



# If War Comes

## Israel vs. Hizballah and Its Allies

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Jeffrey White

Policy Focus #106 | September 2010



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Front cover: An Israeli gunner runs to reload an army artillery piece after it fired toward Lebanon from a position near the Lebanese border in northern Israel, July 2006. (AP Photo/Pier Paolo Cito)

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# About the Author

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# Executive Summary

THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS have seen much discussion of growing tensions between Israel and Hizballah, along with the group's allies, Syria and Iran. If war does in fact come to Israel's northern border, it would bear little resemblance to the 2006 conflict in Lebanon. Instead, it would in all likelihood be a transformational, even fateful, event for the region—certainly for Hizballah and Lebanon, probably for Syria, and perhaps even for Iran. Israel and its regional standing would likely undergo substantial alterations as well.

This study offers not a prediction of war, but rather a forecast of what it could look like. In all probability, it would be a major conflict, one fought over extensive areas of Lebanon, Israel, and probably Syria, featuring large military forces executing complex operations and resulting in substantial casualties (military and civilian) as well as major infrastructure damage in all of the countries involved. Although the political-diplomatic arena would be important, success on the battlefield would be central to determining the outcome.

Given the high stakes, the fighting would be intense and would likely escalate and expand. Israel and Hizballah would feel great pressure to win such a war, and that need would drive the hostilities to a new level, likely pulling in Syria and pushing Iran to become involved as well. The conflict would be a severe test for decisionmakers and warfighters on both sides, and a challenge for key external actors, especially the United States.

A number of circumstances could ignite such a conflict. One side may simply conclude that it is time to act for one reason or another. War could also develop from various incidents, such as violence along the Lebanese border, in Gaza, or in the West Bank. Other activities could produce situations in which escalating tensions and misperception of the other side's intentions and/or actions lead to a conflict.

## The Combatants

The current threat to Israel is essentially a conventional one—Hizballah's rocket, missile, and antitank forces

are largely conventional in structure and purpose, as is the Syrian military. Israel has prepared its own conventional forces for this threat, including enhancements in air, ground, and naval systems, command and control, intelligence, force readiness, active rocket/missile defense, and civil defense. Although the challenge of a war with Hizballah and its allies should not be underestimated, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are much better prepared today than they were in 2006.

In a conflict of the sort outlined here, Israel would aim to fundamentally alter the military equation, with great consequences for the political situation. Although this would probably not amount to "final victory," it would likely be decisive in the military-operational sense. Israeli military strategy would center on the use of large-scale joint air, ground, and naval operations to rapidly eliminate Hizballah's rocket and missile forces, destroy its ground forces in southern Lebanon, severely damage its command and control systems, and destroy its infrastructure throughout Lebanon.

Israel would probably attempt to prevent the conflict from escalating into general war with Syria by employing threats, mobilization, force deployments, and posturing. At the same time, however, it would be ready for that contingency. Any Syrian forces and infrastructure that supported Hizballah would likely be targeted, and any Iranian elements supporting the group would be subject to attack as well. Meanwhile, Israel would attempt to deter direct Iranian attacks on its territory via warnings and preparation of strategic strike assets, including air, missile, and naval forces.

Hizballah's preparations for a future war are intended to deter Israel, shift the military balance in the group's favor, and bolster its political objectives. Its recent activities represent serious planning for war, and the cumulative effect of these activities has been to increase the group's self-confidence and perhaps erode Israeli deterrence. Hizballah was largely successful in prosecuting the 2006 war, and it aims to repeat that success in a future conflict.

If a new war erupts, Hizballah's military efforts would center on the following strategies:

- Offensively, to launch massive rocket/missile attacks on military and civilian targets with the intention of inflicting significant casualties and damage
- Defensively, to oppose Israeli air, ground, and naval operations inside Lebanon with aggressive action, slowing any advances while inflicting as many casualties as possible and, at the same time, preserving its own forces

The group would aim to continue operations as long as it saw itself in an advantageous position, allowing it to inflict the most political, military, economic, and social damage on Israel.

For their part, Syria and Iran would at minimum provide communications, command, control, intelligence, and resupply assistance in an effort to keep Hizballah in the fight. Syrian air defense elements would oppose "penetrations" of Syrian airspace and perhaps engage Israeli aircraft over Lebanon, given the small operational area involved and the proximity of Damascus to the combat zone. Beyond basic support (e.g., advice, arms, intelligence), Iran's potential role is unclear. But in a large-scale conflict, Tehran could decide to participate more directly by providing light infantry or special forces in Lebanon, and perhaps missile and air defense forces within Syria. And both Damascus and Tehran would likely feel pressure to increase their roles as the war escalated, due in part to their connections with and commitments to Hizballah.

If Syria became directly involved in a conflict with Israel during a war in Lebanon, its goals would include:

- Preserving the regime and its key assets (security, military, economic)
- Preserving Hizballah's position in Lebanon and its ability to threaten Israel
- Reestablishing a Syrian military presence in Lebanon

- Inflicting a defeat on Israel sufficient to create the conditions for regaining the Golan Heights

In Iran, the regime could decide to take one or more of several steps, on an escalating scale of involvement:

- Providing more arms to Hizballah and Syria
- Providing advisors, technicians, or light combat forces
- Carrying out asymmetric attacks on Israeli interests (e.g., terrorist-type actions)
- Engaging in regional troublemaking (e.g., raising tensions in the Strait of Hormuz)
- Conducting missile strikes on Israel

In the Palestinian arena, Hamas leaders would likely limit the group's participation to token actions accompanied by supporting rhetoric. At the same time, no one should be surprised if a new war in the north included a "Gaza excursion." Hamas could decide to enter the conflict in serious fashion, employing heavy rocket fire and long-range weapons. Alternatively, Israel could decide to finish the job begun with Operation Cast Lead in 2008–2009.

### Escalation and Uncertainty

The war outlined here would present a dangerous situation—various pressures and dynamics would push it toward escalation. The course of the fighting, the combatants' offensive strategies and doctrinal approaches, the depth of their preparations for war, their expectation that the other side will use massive force, and the perceived advantages of preemption would all foster a broader and more serious conflict. Some factors would work to limit the hostilities, such as external political intervention, the prospect of overwhelming losses, or impending defeat. On balance, however, the pressures to escalate would likely outweigh the control mechanisms, resulting in a rapidly intensifying war. A period of acute danger would emerge early, when the advantages

of gaining a step on the opponent would be most pronounced. Decisionmakers on all sides would be under great pressure to act quickly in order to achieve their goals and protect their assets and populations.

To be sure, there are many uncertainties regarding a conflict of this nature and scope, such as the strength of will of key leaders, the true nature of the Hizballah-Syria-Iran military relationship, the effects of external intervention prior to combat, the war's starting conditions and subsequent rapidity, public attitudes toward the fighting, the potential use of chemical or biological weapons, and the role of chance. These and other uncertainties could influence the course of the war, lengthening or shortening it, broadening or narrowing its scope, and increasing or decreasing its intensity.

## Outcomes

Uncertainties aside, the broad outlines discussed above would likely hold in a future war: it would be a large-scale, intense conflict waged between Israel and some combination of Hizballah and its allies, fought in and over Israel, Lebanon, and Syria, and lasting weeks. In the end, the following conditions would likely prevail:

- The IDF would be occupying some, perhaps substantial, parts of Lebanon and potentially all of Gaza.
- Wherever the course and outcome of the war went badly—defeats, significant civilian casualties, widespread destruction—there would be political crises.
- Several immediate requirements would emerge: dealing with dislocated civilians, rebuilding and resupplying military forces, and repairing damaged infrastructure.

This situation would require a great deal of time and serious political and economic investments before it could stabilize.

In the long term, the sort of war outlined here could reshape the region's political and military environment. It would certainly be Israel's most serious war since 1973, and one that the IDF would have to win. Given

the likely political, military, and economic costs, Israel would face serious consequences if it failed to demonstrably achieve its core objectives.

In contrast, if Israel acted decisively, were willing to pay the costs in casualties and damage, and enjoyed military success, then a new war could substantially weaken its opponents in the following ways:

- Hizballah would be broken as a military factor in Lebanon and weakened politically.
- The Syrian regime would be weakened by military defeat and the loss of important military and security assets.
- Iran's activities in the region would be circumscribed by the defeat of its allies; and if Tehran failed to aid them during the conflict, it would lose influence as well.
- Hamas (assuming it became involved directly) would lose its military power in Gaza and at least some of its political power.

## The U.S. Role

Washington should be taking its own preparatory steps for potential war by developing concrete plans for action, both in advance of such a conflict and if hostilities occur. If war comes, the United States should not necessarily take immediate steps toward ending it quickly. Several important objectives would be at stake in such a scenario: breaking Hizballah's military capabilities and reducing its political power; disabusing Syria of the notion that it can act in Lebanon to further its own interests without significant cost; and removing the potent Hizballah proxy from Iran's foreign policy arsenal. Only successful IDF operations can achieve those goals. Accordingly, the United States should consider giving the IDF both the time and the political space it needs to carry out those objectives. Washington should also be prepared for associated Iranian troublemaking in the Persian Gulf. The United States must demonstrate that it will use force if necessary, thwarting any attempt by Tehran to take advantage of the situation created by a Lebanon war.

## Conclusion

Whether hostilities will erupt soon or ever is uncertain; both sides have good reason to avoid it. But if war does come once again to Israel's northern border, a renewed confrontation between Israel and Hizballah will not resemble their inconclusive 2006 encounter. The new war will likely be wider in geographic scope and more destructive, with high-intensity operations from the beginning. The dynamics of the fighting will produce rapid escalation, possibly pulling in Syria and

even Iran. Where the war goes badly for either side, significant military and civilian casualties, disruption of economic activity, and damage to infrastructure are probable. Although Israel will most likely prevail in this scenario, victory for either side will carry substantial costs. And for the losing side, the consequences may well be fateful. As the war deterrent appears to weaken, both Israel and Hizballah are preparing for a serious confrontation that neither can afford to lose.

# Introduction

THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS have seen much discussion of growing tensions between Israel and Hizballah, along with the group's allies, Syria and Iran. If war does in fact come to Israel's northern border, it would bear little resemblance to the 2006 conflict in Lebanon. Instead, it would in all likelihood be a transformational, even fateful, event for the region—certainly for Hizballah and Lebanon, probably for Syria, and perhaps even for Iran. Israel and its regional standing would likely face substantial alterations as well.

Much of the commentary on the situation has focused on the tensions themselves and their prospects for sparking armed conflict. But if another war does erupt, what might it actually look like? How would it be fought? How might it expand or escalate? What consequences would it hold? Of course, there are no definitive answers to these questions—war is the most uncertain of all human endeavors, and forecasting future conflicts is always risky. But given the growing friction between longstanding enemies and the potentially dramatic regional ramifications of a new war, thinking seriously about how such a conflict might unfold is crucial.

To be clear, though, this study offers not a prediction of war, but rather a forecast of what it could look like. It examines in some detail what would likely be a major conflict—one fought over extensive areas of Lebanon, Israel, and probably Syria, featuring large military forces executing complex operations and resulting in substantial casualties (military and civilian) as well as major infrastructure damage. The potential combatants' preparations and current posture support this forecast. Although neither Hizballah nor Israel was ready for war in July 2006, they both seem prepared for the next conflict.

Certain conclusions follow from this large-war scenario. Given the high stakes involved, the conflict would be intense and would likely escalate and expand. This would not be a war fought to strengthen a negotiating position, reinforce a concept such as deterrence, or achieve a temporary change in the military

equation. The circumstances would pressure the combatants to use more of their capabilities rather than hold them back for use in a future conflict. Although the political-diplomatic arena would be important, success on the battlefield would be central to determining the outcome.

There is substantial information and history to shape our thinking about a future war.

This study draws on the publicly available statements of the combatants' political and military leaders, on the record of their weapons acquisitions over the past few years, and on what is publicly known about their military preparations, including developments in doctrine and training.<sup>1</sup> Together, these sources provide strong indicators of a war's potential shape.

As for history, there are two relatively recent benchmarks for judging each side's potential performance. In the 2006 war, Israel fought Hizballah alone in Lebanon, and the conduct of both sides continues to influence opinions about their relative capabilities today. In December 2008, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead to deal with rocket fire from Hamas. The latter conflict was revealing on two fronts: it indicated how the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) had incorporated the lessons of the 2006 war, and it suggested some likely elements of future IDF actions, including scale of operations, use of firepower and maneuver, and integration of intelligence. It did not fully test the IDF, however, allowing Israel to hold back on the full range of its capabilities.

Any new war in the north would be waged simultaneously on four levels: political, strategic, operational, and tactical. This study deals primarily with the strategic and operational levels, though it should be remembered that success or failure at the other levels would inevitably have a major effect on the outcome.<sup>2</sup> Thinking about a war in this way forces one to confront serious issues that are sometimes lost in the broad sweep of policy discussions and advocacy, including how (and how well) the potential combatants have prepared for war, what specifically they will fight for, and how they will use military forces to achieve their goals.

If it does come to pass, the next war will be something different from the 2006 conflict and Operation Cast Lead—larger in scope, more destructive, and with serious potential for escalation to a regional level. Both Israel and Hizballah will need to win this war, and that

need will drive the hostilities to a new intensity, likely pulling in Syria and pressuring Iran to become involved as well. It will be a severe test of the decisionmakers and warfighters on all sides, and a challenge for key external actors, especially the United States.

## Notes

1. The study's knowledge base comprises more than a thousand press reports, journal articles, interviews, and military assessments. Particularly important sources include: Hizballah's English and Arabic websites; Hizballah-affiliated media; reporting from the military correspondents of *Haaretz*, the *Jerusalem Post*, and *Yediot Aharonot*; and publications from the office of the Israel Defense Forces military spokesperson. Also important were studies and analyses from the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University and the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center in Gelilot, Israel.
2. For a discussion of the relationships between these levels of war, see Gen. Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage, 2005), pp. 13–18.

# 1 | Rumors of War

THE INCREASE IN TENSIONS between Israel and Hizballah, and the group's allies, since spring 2010 is based on a combination of circumstances. Statements discussing the possibility of war, its course, and its consequences began emanating from Hizballah, Syria, Iran, and Israel early in the year and took on added weight during the summer.<sup>1</sup> The actors are not so much threatening war as stating that they would respond to an attack. Such sentiments have been accompanied by threats of the dire consequences of starting another war. For example, on February 16, 2010, Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah stated:

I'd like to say to the Israelis today: Not only if you attack al-Dahiya, we will attack Tel Aviv, but if you attack Beirut's Rafiq al-Hariri Airport, we will attack Ben-Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. If you attack our ports, we will shell your ports. If you attack our oil refineries, we will shell your oil refineries. If you attack our factories, we will shell your factories. If you shell our electricity plants, we will shell your electricity plants.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to rhetoric, various concrete actions have ratcheted up tensions and laid the groundwork for serious fighting. Partial mobilization and alerts have been reported in Syria and by Hizballah in Lebanon. Considerable reporting has also highlighted Syria and Iran's transfer of new weapons to the group.<sup>3</sup> The most serious case has been Syria's suspected transfer of an undetermined number of Scud surface-to-surface missiles. Such reports have been bolstered by Israel's November 2009 interception of the vessel *Francon*, found to be carrying a large Iranian arms shipment apparently bound for Hizballah via Syria. In addition, a series of meetings between the leaders of Hizballah, Syria, and Iran—including a February 2010 summit in Damascus—gives the impression of a kind of war diplomacy involving coordination of military policy and planning.<sup>4</sup> The serious clash between Lebanese army personnel and Israeli forces on August 3, 2010, added another element to the tensions.

Hamas has been involved in similar activity, including warnings and threats to Israel and meetings with Iranian leaders. It was also implicated in the July 2010 rocket attack on Eilat, Israel. The situation in Gaza has its own dynamics that raise concerns about another round of fighting there. Meanwhile, Israel has conducted a number of telling actions, including exercises involving its Northern and Southern Commands, rocket and missile defenses, and civil defense systems. It has also issued chemical and biological protection kits to a substantial portion of the civilian population. In addition, Israeli leaders frequently warn of the serious consequences of attacks on their territory.

Although some of this activity may just be whistling in the dark, it has created an ominous backdrop for an inherently dangerous situation—a climate that is conducive to war. Israel has worked hard to deter its enemies, but war talk and arms shipments among Hizballah, Syria, and Iran can undermine that deterrence, or Israel's confidence in it.

