carried out also increased over the years, evidence of the considerable improvement in its operational capabilities (Gabrielsen, 2014).

Daniel Sobelman has argued that the organization's use of Katyusha rockets led to the gradual establishment of mutual deterrence in the conflict with Israel for the first time (Sobelman, 2018). By firing the Katyushas, Hezbollah established an equation in which it fired toward Israeli territory in response to Israeli actions that caused damage to infrastructure or civilian casualties in Lebanon. These rules of the game were violated twice during the 1990s—as part of Operation Accountability and Operation Grapes of Wrath. Both operations were Israeli initiatives in response to successful Hezbollah actions on the ground—many casualties among IDF soldiers and missile fire toward communities in northern Israel—and stemmed from the need to change the equation (Sobelman, 2009). In both operations Israel tried to exert pressure on the government of Lebanon to restrain Hezbollah by creating significant waves of migration of refugees from southern Lebanon northward. However, the Israeli effort did not succeed, and the Lebanese government was unable to restrain Hezbollah, partly due to Syria's support for the organization (Sobelman, 2022).

Between and after the operations, it was evident that Hezbollah was shaping and planning rules of the game against IDF activity in Lebanon and formulating a kind of deterrence equation, by firing Katyushas at the security zone and at Israel in response to what it saw as Israel's deviations from the status quo that Hezbollah wanted to maintain. As part of the rules of the game, the organization also tried to create a hierarchy of responses to Israel's deviations from this status quo, whereas at each point it escalated its response in order to expand the deterrence equation. For example, in 1993-1994, the organization fired Katyushas at communities in the security zone in response to harm to Lebanese civilians, except in multiple casualty incidents, when it responded by firing at communities in northern Israel. In 1995, Hezbollah escalated its response and decided to fire at Israel more frequently. Moreover, the

organization began to fire toward open areas in Israel or to launch Katyushas at the security zone in cases of the destruction of abandoned houses in Lebanon by the IDF, the injury of Lebanese civilians, or increases in the intensity of the conflict. The organization also fired at Israel in response to incidents in which the SLA acted to punish Hezbollah for actions by the organization against the SLA leaders in Lebanon. Later, Hezbollah fired Katyushas at northern Israel in response to the killing of its organizational leaders. Operation Grapes of Wrath (April 1996) led to a strengthening of Israeli deterrence and, in parallel, to fewer incidents of fire toward Israel. However, acquisition in 1996 from Iran and Syria of long-range Katyushas with a range of 40 km increased Hezbollah's ability to threaten the Israeli home front. These Katyushas were intended mainly for the purpose of deterrence, and the organization refrained from using them until the Second Lebanon War (Naveh, 2007).

During the 1990s, the deterrence equation between Hezbollah and Israel was maintained for several principal reasons: Israel's strategic limitations, since Israel identified a vital strategic security interest in maintaining its military presence in Lebanon; the Syrian presence in Lebanon; and above all, Hezbollah's ability to force Israel to operate according to the rules that it defined, and not to utilize its military superiority fully and defeat Hezbollah. Hezbollah's responses to Israel's actions, which aimed to maintain the rules of the game and at the same time help it consolidate its internal standing in Lebanon, were in most cases proportional, in its view, with respect to deviations on Israel's part, and it refrained from provocative and exceptional military actions, at least until recently.

A considerable portion of Hezbollah's success in establishing the deterrence equation against Israel, despite its clear military inferiority, stemmed from its understanding of the limitations of its force and the importance and effectiveness of the cognitive campaign

A considerable portion of Hezbollah's success in establishing the deterrence equation against Israel, despite its clear military inferiority, stemmed from its understanding of the limitations of its force and the importance and effectiveness of the cognitive campaign against Israel.

against Israel. This is a lesson that the organization learned regarding the role of psychological warfare in other conflicts, such as Vietnam and Grenada, and was applied in the struggle with Israel (Harb, 2011). The organization places much emphasis on the visual medium, and some claim that its combat doctrine is subject to this medium, in the sense of "if you didn't photograph, you didn't fight" (Schleifer, 2002). One of Hezbollah's leaders even explained that "on the ground, we hit one Israeli soldier, but a video of him shouting for help affects thousands of Israelis" (el-Houri & Saber, 2010). Consequently, since then the organization has made sure to photograph its actions and broadcast them on its media, especially its television station, al-Manar, accompanied by narration, victory music, or supportive commentary.

The event of the planting of a Hezbollah flag at Delaat Outpost in 1994, which already reflected the cognitive-oriented kinetic pattern of activity that recurred later, is relevant in this context. The incident ended with Hezbollah fighters driven out of the outpost. At no stage could it be claimed that Hezbollah had "captured" the outpost, but the picture of the organization's flag flying over the outpost, which was broadcast many times on various channels, had greater cognitive importance than the "operational achievement." This was also the case with the May 2000 attack on the Rotem Outpost, in which the organization's fighters succeeded in placing the organization's flag on the roof of the outpost for a short time before they were repelled. The incident's importance was in the photographs of the flag on the outpost and not in a tenuous

military achievement, (Schleifer, 2002; 2014). The organization relied on the fact that the Israeli media would broadcast the videos that were screened on al-Manar in order to influence Israeli public opinion. Later the organization also operated close to the Israeli border so that the Israeli media would cover its activities (Gabrielsen, 2014).

