The Foundations of Israel's Response to Threats

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The current issue of this journal focuses on the major problems and threats facing the State of Israel and the IDF. It is usually easier to describe the problem than it is to solve it, certainly in the military field, and especially in the public non-classified arena, since "what is there to do" or "what should be done" must be formulated with a certain amount of caution, as not everything that is known may be publicized.

The following essay suggests responses that the State of Israel – not necessarily the IDF – should provide to five types of problems presented elsewhere in this volume: (a) the problem of Lebanon; (b) the high trajectory threat, which although it relates to Lebanon is a more general threat, as it also appears from the Gaza Strip, Syria, and Iran, and harbors great damage potential that may not have been presented in full in the preceding discussions; (c) what is the right way of prosecuting a war with Syria; (d) coping with the Iranian nuclear threat; and (e) how does one prepare for peace agreements and lines that cannot be crossed in these agreements, both with the Palestinians and the Syrians.

Let us begin with Lebanon. A confrontation with Hizbollah in the near future seems of little likelihood because current deterrence is effective enough on both sides and the organization is therefore not interested in war. The restraining elements are currently stronger than opposing elements. Clearly this is subject to change, but I do not think a confrontation may be expected in the near future.

What is the problem with regard to the deployment of military forces between us and Hizbollah? The problem is that Israel cannot defeat Hizbollah in the wider sense. Israel cannot achieve a victory against

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an effective guerilla organization as long as three conditions prevail: (a) Israel is on one side of the border and Hizbollah is on the other, i.e., Israel does not control the territory. (b) The organization enjoys full state assistance and patronage, as Hizbollah does in Lebanon. Indeed, this is more than mere political patronage – Hizbollah is actually a formal part of the government. (c) The state extending the patronage (Lebanon) is completely immune to response from the state attacked (Israel).

In this situation there is no way to achieve victory, even if at the tactical level the IDF has undergone tremendous improvements such as described by the GOC of the Northern Command regarding the lessons learned and the improvements in training, preparedness, and all other aspects. But Hizbollah has also improved: it has increased its missile arsenal, the range of the missiles, and the organization's entrenchment in villages where it is much harder to operate than in the "nature reserves." Therefore at the tactical level, Hizbollah's improvements offset Israel's. Certain aspects that could have been very effective in the Second Lebanon War will not be effective in a Third Lebanon War. For example: Had the IDF in the last war undertaken a quick military ground operation at the Litani line, it would have been able to remove some 80 percent of the missiles within the range of Israel, and that would have represented a real military gain. This is practically irrelevant in the context of the next war because most of the missiles, whose range is now greater, are beyond the Litani, and therefore any ground operation would be more like the First Lebanon War in the scope of force and depth of area; even then success would by no means be guaranteed.

Therefore tactically, Israel has a serious problem that relates to the question of what kind of war to prosecute: a war on the organization, in which case Israel fights with one hand tied behind its back, or a war with the state, which is always preferable. Lebanon is providing more than enough reasons for the world to understand that it is responsible for what happens within its borders, not only because Hizbollah is a legitimate political party and a member of the government – and not just any member, but one with the right to veto any decision. The Lebanese reality is more complex – or perhaps simpler – but certainly more problematic. In Lebanon, there is an agreement between the "good guys" – the State of Lebanon – and the "bad guys" – Hizbollah and its supporters. This unwritten agreement is as follows: since all Lebanese share a common

goal, let us divide the roles on the basis of our relative advantages. For the sake of the West, the government will present the moderate approach and Lebanon's prettier face, a society seeking culture and tourism, host to the wonderful institutions of democracy such as a presidency, a government, a parliament, and elections. At the same time, we will preserve the situation in which the real responsibility for using military force lies in the hands of Hizbollah, with even the Lebanese prime minister confirming that it is a legitimate part of Lebanon's defense. Indeed, it is the sole significant military power in the country, and only Hizbollah can decide whether to go to war or not. Thus Hizbollah is still the effective military force along the Israel-Lebanon border and it will decide what happens there. This division of roles is convenient for both sides.