## Context of War

Wars occur in a specific geographic, political, and military context. This context shapes the nature and direction of the conflict, if not its exact course.

Geographically, the war postulated in this study would be a broad conflict far exceeding the 2006 war between Israel and Hizballah. First, Hizballah's possession of long-range missiles and rockets would effectively extend the war throughout Israel. Second, Israel's operations to destroy these long-range threats would take it deep into Lebanon, in the air and on the ground. Third, if Damascus directly intervened in the war—as seems probable given the prevailing political and military dynamics—Syria too would become an arena of combat. Iran could become directly involved as well, but because of its distance from Israel, any operations over Iran or along its coast would be limited in scope and duration. Iranian forces or personnel could of course join the fighting in Lebanon or Syria.

The overall theater of combat would cover some forty thousand square miles,<sup>5</sup> divided into three sub-theaters: Lebanon, Israel, and Syria. The Lebanese subtheater includes perhaps three compartments that would see combat of some type: the region south of the Awali River, the Beqa Valley, and the rest of Lebanon. Israel can be divided into two compartments: northern Israel, and central and southern Israel. Syria has three compartments: from Damascus to the Lebanon border, from the Golan Heights to Damascus, and the rest of the country.

The nature of combat in these compartments would vary. It would likely be most intense south of the Awali and in the southern Beqa Valley (areas where Israeli ground forces would be pitted against Hizballah's elaborate defenses) and in northern Israel (which would receive the brunt of Hizballah's rocket and missile offensive). This does not mean that the other compartments would be free from major combat. Depending on the intensity, duration, and degree of participation by Syria and Iran, serious fighting could expand to other compartments.

The broad political context for the current war threat is dominated by several factors: Iran's nuclear program and domestic unrest; Palestinian political paralysis and the lack of movement toward negotiations with Israel; the absence of Israel-Syria peace negotiations; and some tension in the U.S.-Israel political relationship. The need to maintain a close relationship with Washington, not least of all on the Iranian nuclear issue, constrains Israeli decisionmaking about the developing threat from Hizballah and its allies.

The political context has also been influenced by what appears to be growing cooperation and coordination among Hizballah, Syria, Iran, and, to some extent, Hamas. The Lebanese government is being drawn into the issue through Hizballah's political and military activity and Syria's continued political role in the country. This tightening network of relationships is evidenced by meetings and agreements among the key leaders (including the December 2009 defense agreement between Syria and Iran) as well as Hizballah's strong presence within the Lebanese government.

Finally, the military context has been dominated by continuing arms acquisitions, military preparations (including training and exercise activity), a high state of watchfulness and attention to changes in each party's military posture, and assertions of confidence if war comes. For now, an uneasy level of mutual deterrence—or at least lack of interest in war at this time—prevails, but this state of affairs is under continuous strain.

## How War Comes

A number of circumstances could ignite a conflict:

- One side may calculate that it is time to act.
- Acquisition of new weapons or capabilities could change the military equation, either encouraging risk on the part of Hizballah and its allies or pushing Israel to preemptive action. Israel is especially sensitive to changes in Hizballah's air defense capability and in the accuracy and range of its missiles. For example, according to some reports, the group's acquisition of missiles from Syria nearly spurred an Israeli strike on the supply operation in spring 2010.<sup>6</sup>
- Hizballah continues to vow revenge on Israel for the killing of former commander Imad Mughniyah. A successful attack on Israel or Israeli interests would almost certainly produce a strong retaliatory strike against Hizballah in Lebanon.
- Israel may decide to strike Iran's nuclear program, prompting Hizballah missile and rocket attacks on Israel. For political reasons, each side would likely prefer that the other be the initiator, but that does not rule out "war by choice."

War could also develop from various incidents, such as violence along the Lebanese border, in Gaza, or in the West Bank. For example, the sudden onset of war in July 2006 resulted from Hizballah's ill-considered kidnapping of Israeli soldiers; neither side actually anticipated or sought war at that time. Similarly, Gaza slid into war in December 2008 as Hamas failed to properly weigh the effects of renewing serious rocket

fire on southern Israel. Large-scale rioting or violence in the West Bank could also pull in Palestinian elements based in Gaza and Lebanon. For example, the beginning of this kind of process could be seen along the Gaza border in March 2010, where tensions rose because of Palestinian rocket fire and Israeli counteractions (though this particular flare-up did not go far).

Other activities could produce situations in which escalating tensions and misperception of the other side's intentions and/or actions lead to a conflict. In particular, exercises, reserve mobilization activity, and periodic alerts could cause one side to overreact. In May 2010, for example, Hizballah responded to Israel's large-scale "Turning Point 4" civil defense exercise by placing its forces on alert, increasing its activity in the border area, and deploying additional personnel to the South. Operations not directly related to Lebanon could spark war as well, such as Israel's 2007 airstrike on Syria's nuclear facility near Dayr al-Zawr. Israel has a good diplomatic channel to Damascus for signaling its real intentions, thereby reducing the chances for

miscalculation. But its ability to communicate with Iran and Hizballah is more limited. And even where good channels exist, there is no guaranteeing that a message would be received as intended.

In short, war could come in any number of ways. These include a quick and unexpected eruption as in summer 2006, or a slower buildup as in Gaza at the end of 2008.

### Assessing the Combatants

Going to war is a major undertaking and complex process for any political entity. This paper addresses three major aspects of the process for each of the potential major combatants: their preparations for war, their probable strategy for war, and their likely operations during war. This approach necessarily leaves much unsaid, but the intention is to focus on issues central to any meaningful discussion regarding the conduct and consequences of a potential future war. The remaining chapters focus on each of the potential combatants separately, beginning with Israel.

### Notes

1. See, for example, Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), "At Damascus Summit, Ahmadinejad and Assad Attack U.S. and Israel; Ahmadinejad: Israel's Elimination Is Near; Assad: The Resistance Is Winning," February 26, 2010, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/4000.htm>; MEMRI, "Iranian President Ahmadinejad Repeatedly Calls for Eliminating Israel," February 25, 2010, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/3997.htm>; and Amos Harel, "Barak: IDF Has Its Eyes on All Threats, Near and Far," *Haaretz*, April 13, 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/barak-idf-has-its-eyes-on-all-threats-near-and-far-1.284183>.
2. Middle East Media Research Institute, "Hizballah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah Threatens to Bring Down Buildings in Tel Aviv and Hit Ben-Gurion Airport in Future War," February 17, 2010, <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/0/0/0/0/0/2405.htm>.
3. See, for example, Amnon Meranda, "Military Intelligence: Hezbollah Scuds Tip of Iceberg," *YnetNews.com*, May 4, 2010, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3884753,00.html>.
4. See, for example, Middle East Media Research Institute, "Assad-Ahmadinejad-Nasrallah Summit Seen by Arab Resistance Media as 'War Council' in Anticipation of War Breaking Out 'within a Few Months,'" March 5, 2010, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/4019.htm>.
5. This excludes much of eastern Syria (which could see limited Israeli operations) and Iran.
6. *Jerusalem Post*, "Hizballah Admits Receiving Syrian Scuds," April 15, 2010, <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=173217>.

## 2 | Israel's War

### Preparations for War

FROM THE ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE, the potential conflict discussed in this study would not be a battle for “hearts and minds” or an “irregular war.” In other words, if Israel goes to war against Hizballah, it would not aim to win support from the Shiite population of southern Lebanon or the citizens of Damascus. The threat posed by Hizballah and its allies is essentially a conventional threat—the group’s rocket, missile, and antitank forces are largely conventional in structure and purpose, as is the Syrian military. Accordingly, Israel has prepared its own conventional forces—air, ground, and naval—to combat this threat.

Since the 2006 conflict in Lebanon, Israel has made major improvements in its ability to wage this kind of war. These include enhancements in air, ground, and naval systems, command and control, intelligence, force readiness, active rocket and missile defense, and civil defense. Although the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are not without their problems, the 2008–2009 Operation Cast Lead provided a glimpse of their enhanced capabilities. The challenge of a war with Hizballah and its allies should not be underestimated, but the IDF is much better prepared today than it was in 2006.

**Improvements in air force capabilities.** The Israeli Air Force (IAF) has carried out a number of activities to prepare for war. These include:

- Training for long-range flight operations (which has applications for potential missions deep inside Syria and Iran)
- Exercises simulating wartime operations, including multifront and regional conflict
- Training for rapid airfield refueling and continuity of operations under combat conditions (e.g., missile/rocket attack)
- Airfield defense (e.g., against missile/rocket attacks)

- Upgrading older F-16s to the F-16I standard
- Continued development of unmanned aerial vehicles, including acquisition of the Eitan long-range/long-endurance drone
- Extensive cooperative exercises between air and ground forces
- Attaching air force officers to army brigade headquarters to coordinate air support

These actions are aimed at preparing the IAF for the demands it would face in a new war: high-intensity operations, precision strikes, extensive support to ground operations, and operations under missile and rocket attack. The IAF demonstrated the first three of these capabilities during Cast Lead. In addition, its September 2007 strike against the Syrian nuclear facility, its reported interdiction of arms smuggling as distant as Sudan and the Red Sea, and its reported long-range mission rehearsals<sup>1</sup> have allowed it to prepare for operations deep within Syria and, if necessary, Iran. See table 1 for an inventory of IAF aircraft that would be of major importance in a future conflict.

**TABLE 1. Israeli Fighters, Strike Aircraft, and Attack Helicopters**

TYPE	SQUADRONS	TOTAL AIRCRAFT
<b>F-15 variants</b>	3	87
<b>F-16 variants</b>	9	327
<b>AH-64 Apache attack helicopters</b>	2	48
<b>AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters</b>	1	33

Source: Anthony Cordesman and Aram Nerguizian, *The Arab-Israeli Military Balance: Conventional Realities and Asymmetric Challenges*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2010), p. 24.

**Improvements in ground force capabilities.** A major area of emphasis under the current IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, has been improving the readiness of ground combat forces for large-scale operations on a complex battlefield. This has been a comprehensive effort incorporating many of the lessons learned from the 2006 war. (See table 2.) Specific measures include:

- **Training and exercises for ground combat, at all levels.** This includes the IDF General Headquarters, the Northern and Southern Commands, and the divisions, brigades, and support units that would be expected to take part in a new war. As a senior IDF armor officer put it in March 2010, “We are training like crazy, and we are as ready as ever.”<sup>2</sup> For example, the 401st Armored Brigade, a unit that experienced difficulties during the Lebanon war, conducted three brigade-level exercises in the period between that conflict and Cast Lead.
- **Enhancing the ability to maneuver and fight on a complex battlefield,** particularly against an enemy employing large numbers of antitank missiles and countermobility measures (e.g., mines, improvised explosive devices). Preparations include extensive combined-arms and joint exercises at all levels, introduction of enhanced communications, command, control, and intelligence (C3I) systems (i.e., the “digital battlefield”), and enhanced vehicle protection and crew survivability measures. In 2006, the IDF’s ability to conduct large-scale ground maneuver was limited by a combination of training deficiencies, poor preparation, hasty planning, and Hizballah tactics and weapons. Since then, the IDF has worked to restore its ability to maneuver and fight on a large scale in Lebanon.
- **Preparing the reserve forces for combat,** including mobilization exercises, field training exercises, and use of reserve elements in Operation Cast Lead. The readiness of these forces was a major problem in the 2006 war, but their training and equipment has been enhanced since 2007, and their limited participation in Cast Lead provided an opportunity to test their progress.<sup>3</sup>

- **Preparing for joint operations.** Israeli forces routinely exercise air-ground cooperation at brigade levels and above. As mentioned earlier, air liaison officers have been established at the brigade level. Symbolically, senior IDF officers such as the chief of staff and the head of Southern Command have been featured in stories about flying with the IAF and emphasizing air-ground cooperation. In addition, the ability of the air force and ground forces to work closely together on a complex battlefield was tested in Cast Lead and is a routine feature of security operations along the Gaza border.
- **Specific training for combat in Hizballah-fortified areas,** including urban and tunnel combat. The IDF has established a number of training areas for such fighting, including simulated tunnel systems. Infantry forces routinely train in these areas, including reserve formations. Units are also subjected to a rigorous exercise program featuring sustained combat and movement under realistic conditions. In May 2010, the Kfir Brigade, the IDF’s urban warfare specialists, conducted a brigade-level exercise of operations in a built-up area. Israel also plans to extend urban warfare training to armored units.
- **Focused and serious planning.** As evidenced in the preparation for Cast Lead, the IDF is capable of serious planning. Operational plans were developed and exercised well in advance of that conflict, and headquarters and combat forces were well rehearsed for their roles.<sup>4</sup>
- **Improving combat spirit.** This was noticeable during Cast Lead (where Israeli ground forces were well prepared, even eager, for fighting) and in the high recruitment rates for combat units, especially the infantry.<sup>5</sup> The IDF’s performance in Cast Lead further boosted combat spirit. In addition, the IDF has placed renewed emphasis on commanders “leading from the front” and acting aggressively in the presence of enemy forces.
- **Preparing for large-scale logistics activities.** Operations on the scale outlined in this paper would

**TABLE 2. Lessons of 2006 for the IDF and Hizballah**

<b>ISRAEL'S LESSONS</b>		<b>HIZBALLAH'S LESSONS</b>	
<b>SPECIFIC ISSUE</b>	<b>MEASURE TAKEN</b>	<b>SPECIFIC ISSUE</b>	<b>MEASURE TAKEN</b>
Persistent short-range rocket threat	Emphasis on rapid ground operations in southern Lebanon to seize launch areas	Vulnerability to air attack	Acquisition of improved surface-to-air missiles; possible connection to Syrian air defense system
Antitank guided missile threat	Protection measures for armored vehicles and detailed "intelligence preparation of the battlefield"	Vulnerability of key weapons systems (long-range rockets)	Increased inventory and order of battle to reduce the effects of attrition; increased range to expand the search area for IAF reconnaissance and strike assets
Conduct of large-scale (operational-level) maneuver	Training and exercise activity at general headquarters, corps, division, and brigade levels; planning for major ground operations	Inaccuracy of rockets	Acquisition of more-accurate missiles (Fateh-110) and increased rocket inventory for saturation fire
Hizballah use of towns/villages as strong points	Urban warfare training and preparation (weapons, equipment, specialized forces)	Sustaining high rate of rocket fire	Expanded inventory; better preparation of launch sites; multiple distributed stockpiles to reduce vulnerability
Hizballah obstacle systems and countermobility measures	Precise intelligence, preparation for obstacle breaching and road clearing	Maintaining command and control of forces during combat and in the face of Israeli efforts to sever/disrupt communication	Establishment of redundant communications systems; preparation for independent operations when communications fail
Weaknesses in combat command and aggressiveness	Emphasis on leadership from the front and aggressive behavior in battle ("combat spirit")	Greater vulnerability of forces operating in the countryside versus towns and villages	Move more operations and forces to towns and villages
Reserve forces' lack of readiness	Emphasis on training reserves and bolstering their equipment and leadership	Vulnerability to deep IDF heliborne and seaborne special operations	Air defense acquisitions; coastal defense preparations
Civilian casualties and collateral damage	Training for urban combat; rules of engagement; precision intelligence and weapons	Importance of understanding Israeli tactics, techniques, and procedures	Continued emphasis on collecting intelligence and observing Israeli military activity in the border area
Supply problems	Emphasis on supporting large operations logistically; refurbishment of reserve equipment stocks	Recognition that high-profile successes (e.g., destroying helicopters and tanks; hitting ships) can affect the course of IDF operations, especially if accompanied by casualties	Attempt to create conditions for similar successes in future conflicts

require a major logistical effort. The IDF would have to support multiple divisions in combat at an extended distance from peacetime bases and storage facilities. Since the 2006 war, the IDF has increased the logistical capability of ground divisions, emphasized logistics operations in training and exercises, and introduced new technology. It is also training to operate under wartime conditions, including rocket/missile attacks on lines of communication.

Overall, the performance of IDF combat units during Cast Lead demonstrated to some degree the effectiveness of these and other readiness measures taken since 2006.

**Improvements in naval capabilities.** During the 2006 war, the Israeli navy nearly lost the Saar 5-class corvette *INS Hanit* to a C-802 cruise missile. The navy has since addressed the issues that contributed to this incident—essentially a failure to follow established operating procedures. It has also deployed an upgraded missile defense system on its combat equipment.