From the withdrawal from the security zone until the Second Lebanon War (May 2000 to July 2006): Hezbollah made sure to present the withdrawal from Lebanon as a crowning achievement for the organization, the sole entity that succeeded in prompting an Israeli territorial withdrawal, ostensibly by force. After the withdrawal, the organization made sure to note that while various UN decisions did not succeed in forcing Israel to withdraw from Lebanon, it was Hezbollah's resistance that led to the achievement and in effect to the first Arab victory in the Arab-Israeli conflict (al-Aloosy, 2020). This claim is at the center of the organization's cognitive war against Israel (the "spider web" speech) and helped strengthen the narrative that crystallized in Israel, of a "withdrawal out of weakness" (Dekel & Kurz, 2020; Shapira, 2021). Israel, for its part, accompanied the withdrawal with forceful and severe threats against Hezbollah, and promised far-reaching responses in the event of Hezbollah actions against it, but did not carry out these threats. In October 2000, Hezbollah attacked an IDF patrol in the Shebaa Farms area and kidnapped three soldiers. Both Israel's unwillingness to act on its threats and its entanglement in the conflict with the Palestinians significantly undermined the credibility of its threats, and as a result also undermined Israel's deterrent capability (Sobelman, 2018).

On the other hand, the withdrawal and the demarcation of the Blue Line—the withdrawal line drafted under the auspices of the UN and recognized by it—created a challenge for Hezbollah. Once it could be claimed that the exclusive military services of the organization were no longer needed in Lebanon after the

liberation from the Israeli presence, Hezbollah had to revamp the objectives of its war against Israel. Its concern for its survival as the only armed military organization in Lebanon and the need to justify maintenance of its weapons arsenal, alongside the desire to receive international legitimacy, compelled it to find pretexts for its continued military activity. The solution lay in the claim that Israel continued to occupy Lebanese territory and the demand to liberate Shebaa Farms, even though in actuality, before 1967 this territory was under Syrian control. Hezbollah also used the imprisonment of Lebanese prisoners by Israel as another pretext to justify its continued military activity against it, the preservation of its military force, and its standing as the only armed militia in Lebanon (Shapira, 2020; al-Aloosy, 2020).

In this period Hezbollah adopted two spheres of action: it changed the focus of its military activity and moved to a defensive, mainly reactive strategy, and at the same time it accelerated its acquisition of advanced weapons, with considerable aid from Iran. It did so alongside efforts to strengthen the deterrence equation with Israel, adopting the doctrine of an eye for an eye (Naveh, 2007). This *modus operandi* is evident, for example, in the way the organization used anti-aircraft fire against IDF aircraft, and in the attempt to kidnap IDF soldiers, with the organization presenting such actions as an attempt to correct the situation whereby Lebanese civilians are held by Israel while the organization lacks the ability to exchange them for Israeli citizens (Sobelman, 2003). In order to continue to consolidate the "occupation" of Shebaa Farms as a pretext for continuing its struggle against Israel, the organization focused its activities on this area, and between October 2000 and the Second Lebanon War carried out what Nasrallah later described as "reminder operations" once every few months, in particular in the Shebaa Farms area (Sobelman, 2018).

The deterrence equation between Hezbollah and Israel and the tacit agreement that emerged

between the two sides with respect to the range of “legitimate” actions were maintained during this period and did not deteriorate into full-scale war, mainly because they alleviated some of the uncertainty involved in the conflict between the sides. However, this equation also created the “deterrence trap” for Israel: the fact that the expected limited response from the Israeli side was clear to both sides undermined Israel’s ability to deter Hezbollah (Sobelman, 2018).

Following the Second Lebanon War: The deterrence equation collapsed temporarily in 2006. The attempt to kidnap IDF soldiers led to the Israeli response that was “unexpected” in the eyes of Hezbollah, and to the Second Lebanon War. Before the war, Hezbollah’s assessment was that Israel would respond in a limited manner, in accordance with the rules of the game that had developed until that time, but Israel’s response deviated and led to considerable damage in Lebanon. The war caused the deaths of 1,191 Lebanese citizens, the injury of 4,054, the displacement of almost a million Lebanese, and massive physical damage (Daher, 2019; al-Aloosy, 2020). Several processes contributed to the collapse of mutual deterrence, some of which were related to the fewer constraints on Israel following the end of the second intifada, along with the internal changes in Israel (the Olmert government), as well as the changes in the balance of power in Lebanon and Hezbollah’s internal standing following Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon. Even though in Hezbollah’s view the Second Lebanon War was a victory achieved with the help of divine intervention (Shapira, 2021), within Lebanon the situation was not necessarily perceived this way. Hezbollah suffered considerable criticism in Lebanon due to its independent military standing and its attempt to impose its resistance doctrine on the entire country, and therefore in response it tried to strengthen its standing as an important actor in the Lebanese arena by accelerating its actions against Israel (Sobelman, 2018).

After the Second Lebanon War, Imad Mughniyeh set up several teams that were

responsible for analyzing the various stages of the war, drawing military lessons from them, and formulating forecasts with respect to the next war. These teams concluded that the organization must focus on exploiting what it sees as Israel’s domestic weakness and on increasing its long-range missile arsenal (Shapira, 2021). As part of the conclusions reached and as a result of the serious military blow inflicted on all of the organization’s systems, including in the organization’s core in the Dahiyeh quarter of Beirut, Hezbollah and Iran began an intensive effort to restore and cultivate the organization’s military capabilities, transforming Hezbollah from an organization that mainly used terrorism and guerrilla warfare into a terrorist army that in time became a fighting force with military frameworks, advanced and precision weapons, and a broad, diverse, and advanced order of battle. Nasrallah described this change and claimed that it was “a new, unique approach to combat—between a standing army and guerrilla warfare” (Albo & Lt. Col. A., 2021, p. 103). This was reflected in building military frameworks and arming them with weapons, with an emphasis on rockets and various types of missiles. The organization succeeded in establishing itself throughout Lebanon, despite the UNIFIL presence and contrary to the demand of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, including in southern Lebanon, which is expected to pose difficulties for an Israeli ground assault in the case of a future conflict (Byman, 2022).

