

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The “campaign between wars” (CBW) is the official term in the Israeli security establishment for the series of offensive actions that Israel has launched, primarily in Syrian territory, over the past decade. What began as individual pinpoint actions aimed at preventing the transfer of advanced weapons from a disintegrating Syria to the Hezbollah organization in Lebanon developed into a physically and geographically large-scale campaign that has been anchored in Israel’s military operational concept, including in the *IDF Strategy* documents.

Regional changes, however, including the stabilization of the Assad regime, the thawed relations between Iran and longstanding adversaries, and the United States’ continued distancing from the region, raise the question whether the overall effect of the campaign between wars still works in Israel’s favor, on levels beyond the physical harm to the enemy. For example, the past decade has seen the emergence of the Iran-led “axis of resistance,” which now operates against Israel more tightly than in the past. Analysis suggests that the expansion of the campaign between wars actually helped create this axis, to the point of significantly increasing the danger to Israel of a simultaneous multi-arena conflict with various enemies.

The IDF’s new capabilities in precision intelligence, air and covert operations, cyber operations, and more have been demonstrated impressively in the campaign between wars. However, experience teaches that focusing on these capabilities can in fact have a negative effect in several areas: CBW requires major monetary resources and a relatively large amount of command attention, which are drawn from other IDF missions, chiefly preparation for a significant military campaign. The means that enable CBW operations – almost unlimited intelligence wealth, central command, and a surplus of capabilities dedicated to precise execution – contrast with the kind of command and operations that are required in a major campaign, and there is concern (also based on

experience) that the command and the forces would have difficulty adapting to the conditions of such a campaign.

This study examines the history of the campaign between wars, its roots as an operational concept, its expansion following its operational success, how it has been viewed over the years by various adversaries, and its relevance a decade after it began. In addition, it examines CBW's impact on IDF readiness for large-scale war and the chances of unintentional deterioration caused by one of the sides. The study suggests that the campaign between wars in its current configuration has passed its peak with regard to most of its objectives, and has increasingly caused negative or unintentional outcomes. Consequently, the study proposes recommendations for the future, led by:

- a. Assessing thoroughly the objectives, achievements, and future operational directions of the campaign between wars, while examining the changes underway in the regional and international systems and defining an end state for the campaign.
- b. Focusing CBW activity solely on worthy targets of enemy buildup, with an emphasis on Hezbollah, and not exaggerating the importance of symbols, e.g., "Iranian entrenchment in Syria."
- c. Examining the situation in Syria carefully, and designing various modes of operation vis-à-vis the different areas within it. In this context, it is necessary to rethink the benefit inherent in striking civilian regime targets.
- d. Preparing the IDF for the scenario of a multi-arena war, while assessing its capabilities in depth and giving renewed attention to aspects that have been neglected (in particular, the readiness of ground forces); simultaneously, conveying in military buildup, in rhetoric, and in actions on the ground that Israel is not afraid of a full-scale war and is not willing to adhere to red lines drawn by the enemy.
- e. Designing and operating non-violent, covert, and political means of influence in the region, especially in Syria and Lebanon.

- f. Forming regional and global coalitions that will constitute a counterweight to the axis of resistance and its connection with Russia and China, and help with the critical political goal of renewing US interest and involvement in the region.
- g. Studying the ways of both learning and shaping concepts in the IDF, and examining to what extent they are influenced by individual instances of success in force application and preservation of achievements, rather than by looking toward the future.