During Cast Lead, the navy demonstrated its ability to carry out the kinds of missions it would likely be tasked with in a future war involving Hizballah and Syria. These missions included shore bombardment, coastal patrol and interdiction, and naval commando operations. Shore bombardment capabilities have been improved via the acquisition and deployment of the SPIKE missile system, which allows precision attacks from naval vessels.

**Improvements in intelligence capabilities.** Israel has placed a high priority on intelligence targeting of Lebanon since the 2006 war, collecting near-daily imagery over the country via manned and unmanned aircraft. The IDF has improved its unmanned reconnaissance capability with the addition of the previously mentioned Eitan long-range drone. A number of Israeli human and technical intelligence operations inside Lebanon have reportedly been discovered and dismantled by Hizballah and Lebanese intelligence units. It is safe to assume that the IDF's Unit 8200 routinely collects signals intelligence on Hizballah activity. The IDF has also given new emphasis to the Combat Intelligence Collection Corps, responsible for obtaining

and analyzing tactical and targeting intelligence on the battlefield. And in June 2010, Israel added a new reconnaissance satellite to an already impressive constellation of space vehicles. Efforts have been made to improve intelligence support to ground operations as well—a weakness in the 2006 war.

This attention to intelligence was evident during Cast Lead, with the development of a deep target deck to support sustained airstrikes, detailed intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB), and real-time support to tactical commanders. A key element in Cast Lead was the effective integration of intelligence at the tactical and operational levels by means of combined operations and intelligence cells.

To be sure, combat in Lebanon would pose a different and greater intelligence challenge. The area that would need to be covered is larger, and enemy forces would be more numerous. Syrian and Iranian involvement would further tax Israel's intelligence capabilities. Nevertheless, the techniques demonstrated in Cast Lead would be largely applicable and important in the next war.

**Improvements in missile defense and civil defense.** Israel continues to enhance its missile and rocket defense capabilities. The IDF is working toward a multilayer defense against the constellation of "high-trajectory" threats.<sup>6</sup> This defense includes the Arrow antimissile system,<sup>7</sup> improved Patriot surface-to-air missile systems, and the Iron Dome system, which will reportedly begin limited operational deployment in November 2010.<sup>8</sup> Antimissile and rocket defenses have been exercised, including the Juniper Cobra IAF–U.S. European Command exercise in October–November 2009 and a computer simulation of the multilayered defense system in March 2010. (See table 3 for a list of Israel's defense systems.)

Passive defense capabilities are improving but still developing. In 1992, the IDF created the Home Front Command to oversee the wartime response to attacks inside the Israeli civilian sector, or "rear area." This command underwent a major test in the 2006 war and has been given greater emphasis and resources since then. Israel established the National Emergency Authority in 2007 to coordinate civilian and military civil defense measures.

In addition, the government conducts “Turning Point” national civil defense exercises annually. The latest in this series—“Turning Point 4,” carried out in May 2010—simulated a major attack by Hizballah, Syria, Iran, and Hamas, including strikes involving Syrian missiles with chemical warheads.<sup>9</sup>

Israel’s long experience with rocket attacks has spurred it to develop a significant shelter program as well, providing some measure of protection for a substantial percentage of the population. In February 2010, the government began nationwide distribution of gas masks, though the entire population cannot be covered due to budgetary limitations. Other major civil defense measures include deploying rocket attack warning systems, coordinating emergency and medical services, and establishing emergency communication services.

The IDF is also taking passive measures to protect its key facilities during wartime, in recognition of the growing threat from accurate long-range missiles acquired by Hizballah and Syria. IAF bases have conducted exercises simulating missile attacks, and preparations for operating under such conditions are being extended to ground force installations as well. The IDF has also begun dispersing stockpiles of important war materials (e.g., weapons, ammunition, spare parts, fuel) to reduce the threat that rockets and missiles pose to its logistics system.

**TABLE 3. Israeli Anti-Rocket and Missile Systems**

SYSTEM	PRINCIPAL TARGET	NUMBER OF BATTERIES
<b>Patriot</b>	Surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) and long-range rockets	8
<b>Arrow II</b>	Long-range SSMs	2
<b>Iron Dome</b>	Short-range rockets	2 projected*

\* The United States has agreed to fund ten or more additional Iron Dome batteries. See Natasha Mozgovaya, “U.S. Congress Gives Obama Okay to Fund Israel Rocket Defense,” *Haaretz*, May 21, 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/misc/article-print-page/u-s-congress-gives-obama-okay-to-fund-israel-rocket-defense-1.291339?trailingPath=2.169%2C2.216%2C2.217%2C>.

### Israel’s Strategy

In war, military strategy supports political goals, and war aims are accomplished by deploying and employing forces effectively. Strategy determines which forces will be used (deployment) and how they will be used (employment).<sup>10</sup>

Israel’s likely war aims in a conflict of the nature outlined here would be broader than simply trimming Hizballah’s military capabilities for a time (or “mowing the grass,” as some have put it) and reinforcing deterrence. Those goals are too limited in the context of a large-scale conflict with potentially fateful consequences. Instead, Israel has prepared for a major war, and it would have major war aims. The Israelis would seek to fundamentally alter the military equation, with great consequences for the political situation. Although this would probably not amount to “final victory,” it would likely be decisive in the military-operational sense.<sup>11</sup>

**Goals.** Israeli strategy in a future war is likely to have two primary components: countervalue and counterforce. The objectives of the countervalue component would involve:

- Compelling Hizballah to quit the war under terms favorable to Israel
- Reducing Syria’s involvement in the conflict and its support to Hizballah
- Pressuring the Lebanese government and military to discontinue their relationship with Hizballah

The countervalue component would probably involve attacks on leadership, infrastructure, and economic targets associated with Hizballah. Examples include petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POL) facilities, as well as roads, bridges, airports, industries, and banks. Under the “Dahiya Doctrine,” Israel would use heavy firepower against civilian infrastructure associated with Hizballah military operations. In an October 2008 interview, Israeli Northern Command chief Gadi Eisenkot stated, “What happened in the Dahiya quarter of Beirut in 2006 will happen in every village from which Israel is fired on.... We will apply disproportionate force on it and cause great damage and destruction there. From our standpoint these are not civilian

villages. They are military bases.”<sup>12</sup> IAF operations against Hamas during Cast Lead are another indicator that Israel would attack Hizballah as a system with leadership, infrastructure, and economic components, not just as a military force.<sup>13</sup>

Given Israeli statements regarding Hizballah's role in the Lebanese government and Beirut's accountability for the group's actions, strikes on targets associated with the Lebanese government could also be anticipated. As Defense Minister Ehud Barak has stated, “We hold Lebanon responsible for any action by Hezbollah against us. We do not plan to chase every rocket around the wadis and the outskirts of villages.”<sup>14</sup>

The counterforce component of Israeli strategy would involve:

- Breaking Hizballah's military capability to threaten Israel
- Disrupting Syrian military support to Hizballah and, if Damascus decided to become directly involved, reducing the Syrian military threat to Israel<sup>15</sup>
- Changing the political equation in Lebanon and perhaps beyond by reducing Hizballah's status as a military force and diminishing Syria and Iran's ability and/or willingness to support the group

In addition, the IDF would be prepared to act in Gaza if Palestinian elements there attacked Israel. It would also watch carefully for any signs of Iranian preparations to strike Israel directly, responding to any such attacks as they occurred.

Time would be an important component in this strategy—Israel would need the war to move quickly (see the “Short War–Big War” case study for the reasons behind this factor). It would need to suppress rocket and missile attacks within days, not weeks. Ground force operations would need to proceed rapidly against Hizballah's forces in the South. In short, Israel could not allow Hizballah to maintain a large number of rocket and missile launches over a period of weeks, or to prevent Israeli ground forces from achieving their operational goals quickly.

**Military strategy.** When assessing military strategy, one must keep in mind the adage that “no plan survives the test of battle.” Any strategy must be capable of adapting to changing events, modifying aims and use of forces as needed.<sup>16</sup>

Israeli military strategy in a northern war would likely center on the use of large-scale joint air, ground, and naval operations to rapidly eliminate Hizballah's rocket and missile forces, destroy its ground forces in southern Lebanon, severely damage its command and control systems, and destroy its infrastructure throughout Lebanon. Targets would include elements of the Lebanese infrastructure that support Hizballah military activity, as well as any Lebanese army forces that join the fighting on Hizballah's side. Syrian forces and infrastructure that support Hizballah would likely be attacked as well, unlike in 2006, when Damascus got away with extensive assistance to the group without reprisal. Israel would likely attempt to prevent the conflict from escalating into general war with Syria by employing threats, mobilization, force deployments, and posturing. At the same time, however, it would be ready for that contingency. In addition, any Iranian elements supporting Hizballah would be subject to attack, including air resupply flights to Damascus International Airport and other Syrian airfields. Israel would attempt to deter direct Iranian attacks on its territory via warnings and preparation of strategic strike assets, including air, missile, and naval forces.

A key element of Israel's overall strategy would be protection of the home front with active and passive measures, including missile/rocket and civil defense measures. Effective efforts on this front would ease any decision to go to war, reduce casualties and damage during the war, and give the government and IDF a freer hand to prosecute operations to conclusion.

Israel has been building the forces and capabilities needed to execute this strategy since 2006, and all elements have been exercised. Operation Cast Lead served to test the performance of units, doctrine, tactics, and equipment for a major war in the north. As a result, the IDF and Israel are much better prepared for large-scale combat than they were in 2006.

## Israel's Operations

Military strategy is implemented via operations. The operations likely to be conducted in a future war are laid out here in broad strokes; no attempt is made to depict every possible operational variation or tactical detail. Missile, air, ground, and other operations would be coordinated to achieve strategic military aims supporting political objectives. Although it is convenient to separate them for discussion's sake, they would be integrated and mutually supportive in execution.

The combatants' operational concepts will largely determine how they fight the war, and wherever one side achieves an important "operational gap,"<sup>17</sup> it will hold an advantage. In the 2006 war, Hizballah's short-range rocket capabilities represented an operational gap that the IDF could not close, and the course of the next war may center on similar gaps. As IDF deputy chief of staff Benjamin Gantz stated in May 2010:

Will we be able to stop the very last Katyusha? No. Will we be able to stop the narrative that Nasrallah will create? No. But once, in reality, we seriously degrade his capacity to launch, and once our achievements on the ground are clear and the other side comes clamoring for a cease-fire, there will be no doubt about who is the victor and who is the vanquished.<sup>18</sup>

The IDF likely has several options for a conflict in the north, some of them perhaps limited in scope, scale, and types of forces involved. As emphasized throughout this paper, however, if such a war does erupt, Israel would most likely wage it on a large scale, employing a full range of air, ground, and naval operations and penetrating well into Lebanon. As General Gantz stated in the same May 2010 interview:

Next time, *as in full war* [author's emphasis], we will maximize all our unique advantages to get to a decisive situation where damage to the enemy continues to intensify while damage to us continues to wane. Once we pass that decisive point, we acquire for ourselves protracted freedom of maneuver that will allow us to push on to victory.<sup>19</sup>

These operations would also likely extend into, or at least over, Syria during the course of the conflict.

Operation Cast Lead provided hints as to what such a conflict could look like, but as discussed previously, the different geography and enemies involved would lead to a different war for Israel. More forces would be committed in operations of greater intensity and scope, with broader goals at stake.

## Offensive Operations

**Air operations.** A major feature of an air war in the north would be an intense and sustained air operation against Hizballah's long-range and mobile missiles and rockets. The IAF would seek to eliminate or significantly reduce the threats posed by these systems as rapidly as possible. Given Hizballah's possession of weapons with a range of up to 435 miles,<sup>20</sup> this potentially means operations deep within Lebanon, well into the northern Beqa Valley. (See fig. 1.) At the beginning of the 2006 war, the IAF was able to eliminate much of the long-range rocket threat very quickly. Given the proliferation of such systems to Hizballah since then, however, neutralizing the current threat is likely to take longer and be less complete.

As mentioned previously, Israel has made clear that it holds the Lebanese government responsible for any Hizballah attacks. Accordingly, the IAF would likely launch a second major air operation against Lebanese government and infrastructure targets used by Hizballah (e.g., roads, telecommunications facilities). It would also attack Hizballah leadership facilities and leaders when they can be found.

In addition, the IAF would attempt to interdict force movements and resupply efforts meant to aid Hizballah. This would entail strikes on road chokepoints, convoys, storage areas, and fuel depots, all of which would support efforts to suppress missile and rocket fire and facilitate major ground operations. The IAF would also provide close air support to ground forces, aiding the suppression of centers of resistance and supporting deep operations by paratroop and special forces. The air force would not devote much, if any, effort to striking short-range rocket systems in southern Lebanon, however. This threat would be dealt with by ground forces, active defense systems, and civil defense measures.

## The 'Short War–Big War' Conundrum

For Israel and the IDF, a war with Hizballah and its allies would present a difficult conundrum. On the one hand, Israel would need the war to move quickly for military, political, and economic reasons. Militarily, an extended campaign would allow for more attacks on Israel, increase the number of Israeli military and civilian casualties, and lend credence to Hizballah's offensive and defensive capabilities. It would also increase stress on the IDF's material stocks and reserve system. Politically, a long war would allow for increased international pressure on Israel to end the conflict short of its goals—pressure that could extend to any state supporting Israel as well. In addition, the longer the war lasted, the more damage and dislocation it would cause to the Israeli economy. In summary, Israel needs a short war to avoid or mitigate these problems.

On the other hand, Israel will have to fight a "big" war if it intends to achieve anything significant against Hizballah and its allies. War on the scale outlined in this study—even if waged primarily against Hizballah alone—is major war, not a raid or limited operation. It is military campaigning with operations lasting for weeks rather than days, not another Six Day War. If the conflict expanded and escalated—and if Syria became directly involved, as seems likely—its duration would be extended as well.

Past conflicts suggest that Israel will have at least several weeks in which to conduct military operations relatively unimpeded, but probably not months. For the IDF to achieve its operational goals against Hizballah in the course of several (i.e., more than three) weeks seems like a reasonable prospect. But more time would be required for the IDF to deal with both Hizballah and Syria (and possibly Iran), and that would mean a long war.

### DURATION OF PAST ISRAELI WARS AND MAJOR OPERATIONS

CONFLICT	LENGTH OF MAJOR OPERATIONS
October 1973 war	20 days
1982 Lebanon war	Approximately three months (June–August 1982, including the "siege of Beirut")
Operation Defensive Shield (2002)	24 days
2006 Lebanon war	34 days
Operation Cast Lead (2008)	22 days

The implication of this conundrum is that if the IDF goes to war in Lebanon again, it will do so massively, pushing the tempo hard to achieve major operational results quickly. Rapid success in Lebanon could also serve to deter Syria and Iran from becoming directly involved, thus helping to keep the war short.

If Damascus decided to join the conflict, the IAF would establish air superiority over Lebanon and relevant portions of Syria, conducting reconnaissance and strike missions as required. An escalating conflict with Syria would demand an increasing share of IAF attention, including intelligence efforts. This would

probably require reduction of the air effort over Lebanon. The most likely Syrian targets would include command and control systems, air defense systems, missile/rocket forces, and infrastructure important to the leadership. If Syrian ground forces became involved in Lebanon or the Golan Heights, the IAF

## Major Israeli Operational Challenges

Among the IDF's most significant operational challenges in a future war would be:

- Rapidly penetrating Hezbollah's defenses in southern Lebanon and advancing across the Litani River
- Suppressing medium- and short-range rocket fire as quickly as possible (contingent upon successful completion of the item above)
- Rapidly locating and destroying long-range rocket and missile systems
- Limiting civilian casualties during air and ground operations
- Disrupting resupply of enemy forces in southern Lebanon, whether from Syria or central and northern Lebanon

If the conflict expanded to include direct Syrian involvement, the IDF's challenges would increase significantly to encompass:

- Establishing air superiority over Syria
- Suppressing Syrian air defenses
- Conducting offensive air operations against Syrian targets (both countervalue and counterforce)
- Conducting air operations simultaneously over Lebanon and Syria
- Conducting major ground operations in the Golan Heights area and Lebanon simultaneously

If Tehran became involved directly, the IDF would have to be prepared to conduct long-range air operations against Iran. Such efforts would divert intelligence and operational resources from the conflict with Hezbollah and Syria.

