A Changed Threat?
The Response on the Northern Arena

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In light of talk about the northern sector heating up and the possibility of a deterioration into war, the question of the change in the threat facing Israel − from the longstanding situation in which the state's reference scenario was a surprise attack for the purpose of conquering either limited or more extended territory to the new reality that includes extensive rocket and missile fire at Israeli population centers together with the use of terrorism and guerilla tactics − again rises to the surface.

What has changed? What is meant by "a changed threat"? Rocket fire is nothing new; such fire was directed at Israel from Lebanon more than forty years ago. Terrorist attacks also occurred over the years, even before the establishment of the state. To my mind, the change lies in the formulation of a strategic concept whereby the military and civilian rear is the weak point that offsets Israel's military superiority. The enemy channels its efforts according to a comprehensive, systemic approach of high trajectory fire at civilian areas, and in the Palestinian context, by the widespread use of terrorism inside the State of Israel; the enemy's assessment is that instilling fear and causing widespread damage will achieve political success. The change in the pattern of action is meant to damage Israel while minimizing the qualitative advantage of Israel's military. Therefore it is necessary to find the appropriate response to this change. Military commanders are supposed to be able to provide a response to a changing threat while at the same time continue to be prepared for the classical threat of enemy armies as well as for the non-conventional threats of chemical and biological warfare.

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In the northern arena, three and a half years after the Second Lebanon War, the situation is complex. On the one hand, there is a sense of security and actual security that were absent for many years; on the other hand, we see evidence of the growing threat described by Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yaakov Amidror. Hizbollah has doubled its capabilities with regard to certain types of rockets and has improved the range and accuracy of their systems as a result of Iran's deepening involvement in Lebanon and as a lesson learned from the war. The Syrian front, however, has been calm for 36 years. It appears that the success of the Yom Kippur War made a deep impression on the Syrian leadership's view of Israel's military force.

On the Lebanese front, the picture is more complex. Since the Second Lebanon War, Hizbollah has not attempted as much as a single attack from the northern border. Since the war there have been six terrorist incidents in the north involving the firing of ten rockets, all attributed to global jihadists. The incidents are similar: a small cell of terrorists emerges from the refugee camps near Tyre and Sidon, equips itself with 1.5 m-long or even shorter rockets, travels towards the border vicinity, lays the rocket down in a fairly primitive fashion on some boards with a timer determining the time of the launch, and hurries away from the site. I am not belittling this pattern of action; in one case, a nursing home was damaged and one young woman was slightly injured. It certainly has the potential for a more serious event liable to kill many civilians. Lebanon is host to two branches of global jihad: one is the Abdullah Azzam Brigades and the other is Fatah al-Islam. Both are well known to the Lebanese authorities but receive little official attention.

With the experience of the Yom Kippur War and Second Lebanon War in mind, the test in the northern arena is one of capability rather than one of intention. The Syrian army is the only element in the region with the capability of conquering territory, firing into the depth of Israel, and operating chemical weapons. Hizbollah has considerable capacity to fire into the depth of Israel. Therefore, alongside the question of capability, the question of intention must be addressed through intelligence and smart risk management.

The threat of the Syrian army underpins the IDF's reference scenario and its training. It is a conventional army whose capability is fundamentally different from that of Hizbollah and Hamas. Syrian leaders state quite openly that returning the Golan Heights to Syrian

sovereignty is a Syrian interest of the highest order. They speak of returning the Golan Heights through peaceful means, but also about the possibility of "resistance" and, should it come to it, the possibility of war to recover the Golan Heights. How the IDF has constructed its defensive, intelligence, and offensive capabilities demonstrates that this message has been internalized. In addition, a central component of the Syrian modus operandi has long been the assistance extended to terrorist organizations in general and Hizbollah in particular. Today the assumption is that whatever is available in Syria's arsenals makes its way to Hizbollah. This is a pattern that was true to an extent until the Second Lebanon War and has intensified since the war.

Hizbollah has changed since the Second Lebanon War. It has significantly increased its high trajectory fire capabilities, and the ability to fire at the depth of Israel from the heart of Lebanon has become a central pillar of the organization's strategic concept. At the same time, the organization has constructed a defensive system subject to the constraints leveled by the war. If until the Second Lebanon War the organization was spread out along the border fence and was the uncontested omnipotent ruler of southern Lebanon, the territory is now host to the Lebanese army and UN forces. These two have reduced Hizbollah's freedom of action in the south. The organization in turn has taken a significant step to concentrate its military means south of the Litani inside Shiite villages along with deploying personnel and means through Lebanon's heartland.