The death of Imad Mughniyeh in Damascus from a car bomb in February 2008 marked a crisis point and another milestone in the organization’s development. Mughniyeh, who led the organization’s military activity from its beginning, evolved from a marginal terrorist into a military commander with senior standing in the organization, a kind of chief of staff and defense minister of the army-in-the-making, and with this, his standing and importance in the eyes of Iran also increased. His killing left Nasrallah—who until then had mainly been a

leader with political and religious authority in the organization and who relied to a large extent on Mughniyeh as the mainstay of the military-operational realm—as the supreme leader, but alone in the campaign and in shouldering the burden. This forced him to enter the military-strategic sphere, to follow the organization’s operational activity more closely, and to supervise Mughniyeh’s successors, who did not reach his level. In place of the vacuum that Mughniyeh left behind, Nasrallah relied more and more on Qasem Soleimani.

Soleimani, the commander of Quds Force in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, formulated a military strategy that came to be known as the “Soleimani vision,” which was based on building an “armed resistance” led by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. Hezbollah was a central actor, alongside trained militia forces armed with advanced weapons in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. According to Soleimani’s vision, this axis, led by Hezbollah, was meant to surround and impose a “rocket siege” on Israel via thousands of rockets, missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, and trained commando units, along with attack tunnels that would penetrate into Israeli territory from Lebanon in order to carry out surprise attacks that would bring about a decisive military victory for the organization (Albo & Lt. Col. A., 2021; Melman, 2019).

After the targeted killing of Mughniyeh, which Hezbollah attributed to Israel, Hezbollah acted openly to avenge his death via attempts to attack Israeli targets abroad, while simultaneously maintaining quiet along the border in Lebanon. The organization carried out a long series of such attempts, especially in 2009-2016, against a variety of Israeli targets around the world, which included official representatives, diplomatic missions, and Israeli tourists. Another motivation for these attempts was the assassination of Iranian scientists that was attributed to Israel as part of the effort to prevent Iran’s nuclear progress, which in turn led to attack attempts by Iran and Hezbollah, some of them with mutual assistance. However, Hezbollah’s

foreign operations apparatus failed in most of its attempts, except for the attack on Israeli tourists in Burgas, Bulgaria, in July 2012 (six people were killed, among them five Israelis and one Bulgarian citizen)—the last attack against Israelis abroad that has succeeded to date. Indeed, the capabilities demonstrated by Hezbollah’s foreign attack apparatus were far from those that it demonstrated during the period when Mughniyeh commanded it (Shapira, 2020; Levitt, 2020). But despite the relative lack of success of these attempts, their very existence, as well as the extensive coverage they received in the Israeli media, enabled Hezbollah to continue to consolidate its deterrence equation with Israel, including via the threat of attacks in the international arena, and to herald it as a constant potential operational alternative for the purpose of consolidating its overall deterrence equation vis-à-vis Israel.

Hezbollah’s participation in the civil war in Syria starting in 2013, on the level of full fighting formations with thousands of fighters, contributed substantially to strengthening the organization’s fighting capabilities—a process that began after the Second Lebanon War and now gained momentum. The involvement in the war was the product of the close connection between Hezbollah and Iran as well as Syria, and it enabled Hezbollah to accumulate combat experience in fighting, operating battalion and brigade-level frameworks, engaging in fire support, and combining military units with special forces as part of the offensive effort, as well as in learning from the experience of the Russian army, which fought alongside it. This experience helped Hezbollah become a modern terrorist army in the conceptual, strategic, operational, and tactical spheres (Albo & Lt. Col. A, 2021). Furthermore, its involvement in the war contributed to the tightened relations with Russia, and Russia has emphasized that it does not relate to Hezbollah as a Lebanese organization, but rather, as an actor that has a presence in many countries in the region (Shapira, 2021).

On the other hand, the organization paid a heavy price for its participation in the war, both in its participation in the war with the ensuing loss of fighters and in the diversion of attention from the struggle with Israel. Moreover, criticism in Lebanon addressed its participation in the war, which did not contribute to the interests of the Lebanese people—criticism that increased the more Hezbollah became entangled in Syria and the internal situation in Lebanon worsened. The outbreak of the economic crisis in Lebanon (October 2019), the most severe in its history and which has plagued it since, has made it even harder for the organization to take an active part in the struggle against Israel.

The targeted killing of Qasem Soleimani in January 2020 also left a vacuum. Soleimani, who had a close personal relationship with Nasrallah, played a central role in shaping Hezbollah's strategy, its force buildup, and its operational characteristics. However, there is no doubt that his killing, along with the exposure and destruction of the attack tunnels penetrating from Lebanon (late 2018), as well as the progress in building the Israeli barrier on the northern border, has slowed but has not curbed the increased and systematic pace of the preparations for a military conflict with Israel, which Soleimani pushed for. At the same time, following Soleimani's death, the organization's importance has grown, along with Nasrallah's personal standing among the Iranians as a leading actor in the axis and the "resistance front" that Iran seeks to shape, which, aside from the Shiite axis, includes the Palestinian groups that it supports: first and foremost Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Hamas as well.