The list above does not include everything the IDF would have to do to wage war, only the major challenges it would face at the operational level. To bring the war to a successful conclusion, the IDF would need to master each of these challenges as they arose. If the IDF were forced to confront Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran at the same time, it would face a very serious challenge indeed.

would target them as well. All in all, supporting a general conflict in Lebanon and Syria would be a very demanding task for the IAF.<sup>21</sup>

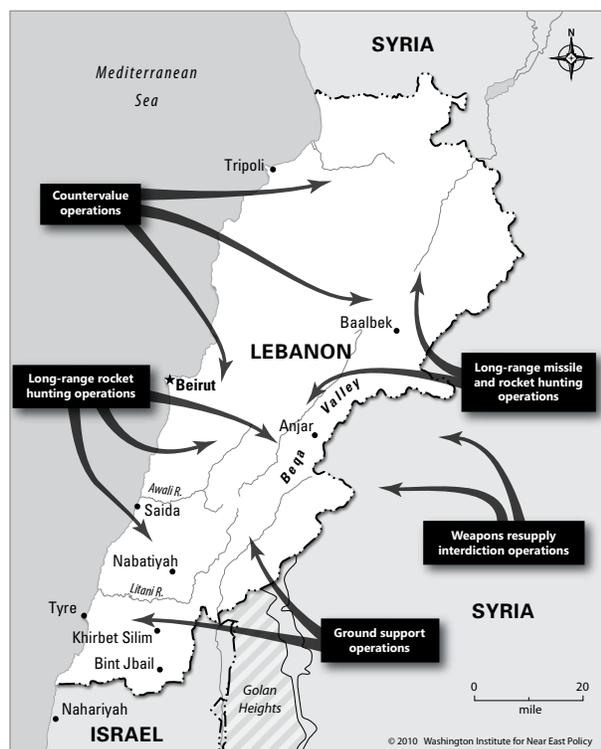
**Ground operations.** Israel would likely launch a major ground operation in southern Lebanon at the onset of a new war—specifically, a multidivision (three or more) thrust intended to secure rocket launch zones in the South and destroy Hezbollah ground forces there (See table 4.) How deep into Lebanon this operation would go is uncertain, but the Litani River is by no means the northern limit. Fully addressing the rocket/missile threat and dealing a decisive blow to Hezbollah's military capabilities would logically entail seizing Lebanese territory to some depth and holding it for at least long enough to dig out Hezbollah combat forces and infrastructure.

The IDF would certainly have to occupy the potential launch areas of Hezbollah's short- (6–40 km) and medium-range (40–100 km) rocket systems. Most of this territory would be in southern Lebanon below the Awali River on the line between Saida (Sidon), Jezzine, and Kawkaba. (See fig. 2.) Most of the related ground operational activity would be near or below the Litani and in the southern Beqa Valley. Overall, this is an area of some 3,600 square kilometers.

Within this area the IDF would also seek to destroy Hezbollah combat forces and associated defensive positions, C3I facilities, and weapons storage areas. Israeli intelligence presumably has a good picture of the Hezbollah military presence in southern Lebanon, but actually rooting out this presence is not be a trivial task. As for long-range rockets and missiles (i.e., greater than 100 km), destroying them would fall to the IAF and possibly special operations units.

Major IDF ground forces would likely move into the Beqa Valley as well. This would increase the risk of contact with Syrian forces. In fact, the dynamics of the fighting could pull Israeli forces even further north. At minimum, paratroop and special forces operations would likely be carried out well north of the Litani in order to destroy key Hezbollah targets and forces and isolate the group's personnel in the South.

Ground operations would likely feature a rapid deep maneuver accompanied by insertion of airborne forces



**FIGURE 1. Notional Israeli Air Force Operations against Hezbollah**

to isolate the battlefield. The IDF would also employ heavy firepower to destroy Hezbollah centers of resistance, a feature of Cast Lead as enacted on Hamas. Unlike in 2006, the operation would be intensive and coordinated to quickly achieve clear military objectives. And the IDF would commit its best ground combat elements—airborne, infantry, and armor—to the fighting, as it did in 2006 and 2008–2009. This would be perhaps Israel's most important operation of the war.

The IDF would have to carry out these tasks while limiting civilian casualties. In the wake of Cast Lead, it has taken measures such as including protection of civilians in its doctrine and sensitizing commanders and soldiers to this requirement.

The IDF would also have to be prepared for Syrian ground intervention in Lebanon, and for the possibility that the fighting would spread to the Golan Heights. These requirements, plus the necessity for three or more divisions in Lebanon alone, would call for mobilization of additional reserve forces: several armored divisions,

infantry and airborne brigades, and corresponding combat support and service support formations. Select reserve combat, combat support, and service support units were mobilized for Cast Lead, giving the IDF the opportunity to test both the reserve mobilization system and the fitness of select reserve formations.

**Naval operations.** The Israel navy would provide support to ground and air operations in Lebanon, including:

- Interdiction of sea movement along the Lebanese coast
- Interception of potential arms carriers
- Special operations against high-value coastal targets
- Gunfire missions against road traffic, rocket/missile-associated targets, headquarters, and other facilities/targets near the coast
- Prevention of sea-based attacks on Israel

In the event that Syria entered the war, the navy would likely extend similar operations to Syrian coastal areas.

**Special forces operations.** The IDF has highly effective and experienced special forces, and they would likely play a significant role in a future war.<sup>22</sup> The principal objectives of these operations would be to:

- Destroy high-value targets, including leadership, missile units/facilities, and headquarters and control centers.
- Disrupt enemy operations.
- Create fear and uncertainty among enemy leadership and formations.
- Divert enemy resources.
- Collect intelligence.

During the 2006 war, the IDF conducted more than twenty-five special operations within Lebanon.<sup>23</sup> Given the more serious nature of a future war, the role of the special forces would be expanded. And if Syria became involved, special operations would likely be conducted there as well.

### Defensive Operations

Defense would play a pivotal role in Israel's conduct of a new war, requiring both passive and active defensive

**TABLE 4. Notional Israeli Ground Order of Battle in a Future Lebanon Conflict**

UNIT*	TYPE	STATUS	OPERATIONAL AREA	NOTES
Northern Territorial Command	Headquarters controlling multiple corps/divisions	Regular	Northern Israel, Lebanon, Golan Heights, Syrian front	Would be responsible for conduct of a war in the north
“The Northern Formation” (corps-level headquarters)**	Headquarters controlling multiple divisions	Regular	Northern Command	Would be responsible for ground operations in Lebanon
“Galilee Division” (91st)	Headquarters with multiple regular and reserve brigades	Regular	Lebanese border	Would secure the border against Hizballah penetration into northern Israel and serve as the IDF’s offensive into southern Lebanon
162nd Armored Division	Armor	Regular	Central Command	Fought in Lebanon during 2006 war
36th Armored Division	Armor	Regular	Golan Heights	—
Up to three reserve armored divisions (366th, 319th, and one unidentified)	Armor	Regular	Northern Command	—
98th Paratroop Division	Airborne	Reserve	Central Command	Wartime headquarters
Golani Infantry Brigade	Infantry	Regular	Northern Command	High-quality infantry unit
35th Paratroop Brigade	Airborne	Regular	Central Command	High-quality airborne unit
551st “Spearhead Brigade”	Airborne	Reserve	—	High-quality reserve paratroop unit
Nahal Brigade	Infantry	Regular, Reserve	—	High-quality infantry unit
Givati Infantry Brigade	Infantry	Regular	Southern Command	High-quality unit
Alexandroni Infantry Brigade	Infantry	Reserve	Northern Command	High-quality reserve infantry unit
Kfir Infantry Brigade	Infantry	Regular	Central Command	Urban warfare specialty
Carmeli Infantry Brigade	Infantry	Reserve	Northern Command	Subordinate to 91st Division
Sayeret Matkal (General Staff Reconnaissance Unit)	Reconnaissance and raiding	Regular	As needed	Elite special operations unit specializing in long-range operations
Sayeret Egoz (“Walnut”) reconnaissance unit	Reconnaissance and raiding	Regular	As needed	Elite special operations unit associated with the Golani Infantry Brigade
Shayetet 13 naval commandos	Reconnaissance and raiding	Regular	Primarily coastal operations	Elite navy special warfare unit
Sayeret Yael (“Ibex”) special engineering unit	Engineer	Regular	As needed	Elite combat engineering unit; used for deep operations against infrastructure and fortified positions
Northern Command artillery formations	Artillery	Reserve	Northern Command	—
Various support units	Combat intel, supply, transport, communications, etc.	—	—	—

\* All unit designators and titles drawn from open source reporting.

\*\* A second corps-level headquarters would likely be established in the event of direct Syrian involvement or a threat of conflict in the Golan Heights.

operations. These efforts would aim to reduce the effects of enemy offensive operations while providing time for IDF offensives to directly eliminate the threats. Their goals would include decreasing casualties, damage, and disruption throughout Israel, thereby tempering political pressure on the government and military and permitting smooth IDF mobilization and offensive efforts.

One of the tenets of Israeli military doctrine has been to fight wars on the enemy's territory. Yet the development of a high-trajectory rocket and missile threat by Hizballah and its allies has made this concept difficult to execute. In response to the attacks on northern Israel in 2006, the more recent rocket attacks on southern Israel from Gaza, and the growing weight of fire expected in a future war, the Israeli government has made defense a serious effort.

**Active defense.** Hizballah was very successful in sustaining high levels of rocket strikes on northern Israel in 2006, despite all Israeli countermeasures. Today, Israel's principal active defense measure would involve intercepting missiles with the Arrow and Patriot systems, and countering short-range rockets via the Iron Dome system (assuming it is deployed in time). How effective these systems would be under wartime conditions is uncertain. Major variables include the extent of Syrian and Iranian involvement in missile attacks, the effectiveness of IAF operations against long-range missiles/rockets, and the speed with which IDF ground forces overrun launch areas. Active defense efforts would likely reduce the number of missiles and rockets landing in Israel, but some would inevitably get through. The most likely scenario is that the combined effect of IDF operations would take hold only over time, but that the number of missiles and rockets launched and penetrating the defenses would decline as the war goes on, as in Cast Lead.<sup>24</sup>

**Civil defense.** Israel's civil defense operations would aim to protect as much of the population and civilian infrastructure from attack as possible, and to mitigate the casualties and damage from missiles/rockets that do hit. Israel is prepared for the movement of numerous



**FIGURE 2. Notional Israeli Offensive Operation in Southern Lebanon**

people from areas under attack, as occurred in 2006. Nevertheless, many civilians, especially in northern Israel, may have to ride out the most intense period of strikes in shelters. Strikes against central and southern Israel should be less intense, and warning systems would provide some opportunity to seek shelter even in the event of a surprise attack, and even in most of northern Israel. Overall, the more warning Israel has regarding the outbreak of hostilities, the more effective its civil defense measures will be. Advance warning could allow time for issuing instructions to the civilian population, preparing shelters and medical response facilities, mobilizing Home Front Command reserve personnel, and activating civil-military response mechanisms.

Israel is substantially better postured to deal with missile/rocket attacks on the home front than it was in 2006. The combination of active and passive defensive measures and offensive air and ground operations should reduce the potential casualties and damage inside Israel. At the same time, some damage (perhaps significant) is likely, especially early in the war.

## Notes

1. See, for example, Ron Ben-Yishai, "Romania Replaced Turkey," YnetNews.com, July 27, 2010, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3926068,00.html>.
2. Brig. Gen. Agay Yehezkel, quoted in "IDF Phasing Out Contentious Tank Shell in Wake of Gaza War," Reuters, March 15, 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1156318.html>.
3. Yoaz Hendel, "The Reserves Comeback," *Strategic Assessment* (Institute for National Security Studies) 10, no. 4 (February 2008), <http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=1647>.
4. The May 2010 Gaza flotilla incident has raised questions about the IDF planning process. The Eiland Commission report on the raid criticized the IDF for focusing too narrowly on one anticipated scenario for the confrontation and failing to prepare alternative courses of action if the situation did not develop as expected. (See Office of the IDF Spokesperson, "Maj. Gen. (Res.) Eiland Submits Conclusions of Military Examination Team Regarding Mavi Marmara," weblog post, July 10, 2010, <http://idfspokesperson.com/2010/07/12/maj-gen-res-eiland-submits-conclusions-of-military-examination-team-regarding-mavi-marmara-12-july-2010>.) Nevertheless, the IDF views Hizballah as a serious military challenge, one substantially greater than that represented by Hamas, and has in all likelihood planned accordingly.
5. See, for example, Office of the IDF Spokesperson, "76% of Recruits Request Combat Positions," press release, March 4, 2010, <http://dover.idf.il/IDF/English/News/today/10/03/0401.htm>.
6. "High-trajectory" refers primarily to the missile and rocket systems that can be fired "over" Israeli defenses. With regard to Hizballah, these systems include the Fateh-110 and Scud guided missiles, long- and short-range artillery rockets, and 120-millimeter mortars.
7. The Arrow would presumably be effective against Hizballah Scuds. In November 2009, Israel indicated that it would significantly increase production of Arrow interceptor missiles. See Yaakov Katz, "Barak: IDF to Up Arrow Interceptor Production," *Jerusalem Post*, November 17, 2009.
8. The "David's Sling" system intended to counter the medium- and long-range rocket threats is several years in the future and is not considered in this paper.
9. Yaakov Katz, "Massive Civil Defense Drill Planned for May," *Jerusalem Post*, March 19, 2010, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Article.aspx?id=171324>.
10. Gen. Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage, 2005), p. 15.
11. Success in war is never final, but it can change the situation dramatically. In 1967, Israel's victory fundamentally altered the region's political and military framework, and the effects of its success on the battlefield still persist today. Success on that scale may or may not be possible today, but the kind of military power wielded by Israel and its enemies can still be used to achieve important, even strategic, goals.
12. Reuters, "Israel Warns Hizballah War Would Invite Destruction," *Yediot Aharonot*, October 3, 2008, <http://www.ynet.co.il/english/Ext/Comp/ArticleLayout/CdaArticlePrintPreview/1,2506,L-3604893,00.html>.
13. Questions remain as to how the Goldstone report—the UN's judgment on the Gaza hostilities before and during Cast Lead—might affect future IDF operations. Israel has made some adjustments in tactical doctrine for operations in built-up areas (e.g., greater attention to removing civilians from areas of combat; increased use of precision munitions), intended to reduce the threat to civilians in future conflicts. But in a war of the kind outlined here, one with potentially major consequences for the state of Israel, the Goldstone influence would probably not limit Israeli operations.
14. Quoted in Amnon Meranda, "Barak: Iran Not Existential Threat on Israel," *Yediot Aharonot*, March 3, 2010, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3859501,00.html>.
15. In a May 2010 interview, the IDF's deputy chief of staff stated, "We don't have an interest to initiate a conflict with Syria, but we have enough forces on our northern border to deal with both our neighbors that have the capacity to threaten us. If [Syria] chooses to use its capacity, we will know how to combat it." Maj. Gen. Benjamin Gantz, interview in *Defense News*, May 31, 2010, <http://www.defense-news.com/story.php?i=4649373>.
16. Smith, *The Utility of Force*, p. 15.
17. For more on this term, see Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (New York: Free Press, 1969), p. 325.
18. Gantz, *Defense News*.
19. Ibid.
20. Or 700 kilometers, the range of the Syrian Scud-D.
21. It is uncertain whether Israel would directly attack leadership targets in Syria during a conflict that fell short of all-out war. Although some observers in Israel have indicated that a new war would lead to the end of the regime in Damascus, this does not necessarily mean that regime change would be an Israeli objective, or that the IDF would conduct operations to bring about that result. Israel also has to be concerned that a direct threat to the Syrian regime could cause Damascus to use chemical or biological weapons against targets in Israel.
22. The term "special forces" as used here covers the General Staff Reconnaissance Unit (Sayeret Matkal), the IAF's Shaldag unit, and the naval commando unit Shayetet 13. Other elite formations of the territorial commands, the elite infantry and paratroop brigades, the combat engineers, and the Combat Intelligence Collection Corps would also likely be involved in these kinds of missions. For a fuller discussion of the Israeli special forces, see Yoaz Hendel, "IDF Special Units: Their Purpose and Operational Concept," *Strategic Assessment* (Institute for National Security Studies) 10, no. 2 (August 2007), <http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=252>.
23. Ibid.
24. As part of its Turning Point 4 civil defense exercise, Israel projected nearly 200 rockets and missiles fired from Syria (some with chemical warheads) and landing in central Israel, and 200,000 people moving from the center of the country southward. Although this was an exercise scenario, it may suggest the scale of attack and some of the consequences Israel believes it faces. See Yaakov Katz and Herb Keinon, "Drill Simulates Missile Attack," *Jerusalem Post*, May 24, 2010, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Article.aspx?id=176240>.