South of the Litani there are 160 Shiite villages and towns. There the organization feels at home, completely protected; no other forces dare enter these areas. On the one hand, confronting an enemy hoarding its materiel inside populated built up areas represents an operative problem; on the other hand, this is the most significant restraining element for Hizbollah because the meta-goal of the organization is achieving Shiite hegemony in Lebanon, and its main center of gravity in Lebanon is the support of the Shiite population, the very group that experienced significant trauma three years ago. Hizbollah leaders would presumably think twice before opening fire from Shiite civilian areas, as they understand the meaning of another confrontation.

Furthermore, behind closed doors, the organization is asking itself many questions about its performance during the Second Lebanon War:

its battle readiness; how classified systems were attacked, namely, the medium and long range rocket batteries, even though their existence was known to only a very few; and other operations in the heart of Lebanon. The organization understands the meaning of these attacks, including the intelligence that enabled them. Hizbollah is therefore giving itself far fewer kudos than those it received from the Israeli public.

What has changed since the summer of 2006? It seems to me that the most important point stems from the very difficult experience the organization underwent then. Since its inception, it has absorbed scattered blows, but the forceful blow it sustained in the Second Lebanon War was entirely new to it.

In the background of the two familiar threats mentioned above, there is a very important factor capable of affecting what is happening in the northern arena, and that is the Iranian threat. This is a multi-dimensional threat: the two higher and visible dimensions are in the media in Israel virtually every day, but there is a third, extremely influential dimension that is more hidden. The first dimension is the nuclear threat. It is fairly familiar because it is in the news and on the public agenda. The second dimension lies in the conventional capabilities that Iran is careful to show off whenever it can: hundreds of Shehab missiles, with Israel well within range.

The third dimension, a hidden and very influential threat in the northern arena, is Iran's involvement by means of the Quds Force. This force was established after the revolution as the long arm of the Iranian regime, designed to export the vision of the revolution and to promote strategic concepts. One of its important ideas is exhausting the State of Israel to the point of destruction. The Quds Force, which is also called the Lebanon Corps and functions as a command, is not a corps command in the sense of an IDF corps command, rather a professional core of people who are supposed to disseminate the vision as well as translate it into practical terms. A similar concept and rationale also operates in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Yemen.

This has been an ongoing threat primarily in the northern arena, but it is also gathering strength in the south, together with the attempt to empower Palestinian resistance. In this context, Iran exerts several efforts:

a. Financing, to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars: this is Hizbollah's primary source of funding. The world's only Shiite state is ideologically motivated to finance the establishment of the second Shiite state. In Iran's view, the most appropriate candidate is Lebanon.

b. Training, instruction, and guidance for Hizbollah's operative plans. This took place already before the Second Lebanon War, but has greatly increased since then.

c. Ongoing supply of materiel and weapons from Iran to Syria. This phenomenon receives publicity only when there is an interception, such as the interception of the weapons ship in 2009.

Until the Second Lebanon War, we witnessed mostly Iranian training and assistance; since then we have seen much deeper involvement, all the way to command and control of operational processes in the organization and of what occurs in Lebanon. This development came about in light of the war, after Iranian authorities failed to anticipate that the systems they had built for a rainy day would be activated because of a tactical event. The assassination of Imad Mughniyeh two years ago also significantly increased Iran's involvement in Lebanon.

If the formulation of a strategic concept that identifies the military and civilian rear in Israel as the country's weakness and offsets Israel's military superiority constitutes the essence of the change in the threat against Israel, the following question arises: was the Palestinian intifada that began in September 2000 a part of a coherent strategic concept in which the Israeli rear is its Achilles' heel that should be targeted with shock and awe, or did the intifada erupt as a result of events that spiraled out of control? The answer to this question is still incomplete.

Hizbollah started to build its modus operandi of terrorism and guerilla fighting against IDF forces in the security zone in southern Lebanon alongside rocket fire against the civilian rear. Then, the rear was the strip of settlements along the northern border. It was careful not to fire directly into the settlements other than as a response to Israeli actions. For many years, debates raged in the Northern Command about Hizbollah's intention: did it want to reach the fence and carry out attacks, or did it want to attack IDF forces in the security zone? To the best of my recollection, most of the fire at Israeli settlements occurred in the wake of IDF activity that Hizbollah considered as having crossed the line. The

moment the IDF left the security zone, Hizbollah's fire capability grew tremendously as the organization deployed very close to the fence. There was talk then of some 18,000 short range and hundreds of medium range rockets. This was evident in the war.