The Current Balance of Deterrence between Hezbollah and Israel

Since 2006 the Lebanese border has been relatively quiet. The basis of this balance of deterrence is that both sides lack an interest in re-engaging in a large-scale military campaign, whose results are expected to be far worse than in the past. From Hezbollah's perspective, this

has been joined by a series of developments and constraints that limit its ability to participate actively in fighting with Israel, chiefly the involvement in the war in Syria over the course of a decade and the internal crisis in Lebanon. Therefore, the organization has settled for isolated response incidents, aimed in its view at preventing Israel from pushing the boundaries and eroding the elements of deterrence that the organization selected to signal to Israel the limitations of its responses. Israeli successes that the organization has not managed to appropriately avenge in practice (such as the killing of Mughniyeh and the destruction of the tunnels into northern Israel) have also contributed to this. But Hezbollah has not stood still, and in the years that have passed, has worked vigorously in two main fronts to consolidate its deterrence of Israel: the first and most important is the organization's ongoing military buildup with Iran's aid, to the point where today it is the main conventional military threat on Israel's borders; and the second is the heightened cognitive campaign, using new media and the organization's mouthpieces in Lebanon's traditional media.

Hezbollah's military buildup has contributed to the creation of a balance of terror with Israel. The organization has accumulated massive destructive power, including firepower that is based mainly on rockets and missiles of various types and ranges (about 150,000, according to general estimates) that can reach the entire Israeli home front, including precision missiles; thousands of drones; limited air defense capabilities; and cyber capabilities (Mizrahi et al., 2021; Shapira, 2021). In Hezbollah's view, this arsenal is sufficient for deterring Israel and causing it to hesitate to use force against it.

Furthermore, Hezbollah and Iran are also active on the Golan Heights front. Their purpose was and remains to build an operational infrastructure among the local population in the Syrian Golan and to use this infrastructure against Israel. Even though Israel has succeeded in striking Hezbollah officers responsible for

pursuing this goal, Iran and Hezbollah have not given up hope of making the Golan Heights part of the conflict with Israel (Shapira, 2021).

Meanwhile, since 2006 Hezbollah has managed to maintain its presence in southern Lebanon, blatantly violating Security Council Resolution 1701, which granted UNIFIL the mandate to act to prevent the organization's entrenchment near the Israeli border.

Meanwhile, recent years have seen Hezbollah increasingly involved in the development of land combat capabilities, in the form of the Radwan Unit (125) commando force, which has several thousand highly skilled fighters who were trained in Iran. Their declared purpose is to infiltrate into Israel's territory in order to capture territory in the Galilee or at least to attack communities in the Galilee, kill and kidnap Israeli civilians and soldiers and transfer them to Lebanese territory, or capture an Israeli outpost or community, even for a limited time, in order to shock and awe the Israeli public and produce a "victory image" of conquering sovereign Israeli territory. The unit comprises five battalions with a thousand people each, and each battalion is responsible for knowing the specific topographical conditions of the territory for which it is responsible and has been trained to capture (Levitt, 2023; Shapira, 2021).

Nasrallah repeatedly refers to these capabilities and amplifies them in his speeches as part of the cognitive campaign against the IDF, decision makers, and the public in Israel. The demonstration of Radwan Force's capabilities during what was defined as a "large maneuver" (May 21, 2023), to which, in unusual fashion, hundreds of journalists were invited, and during which Radwan operatives presented breaching the wall along the border in order to penetrate into Israel, should be seen in this context. It seems that this time, Hezbollah's cognitive effort was not especially successful, as it was an unimpressive presentation of old and

limited weapons with questionable potential achievements (Halabi, 2023b).

Meanwhile, since 2006 Hezbollah has managed to maintain its presence in southern Lebanon, blatantly violating Security Council Resolution 1701, which granted UNIFIL the mandate to act to prevent the organization's entrenchment near the Israeli border. Hezbollah makes sure to deepen its presence in this region (partly in civilian disguise, in the form of building observation posts of the organization Green Without Borders), including by building infrastructure and hiding weapons among the civilian population, which creates an advantage for the organization in both routine times and in emergencies.

Israel, for its part, takes pains to maintain the large military-technological gap between the IDF and Hezbollah and to build up its strength, both offensively and defensively. Along with exposing and thwarting Hezbollah's tunnel project, it is working to complete the construction of a barrier, including in areas in dispute, in order to prevent the construction of future tunnels and make it difficult to cross the border; it also carries out special drills, including the scenario of fighting against the Radwan Force (Zeitun, 2023; Schweitzer & Riemer, 2018). In addition, the IDF works vigorously to harm the organization's buildup efforts with hundreds of strikes in Syria in the past decade that have been attributed to Israel, in the framework of the campaign between wars. This effort, even if it is partially successful (or mostly successful, as the IDF's commanders claim), has so far only managed to delay but not completely stop Hezbollah's buildup process (Valensi & Kaduri, 2022; Kaduri, 2023). At the same time, Israel makes sure to maintain the rules of the game that have developed since 2006 and became guidelines for the two sides and part of the deterrence equation between them, centered on Hezbollah maintaining quiet along the border in Lebanon, as long as Israel does not operate in the Lebanese realm. Consequently, the Lebanese sphere has become a "sphere of

immunity” where Israel refrains from operating, at least publicly.

Hezbollah is not satisfied with merely maintaining this equation, and in recent years has tried to expand it, similar to its previous attempts to expand the deterrence equation. Since 2019, the organization has warned that any Israeli harm to its operatives in Syria will lead to a response. This expansion of the equation is reflected in both kinetic actions, such as firing an anti-tank missile at an IDF vehicle in September 2019 in response to the strike on the precision missile project in Dahiyeh by drones and a strike in Syria on a Shiite axis squad that was about to launch attack drones toward Israel, and in the threats sounded in Nasrallah's speeches (Schweitzer & Mizrahi, 2019). Nevertheless, even though Nasrallah has boasted that he will harm an Israeli soldier for each incident of harm to a Hezbollah operative in the Israeli strikes in Syria, and even claimed in his May 25, 2020 speech that Israel is refraining from striking Hezbollah personnel in Syria and changing its action strategy due to his threats, in practice many times the organization has refrained from taking action and avenging the deaths of its operatives.