### 3 | Hizballah's War

#### Preparations for War

HIZBALLAH'S PREPARATIONS for a future war are intended to deter Israel and shift the military balance in the group's favor while supporting its political objectives. Aided by Syria and Iran, Hizballah is engaged in a significant and seemingly accelerated military buildup. Offensively, it has acquired surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) with longer range and greater accuracy than any weapon it employed during the 2006 war. These new acquisitions include the M600/Fateh-110<sup>1</sup> and, reportedly, some variant of the Scud SSM.<sup>2</sup> (See table 5 for a fuller list of the group's rocket and missile inventory.)

The M600/Fateh-110 is important because of its range (more than 200 km) and accuracy (with a circular error probability of 100 m). It is a suitable weapon for attacking Israeli military facilities such as air bases, headquarters, and intelligence collection centers. Hizballah may have as many as 200 of these missiles.

The group's acquisition of Scud missiles seems more important psychologically than militarily, given Israel's

active defenses and its experience in dealing with Scud attacks during the 1991 Gulf War. Nevertheless, possession of Scuds likely boosts Hizballah's confidence in its ability to strike deep within Israel, enhancing the group's image as a powerful military force. Given their long range and large warhead, Scuds may also increase the psychological pressure on Israel's civilian population.

During the 2006 war, Hizballah fired some 4,000 of its 13,000 or so artillery rockets into northern Israel, reaching as far south as Hadera on the Mediterranean coast. Since then, the group has built its combined rocket and missile stocks to 40,000 or more of various types. It has both long-range missiles and rockets with powerful warheads (Syrian-produced 302-mm and 220-mm systems). Some of these also carry warheads designed to increase casualties through enhanced fragmentation effects.

Rockets, and now missiles, are Hizballah's main offensive weapons, and their numbers and suspected variety would allow the group to sustain more attacks,

**TABLE 5. Reported Hizballah Rockets and Missiles**

SYSTEM	TYPE	RANGE (KM)	WARHEAD WEIGHT (KG)	SUPPLIER
Zelzal-2	Rocket	210	600	Iran
Nazeat	Rocket	100–140	1300(6)/250(10)	Iran
Fajr-3	Rocket	43	45	Iran
Fajr-5	Rocket	75	90	Iran
302 mm	Rocket	75	100	Syria
220 mm	Rocket	70	unknown	Syria
122 mm	Rocket	20–40	30	Iran/Syria
107 mm	Rocket	6	unknown	Iran/Syria
M600/Fateh-110	Missile	210–250	500	Iran/Syria
Scud variant	Missile	300–700*	985	Syria

\* Depending on variant: Scud-B, 300 km; Scud-C, 500 km; Syrian Scud-D, 700 km. The Scud system is not confirmed to be in Hizballah's hands in Lebanon at present.

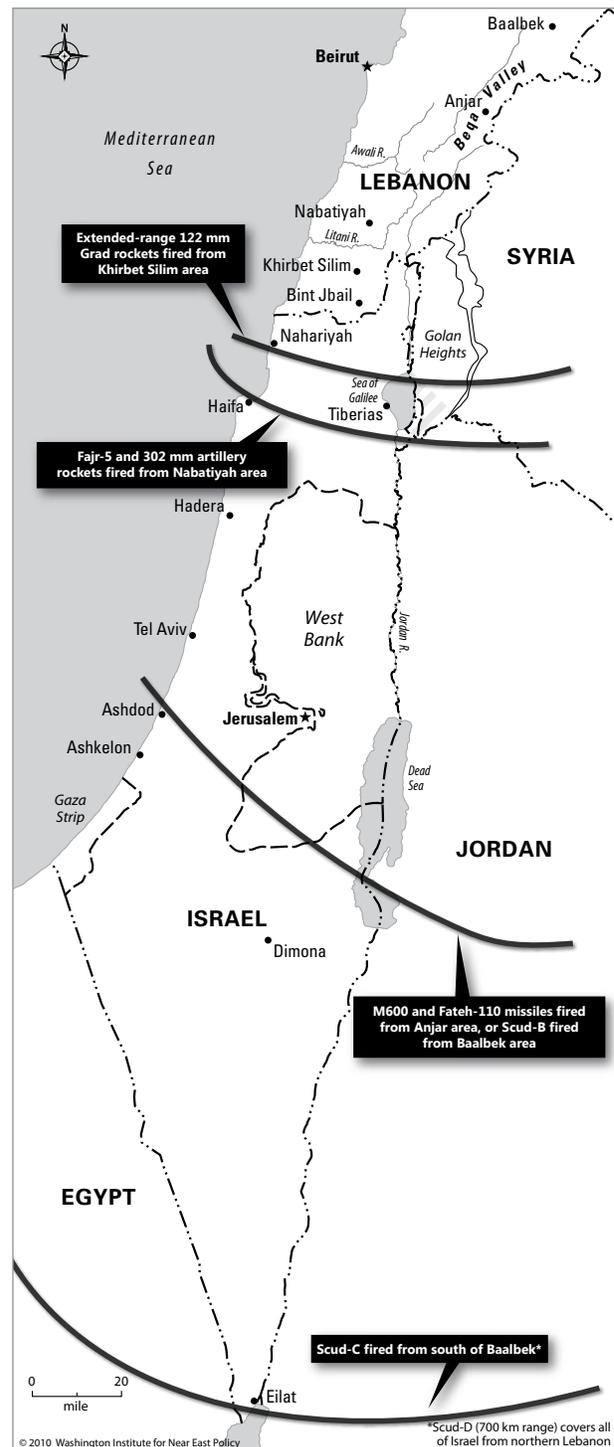
over a longer duration, to a greater depth, and with the probability of more casualties and damage than in the 2006 war. In short, this capability allows Hizballah to threaten both military and civilian targets throughout Israel. (See fig. 3.)

Unconfirmed reporting indicates that Syria is also providing Hizballah with surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems, including the SA-2, SA-8, and possibly The Sa-24. (See table 6.) These Weapons Pose Varying degrees of threat to the Israeli Air Force (IAF). The SA-2 does not fit well with Hizballah's needs, but the SA-8 and SA-24 are far more formidable systems. The SA-24 is man portable, easy to conceal, and effective against low-altitude targets, while the SA-8 is a highly mobile system with multiple engagement capabilities, also designed to counter aircraft at low altitudes. A lack of air defense capability was a key Hizballah weakness in the 2006 war, so the group no doubt understands the importance of addressing this gap before going to war again.

Hizballah also continues to acquire advanced anti-tank weapons from Iran and Syria. As in 2006, these weapons—including the AT-14 Kornet, AT-5 Konkurs, AT-13 Metis-M, AT-4 Fagot, and RPG-29—would be key to defending against an Israeli ground operation in southern Lebanon (See table 7 for a fuller list of the group's reported antitank weapons.)

In general, Damascus continues to serve as Hizballah's arsenal; Syria's extensive weapons stockpiles are largely open to the group. Although the limits of this largesse are unclear, that may be more a question of Hizballah's ability to integrate and employ weapons systems effectively rather than Syrian restraint. Tellingly, Damascus has not only provided the types of weapons most useful to Hizballah, it has also provided them in large numbers.

For its part, Iran provides arms, training, and military personnel to Hizballah and has threatened to intervene in any conflict between the group and Israel. Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps personnel reportedly serve key roles within Hizballah's forces in Lebanon, and they would likely play an active combat role in a new war. Indeed, assistance from Syria and Iran is essential to Hizballah's buildup; without it, the group



**FIGURE 3. Selected Rocket and Missile Coverage of Israel from Potential Launch Areas in Lebanon**

**TABLE 6. Reported Hizballah SAM Systems**

TYPE	ROLE	NOTES
SA-2	Medium/high altitude	Old, complex strategic system, unlikely to be in Hizballah's possession despite reports
SA-7	Low altitude, man portable	Old, ineffective
SA-8	Low/medium altitude, highly mobile	1980s system, but still believed to be effective
SA-18/24	Low altitude, man portable	Modern, effective against helicopters

would not be a military factor outside Lebanon, and much less of a factor inside.

In order to be effective, Hizballah's weapons must be integrated among the group's forces through training and exercises. Hizballah conducts training in Syria for specialist troops (e.g., SAM, SSM, and antitank guided missile units), and for commanders and staff in Syria and Iran. According to Israeli reports, the group conducted significant military exercises in 2007–2008 focusing on the defense of southern Lebanon. These efforts allowed Hizballah to test its "lessons learned" from the 2006 war, its ability to move forces rapidly from the north to the South, and the combat capabilities of its forces near the Israeli border. The subject matter and sophistication of this activity resembled that of a regular army.<sup>3</sup>

Hizballah has also been involved in the preparation of areas north and south of the Litani River for offensive and defensive operations.<sup>4</sup> According to one Israeli analyst, 160 villages and outlying areas south of the Litani have been prepared as launch areas for rockets and as defensive strong points.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, Hizballah reportedly increased its recruitment efforts following the 2006 war and is now believed to have more personnel available than it did then.<sup>6</sup> According to a July 2010 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) intelligence assessment, Hizballah forces in southern Lebanon number some 20,000 fighters and are organized into three "units" or "divisions."<sup>7</sup> Based on its intelligence collection efforts, Israel believes that one of these units has some 5,000 combatants and controls 30,000 rockets and missiles.<sup>8</sup> Each unit

**TABLE 7. Reported Hizballah Antitank Weapons**

SYSTEM	RANGE	PENETRATION (MM)	GUIDANCE SYSTEM
Kornet	5.6 km	1,100–1,200	Laser
Konkurs	75 m	800	Wire
Metis-M	80 m–1.5 km	460–850	Wire
Sagger	3 km	200	Wire
Fagot	70 m–2 km	400	Wire
Milan	400 m–2 km	352	Wire
TOW	600 m–3.7 km	760	Wire
RPG-29	460 m	750	Manual
RPG-7	500 m	330	Manual

or division has a number of subordinate elements that control some fifteen villages each. Forces assigned to villages vary from 20 to 200 fighters, probably depending on the size and/or location of the village and its importance to Hizballah's operational plans. Villages serve as weapons storage facilities, locations for command posts, and centers of resistance. IDF intelligence indicates that many of these facilities are located near schools and hospitals, and sometimes inside civilian homes.<sup>9</sup>

Hizballah's sensitivity regarding its military presence in the South has been reflected in a series of confrontations between residents of that region and UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) forces. Although some allege that these clashes are spontaneous popular responses to intrusive UNIFIL operations, they are more likely Hizballah-instigated efforts aimed at curbing the UN force's ability to conduct its mission.

The IDF also believes that Hizballah is conducting extensive intelligence operations against the IDF. According to the commander of Israel's 300th Infantry Brigade, responsible for the western portion of the Lebanon border, "Every day they are collecting significant intelligence on our forces along the border."<sup>10</sup>

These activities are indicative of serious preparations for war. Their cumulative effect has been to increase Hizballah's self-confidence and perhaps erode Israeli deterrence. The group was largely successful in prosecuting the 2006 war, operating effectively within the geographical, political, and military context at the time. It aims to repeat that success in a future war.

## Hizballah's Strategy

**Goals.** Hizballah's offensive goals in a war would likely include:

- Weakening Israel politically, both at home and abroad, as in 2006
- Weakening the IDF's confidence, combat spirit, prestige, and deterrent capability
- Weakening Israeli society by inflicting casualties and damage on civilians and infrastructure

- Compelling Israel to end the war under conditions favorable to its enemies
- Increasing its own political role and capabilities within Lebanon and with respect to Israeli-Palestinian issues
- Demonstrating the effectiveness of the "resistance" concept ("al-Muqawama") as a means of dealing with Israel and broadening its support base in Lebanon and beyond
- Creating the basis for a narrative of Hizballah victory in the war

The group would also have important defensive goals:

- Preventing a deep Israeli incursion into southern Lebanon
- Preserving itself as a political and military force

There may be tension between Hizballah's offensive and defensive goals. For example, the more extensive its strikes on Israel, the heavier Israel's response is likely to be, and the greater the threat to the group's military forces and domestic political position.

## Military Strategy

Once a new war began, Hizballah's military efforts would center on the following strategies:

- Offensively, to launch massive rocket/missile attacks on military and civilian targets with the intention of inflicting significant casualties and damage<sup>11</sup>
- Defensively, to oppose Israeli air, ground, and naval operations inside Lebanon with aggressive action, slowing any advances while inflicting as many casualties as possible and, at the same time, preserving its own forces<sup>12</sup>

Both offensively and defensively, Hizballah would aim to continue operations as long as it saw itself in an advantageous position, allowing it to inflict the most political, military, economic, and social damage on Israel. This approach is basically the same one Hizballah successfully executed in 2006. A long war would place increasing diplomatic pressure on Israel and create an image of Israeli military ineffectiveness and futility. It would also

allow Hizballah to claim that it was successfully standing against Israel. In other words, this approach is the exact opposite of Israel's quick-war strategy.

The weapons systems and forces available to Hizballah are consistent with the execution of this strategy, and the group's leaders have repeatedly expressed confidence in their abilities.<sup>13</sup> The group's specific targets, the timing of its strikes, and the conduct of its defensive operations would depend on the conflict's initial circumstances and course, but the basic strategy would be to fight the war in the manner just described.

## Hizballah's Operations

**Offensive operations.** The principal offensive operation would be a coordinated missile and rocket campaign against military and civilian targets throughout Israel. Elements of this campaign would include:

- Attacks on Israeli population centers and civilian infrastructure, principally by artillery rockets, with most of this effort aimed at northern Israel
- Attacks on civilian targets deep in Israel, with the aim of bringing the war to the population as a whole, increasing pressure on the government to end the conflict, and demonstrating the IDF and government's inability to defend the population<sup>14</sup>
- Missile attacks on military installations, including airfields, headquarters, logistics facilities, mobilization centers, and command and control centers
- Attempts to saturate Israel's active and passive defenses with high volumes of fire via multiple systems and from multiple launch areas, including some deep in Lebanon
- Sustaining high volumes of rocket fire (several hundred launches per day) for a long duration
- Firing from deep within Lebanon
- Potentially conducting special forces raids into northern Israel to achieve propaganda victories and disrupt IDF operations<sup>15</sup>

Hizballah has the capacity to wage such a campaign on its own given the types and numbers of weapons it



**FIGURE 4. Notional Hizballah Offensive Operations in Northern Israel**

has. In the 2006 war, Hizballah showed evidence of sophistication in its rocket attacks. According to one study, it was able to surge firing rates, concentrate fire on specific targets, and time firing to produce the most casualties.<sup>16</sup> In a new war, short-range rockets would be launched by combat units in the South, while the medium- and long-range rockets and missiles would be launched by dedicated firing units. (See fig. 4.) Currently, the IDF estimates that Hizballah could launch some 500–600 rockets per day against Israel.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, the group's apparent acquisition of Scuds with a range greater than 300 kilometers will allow it to expand the area from which missiles can be fired, posing a greater challenge to IDF response efforts. (See table 8 for a possible Hizballah launch concept in a future war.) And the group's reported M600/Fateh-110 arsenal gives it the accuracy needed for attacks on military installations.

If Damascus became involved in the fighting, the likelihood of attacks by missile and rocket forces deployed from within Syria would grow. Syrian participation

would increase the weight of fire on targets deep within Israel and the number of accurate missiles fired against military installations, while also splitting Israel's efforts to counter the attacks. Given the degree of cooperation between Syria and Hizballah, this campaign would probably include coordinated targeting.<sup>18</sup>

As fighting progressed, Hizballah would need to resupply its rocket/missile forces and deal with losses among those units. Its large inventory of weapons would reduce the need for immediate resupply from Syria. Pre-positioning rocket/missile stocks close to launch sites and firing units could limit the need for supply movement within Lebanon as well. But some movement of weapons and launch elements would likely be required to sustain firing, replace combat losses, and respond to the developing battle. This would entail using the Lebanese road system, especially in the central and southern regions, making such efforts potentially vulnerable to interdiction by the IAF and other Israeli forces.

None of these operations would be easy to execute in the face of determined and large-scale Israeli offensive operations. An inventory is neither an order of battle nor a plan—Hizballah must have the requisite command, control, communications, and intelligence (C3I), along with firing units that are well organized and sufficiently numerous, in order to conduct effective operations on the scale suggested here. It also must have a coherent plan for coordinating its operations. One can assume that Syria and Iran have already assisted Hizballah with such war planning.