Did Israel need the war in order to see the bitter truth about its capability to handle this threat? The war did indeed reveal deficiencies in the use of force and many other deficiencies that necessitated a profound self-examination, but in my opinion the war was not a failure. At the end of the day, the loser in the war was Hizbollah. I am convinced that the IDF learned the lessons required and that significant improvements in the IDF's capabilities have taken place since then.

From 2000 until 2006 the IDF concentrated primarily on fighting brutal terrorism that left 1,170 Israeli soldiers and civilians dead, while training for conventional warfare dropped significantly. This effort generated impressive results in fighting terrorism, but it came at a price. However, this was not the only reason for the difficulties encountered in the Second Lebanon War. In the final analysis and despite the deficiencies in operating the ground forces, Hizbollah fired 4,000 rockets at Israel in this confrontation, mostly short range 107-122 mm rockets and some medium range of 220-302 mm. The IDF fired some 200,000 rounds into Lebanon. This may be meaningless from the perspective of the Israeli citizen, but Hizbollah was counting. There were 7,800 aerial sorties by fighter planes attacking a range of targets, some of great value, others of less importance. All of these, together with the conquest of parts of southern Lebanon, inflicted real damage on the organization. In my understanding, this damage has greatly affected its conduct, its way of thinking, and together with what the organization's leader experienced, is expressed in the fact that the man who led Hizbollah with great pomp and fanfare has for the last three and a half years been in hiding like the most wanted man in Nablus.

The organization, steeped in jihad, has not carried out a single attack on the northern border in the last three and a half years. When I speak with my commanders and soldiers I always say that our working assumption is a strict assumption of the test of capability, and that we have been preparing for the situation, which is liable to blow up at any moment without warning, for three and a half years. I believe that we will act effectively when necessary. The weekly statement by Nasrallah

(who addresses his people over the TV screen and speaks of the historic victory) is sounding more and more like empty sloganeering.

When examining the last decade, we see that it began with guerilla fighting in Lebanon and with Hizbollah gaining tactical successes against us in southern Lebanon. At the end of the decade's first year, the Palestinian intifada broke out inspired by events in Lebanon, as the Palestinians understood that they could achieve aims by force. Many successes were achieved in the war on terrorism. We have yet to announce the end of the war even though Palestinian terrorism in Judea and Samaria was defeated about four years ago. This intifada cost Israel 1,170 dead, 138 alone in March of 2002, which formed the impetus for Operation Defensive Shield. There is a large difference in how terror is fought after the territory was recaptured in Defensive Shield over the previous situation. The second campaign of the last decade was the battle in Lebanon lasting 33 days, in which Hizbollah attempted to operate its system-wide concept of continuous fire into Israel's heartland. During Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip, Hamas tried to recreate Hizbollah's approach using high trajectory fire and sowing public panic, and continued launching rockets at the Israeli civilian front until the very last day of the operation.

In comparing these three campaigns, one wonders why high trajectory fire sounds so much more threatening than terrorism. As the result of tens of thousands of rockets, close to 80 Israelis were killed, among them civilians and soldiers, including the soldiers killed by high trajectory fire near Kfar Giladi; by contrast, the suicide bombing of a single terrorist on a bus might kill more than twenty. I am not ignoring the psychological impact caused by paralyzing a part of the country, nor the attack leveled by continuous IDF activity. Nonetheless, this comparison should put the enemy's desire to view the rear as Israel's weakness in its proper proportion, and it is towards that proportion that we must direct our efforts in order to achieve results.

Citing von Clausewitz, it is customary to say that an army is in one of either two situations: preparing for war or fighting a war. The last decade showed us that there is a third situation, which over the years we came to call "ongoing security." However, it is difficult to describe the past decade as "fighting ongoing security." Fighting Palestinians in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip, the scope of the force used, and the stretching of

significant parts of our resources, especially the ground forces, opened up another dimension of warfare and posed the question: what attainment is required in each situation?