However, in the past two years several incidents have occurred that together have eroded the balance of deterrence between Israel and Hezbollah in the organization's favor, and undermined the strategic clarity that prevailed in the region. Aside from the incidents mentioned, the organization can also point to its claim that it is the cause of the reduction in the Israeli Air Force's activity in Lebanon, alongside the expanded presence of its operatives next to the border with Israel, while creating friction with IDF soldiers along the border.

A major reflection of the effort to expand the deterrence equation with Israel and Hezbollah's increasing audacity can be found in the combined kinetic-cognitive-diplomatic campaign on the eve of the signing of the agreement to demarcate the maritime border

with Israel (October 2022). The campaign was waged against the backdrop of the severe political and economic crisis in Lebanon, and led to incisive public criticism of the organization as responsible for this crisis. As a result of this criticism, the organization had to reestablish its standing in Lebanon and justify its continued possession of its weapons arsenal.

While the campaign was waged mainly via speeches and interviews by Nasrallah and senior figures in the organization with sympathetic media outlets in Lebanon and on social media, kinetic measures were also integrated alongside the cognitive dimension. On two occasions, unarmed drones were launched toward the Karish gas field (June-July 2022), in a step that was meant to attest to Hezbollah's military capabilities and to underscore that the organization's precision weapons arsenal can harm Israel. Moreover, a symbolic flotilla was launched from the coast of Tripoli toward Israel's territorial waters, and Hezbollah's forces along the border were reinforced. At the same time, the organization conveyed threatening messages via diplomatic channels (Mizrahi, 2022a; Schweitzer et al., 2022; Sobelman, 2023).

It seems that Hezbollah's willingness to test the waters as part of this campaign, risking a possible Israeli response, is the product of its view that Lebanon's economic survival is at stake, as is the organization's survival. The organization also believes, and this was even expressed explicitly in Nasrallah's speeches, that the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis in Europe made the United States, Europe, and Israel more vulnerable to pressure, and therefore believes that the United States would use its restraining influence on Israel to prevent another war (Sobelman, 2023). On the other hand, Hezbollah was cautious and refrained from responding from the Lebanese border to the ongoing Israeli strikes on its assets and those of Iran in Syria, and likewise did not intervene on behalf of the Palestinian struggle in the recent conflicts between Hamas and Islamic Jihad and Israel, despite their expectation of

its involvement as part of the “convergence of arenas” doctrine.

Hezbollah’s improved military capabilities have been exploited by Nasrallah to strengthen the deterrence equation with Israel. In his speeches, which are covered at length in the Israeli media, Nasrallah has frequently threatened the Israeli public while boasting, especially in the last few years, about Hezbollah’s ability to produce precision weapons independently, joining the high-quality weapons that the organization receives from Iran. Nasrallah has used his possession of these weapons to frighten Israel’s citizens about what awaits them and to deter the Israeli leadership from offensive action in Lebanese territory.

In his rhetoric since the Second Lebanon War, Nasrallah is careful to make clear that the organization is not interested in war, but if such a war breaks out, he is ready and can win it, because he has missiles that can strike every part of Israel and “100,000 fighters” (a number that is far from the reality). He even claimed recently that it is not Israel that is threatening Hezbollah with war, but rather it is the organization and the resistance front (the Shiite axis along with Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad) that are threatening Israel, and recommended that it avoid the mistake of getting drawn into a war that would lead to its annihilation (Halabi, 2023a). Thus, Hezbollah hopes to prove and to consolidate its standing as the main actor in the axis of resistance, as part of the conception that has taken hold among the members of the front led by Iran regarding the strategy of the convergence of arenas, meaning the advancement of an integrated multi-front campaign against Israel, as was first manifested in Operation Guardian of the Walls (May 2021).

The results of the November 2022 election in Israel, the rise of a right-wing government, and the large-scale protests against the government’s proposed judicial overhaul were seen by Hezbollah as another opportunity to strengthen the deterrence equation in the organization’s favor. In the first half of 2023, it

was evident that the deep internal argument in Israel is perceived as Israeli weakness, and this has strengthened Nasrallah’s deep belief in the realization of his spider web theory and in an opportunity for the organization, based on Nasrallah’s false sense of security (Schweitzer & Mizrahi, 2023a). This false confidence, as well as the Iranian and Palestinian disappointment at the lack of direct Hezbollah involvement in the struggle against Israel in response to the harm to Iranian targets in Syria and in Iran itself, led to two acts that departed from the deterrence equation with Israel:

- a. The first was the attack within Israeli territory (March 13, 2023) at Megiddo Junction on Route 65, in the form of an explosive charge that was planted by a terrorist who was trained and sent by the organization, infiltrated into Israel from Lebanon, and seriously injured an Israeli citizen. Apparently, the organization’s intention was to kill many people. This attack was carried out by Hezbollah without any prior Israeli activity that in the past was seen as an Israeli “violation” of the rules of the game, but rather at Hezbollah’s initiative, amounting to another “deviation” from these rules. While Hezbollah refrained from claiming explicit responsibility for the incident, the information published shows clearly that it was behind the management and implementation of the incident, possibly at Iran’s urging.
- b. The second was the firing of 34 rockets from Lebanese territory during Passover (April 6, 2023), following clashes on the Temple Mount. Hezbollah’s knowledge of or prior involvement in permitting this rocket fire is disputed, and although according to firm statements by Israeli intelligence figures Hezbollah did not know in advance about the timing of this specific rocket fire, our assessment is that Hezbollah was familiar with the existing infrastructure and gave its principled consent to the rocket fire as part of the strategic coordination between

Hezbollah leaders and leaders of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Iran, who were in Beirut at the time.

