

INTRODUCTION

Early 2023 marked 10 years since the first strike in Syrian territory attributed to Israel, in the framework of what came to be known as the “campaign between wars” (CBW). What began as a small number of individual strikes, intended to prevent the transfer of advanced weapons to Hezbollah, developed over the years into an ongoing and intensifying campaign in Syria and elsewhere that has become a central focus of IDF activity and attention.

Over time, the campaign between wars developed far beyond its initial objectives, namely, preventing Hezbollah’s acquisition of advanced weapons, and later, impeding the entrenchment of Iran’s proxies in Syria. Various statements by the political and military leaderships in Israel have even attributed it strategic significance, portraying it as a new, important form of warfare that reflects Israel’s advantages and greatly improves its strategic standing.

However, the enemy also learns the lessons of the campaign between wars and changes accordingly, and recently even developed a kind of “counter-campaign between wars,” analyzed below. At the same time, significant changes have occurred in the regional picture, following Russia’s force deployment in Syria and the stabilization of the Assad regime in Damascus, the continued US withdrawal from the region, and the increasing standing of Iran and the emergence of the “axis of resistance” to Israel, with tightened relations between Iran and Hezbollah with the terrorist organizations in Gaza and the West Bank. The regional “period of détente,” reflected in the warmed relations between longtime and bitter adversaries (Iran and Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt) and in Syria’s return to the Arab League, also demands a serious examination of Israel’s force application policy.

Within the security establishment, opinions are divided regarding the effect of CBW on the IDF’s readiness for war, and especially for the scenario of a multi-arena conflict, which stands at the center of the multiyear force buildup plan advanced by IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi. Some see CBW as a

systematic campaign to reduce the enemy's capabilities, which will improve Israel's opening stance in a future war; others point out that the CBW red lines that Israel maintains meticulously erode its deterrence vis-à-vis the enemy (especially Hezbollah) and argue that CBW *modi operandi* are not necessarily compatible with preparing the IDF for the scenario of a full-scale war.

Ten years since the beginning of the campaign between wars, the time has come to thoroughly examine the evolution of the campaign, its current state, its substantive achievements, and above all, the impact that the emphasis on CBW has had on Israel's regional situation and the IDF's readiness for war.

The research presented here involves studying CBW genealogy, from its roots in the IDF's operational concept and the development of actions since 2013, and the way the enemies – Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran – have viewed them. In addition, it examines developments since early 2023, including significant changes in the enemy's approach to recent events and the operational environment. The last part of the study presents lessons and recommendations that constitute a significant change to the existing policy. Their essence is focusing the kinetic activity on critical aspects of the enemy's military buildup, while forgoing broader targets and developing non-kinetic, political, and other ways to realize Israel's objectives in Syria and Lebanon, which in themselves are not sufficiently defined. In addition, it is necessary to prepare the IDF for the scenario of a multi-arena conflict, and to convey through readiness and action that Israel does not fear such as conflict. In the political sphere, Israel should focus on creating regional and global coalitions that constitute a counterweight to Iran's increasing strength, its formation of the axis of resistance, and its tightening ties with Russia and China.

CBW, with all its operational success and the demonstrated high level of intelligence and air capabilities, has exhausted most of its utility in its current configuration. Thus, it is necessary to formulate a realistic policy and other modes of operation in order to improve Israel's standing and prepare it better for the possibility of conflict – which perhaps will help prevent it.

The authors would like to thank the Managing Director of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Maj. Gen. (res.) Tamir Hayman, for his support and advice in writing this paper. In addition, we thank the senior figures in the operational systems involved in CBW in the past and present, with whom off the record conversations were held for the purpose of writing this study. They will not be quoted in the document or mentioned by name. Thanks also go to Dr. Anat Kurz, the Director of Research at INSS, and to her staff for their comments.