**Defensive operations.** Hizballah's primary defensive operation would be of southern Lebanon against Israeli forces attempting to penetrate deeply into the territory. This would perhaps be the group's most important operation of the war. It would include:

- Activating militia and local forces in the South
- Deploying additional regular and special forces to the South
- Using towns and villages as centers of resistance
- Activating ambush sites and laying mines along important avenues of approach and lines of communication
- Defending against deep operations by Israeli airborne and special forces
- Conducting the defense in a way that inflicts maximum losses on the IDF

Hizballah would focus on defending the area south of the Litani and the southern Beqa Valley, viewing this area as its territory and natural defense zone. (See fig. 5.) Where opportunities presented themselves, the group would try to achieve local or tactical defeats of Israeli forces. Hizballah is also prepared to fight north of the Litani, where it has been building infrastructure for defensive operations. If it faced too much Israeli pressure in the South, the group could fall back to this line, but that would mean sacrificing important launch areas, losing the ability to maintain a heavy volume of fire against targets in Israel, and abandoning a part of

**TABLE 8. Notional Hizballah Weapons Deployment**

WEAPON TYPE	EXAMPLE	PRINCIPAL DEPLOYMENT AREA*	PRINCIPAL TARGET AREA
Short range	107 mm rocket	South of Litani	Northern Israel
Medium range	220 mm rocket	South of the Saida-Jezzine-Kawkaba line	Northern Israel
Long range	M600/Fateh-110 missile	Depth of Lebanon	Northern/central Israel
Very long range	Scud missile	Depth of Lebanon	Central/southern Israel

\* Hizballah could choose to deploy longer-range systems further south in Lebanon in order to increase coverage and density of fire in central and southern Israel. This could expose the systems to greater risk, however.

### Major Hizballah Operational Challenges

Like Israel, Hizballah would face several operational challenges in a future war, such as:

- Maintaining a coherent defense of southern Lebanon
- Sustaining significant levels of rocket and missile fire on Israel
- Protecting its leadership and infrastructure
- Maintaining resupply from Syria in an extended conflict

These challenges would become somewhat easier if Syria joined the fighting directly. That would force Israel to divert resources, especially IAF assets, to deal with Syria, reducing the pressure on Hizballah.

its population base. In either case, Hizballah would attempt to slow the IDF's advance on the ground while inflicting blows that cause the maximum possible attrition and maintaining launch operations. As Israeli forces penetrated into the South, Hizballah special forces would likely attack high-value IDF targets in Lebanon, such as headquarters and logistics convoys. Hizballah knows IDF forces would be coming to southern Lebanon and it plans to fight them there.

To support its main defensive operation, Hizballah would conduct two supporting operations. First would be an air defense operation deploying SAM elements to protect critical capabilities: leadership, C3I, key defensive positions, logistics activity, and long-range rockets and missiles. Hizballah probably understands that it cannot defend all important assets, but that it could perhaps inflict losses, hamper IAF operations, and conduct "SAMbushes" for psychological effect. Any IAF losses would be trumpeted as major successes, and captured or killed aircrew would be manipulated for psychological purposes and as bargaining chips. In fact, Hizballah's mere possession of SAM systems increases the complexity of Israel's planning and could cause the IDF to divert strike assets to SAM suppression missions. And if Hizballah's air defenses are tied

into the Syrian air defense system, their effectiveness would potentially increase. This would be true even if Syria only provided data from its air warning radars.

Hizballah's second supporting defensive operation would involve protecting the Lebanese coast. During the 2006 war, the Israeli navy carried out extensive coastal operations, including interdiction, gunfire support, special forces actions, and intelligence and surveillance activities. Hizballah had one great success against this activity when it (or its Iranian allies) hit the INS *Hanit* with a C-802 "Noor" coastal defense missile. In the next war, Hizballah would likely attempt to present a more effective defense of the coast, again deploying cruise missiles like the C-802. The intention would be to hamper Israeli operations, prevent or at least oppose special forces landings, and attempt to sink an Israeli vessel for psychological effect. Hizballah secretary-general Nassan Hasrallah has also stated that "the resistance" would attack shipping bound for "Palestine" if Israel blockades the Lebanese coast.<sup>19</sup>



FIGURE 5. Notional Hizballah Defensive Concept

Regarding the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), Hizballah likely intends to involve them in the defense of the South. Although most LAF units would probably seek to avoid combat or offer only token resistance, some may become directly involved in the fighting. Such involvement would be negligible from a combat standpoint, but the political effects of Israeli forces fighting the Lebanese army would be significant. If nothing else, it would validate Hizballah's concept of the "resistance" and the army uniting in the defense of the Lebanese state.

Hizballah's military operations would be accompanied by a large-scale influence operation intended to mobilize international pressure against Israel and its supporters. The group would employ public diplomacy and its extensive media apparatus to condemn Israel, generate anti-Israel demonstrations, earn public expressions of support for Hizballah and Lebanon from the international community, and delegitimize Israel's conduct of the war.

In addition, military cooperation between Hizballah and its allies is already evident, from the tactical to the strategic level. During a new war, Syria and Iran would at minimum provide C3I and resupply assistance in an effort to keep Hizballah in the fight. The Syrian army would initially be placed on alert, perhaps mobilizing and deploying to wartime positions. This would be a risky move, however, because Israel would view it as highly provocative. At the least, Syrian air defense elements would oppose "penetrations" of Syrian airspace and perhaps engage Israeli aircraft over Lebanon, given the small operational area involved and the proximity of Damascus to the combat zone. Syria could also offer coastal defense assistance through means such as its Sepal missile system and trained operators. And if the war escalated, Syrian ground and air defense forces could enter Lebanon to support Hizballah's defense or prevent its collapse.

Beyond basic support (e.g., providing intelligence, advice, arms, and some specialized combat forces), Iran's

## Hizballah Variations

Although Hizballah would most likely fight along the lines described in this chapter, it could also pursue alternative strategies. For example, it could employ its forces and rocket/missile strikes in a manner intended to draw Israel into a deep and extended campaign in Lebanon. This could allow it to inflict more casualties and damage on Israel, create more diplomatic pressure on the Israeli government, and solidify Hizballah's image as the defender of Lebanon.

The group might also attempt to turn a tactical event into a strategic victory. In the 2006 war, for example, Israel conducted a controversial strike against Hizballah rocket launchers located near an apartment house in Qana. Whatever its direct ramifications, the strike created enormous negative press coverage and greatly reduced political support for Israel's operations. In a new war, Hizballah would likely attempt to create an incident capable of producing similar results.

Although these variations are within the realm of possibility, the first seems contrary to Hizballah's basic needs and objectives: to conduct a coherent defense of the South and continue heavy rocket and missile fire into Israel. If IDF ground forces were operating deep within Lebanon, Hizballah would have difficulty portraying this outcome as a success. And if the group lost its launch areas in the South, it would have difficulty sustaining heavy fire. As for the second variation, any Hizballah attempt to create a controversial incident would still depend on the IDF making an error. Although that is certainly a possibility given the likely intensity and complexity of the expected combat, it is not something that Hizballah can count on.

potential role in a new war is unclear. But in a large scale-conflict, Tehran could decide to participate more directly. For example, it could provide regular combat forces, light infantry, or special forces in Lebanon, and perhaps missile and air defense forces within Syria.

Both Damascus and Tehran would likely feel pressure to increase their involvement as Hizballah's war escalated. From essentially supportive activity such as intelligence and logistics assistance, each regime could ultimately expand its role to direct involvement in the fighting in and over Lebanon.

## Notes

1. The M600 is variously reported as a rocket and a missile, and two models of the weapon are likely in circulation. The missile version, with a guidance package, would pose the greater threat due to its increased accuracy. An M600 rocket fired to its maximum range of more than 200 kilometers would be very inaccurate, although it could carry a large 500-kilogram warhead.
2. It is not known whether these Scuds (reportedly provided by Syria; see chapter 1) are actually in Hizballah hands in Lebanon or held elsewhere. Also unknown is which type of Scud (B, C, or D) was provided. The type is important because it determines range and accuracy. The D version would pose the most significant threat because it has the longest range and, potentially, the greatest accuracy.
3. Guy Aviad, "Hizballah's Force Buildup of 2006–2009: Foundation and Future Trends," *Military and Strategic Affairs* (Institute for National Security Studies) 1, no. 3 (December 2009), p. 13, <http://www.inss.org.il/programs.php?cat=56&incat=&read=480>. The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) did not report seeing any of this activity. See UN Security Council, *Ninth Report of the Secretary-General on Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006)*, March 3, 2009, p. 7, at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2009/119](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2009/119).
4. UNIFIL has not found any significant military forces or preparation in its area of operations, and the Hizballah "nature reserves" it has discovered were reportedly abandoned. Yet UNIFIL's mandate prevents it from searching private homes. (See UN Security Council, *Twelfth Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006)*, February 26, 2010, p. 5, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2010/105](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2010/105).) UNIFIL did find Hizballah military presence and activity in the July 2009 Khirbet Silim incident (in which ammunition stored in a building in southern Lebanon detonated). (See UN Security Council, *Eleventh Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006)*, November 2, 2009, p. 2, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2009/566](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2009/566).)
5. Alex Fishman, "Getting Ready for Hizballah," *YnetNews.com*, May 15, 2010, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3889774,00.html>. See also Aviad, "Hizballah's Force Buildup," p. 15.
6. According to one estimate, Hizballah had 6,000–8,000 combatants in July 2006 (Aviad, p. 9). But a May 2010 estimate placed the group's forces closer to 20,000 (Fishman, "Getting Ready").
7. Office of the IDF Spokesperson, "Intelligence Maps: How Hizballah Uses Lebanese Villages as Military Bases," weblog post, July 8, 2010, <http://idfspokesperson.com/2010/07/08/intelligence-maps-how-hezbollah-uses-lebanese-villages-as-military-bases-7-july-2010>.
8. Yaakov Katz, "IDF Reveals Hizballah Positions," *Jerusalem Post*, July 7, 2010.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Office of the IDF Spokesperson, "Hizballah Uses Lebanese Villages as Military Bases," press release, July 8, 2010, <http://dover.idf.il/IDF/English/News/today/10/07/0801.htm>.
11. In his previously cited February 16, 2010, speech, Nasrallah appeared to outline a doctrine of proportionality regarding attacks on Israel—that is, if Israel attacks civilian infrastructure in Lebanon, Hizballah will attack civilian infrastructure in Israel. Theoretically, Hizballah could attempt to execute this retaliatory strategy during a future war. More likely, however, is that the group intends to attack civilian targets in Israel from the outset. In fact, its weapons systems do not give it the option of doing otherwise, and a conflict limited to the military sphere would not serve the group's interests. See "Sayyed Nasrallah: Nothing Will Be Safe in Israel from Our Rockets if You Bomb Us," *al-Manar television*, February 16, 2010, <http://www.almanar.com.lb/newssite/NewsDetails.aspx?id=124826&language=en>.
12. Nasrallah outlined this strategy in a November 11, 2009, speech, stating, "Therefore, I say that we are ready. I say to Barak, Ashkenazi, Netanyahu, Obama, and the whole world, send as many ("Israeli") brigades as you want, send even your whole army, we will destroy it in our mountains and valleys." See *Moqawama.org*, "H. E. Sayyed Nasrallah: Send All Your Powers...Our Geography and Resistance Will Devour You!" <http://english.moqawama.org/essaydetailsf.php?eid=9510&fid=11>.
13. See, for example, *Moqawama.org*, "Sheikh Qaouk: The Resistance Was Able to Put an End to 'Israel's' Barrage of Threats against Lebanon," March 3, 2010, <http://english.moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=10387&cid=258>.
14. Nasrallah explicitly identified Israeli civilians and civilian infrastructure in central Israel as targets during his February 16, 2010, speech: "We have to know that the real concentration of Israelis stretches from south of Haifa to south of Tel Aviv, at a 15-kilometer deep line to the east. The bulk of residents are there, and so are oil refineries and factories and practically everything." See *Moqawama.org*, "Sayyed Nasrallah: Nothing Will Be Safe."
15. Any attempts to penetrate northern Israel and attack important military and symbolic civilian targets would aim to create psychological effects, including the appearance of a 360-degree front, an image of Israel invaded and vulnerable, and the idea that the battle is not being fought on Arab territory alone. Even a few attacks inside Israel would have significant political and psychological effects both for Israel and its opponents. Such actions would also draw IDF attention and potentially divert resources.
16. Uzi Rubin, "Hizballah's Rocket Campaign against Northern Israel: A Preliminary Report," *Jerusalem Issue Brief* (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs) 6, no. 10 (August 31, 2006), <http://www.jcpa.org/brief/brief006-10.htm>.
17. Office of the IDF Spokesperson, "Hizballah Uses Lebanese Villages."
18. According to one report, Israel has defined Hizballah as "a division of the Syrian army." See *Jerusalem Post*, "Hizbullaha a Division of Syrian Army," April 18, 2010, <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=173420>.
19. *YnetNews.com*, "Nasrallah Threatens to Hit Ships," May 25, 2010, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3894246,00.html>.

## 4 | War beyond Israel and Hizballah

THE MOST LIKELY CASE is that a new war would center on hostilities between Israel and Hizballah,<sup>1</sup> but as indicated in previous chapters, some degree of participation by Syria and Iran is almost certain. In peacetime, the prospect of direct Syrian and Iranian involvement may seem remote, but in the press of war and staring defeat in the face, Hizballah's patrons may find that the previously unthinkable can become necessary.

The extent to which Damascus and Tehran would participate is unknowable beforehand. Even if they have made firm commitments to join such a conflict, they could still renege when faced with the risks involved. At the same time, their relationship with Hizballah could create dynamics that pull them in directions in which they would prefer not to go, forcing them—and perhaps other actors such as Hamas—to make very difficult decisions under the pressures of war.

### If War Comes to Syria

Although Syria would most likely seek to avoid direct or serious conflict with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), Israel may not allow it to remain on the sidelines in a new war, particularly given its extensive support to Hizballah. Syria's commitments to Hizballah and concerns about its own defense could lead it into direct conflict as well.<sup>2</sup> As mentioned previously, Israeli operations against resupply efforts from Syria could lead to clashes with Syrian forces. And if Hizballah appeared trapped in a worsening military

situation, Damascus could feel compelled to directly intervene. All in all, a major war between Israel and Hizballah would present the Syrian regime with major dilemmas.

### Preparations for War

Syria has made serious preparations for war with Israel, and in some respects it is well equipped for such a conflict. The regime has gradually focused its efforts on a combination of offensive tools (primarily missiles and rockets) and defensive equipment, especially antitank and surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs).<sup>3</sup> Iranian financial assistance has made this possible, allowing Syria to make crucial arms purchases despite its weak economy.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of offensive capabilities, Syria would rely on its missile and artillery rocket forces. Syrian SSMs are organized into launch brigades, generally by type (See table 9.) These forces give Syria the ability to strike into the full depth of Israel from positions deep in its own territory, and to accurately target military facilities and key civilian infrastructure. In addition, some of these weapons (e.g., the Scud variants) can be equipped with chemical warheads.

Syria's long-range artillery rockets give it additional means of striking targets in Israel. The Syrian army has a variety of rocket systems, including 220-millimeter, 302-millimeter, and 600-millimeter variants (see table 10). Units operating the 220-millimeter and 302-millimeter

**TABLE 9. Syrian SSM Systems**

SYSTEM	RANGE (KM)	WARHEAD WEIGHT (KG)	ACCURACY (METERS)	STATUS
SS-21 Scarab	70–120	482	30–160	Confirmed
Scud-B	300	770–1,000	450	Confirmed
Scud-C	500–700	500–800	50–900	Confirmed
Scud-D	700–1,500	500–1000	50–190	Confirmed
M600/Fateh-110	500	500	100	Reported

**TABLE 10. Syrian Long-Range Artillery Rockets**

SYSTEM	RANGE (KM)	WARHEAD WEIGHT (KG)
220 mm	70	50
302 mm	100	175
600 mm	250–300	500
Frog-7	70	550

systems are organized in a long-range rocket brigade. Syria is believed to have hundreds of these artillery weapons, and they would be integrated into any firing plan against targets in northern Israel.<sup>5</sup> And the 600-millimeter system could be used against targets throughout all but the extreme southern portions of Israel.