In any case, it seems that in both cases Hezbollah operated in the service of its interests and those of its affiliates in the resistance front, chiefly Iran, while hiding behind Palestinian operatives to obscure its level of involvement, yet at the same time demonstrated willingness to seriously risk an Israeli response in the case of exposure, as part of the organization's policy of living on the edge. Presumably a prominent component of the organization's increased audacity and its pushing the boundaries of the deterrence equation with Israel recently stems from its underestimation of Israel's willingness to respond in an aggressive military manner to its violations, based on its perception that Israel is currently weak and hesitant due to its serious internal crisis, and therefore will refrain from responding to its active provocations (Mizrahi & Schweitzer, 2023b).

Conclusion

The balance of deterrence between Israel and Hezbollah along the Lebanese border follows the development of rules of the game formed and shaped over the course of many years through a dynamic of trial and error by both sides, with the influence of many formative elements. Today more than in the past, Hezbollah is challenging Israel and pushing the limits of the deterrence equation. Hezbollah's willingness to foment military tension with Israel increases, the more confident it is in its strength and its ability to cause destruction and strategic damage to Israel. This is due to the upgrading of its military capabilities, chiefly the precision missiles; the tightened coordination of the axis of resistance at its side; and what it identifies as Israel's internal weakness, which, in its eyes, prompts the unwillingness to risk a full-scale military campaign against the organization, despite its considerable military strength. This position is reinforced by its assessment that the United States is withdrawing from the Middle

East and, like the other Western countries, is not interested in the eruption of war while its attention is focused on the war between Russia and Ukraine.

While Israel's deterrence has been challenged in recent years, both sides' interest in maintaining strategic clarity regarding the rules of the game and the mutual deterrence between them remains evident.

While Israel's deterrence has been challenged in recent years, both sides' interest in maintaining strategic clarity regarding the rules of the game and the mutual deterrence between them remains evident. These serve their common interest in preventing large-scale war, in which both sides are liable to suffer very serious blows. While in the past year Hezbollah's confidence has increased along with its willingness to take greater risks, which could cause the situation to deteriorate, it seems that the organization is still largely restrained and interested in avoiding a large frontal confrontation with Israel.

This restraint is partly the product of Hezbollah's integration and consolidation in Lebanon over the years, and of the rise in the importance of considerations related to Lebanon's situation and the organization's domestic standing (Michael & Dostri, 2018). In our assessment, Hezbollah's developing responsibility for Lebanon's situation and for the future of its residents is at least as important to the organization as the considerations related to Iran's interests and its ideological doctrine. As Hezbollah is more involved in and gains experience with political practices, it discovers that it has channels of influence other than the kinetic route. At the same time, the organization's responsibility for the future of Lebanon and its residents has grown, and its sensitivity to the increasing criticism among the Lebanese public is evident, against the backdrop of the serious economic-political

crisis in Lebanon since 2019, which has led to a decline in support for Hezbollah's camp, reflected in the results of the elections to the Lebanese parliament (May 2022).

Nevertheless, Nasrallah's tendency to take risks out of hope that Israel, given its current weakness in his view, will contain its response, and given the organization's increasing commitment to the axis of resistance in the service of Iranian and Palestinian interests, could lead to uncontrolled scenarios of short and limited conflicts that could develop into large-scale war, contrary to the interests of both sides. This requires that Israel study these scenarios and prepare for them.

Yoram Schweitzer is a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) and head of the INSS Program on Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict since February 2003. Schweitzer served in the intelligence community, as an advisor on counterterrorism strategies for the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Defense, as head of the international counterterrorism desk in the IDF, and as a member of a task force on the issue of captured and missing Israelis in the Prime Minister's Office. He holds a Master's degree in military and diplomatic history from Tel Aviv University. yorams@inss.org.il

Orna Mizrahi, one of the longest-serving members on the National Security Council (she served under 8 NSC heads), is a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). In her final position (2015-2018) as Deputy Director of the NSC for Foreign Policy, she coordinated the staff work and strategic planning for the Prime Minister and the Diplomacy and Security Cabinet on regional and international issues and was responsible for preparing papers for the Prime Minister's diplomatic meetings. She holds a Master's degree (with honors) in Middle East history from Tel Aviv University. ornam@inss.org.il

Anat Shapira is a Neubauer research fellow in the Program on Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), and a doctoral student in philosophy at Tel Aviv University. Her research deals with the moral basis

of the ethics of the rules of war. She completed her Bachelor's degree in philosophy and in the honors program at the University of Haifa with distinction, and continued on to a Master's degree in philosophy. anatgelber@gmail.com