The question thus becomes whether Israel cooperates with this Lebanese strategy, and in my opinion, the answer must be no. The only real way to deter a war for years, not only for months, is to make it clear to everyone that the next war, should it occur, will be prosecuted by the State of Israel against the Republic of Lebanon, which in deeds and declarations is saying, "Hizbollah Is Us." It should not be able to avoid its responsibility. It is imperative that the reality of the Second Lebanon War – where Haifa residents lived in bomb shelters while Beirut residents were blithely going to the beach – is no longer acceptable to Israel.

Should a war be fought between states, it is obvious that Israel has clear advantages over Lebanon. But the essential point is that no one wants to see Lebanon destroyed: not the Lebanese, not Hizbollah, certainly not the West or France, not Saudi Arabia, nor even Syria and Iran. No one wants to see Lebanon hurt, and everyone wants to see Israel behave according to the rules of the game that are convenient to Hizbollah. If Israel explains all of this beforehand and creates a situation in which it is clear to everyone that war, if it breaks out, will be with the state of Lebanon, then it is reasonable to think that Israel can achieve deterrence. Should war break out in spite of this, Israel can be victorious.

In contrast with what was typical in classical wars, whereby you fought first and only then, in accordance with the military results, the political campaign started, today's reality is usually reversed: the political campaign must start first because when the war starts or the hostilities break out, no one in the world has the patience to listen. Thus the correct explanation must contain three components: (a) Hizbollah is positioning

a widespread military infrastructure inside 160 Shiite villages and is creating an inevitable situation of deadly destruction for hundreds of thousands of locals; (b) the Lebanese government is responsible for what is happening, not only by virtue of binding UN resolutions but primarily because of its own policy; (c) militarily, Israel has no choice: it either loses the next war or prosecutes it in a way that will allow it to end quickly.

This argument must be presented ahead of time. One of the biggest mistakes of the Second Lebanon War was that no attempt was made to explain to the world ahead of time what was liable to happen. I recall Ehud Olmert's first visit to the United States as prime minister in April 2006. It was clear he would be talking with the heads of the Bush administration about Iran and the Palestinians. Some people said this was an opportunity also to talk about Lebanon. At that time, Hizbollah attempted an operation every month or two, from an attempted abduction in Rajar to opening fire at Mt. Dov, and at that point a confrontation between Israel and Hizbollah seemed inevitable. Some said that the situation should be explained ahead of time because once Israel undertakes a military operation it would be too late to start explaining. In April 2006, before his first meeting with President Bush, Olmert advised leaving the Lebanon issue alone, that it wasn't a burning item. Yet once the war started in July, it was impossible to explain anything to the United States administration and certainly not to the Europeans

The high trajectory threat has indeed grown, but in some respects not everyone understands just how much it has grown. It is obvious that the threat has grown numerically: Hizbollah has more rockets and missiles, as do Hamas and others. It is obvious that the rocket and missile ranges of both Hamas and Hizbollah have also increased, and likewise for Syria's rockets. It is also obvious that the military warheads are growing and the damage they can cause is much greater: you cannot compare a 107 mm Katyusha or Qassam to a 220 mm – or bigger – rocket. It is also clear that the rocket threat prevails not only on the northern or northeastern front but also, and simultaneously, in the south. In such a situation it will be difficult to find any calm areas in the country and it will be harder to defend against fire coming from several directions. It will be harder to attack a large part of the launchers because they will be hidden deep in the midst of populated areas; this is true of the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, and especially Syria. In the past, the Syrians had primarily Scud missiles, which were

very large but limited in number, and operated from clumsy launchers. These features made them more open to attack by the Israeli air force. Today Syria also has hundreds of rockets, some of which are smaller and easier to operate and located within populated areas. Therefore, even these blatant military targets are becoming harder to attack.