Defensively, Syria has concentrated on systems aimed at offsetting Israel’s advantage in airpower and armor operations. For its air defenses—traditionally based on aging Soviet systems—Damascus has acquired the more modern SA-22 self-propelled short-range gun and missile air defense systems. It has also contracted for the SA-X-17 medium-range surface-to-air missile (SAM) system.<sup>6</sup> Although the Syrian air force is not considered

much of a threat to the Israeli Air Force (IAF), it has modern MiG-29M/M2 fighter aircraft that could be used to defend Syrian airspace in a conflict.

On the ground, antitank guided missiles (ATGMs) are key to Syria’s ability to counter Israel’s armored forces. The Syrian army has a wide range of modern Western and Russian systems and continues to contract for additional ones. (See table 11.)

Beyond obtaining the weapons it needs, Syria is also preparing its forces for combat. Training for anti-tank operations and close combat, periodic alerts, and reserve mobilization drills are all aimed at getting the army ready for war should it come. (See table 12 for more on the Syrian order of battle.)

Syria has also embedded itself in a complex and only partially understood set of defense relationships with Iran, including a “supreme joint defense commission.”<sup>7</sup> Iranian and Syrian leaders openly proclaim that their defense relationship is part of the “resistance” against Israel.<sup>8</sup> Although the true extent of any such arrangements would likely become clear only after a war began, Syria probably expects some form of military assistance from Iran in the event of hostilities, even if only weapons resupply and diplomatic support.

**TABLE 11. Syrian ATGMs**

SYSTEM	RANGE (METERS)	PENETRATION (MM)	GUIDANCE SYSTEM
AT-14 Kornet	100–5,500	1,100–1,200	Laser
AT-5 Konkurs	70–4,000	800	Wire
AT-10 Bastion	5,000	600	Laser
Metis-M	80–1,500	460–850	Wire
AT-3 Sagger	300	200	Wire
AT-4 Fagot	70–2,000	400	Wire
Milan	400–2,000	352	Wire
TOW	600–3,700	760	Wire
RPG-29	500	750	Manual
RPG-7	500	330	Manual

## Syria's Strategy

**Goals.** If Syria became directly involved in conflict with Israel during a war in Lebanon, its goals would include:

- Preserving the regime and its key assets (security, military, economic)
- Preserving Hizballah's position in Lebanon and ability to threaten Israel
- Reestablishing a Syrian military presence in Lebanon
- Inflicting a defeat on Israel sufficient to create the conditions for regaining the Golan Heights

**Military strategy.** Syria's strategy would have the following components:

- Offensively, to use its rocket and missile forces against Israel, probably in coordination with Hizballah's offensive. Damascus is unlikely to order the use of chemical or biological weapons against targets inside Israel except in the event of a clear threat to regime survival. Battlefield use of chemical weapons is a possibility, especially in a defensive role, though it would raise the risk of escalation by Israel.
- Defensively, to limit Israel's air campaign over Syria and possibly Lebanon; to stop any Israeli offensive operations on the Golan Heights and, with Hizballah involvement, through the Beqa Valley; and to assist Hizballah's defensive operations in southern Lebanon.

Syrian execution of this strategy would support Hizballah's intention to achieve a protracted conflict.

## Syria's Operations

**Offensive operations.** Syria's main offensive operation would involve missile and rocket attacks on targets in Israel. Which targets and how deep inside Israel to strike would depend on the conflict's scope and intensity. Damascus might attempt to limit attacks on Israel

**TABLE 12. Syrian Army Order of Battle**

UNIT TYPE	NUMBER
Corps headquarters	3
Armored division	7
Mechanized division	3
Republican Guard	1
Infantry/special forces	1
Total divisions	12
Independent brigades/groups	22

Source: Institute for National Security Studies, "Middle East Military Balance" database, section 17 on Syria, updated March 22, 2009, <http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291275907961.pdf>.

as part of a "negotiating by salvos" approach to avoid full war.<sup>9</sup>

**Defensive operations.** Syria would have to carry out two main defensive operations and a supporting one. The two main ones would be the air defense of Syria (employing its SAM assets and any air force elements it wished to risk) and the ground defense of the Golan front in the event Israel opened offensive operations there. The supporting operation would involve extending its defense into Lebanon by deploying ground forces into the Beqa Valley and providing air defense coverage over some or all of Lebanon, especially the Beqa. Operations in Lebanon would become increasingly likely if Damascus saw an Israeli ground threat developing in the Beqa.

Syria has the forces and weapons to support the strategy and operations outlined here. And publicly, at least, Damascus seems confident that it could implement its plans.<sup>10</sup>

## If Iran Joined the War

Iranian involvement in a future war would be based on its connections and commitments to Hizballah and Syria—entanglements that appear to be thickening. Tehran provides Hizballah with arms, money, and political support and is a partner in the "resistance"

## Major Syrian Operational Challenges

Direct involvement in a war between Israel and Hizballah would pose major operational challenges to the Syrian military. These include:

- Maintaining coherent air defense over key areas (Damascus, the Golan, and the Lebanese border, as well as critical military, infrastructure, and industrial targets in the rest of Syria)
- Maintaining coherent and sustained rocket/missile fire on Israeli targets while under attack
- Deploying forces to the Lebanese border and/or into Lebanon
- In the event of an Israeli offensive on the Golan, conducting ground operations both there and within Lebanon or on the Lebanese border

The Syrian military command—not known for its adaptability to rapid changes on a complex battlefield—would be severely stressed by these challenges.

against Israel. Occasionally, it makes this commitment public, as in President Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad's February 2010 statement that "the people of Iran will stand by the peoples of Lebanon" in the event of an Israeli attack,<sup>11</sup> and Vice President Muhammad Reza Rahimi's April 2010 statement that Iran would back Syria "with all its strength."<sup>12</sup> According to IDF intelligence, Iran maintains oversight of Hizballah's military operations through a senior Qods Force officer stationed in Beirut.<sup>13</sup> In the event of war, and especially Hizballah and Syrian reverses, Iran would have to balance its own basic security interests with whatever commitments it has made.

**Practical limits of Iranian involvement.** In addition to any policy constraints Iran may feel about participating in a war in Lebanon, it faces limitations imposed by its own capabilities and geography. Tehran does not possess

large forces suitable for expeditionary deployment, and Iran is a long way from Lebanon. Moving any forces to the area of combat would require overflight approvals and long sea lines of communication.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Iran does have some capability for intervention and, if it is willing to take the risks, direct participation.

On an escalating scale of involvement, Iran could:

- Provide more arms to Hizballah and Syria.
- Provide advisors, technicians, or light combat forces.
- Carry out asymmetric attacks on Israeli interests (e.g., terrorist-type actions).
- Engage in regional troublemaking (e.g., raise tensions in the Strait of Hormuz).
- Conduct missile strikes on Israel.

Moving up this scale would of course increase the risk of direct conflict with Israel and a crisis with the United States.

## Preparations for War

Within its limits, Iran has made preparations for a conflict with Israel. First, it has created missile forces, based on the Shahab-3, capable of striking all of Israel. It is also working to increase the accuracy and terminal effects of its systems, in addition to exercising its missile capabilities in four "Noble Prophet" exercises since 2006.<sup>15</sup> By 2008, it had reportedly more than tripled its Shahab-3 arsenal from thirty to one hundred.<sup>16</sup>

Tehran has also invested in air defense capabilities. It acquired at least one modern Russian SAM system in 2007—the short-range SA-15/Gauntlet—and has displayed SAMs and radars allegedly produced on its own.<sup>17</sup> In 2009, it created a separate air defense force to consolidate control of all such assets.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, Iran has bolstered its navy and coastal defense capabilities, allowing it to threaten shipping in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz.<sup>19</sup> It has routinely exercised these capabilities, and although such measures are not directly relevant to war with Israel,

they could serve as the basis for efforts to increase tensions in the Persian Gulf region in support of Hizballah and Syria.

For asymmetric operations, Tehran would rely on its well-tested and widely deployed Qods Force, which has the capability to strike at Israeli interests beyond Israel.<sup>20</sup> Iran has also used aggressive information operations as part of its preparation for potential conflict with Israel. These efforts include:

- Projecting an image of strength through statements by senior officials (e.g., Vice President Rahimi's "We will cut off Israel's feet" threat in April 2010<sup>21</sup>)
- Publicly displaying solidarity with Hizballah and Syria (e.g., the February 2010 "dinner in Damascus")
- Publicly displaying its arsenal (including phony weapons) in parades
- Publicizing its military exercises

These actions are intended to demonstrate that Iran is both capable of striking Israel and too powerful for other nations to attack, as Ahmadinezhad claimed in April 2010.<sup>22</sup>

### Iran's Strategy

Iran's current strategy for dealing with Israel may boil down to deterrence, but in the event of a major conflict involving Hizballah and Syria, it would need to revise its approach. In such a scenario, Iran's goals would be similar to Syria's:

- Preserve the regime and its key assets (security, military, economic).
- Preserve Hizballah's essential political and military situation in Lebanon.
- Preserve the regime of Basar al-Asad in Syria.
- Contribute to (and receive credit for) a military defeat of Israel.

To secure these goals, Iran would likely employ a military strategy that centered on:

- Resupplying Hizballah as needed to help it remain in the fight<sup>23</sup>
- Providing technical expertise and intelligence to Hizballah and Syria
- Supporting Syria with arms, and probably with "volunteers" as well
- Deterring Israel from launching direct attacks on Iran
- Possibly conducting a limited demonstration attack on Israel

### Iran's Operations

Under the scenario just outlined, Iran's involvement in a war would primarily be a logistical operation. The regime would face difficulties in its resupply efforts due to both the distances involved and the likelihood of Israeli disruptive efforts.

Tehran would almost certainly advertise the fact that Hizballah was employing Iranian weapons against Israel, and it would resupply the group as needed. Offensively, however, it would have limited ability to intervene. As mentioned earlier, it could use the Qods Force to conduct asymmetric attacks on Israeli interests, but this would raise the risk of retaliation. Regarding potential missile strikes against Israel, Tehran would probably hold that measure in reserve for deterrent and retaliatory purposes.

Again, however, Tehran could choose direct involvement if Hizballah and/or Syria were on the verge of catastrophic defeat.<sup>24</sup> In this case, it could opt for a demonstration attack with a few missiles aimed at a prominent Israeli target in order to show that it was a participant in the war. The likelihood of such a strike would be even greater if Tehran believed that Israel were losing the war, since the Iranians would have less to fear in terms of Israeli retaliation. Such an action would be in keeping with the regime's emphasis on the psychological elements of war.

Iran could also choose to threaten or interrupt the flow of oil through the Persian Gulf. This would be a very risky action, however, raising the possibility of international intervention and creating serious potential for a clash with Western naval forces in the region.

Defensively, Iran would be prepared for expansion and escalation of the war to include attacks on its territory by Israel and/or the United States. Accordingly, it would bring its air defense and naval forces to an advanced state of readiness and probably take measures to secure its leadership and missile forces (e.g., dispersal, moving to shelters).

Iran has expressed confidence in its ability to fight Israel, either indirectly through Hizballah and Syria or directly. Whether or not this rhetoric is merely for show remains to be seen. Although Tehran's willingness to honor its commitments is unclear, some Iranian involvement in a future war should be expected.

### Gaza's Role

Hamas has aligned itself with Hizballah and its allies at least verbally, and the group remains beholden to Iran for financial and military support. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether Hamas leaders would choose direct involvement in such a dangerous conflict. And they no doubt remember the lack of real support sent their way during Israel's Operation Cast Lead in 2008–2009. Therefore, they would likely limit the group's participation to token actions such as firing (or permitting the firing of) a few rockets into southern Israel, accompanied by supporting rhetoric. Hamas might also use the opportunity to attempt another kidnapping of IDF personnel.

At the same time, no one should be surprised if a new war in the north includes a "Gaza excursion." Hamas could decide to enter the conflict in a serious fashion, employing heavy rocket firing and long-range weapons. Alternatively, Israel could decide to finish the job begun with Cast Lead.

Currently, Hamas appears to be coordinating with Hizballah at least on the political level. On March 1, 2010, Hamas leader Khaled Mashal stated that

some people are trying today to drive a wedge between the Arab and the Islamic resistance movements,

between the resistance movements of Palestine, and between Syria, Lebanon, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. These attempts are destined for failure. We are in the same trench, confronting the enemy of our nation: Israel, and whoever stands behind Israel—America and others.<sup>25</sup>

The group's leadership also participates to some degree in the diplomatic activity surrounding Syria, Iran, and Hizballah. All of this suggests that Hamas wants to be seen as a player in that crowd, which would make it more difficult for the group to stand aside during another war in the north.

Militarily, Hamas has increased its ability to participate in another round of fighting with Israel. It has acquired more and longer-range rockets than it had before Cast Lead, giving it the capacity to strike more deeply into Israel, at a higher rate of fire, and for a longer duration. As a result, it could inflict more casualties and physical damage than it did during the last round. (See table 13 for more on Hamas's arsenal.)

The group has also increased its ground combat capabilities. Integrating lessons from Cast Lead, Hamas has made command changes, increased training, deepened its fortification system in Gaza, and acquired additional antitank weapons (along with man-portable SAMs, most likely).

If war came, the group would attempt to fight in a fashion similar to Hizballah: attack Israel with rockets while defending against an IDF incursion into Gaza. It would likely hope to take advantage of Israel's resource commitment in the north to avoid the full weight of an IDF response.

Hamas is not the only element in Gaza with the ability to fire long-range rockets against Israel. Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other groups could initiate such firing regardless of Hamas intentions.

For its part, Israel would likely conduct an economy of force operation against Hamas as it mounted its main effort in the north. Specifically, the IDF's Gaza Division and mobilized reserves would be employed to deter and contain Palestinian elements within Gaza, but Israel would likely avoid a major ground incursion until the situation in the north had been favorably resolved. This is not a certainty, however. The IDF was

**TABLE 13. Hamas Artillery Rockets and Mortars**

SYSTEM	TYPE	RANGE (KM)	SUPPLIER
90 mm Qassam	Unguided rocket	9	Produced in Gaza
107 mm Qassam	Unguided rocket	8.5	Produced in Gaza
115 mm Qassam	Unguided rocket	11–12	Produced in Gaza
122 mm Grad	Unguided rocket	20	Iranian design/manufacture
122 mm extended-range Grad	Unguided rocket	40	Iranian design/manufacture
Unidentified long-range rocket*	Unguided rocket	60–70	—
81 mm mortar	Mortar	4.9	Iranian design/manufacture
120 mm mortar	Mortar	6.2	Iranian design/manufacture

\*The exact designation of the longest-range rocket currently in the group's possession is uncertain, but some reports indicate that it is the Iranian Fajr-5.

built to fight a war against major Arab states, and it has very large capacities that have not been employed for decades—if necessary, it could operate simultaneously in the north and against Gaza. That would require mobilization of additional forces and diversion of some air, special forces, and intelligence assets.

If Israel decided to invade Gaza, it would carry out a major combined air and ground operation with naval support. This would likely involve extensive ground operations deep inside Gaza, including urban areas. The intent would be to comprehensively eliminate the Palestinian military structure there (especially Hamas's al-Qassam Brigades) and end Hamas political control. This could entail occupying parts of Gaza for an indefinite period.<sup>26</sup>

### Expansion to Other Areas

Large-scale war could also lead to security issues in the West Bank and Israeli Arab neighborhoods. Riots, demonstrations, sniping, and rock throwing are all possible. Yet it should be pointed out that during Cast Lead—which directly involved Palestinian interests—relatively few such disturbances or violent incidents were reported. Effective work by the Israeli police and security services as well as Palestinian Authority (PA) forces prevented any serious situation from developing. If a new war in the north was accompanied by large-

scale IDF operations in Gaza, then security incidents would arise, but they would probably be contained at low levels as in 2008–2009. The PA has little interest in sacrificing its West Bank gains in an effort to save Hamas, much less Hizballah.

If, however, Palestinians perceived that Israel was losing the war, then the equation could change. In that scenario, the PA leadership and security forces would be more likely to permit or even tacitly support violence.

### Escalation and Control

The war outlined here would present a dangerous situation with clear potential to escalate into a broader and still more serious conflict. Various pressures and dynamics would push it toward escalation, though some factors would work to limit it.

In both the 2006 war and Cast Lead, decisions and events on and off the battlefield shaped the scope and intensity of the fighting. A similar effect would likely be seen in a new war. Israel, for example, would have to decide on the limits of its air and ground operations in Lebanon, and on what to do if progress were not rapid enough or success not great enough. For its part, Hizballah would have to respond to the course of the fighting. If it were losing, would the group attempt to end or broaden the conflict? And the parties would

face another set of decisions regarding Syria: Damascus would have to decide whether to enter the conflict and at what level, Israel would have to decide what to do about Syrian involvement, each government would have to decide on a response to the initial clashes, and so on. In addition, Iran would face its own difficult decisions regarding the extent of its involvement. Each of these and other key decision points would provide an opportunity for escalation or, less likely, a chance to limit or reduce the level of conflict.