References

- Al-Aloosy, M. (2020). *The changing ideology of Hezbollah*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Albo, M., & Lt. Col. A. (2021). Learning and change in Hezbollah: On the path to a new operational doctrine? *Bein Haktavim*, 35, 101-123. <https://tinyurl.com/463byh7d> [in Hebrew].
- Al-Salhy, S. (2020, January 14). Exclusive: Iran tasked Nasrallah with uniting Iraqi proxies after Soleimani's death. *Middle East Eye*. <https://tinyurl.com/cs82pdtr>
- Byman, D. L. (2022). Hezbollah's dilemmas. *Policy Brief*, Brookings Institution. <https://tinyurl.com/38ksmha6>
- Caldwell, N. (2022, February 18). Hezbollah after Syria: More lethal, less domestic support. *Journal of Political Inquiry*. <https://tinyurl.com/bdfnm7da>
- Col. T., & Col. R. (2023). The doctrine of superiority in the strategic competition between Israel and Iran. *Bein Haktavim*, 39, 1-10. <https://tinyurl.com/32j79nu3> [in Hebrew].
- Daher, A. (2015, November 4). *Hezbollah and the Syrian conflict*. Middle East Institute. <https://tinyurl.com/4c7hep7b>
- Daher, A. (2019). *Hezbollah: Mobilization and power*. Oxford University Press.
- Dekel, U. (2023, April 16). The Palestinian resistance axis converges with the Iran-Hezbollah axis. *INSS Insight*, 1709. <https://tinyurl.com/3j6hryc3>
- Dekel, U., & Kurz, A. (2020, May 24). Unilateral moves as game changers: 20 years since the withdrawal from Lebanon, 30 days to annexation. *Special Publication*, Institute for National Security Studies. <https://tinyurl.com/336uz3es>
- Eichner, I. (2022, July 26). After Nasrallah's threats: Israel conveys warning messages to Hezbollah. *Ynet*. <https://tinyurl.com/mutf4wu7> [in Hebrew].
- Eichner, I., & Zeitun, Y. (2020, July 27). Netanyahu on the incident in the north: Hezbollah is playing with fire. *Ynet*. <https://tinyurl.com/yvfw8wze> [in Hebrew].
- El-Houri, W., & Saber, D. (2010). Filming resistance: A Hezbollah strategy. *Radical History Review*, 106, 70-85. <https://tinyurl.com/mry87heb>
- Gabrielsen, I. (2014). The evolution of Hezbollah's strategy and military performance, 1982-2006. *Small wars and insurgencies* 25(2), 257-283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2014.903636>
- Ghaddar, H. (2016, December 21). What's at stake for Lebanon's new government. *Policy Analysis*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy. <https://tinyurl.com/578aex89>