All of these points add up, yet they are still not the primary issue, which is: even now, and certainly in the future, we may expect a far reaching change in the enemy's missile and rocket accuracy, making statistically tolerable weapons into accurate weapons. Maj. Gen. Amidror mentioned Israel's small size, its concentration of strategic targets in a small area, and the lack of redundancy; all of these factors are becoming more and more critical.

One of the issues that took the army a long time to understand is the problem of the threat against the military rear: in 1991, during the Gulf War, it was understood that while in previous wars, such as the Yom Kippur War, there was primarily the front, now Israel had both a front and a rear. The army is on the front and the civilians are in the rear, so it is necessary to defend the civilians too; this was already clear twenty years ago. Much time passed until it was understood that in addition to the civilian casualties – a problem in and of itself, but one that does not directly affect the ability to fight – a much more serious threat was developing, namely the threat against the military rear, i.e., everything that creates the capability to wage war and do so continuously, from air force bases through logistics, command, and control means to headquarters. This is true at the national level, and not only the military level: from power stations and refineries to hospitals. The damage from an attack to strategic targets of this kind is greater than the familiar damage caused by human casualties or economic damage. Moreover, the threat of precision weaponry in the hands of the enemy is also liable to affect the ability to prosecute the war itself effectively.

The response to this threat is complex and in part already exists in the form of anti-missile systems such as the Arrow, Iron Dome, and others designed to defend large areas, but they are not enough. What is necessary is also the fortification of certain targets and improvements to their survivability, their redundancy, and their backup, and this costs money. The statement "we will not fortify ourselves to death" is basically sound, but as with everything else it is a question of how much, i.e., Israel

will not invest limitlessly in defense. Generally speaking, this approach is correct; nevertheless, fortifying sites of supreme strategic value is critical and is, technologically speaking, possible.

My third point is Syria. After the Second Lebanon War, amidst the plethora of lessons, both those worthwhile and those less so, some said, "We built an air force, and it turns out not to have been good enough; it can't attack every Katyusha; we ignored ground combat; we didn't develop and train the ground forces well enough," and so on. Therefore the response is to return to good military capabilities of the ground army, because that is what brought Israel its victories in the past.

The relative importance of the air force and its effectiveness depend primarily on the type of enemy it encounters. If the enemy has predominantly classical military targets in the sense of tanks, headquarters, cannons, airstrips, planes, ships, and ports, and the enemy is a state entity, i.e., it has institutions of government and government infrastructures, the most effective means by which to act against that enemy is indeed the air force. Therefore, it remains the case that the air force is the most effective means in a war between Israel and Syria also in the future. The fact that use of the air force is not optimal in other sectors must not change the assessment of its importance relative to a future confrontation with Syria.

The ability to achieve success on the ground in a war against Syria is limited. One could reach a point of victory in the sense that the enemy would agree to a ceasefire, primarily by attacking the most important components to the government such as its strategic ability in the form of surface-to-surface missiles, anti-aircraft weapon systems, airfields, ports, and other infrastructures. Israel has the ability to attack all of these with a high degree of accuracy and cause a great deal of destruction. That is Israel's most prominent relative advantage, and not the army-versus-army warfare on the hills of the Golan Heights. That is not to say that the ground maneuver is redundant, and it is clear that it is necessary to invest in it in order to yield optimal results, but in terms of priorities its place is second.

The primary dilemma in a war with Syria is how to use the force with such power that the price Syria has to pay keeps growing to the point that it will want to end the fighting quickly yet at the same time not bring its leaders to the brink of desperation such that they will want to use chemical

weapons. In other words, it would be unwise to be too successful and thereby cause the leaders of the regime to think they might be losing their grip on the government or bringing an unbearable national disaster on the Syrian people. It is difficult to ascertain what kind of action would lead to maximal damage to the enemy without bringing about the use of a type of weapon where the goal is to push it outside the circle of threats, i.e., chemical weapons. This, I believe, is the primary dilemma with regard to a war with Syria.