Preparing for war means building optimal readiness in order to achieve the tasks during the moment of truth, and fighting a war means aiming to attain the determined objectives. The third situation, which characterized the last decade, is a different battle; the term "ongoing security" is not particularly apt, and perhaps we need to find a more suitable label. The required achievement with regard to fighting terrorism is to minimize it as much as possible to the point that terrorism does not interfere with the freedom to live a fundamentally routine life, does not affect the national security of the State of Israel, and deters the enemy from using high trajectory fire. If so, what modus operandi should be developed on the basis of the last decade's experience? In this regard, I would like to note three insights.

The primary insight I had as a commander in Judea and Samaria during that war on terrorism was that the most effective war on terrorism can only be achieved through control of the territory and the population. Without a responsible element controlling the area and the people, I do not see a way of fighting terrorism effectively. This is an operational lesson; there really is no other way of putting it. Even the strongest army in the world fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq in a truly impressive manner will find itself in dire straits after a while.

A second insight I had was the great difficulty in deterring organizations from amassing more power. It is very difficult to deter Hamas and Hizbollah from growing stronger. Israel has the ability to deter them from acting, but it is also necessary to deter and foil their attempts at force buildup. However, most of the energy should indeed be directed at deterring operations, not by boasting or verbal acrobatics but by action. For example, when the global jihadist organization Abdullah Azzam fires a few rockets, this should not be dismissed as a fly-by-night group operating contrary to Hizbollah and Lebanese interests. Such cases should be met with an immediate message delivered with blunt force.

Hizbollah and Hamas have forged a modus operandi of fighting from within dense population centers, obligating Israel to come up with a complex response while maintaining its moral core and, of course,

international rules of war. Before the Second Lebanon War, they had forged a modus operandi that served as the blueprint for abducting Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, Gilad Shalit, the teenager Eliyahu Asheri, two girls in Rehelim, a Jew in Nablus – all these events took place in the weeks leading up to the war, as well as an attempted abduction in Rajar. When the abduction up north occurred, an operational and ethical question arose: should we attack targets with "special gravity"? These were targets in a highly classified deployment of mid-range rocket capabilities in the homes of Hizbollah operatives. The idea was to topple walls or make an opening for surprise fire. An IDF performance study spoke of 200-500 civilian deaths as collateral damage of such an attack. The position of the army was: despite the direct, immediate threat from these houses against Israeli civilians, we recommended not attacking them at the first stage but only at the second stage, after we evacuated the population. We were willing to assume the risk in order to prevent harming civilian non-combatants. As we know, a different decision was reached, contrary to our position. In hindsight, it was the right decision. An important deployment, having the capacity to cause devastating damage, was thus eliminated. The same dilemma surfaced on the second day of fighting with regard to attacking two important targets in Beirut: Nasrallah's office building and apartment building. It was possible to attack the two without giving any warning and with reasonable chances of hitting them. Nonetheless, all the residents in the area ("the security square") were instructed by flyers to evacuate. We attacked the two buildings only 18 hours later. In my opinion, this is evidence of the IDF's ethics. We also informed the entire population of the south, the neighborhood in Beirut, and neighborhoods in the Beqaa Valley in Hizbollah's spheres of activity that they had to leave. This came at the expense of the effectiveness of the attack, yet we cannot live with a reality in which the enemy builds firing systems inside civilian environments to kill Israeli civilians and Israel is unable to do something to stop it.

In my position as GOC Northern Command, I gave only a single interview, a little over a year ago. In it, I talked about the possibility that were a war to break out we would attack Hizbollah disproportionately. This interview found its way into the Goldstone report with an accompanying letter saying that Israel had preconceived disproportionate attacks against civilian populations in order to punish them. This was in spite

of the fact that I had been speaking about attacking in order to render a severe blow to Hizbollah, not to the civilians. The method of operation in Lebanon was that in the first stage we attacked the targets representing an immediate threat. In the second stage we turned to the civilians in order to protect them, and only after evacuating the population did we attack Hizbollah targets widely. I am convinced that this is a moral pattern and it was right to operate according to it; if we need to go to battle again, it will be proper to act on it again. Hizbollah is the one turning the hundreds of villages and the Shiite regions in Lebanon into battlefields. I hope that this understanding will make the organization reconsider before it opts to use more terrorism or fire against us or undertake another abduction. Understanding our method of action is not directed solely towards Hizbollah but to the entire environment in which we operate.