- Ghaddar, H. (2020, December 9). Hezbollah has created parallel financial and welfare systems to manage the current crisis. *Policy Analysis*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy. <https://tinyurl.com/2dya862w>
- Hacohen, D. (October 8, 2022). Benny Gantz threatens: "If Hezbollah makes a mistake and attacks—we will dismantle Lebanon" • Netanyahu invited to briefing. *Kikar HaShabbat*. <https://tinyurl.com/yc4baeyk> [in Hebrew].
- Halabi, E. (2023a, May 26). Nasrallah answers head of Military Intelligence: "You're not threatening war—we are." *Ynet*. <https://tinyurl.com/4dk8xv24> [in Hebrew].
- Halabi, E. (2023b, June 2). "Radwan Force" aspires to penetrate into Israel and capture territory in the Galilee: Hezbollah's commando unit. *Ynet*. <https://tinyurl.com/mrxfe9fh> [in Hebrew].
- Harb, Z. (2011). *Channels of resistance in Lebanon: Liberation propaganda, Hezbollah and the media*. I. B. Tauris.
- INSS Israel. (2021, August 17). Gaza, Iran, the northern border—and what connects them: The threat of coordination of the axis of resistance. Podcast 180, *YouTube* [video]. <https://tinyurl.com/3xa2au8j> [in Hebrew].
- Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. (2020, May 7). Germany announces that it will outlaw Hezbollah. In this declaration, Germany joins other countries that have already declared the organization a terrorist organization. <https://tinyurl.com/3a2ym27d> [in Hebrew].
- Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (2021, January 4). Hezbollah's response to the economic crisis in Lebanon: Situation assessment. <https://tinyurl.com/3mjmmype> [in Hebrew].
- Ish Maas, O. (2017). Hezbollah's strategic culture. *Maarchoth*, 470, 58-67. <https://tinyurl.com/3vxxwjevn> [in Hebrew].
- Kaduri, E. (2023, March 6). The campaign between the wars in Syria: What was, what is, and what lies ahead. *Special Publication*. Institute for National Security Studies. <https://tinyurl.com/4z554bc4>
- Kanaaneh, A. E. (2021). *Hezbollah and the hegemony of resistance*. Hebrew University Magnes Press [in Hebrew].
- Kizilkaya, Z. (2019). Morality of Hezbollah's conflicts with Israel. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 12(3), 371-394. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2019.1573037>
- Kurz, A. (Ed.), Borgin, M., & Tal, D. (1993). *Islamic Terrorism and Israel: Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Hamas*. Papyrus [in Hebrew].
- Lebanon: Geagea renews calls for Hezbollah's disarmament. (2022, May 23). *Middle East Monitor*. <https://tinyurl.com/a38ezx2n>
- Levitt, M. (2013). *Hezbollah: The global footprint of Lebanon's party of God*. Georgetown University Press.
- Levitt, M. (2020). Breaking Hezbollah's "golden rule": An inside look at the modus operandi of Hezbollah's Islamic Jihad organization. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 14(4), 21-42. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26927662>
- Levitt, M. (2021, July 26). Hezbollah's regional activities in support of Iran's proxy networks. *Policy Analysis*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy. <https://tinyurl.com/bdfjkz8t>
- Levitt, M. (2023, March 21). Hezbollah infiltrates Israel (Part 1): Another step toward changing the rules of the game. *Policy Analysis*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy. <https://tinyurl.com/2p8jaham>
- Melman, Y. (2019, February 1). Israel and US reinforce Soleimani myth and strengthen his standing in Iran. *Maariv*. <https://tinyurl.com/ypw23e7z> [in Hebrew].
- Michael, K., & Dostri, O. (2018). The process of institutionalization of sub-state actors: Hamas's conduct between sovereignty and continued violence. *Journal for Interdisciplinary Middle Eastern Studies*, 3, 57-90. <https://tinyurl.com/23sy99d2> [in Hebrew].
- Mizrahi, O. (2022a, October 25). The agreement with Lebanon: The benefits outweigh the drawbacks. *INSS Insight*, 1652. <https://tinyurl.com/8xrbvfv6>
- Mizrahi, O. (2022b, November 15). The governmental vacuum in Lebanon. *INSS Insight*, 1660. <https://tinyurl.com/364bfmt>
- Mizrahi, O., Dekel, U., & Bazak, Y. (2021). *The next war in the north: Scenarios, strategic alternatives and recommendations for the State of Israel*. Memorandum 211, Institute for National Security Studies. <https://tinyurl.com/28m5t2xe>
- Mizrahi, O., & Schweitzer, Y. (2020, August 17). Following the calamity in Beirut: Might the situation in Lebanon change? *INSS Insight*, 1365. <https://tinyurl.com/3uw9trxx>
- Mizrahi, O., & Schweitzer, Y. (2022, June 19). Hezbollah's political challenges following the elections in Lebanon. *INSS Insight*, 1610. <https://tinyurl.com/4bbd3ak6>
- Mizrahi, O., & Schweitzer, Y. (2023a, March 16). Events in Israel reinforce Nasrallah's "spider web" theory. *INSS Insight*, 1697. <https://tinyurl.com/ynvjer7a>
- Mizrahi, O., & Schweitzer, Y. (2023b, May 1). Israel may have to change its deterrence equation with Hezbollah. *INSS Insight*, 1715. <https://tinyurl.com/222c9kun>
- Modrik-Evrone, H. (2020). The IDF and the security zone, 1985-2000—doctrine, preparedness and activity. *Yesodot*, 2. <https://tinyurl.com/53azuj8y> [in Hebrew].
- Nahmias, R. (2006, August 27). "We wouldn't have kidnapped soldiers had we known that this is the response." *Ynet*. <https://tinyurl.com/m767cs7b> [in Hebrew].
- Naveh, T. (2007). *Relations of deterrence between the State of Israel and Hezbollah, 1982-2006* (Master's thesis). Tel Aviv University. <https://tinyurl.com/4uz6pt5s> [in Hebrew].
- Norton, R. A. (2018). *Hezbollah: A short history*. Princeton University Press.
- Schleifer, R. (2002). *Psychological warfare in Israel: A reexamination*. Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University [in Hebrew].
- Schleifer, R. (2014). *Psychological warfare in the Arab-Israeli conflict*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Schweitzer, Y. (2004, June 18). Suicide terrorism: Historical background and risks for the future. Wide Angle. <https://tinyurl.com/3drppfb2>
- Schweitzer, Y., & Mizrahi, O. (2019, September 3). The complexity behind Hezbollah's response to Israel's attacks. *INSS Insight*, 1210. <https://tinyurl.com/2p94xnh3>
- Schweitzer, Y., & Riemer, O. (2018, December 12). Neutralizing Hezbollah's tunnel project: The ongoing campaign against Iranian regional influence. *INSS Insight*, 1116. <https://tinyurl.com/mpvhzcsf>
- Schweitzer, Y., Shapira, A., & Siman-Tov, D. (2022, November 3). Hezbollah steps on the gas: The campaign over Karish. *INSS Insight*, 1655. <https://tinyurl.com/maa3dc9d>
- Shapira, S. (2000). *Hezbollah: Between Iran and Lebanon*. Hakibbutz Hameuchad [in Hebrew].
- Shapira, S. (2020). *The struggle between Israel and Hezbollah, 1982-2020*. Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. <https://tinyurl.com/5debd2en> [in Hebrew].
- Shapira, S. (2021). *Hizballah: Between Iran and Lebanon*. Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv University.
- Shay, S. (2001). *Terrorism sent by the imam: Twenty years of Shiite terrorism, 1979-1999*. Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya [in Hebrew].
- Shay, S. (2017). *Israel and Islamic terror abductions: 1986-2016*. Sussex Academic Press.
- Sobelman, D. (2003). *New rules of the game: Israel and Hizbollah after the withdrawal from Lebanon*. Memorandum 69, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University.
- Sobelman, D. (2009). Hizbollah—From terror to resistance: Towards a national defence strategy. In C. Jones & S. Catignani (Eds.), *Israel and Hizbollah: An asymmetric conflict in historical and comparative perspective* (pp. 49-66). Taylor & Francis.
- Sobelman, D. (2018). Israel–Hezbollah: From “rules of the game” to deterrence stability. In E. Lieberman (Ed.), *Deterring terrorism* (pp. 78-97). Routledge.
- Sobelman, D. (2022). Re-conceptualizing triangular coercion in international relations. *Cooperation and Conflict* 0(0), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00108367221098494>
- Sobelman, D. (2023). Hezbollah's coercion and the Israel-Lebanon maritime deal. *Middle East Policy*, 30(2), 75-93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12689>
- Valensi, C., & Kaduri, E. (2022, July 12). Five good years for the campaign between wars in Syria: What comes next? *INSS Insight*, 1617. <https://tinyurl.com/2fjzfwjy>
- Zeitun, Y. (2023, June 17). Golani reconnaissance company prepares for combat against Hezbollah inside Israeli territory | Report on the special exercise. *Ynet*. <https://tinyurl.com/27hr93px> [in Hebrew].