As for Iran, in the military dimension, there are two graphs that do not proceed along parallel lines: the one – improvements in Israel's offense capabilities, and the other – improvements in Iran's defense capabilities. The Iranian defense improvements graph is steeper than the Israeli offense improvements graph because it is easier to defend, to dig down in the ground, to conceal, or create more storage areas than it is to improve offensives. In the military sense, time is not in Israel's favor. It may be that when the relevant state-political conditions are right for an attack, the desirable operational window of opportunity will already have closed. This is liable to create a dilemma: if a military operation is important or crucial it may be right to undertake it when the military circumstances are the best, while acknowledging that it will be necessary to deal with the political level later. On the other hand, there are political constraints: as long as there is a chance of keeping nuclear weapons from Iran through non-military means, it is best to exhaust it. Furthermore, there are steps Israel cannot take without first having understandings with the United States, and the American pressure to avoid or prevent an Israeli military operation is inevitable.

Legal warfare: I would like to second Prof. Kasher's sentiments, and I am convinced that there are elements working to terrorize Israel from this angle. However, Israel's situation is better than we usually imagine, and what follows are some examples.

In 2002, during Operation Defensive Shield, a problematic political decision was made, based on the understanding that Israel cannot continue fighting Hamas effectively without taking full control of the West Bank. The political significance was that there was no choice but to prosecute a war against the Palestinian Authority. This difficult political decision was made after a major disagreement at the Cabinet level, but it gave the army the necessary freedom to act. At first, the American

administration went along with this idea but its understanding of the campaign differed from Israel's, and after 48 hours, figures in the American administration were demanding that Israel remove its forces from Palestinian cities lest the PA collapse, which would have had far reaching ramifications for the entire Middle East. It was clear to Israel that withdrawing 48 hours after going in would look like a defeat; in any case, it would be impossible to maximize the results of the operation in that amount of time. The confrontation with the administration was not a simple matter, in part because Israel did not explain the conditions of fighting ahead of time. As I noted with regard to Lebanon, it is important to explain to our friends ahead of time why Israel might have to engage in a certain kind of action. Nevertheless, despite the difficult exchanges and actions that looked like the vicious trampling of refugee camps in Nablus and Jenin, Israel conducted the operation assertively enough so that even the administration understood the necessity of the operation for Israel, and in the end stepped back and allowed Israel the necessary room to operate.

Another chapter of Operation Defensive Shield also relates to the Goldstone report, and I refer here to the story of the "Jenin massacre" and the UN decision to send a commission of inquiry to study the issue. The secretary general himself authorized its establishment with the agreement and support of Secretary of State Colin Powell and the agreement of then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Shimon Peres. Such an investigation could have been expected to be similar to the Goldstone effort and possibly even worse in terms of its potential damage. When Prime Minister Ariel Sharon understood the possible damage, he harnessed all his resources to cancel the recognition of the commission of inquiry. My sense is that the error with regard to the Goldstone issue was not whether to cooperate with it or not, rather from the outset allowing this pot to boil over. It could have been prevented had the fight started early enough and been aggressive enough.

Not long after Operation Cast Lead, which drew the ire of the Goldstone report, six of the most important European prime ministers came to Israel as a show of solidarity with the Israeli prime minister. In other words, credit is due to Olmert, who has not earned a lot of plaudits, because it proved that Israel had much stronger political support than was reflected by the existence of UN-sponsored commissions of inquiry.

It was a show of support for Israel's moves, not only on the part of the military but also on the part of important political echelons, and not only from the United States.

In the final analysis, there is a basic understanding among national leaders regarding not only what is just and unjust but who is really worth supporting and who is not, if they want to protect assets threatened by terrorism or extremist Islam or elements supported by Iran. Therefore, we should not panic because of the media and legal frenzy of antagonistic outburst. I am not dismissing it and the struggle against the delegitimization of Israel is very important, but I think that these matters do not represent a real threat to the State of Israel. The real threats are well known throughout the world, and there is a complete congruency of interests between Israel and nations other than the United States. There is even a strong correlation between Israel's interests and Turkey's, despite repeated statements by Prime Minister Erdogan.