Four basic concepts cover the way Israel operates:

a. *Deterrence*, with regard to organizations and states, and the difficulty this entails. In early 2000, the Palestinians understood that the State of Israel is strong and therefore they unleashed a wave of terrorism. When al-Qaeda carried out the 9/11 attacks it understood that it was engaging a global power in battle, yet it was not deterred. So too, Hizbollah: it harassed Israel and the IDF from 2000 until 2006, firing sporadically and attempting to incite terrorism in Judea and Samaria. Hamas too is aware of the gaps between it and Israel and nonetheless acted in the years following the withdrawal from Gaza. Attaining deterrence is complex and problematic but an examination of the reality in both the north and the south after Operation Cast Lead demonstrates that these organizations make rational considerations. Therefore, Israel must look for ways to deter them. I return to a formative speech many quote, but they only cite the end of the sentence. In 2000, Nasrallah announced in Bint Jbeil that Israel is a land of cobwebs. The full sentence was: "Despite its nuclear capabilities and despite the fact that it has the strongest air force in the world, Israel is a land of cobwebs." His assessment of Israel's capabilities stemmed not from its military prowess or the strengths attributed to it but from his understanding of the resiliency of Israeli society and Israel's willingness to engage in action.

b. *Early warning*: We are witnessing a conceptual change from classical early warning that looked for signs that war was brewing on the other

side to the need to construct an appropriate intelligence concept in order to provide early warning about a tactical event liable to turn into a strategic one, such as the abduction of Gilad Shalit and the abductions of Goldwasser and Regev. Israel is required to engage with serious consideration in the updated contents necessary for this critical component in Israel's comprehensive security concept.

c. *Decision*: The changing threat requires a reexamination of the concept of decision. We must understand that modi operandi have changed. Two hundred years ago, von Clausewitz formulated rules and principles, including: when an attacking force identifies weaknesses on the part of the defender and uses most of its force in the minimum amount of time, a phenomenon of neutralizing the enemy's desire to fight effectively or to continue fighting takes place. The great difficulty lies in identifying the centers of gravity against which one blow is enough to dismantle the desire to fight. This is not the enemy's modus operandi that we are up against. The IDF's major difficulty lies in expressing its ability in a series of short, crushing actions fast enough to achieve success. In my opinion, we may continue to use the decision concept, even though Clausewitz attributed it only to the tactical level, which has absolutely nothing to do with the strategic level. We may continue to use the decision concept on condition we understand that it has two components: one is meeting the objectives defined for the army and the other is improving the strategic situation of the State of Israel over time. Both of these must be questions posed at the end of wars following the current patter of action.

d. *Exit strategy*: Shortening the duration of the fighting is a most fundamental and important security principle because of the nature of Israel's army and society. After the Second Lebanon War, someone wrote that one should not undertake an action without first formulating the end scenario and exit strategy. This is simplistic thinking, because should it be acted upon it will spell the end of wars, and I do not see that happening. It is right to devote serious thinking to the end scenario, but the sweeping assertion above is of no value.

Conclusion

The IDF is grappling with all the components of the threat: non-conventional, conventional, and sub-conventional. This last decade was

characterized by coping with three primary campaigns with the sub-conventional threat – the threat of terrorism and guerilla together with high trajectory fire as a main component. In this warfare, the IDF and the security services had many successes.

The primary challenge of the armed forces is to continue providing the Israeli public with security for many years while attaining deterrence and being prepared in every way to defend, attack, and meet all tasks defined for the IDF. The lesson for many years to come is the need to fight terrorism and guerilla with the fewest possible resources and to continue preparing for conventional wars. Such preparation is a more complex, problematic goal even though at the moment this scenario does not seem to be the preferred plan on the part of Israel's enemies. Conventional fighting requires skills such as using command centers, intelligence gathering, ground maneuvers, and system-wide fire. These skills also allow for fighting in other settings.

The need to minimize damage to life and property as much as possible is another important component. The threat of high trajectory fire is severe and I do not treat it lightly, but proper conduct, even passive, before engaging in all manner of sophisticated efforts, will result in a significant decrease in casualties and allow the army to operate more freely.

I hope that Israel's deterrence will last for years and create a comfortable, safe reality that will allow Israel to flourish and make the right decisions without being under the pressure of events, with an understanding in the IDF that a sudden reversal is liable to occur without warning. In the security discourse within the IDF there is a concept called "precious time," the time in which it is possible to prepare the forces before operating them. The environment in which we live has no "precious time." Time works in favor of those who use it well. This is the lesson for preparing the army for battle in the years to come.