On the dilemmas of the army's force buildup, a survey of Israel's capabilities with regard to the resources at its disposal indicates that there are areas in which there are essentially no limitations. Israel has no limitation on technology or on manpower. Despite certain problems in mandatory enlistment and in this or the other percentage of people enlisting or not enlisting, they do not represent a real bottleneck. The only limitation is budgetary. In the end, Israel's capabilities are a function of its budget, the budget being not only the overall sum but also its composition and the balance among priorities it reflects.

Below are some dilemmas with regard to the budget and force buildup: (a) how to divide the budget between the naval, ground, and air forces; (b) how to divide the budget on the basis of types of threat, such as fighting terrorism, conventional wars against states, and a war with distant states such as Iran; (c) whether to build the force on the basis of relative advantages or on the basis of responses to gaps. Operating on the basis of relative advantages means the following: given the fact that the relative advantage vis-à-vis the enemy is the air force, we should continue to strengthen it and thereby force the enemy not to establish good air forces, because the enemy is doomed to lose, but rather to invest in anti-aircraft defense systems. On the one hand, there are gaps that do not favor Israel, creating unbearable risks, and one of them is the

vulnerability to high trajectory fire. Where, then, is the proper balance between closing the gaps and cultivating the relative advantages?

There are other dilemmas with regard to force buildup. Should force buildup occur on the basis of a scenario (or scenarios) or on the basis of generic capabilities? If on the basis of scenarios, a force can be built in a fairly precise manner, but there is the risk that events will unfold differently from the anticipated scenarios. If buildup is on the basis of generic or general capabilities, right for any situation, then on the one hand you have a broad-based response, but you have also wasted many resources. Here, then, the question becomes: where is the balance? Are we prepared for overlap in force buildup, and if so – what is it? For example, we have an old system and a new one has been purchased; we have old planes and have now bought new ones – do we keep the old ones until the new ones are operational? Or do we start taking out the old ones so that there is a gap between the ones going out and the ones coming in, in order to save on resources? How much of a gap can the IDF allow itself? In addition, what is the measure of interchangeability in force buildup? To what extent do remote piloted aircraft replace tanks? Is such interchangeability valid for every scenario? What is the critical mass that must remain in each system?

The last and most important issue in which there were errors that were apparent in the Second Lebanon War – and as head of the planning division in the preceding years I was a party to them – is the question of the optimal response to four dimensions that are qualitatively different in terms of response times:

a. *Readiness and routine security level*. This is a fluid area and changes can be effected within a matter of hours. For example, today there is a battalion along a certain sector. Should it appear that the threat has grown, within a few hours it is possible to deploy an additional two or ten battalions. If today there are a certain number of airplanes in a state of alert and there is a new warning, it is possible to prepare three times the number of planes within a few hours. That is to say, in terms of readiness and routine security, response times are very rapid.

b. *Preparedness level*. Preparedness is composed of the level of training, the number of spare parts, the levels of reserve supplies, and technical fitness. Changes in preparedness take several months to effect.

c. *Military size*. How many battalions, air squadrons, and ships will there be? Here response time is close to five years. In other words, if the decision is made to dismantle a division for any reason whatsoever and it turns out that two years later it is necessary to reconstitute it, the process will take about five years.

d. *Investment in new projects*. Research and development begin with the hope that in another ten years it will be possible to realize the achievements.

The proper balance relates to understanding the issue of response times. One can assume great risks with regard to the first point because the response time can be measured in days; medium risks are acceptable with regard to preparedness for which the response time is measured in months; very small risks are allowable when it comes to the size of the armed forces because here the response time is years. Finding the optimal solution among all of these aspects given the spectrum of threats is the art of military force buildup.