War could begin on a small scale and then escalate, or it could begin large and escalate still further. In fact, the antagonists' strategies have built-in potential to both expand (in terms of geography and combatants) and escalate (in terms of intensity and weaponry employed).

As discussed previously, both Israel and Hizballah have doctrinal approaches to war that support escalation. Israeli doctrine calls for decisive operations to bring about rapid defeat of the enemy's forces, and for conducting battle on the enemy's territory. Israel has also made clear that it holds the Lebanese government responsible for Hizballah behavior, making Lebanese government entities and infrastructure potential targets. It has already demonstrated that it will attack infrastructure associated with its opponents in Lebanon and Gaza. For its part, Hizballah has made clear that it is prepared to strike civilian targets and infrastructure deep inside Israel if Lebanese civilian infrastructure is attacked. If its actions during the 2006 war are any guide, it would do so from the beginning of a new war. Furthermore, although some of Hizballah's rocket and missile inventory is accurate enough for targeting specific military installations, most of its arms are area-fire weapons and would inevitably fall on civilian areas.

Both sides also seem to be thinking about and preparing for a major war rather than a limited one, seemingly accepting this as the most likely scenario. They have each conducted exercises simulating major combat, while Hizballah and its allies have held numerous meetings and issued many statements suggesting coordinated preparations and planning for another war. Although such measures do not produce war in of themselves, they do make a decision to go to war easier, in addition to facilitating actions during wartime.

Expectations have seemingly been established for how enemies and allies will act in wartime. As fighting progresses, the combatants will be pressured to act on these expectations. Hizballah, Syria, and Iran appear to be strong allies, and although their partnership may not be on par with the pre-World War I alliance system, they might nevertheless find it difficult to renege on their commitments. Hizballah is also attempting to wrap Lebanon's government, people, and army into a future conflict, in order to cast the war as being between Lebanon and Israel, not simply Hizballah and Israel.

For its part, the IDF has created the expectation in Israel that it will not permit a repeat of the 2006 war experience—that is, maladroit ground operations, a civilian population under sustained bombardment, and, in the end, an enemy boasting of victory. What Hizballah and its allies expect from Israel is rapid and large-scale operations intended to achieve major military and political goals. This expectation would likely press them to act aggressively rather than waiting for Israeli blows to fall.

The possibility of preemptive action by either side is another potential escalation mechanism. Preemption has clear benefits, not just at the beginning of a war but also at the operational level during the fighting. The preemptor would gain the initiative and set the war's initial or subsequent conditions. For example, Israel would gain a major advantage if it preemptively struck Hizballah's long-range missile and rocket capabilities, as it did in 2006. Alternatively, Hizballah would gain an advantage if it used these weapons first, especially against military targets that would be vital to Israel's conduct of the war (e.g., airfields). Similarly, if direct Syrian involvement seemed imminent, both Israel and Damascus would gain the advantage by striking the first blow. These and other potential advantages would press the combatants to act aggressively.

The military dynamics of the war would influence escalation as well. Success, failure, and military/civilian losses could all pressure the combatants to intensify their efforts in order to force a positive outcome or justify the costs. And as mentioned previously, even if the parties planned to carefully modulate their actions and engage in intra-war signaling in order

to limit the fighting, such intentions could give way to escalation in the face of uncertainty and threat. “Negotiating by salvos” seems feasible in the calm prior to conflict but would be much more difficult once a war has begun.

Political developments could also intensify the conflict. Both internal politics and the requirements of maintaining external relationships could create pressure to expand the conflict. For example, Hassan Nasrallah has established a kind of trinity in the defense of Lebanon: the Lebanese people, the resistance, and the Lebanese army.<sup>27</sup> Hizballah’s entanglement with the Lebanese government, its efforts to identify itself with the country’s defense, and its involvement with the Lebanese army all suggest that a future war would draw in the Lebanese state and society. Similarly, Syria and Iran would face political pressure to increase their involvement if the war were going against Hizballah.<sup>28</sup> Syria would probably consider any Israeli ground advance northward in the Beqa Valley as a threat to Damascus, perhaps leading it into a ground engagement with the IDF there.

For its part, the Israeli government would likely face internal, public, and military pressure to end the threat quickly and decisively, as happened during Cast Lead. These pressures would increase as Israeli casualties increased, especially civilian losses. Hizballah and its allies intend to bring war to the Israeli population as a whole, and at least initially, missiles and rockets would penetrate Israeli defenses in some numbers—in other words, internal pressures would likely arise very quickly. The extent of this pressure would depend on the speed and effectiveness of Israel’s offensive military operations and passive/active defense measures.

Despite these substantial pressures toward escalation, some factors may work to limit a new conflict. As mentioned previously, the close ties, shared interests, and ideological affinity among Hizballah, Syria, and Iran could give way to self-interest during war. Both Damascus and Tehran may choose to limit their involvement in order to avoid the consequences of all-out conflict with Israel. For example, even short of a direct existential threat from Israel, the Syrian regime would have to be concerned about potentially serious damage to its key military and security pillars.

Similarly, some of the military developments that might lead to escalation could have the opposite effect instead. Rapid success, early failure, or high rates of personnel and equipment attrition could push one of the combatants to seek an early end to the conflict. For example, the need to preserve forces to fight another day or reduce political losses within Lebanon could cause Hizballah to look for a way out, as it did in 2006.

Perhaps the most important potential limiting factor would be external political intervention. Pressures from the United States, Europe, the United Nations, and others would likely come into play as the war intensified and threatened to expand. All of the direct combatants would have to take this factor into account, and the longer the fighting persisted, the greater the pressure would become.

International reactions would be shaped to some degree by the combatants’ very different timelines for war. As discussed previously, Israel’s desire for a relatively short but strategically decisive conflict would necessitate intense and large-scale fighting from the beginning. War on this scale may come as a shock to some of Israel’s supporters, and to countries and organizations under the spell of “proportionality.”

Israel’s opponents, however, would seek to prolong the war as long as they were not losing too badly. This would allow them to inflict the maximum political, military, and economic damage on Israel and its supporters; deny Israel a clear victory; and wait for external pressures to bring the conflict to a halt. In other words, their challenge would be to continue the war, but not for so long as to risk comprehensive defeat.

On balance, it seems likely that a new war would intensify rapidly, with pressures to escalate outweighing control mechanisms. A period of acute danger would emerge early, when the advantages of gaining a step on the opponent would be most pronounced. Decisionmakers on all sides would be under great pressure to act quickly in order to achieve their goals and protect their assets and populations. Serious miscalculation would be a real possibility, even more so if the war erupted as a result of an accident or unintended escalation from an isolated incident.

## Notes

1. A variation on this scenario would include Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) involvement (even if only token) in defensive operations against Israeli forces. As mentioned in chapter 3, Hizballah appears eager to create the conditions that would lead to such confrontations. In this situation, IDF elements would inevitably engage the LAF, and the scale of these engagements would depend on the seriousness of the LAF's efforts. Israel would probably accept token resistance without responding harshly.
2. The assessment that Damascus would attempt to stay out of direct war with Israel is based largely on a "rational actor" model of Syrian behavior. In essence, this view holds that self-preservation is the government's highest goal, and that the regime would therefore not put itself at risk by going to war with Israel. Although this assessment is cogent, it tends to downplay the role of personality, ideology, emotion, uncertainty, and chance in judging how the Syrians would behave.
3. Yoav Stern, "Syria Looks to Lebanon War for Tips on Arming Hezbollah," *Haaretz*, May 5, 2009, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/syria-looks-to-lebanon-war-for-tips-on-arming-hezbollah-1.275404>.
4. Barak Ravid et al., "Israel Fears Syrian Army Moves May Signal Hezbollah Attack," *Haaretz*, April 3, 2008, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/israel-fears-syrian-army-moves-may-signal-hezbollah-attack-1.243250>.
5. Ron Ben Yishai, "Syrian Rockets Aimed at Tel Aviv," *YnetNews.com*, September 8, 2007, <http://www.ynet.co.il/english/articles/0,7340,L-3435543,00.html>.
6. Lt. Gen. Michael Maples, "Annual Threat Assessment: Statement before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate," March 10, 2009, p. 19, <http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2009/March/Maples%2003-10-09.pdf>.
7. Fars News Agency, "Iran Views Defense Ties with Syria as Deterrent to Israel," December 9, 2009, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8809181632>.
8. Kuwait News Agency, "Iran, Syria Sign Defence Agreement," December 13, 2009, <http://www.zawya.com/story.cfm/sidZAWYA20091213061319>.
9. Some analysts argue that Syria and Israel could modulate their conduct of a war, signaling their intentions to limit fighting by the careful employment of weapons and forces. Whether such behavior would work amid the uncertainty and pressures of war is unclear at best.
10. See, for example, Roei Nahmias, "Syria: If Israelis Declare War, We'll Hit Their Cities," *YnetNews.com*, March 2, 2010, <http://www.ynet.co.il/english/articles/0,7340,L-3843989,00.html>.
11. Nasser Karimi, "Iran Vows to Stand by Hezbollah against Israel," *Associated Press*, February 18, 2010, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=9872644>.
12. *VOANews.com*, "Iran Vows to Back Syria with All Its 'Strength,'" April 30, 2010, <http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/middle-east/Iran-Vows-to-Back-Syria-With-All-Its-Strength-92509489.html>.
13. Yaakov Katz, "IDF Names Top Iranian in Charge of Hizballah," *Jerusalem Post*, July 8, 2010, <http://www.jpost.com/IranianThreat/News/Article.aspx?id=180767>.
14. The same limitations would also apply if Tehran attempted to resupply Hizballah and Syria with arms. Turkey's improving relationship with Syria and Iran could provide greater opportunity for such activity in a war situation, however.
15. Lt. Gen. Ronald Burgess, "Iran's Military Power," statement before the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, April 14, 2010, p. 23, [http://foreignpolicy.com/files/fp\\_uploaded\\_documents/100414\\_FINAL%20DIA\\_SFR\\_to\\_SASC\\_Iran\\_Hearing\\_20100413.pdf](http://foreignpolicy.com/files/fp_uploaded_documents/100414_FINAL%20DIA_SFR_to_SASC_Iran_Hearing_20100413.pdf).
16. *Haaretz*, "Israel Worried by Report Iran Has Tripled Its Missile Arsenal," December 9, 2008, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/israel-worried-by-report-iran-has-tripled-its-missile-arsenal-1.285505>.
17. Burgess, "Iran's Military Power," p. 8.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
21. Natasha Mozgovaya, "Iran: We'll 'Cut Off Israel's Feet' if It Attacks Syria," *Haaretz*, April 30, 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/iran-we-ll-cut-off-israel-s-feet-if-it-attacks-syria-1.287513>.
22. *Associated Press*, "Iran's Army Too Powerful to Attack," *Jerusalem Post*, April 18, 2010, <http://www.jpost.com/IranianThreat/News/Article.aspx?ID=173422>.
23. In a short war, resupplying Hizballah might not be a military necessity given the amount of weaponry that Iran and Syria have already provided. Politically, however, resupply would be a signal of Iranian commitment to the group and acceptance of the inherent risks.
24. There is no way to know in advance how this decision would be resolved within the Iranian government. The "rational actor" argument suggests that Tehran would not take regime-threatening action, but this ignores the role of ideology and personality. In all likelihood, certain voices within the decisionmaking structure would argue for attacking Israel in such a scenario.
25. Middle East Media Research Institute, "Iranian Leader Khamenei Meets with Heads of Palestinian Factions," *al-Alam television*, March 1, 2010, [http://www.memritv.org/clip\\_transcript/en/2407.htm](http://www.memritv.org/clip_transcript/en/2407.htm).
26. The IDF has made contingency plans for reoccupying the territory. See Amir Buhbut, "The Program for an IDF Military Governor of Gaza Strip" (in Hebrew), *Maariv*, May 18, 2010, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/108/351.html?hp=1&loc=8&tmp=7943>.
27. Nasrallah referred to this "trinity" several times during his May 25, 2010, speech on the anniversary of the "liberation of southern Lebanon" (an Arabic transcript of his remarks is available at <http://www.alintiqad.com/essaydetails.php?eid=32529&cid=75>). See also Middle East Media Research Institute, "Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah Threatens to Bring Down Buildings in Tel Aviv and Hit Ben-Gurion Airport in Future War," February 17, 2010, <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/0/0/0/0/0/2405.htm>.
28. Given the uncertainties involved, this paper largely refrains from predicting the likely outcome of a war. Yet Israel's clear qualitative military edge, coupled with the high stakes, does give it a greater chance of success than its opponents in most scenarios. For more discussion of what Israeli battlefield success would mean for Hizballah and its allies, see the "Consequences" section of chapter 5.

## 5 | Uncertainties and Consequences

ALTHOUGH THE PREVIOUS chapters have sought to be as clear as possible about the likely contours of a new war between Israel and Hizballah, many uncertainties remain regarding a conflict of this nature and scope:

- **Strength of will for key leaders.** How the various leaders will act at the moment of crisis is uncertain. Some may act less decisively or coherently than their peacetime statements would suggest. And they would all face enormous and often-conflicting internal and external pressures. Hizballah's leadership would be in hiding and likely subject to attack if discovered by Israeli intelligence. Some leaders may not have the strength of will required to manage these pressures.
- **The real nature of the Hizballah-Syria-Iran military relationship.** This relationship is central to the question of whether a war between Israel and Hizballah would escalate into a general or regional conflict. Yet it remains poorly understood. Its strengths and limits are unknown and may only become clear in the event of war. As indicated in previous chapters, an equally good case could be made for two very different scenarios: either the parties will act in their own narrow self-interest, which would limit potential escalation, or they will all act together as true allies, which would promote escalation and expansion.
- **External intervention prior to combat.** Intervention by outside actors may cause one of the parties to pull back from the brink of conflict or modify its plans. The most obvious case would be U.S. intervention to prevent or temper an Israeli operation, but other states and the UN could also attempt to head off or constrain a war.
- **Starting conditions.** Most of this paper deals with the major characteristics of war without regard to how the conflict begins, but those inaugural circumstances would be important to the sequence

and evolution of operations, at least initially. A gradual buildup to war would likely result in operations unfolding differently than a sudden onset of fighting precipitated by an isolated incident or pre-emptive attack.

- **The pace of events.** How fast war develops could push events in various directions. A slow-developing conflict would allow more time for diplomacy and "signaling," reducing uncertainty. A rapidly developing conflict would have the opposite effect, creating more opportunity for miscalculation, misunderstanding, and escalation. Whereas Hizballah would want the conflict to be slow as in 2006, Israel would seek a rapid war. As a result, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) would likely attempt to maintain a high operational tempo in the air and on the ground from the start, in part to reduce the rocket and missile threat and accomplish its goals before diplomatic intervention.
- **The role of the unexpected.** The capricious gods of war—blunder and chance—would inevitably have their say in any new conflict. Operations would not unfold precisely (or, at times, even remotely) according to plan. The unanticipated would occur at all levels—political, strategic, operational, and tactical. These surprises would shape the war and its outcome in unexpected ways. Consequently, the more-adaptable governments and militaries would be at an advantage.
- **Public attitudes toward military action.** Public perceptions, especially in Israel and Lebanon, would influence the way the war was prosecuted, but to what degree is uncertain. Depending on these attitudes, leaders on each side may feel more or less constrained in their use of force.
- **Crossing the chemical warfare line.** Syria has a significant chemical warfare capability that has traditionally been viewed as a deterrent to prevent Israel

from attempting regime change. But in a large-scale conflict—especially one involving attacks on targets important to the regime—Damascus could authorize the use of these weapons against targets in Israel. Doing so would mean total war between the two countries.

- **UNIFIL's role.** Currently, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon has some 12,000 troops in the South. Their role during a conflict—whether to fight, avoid involvement, or withdraw—could complicate ground operations by Israel and Hizballah. Moreover, Hizballah may choose to operate near UNIFIL bases in the hope of creating an incident in which the IDF is perceived to be firing on UN forces. How such an incident actually evolved would depend on IDF restraint and/or precision in fire, and how UNIFIL reacted to being set up by Hizballah.

These and other uncertainties would influence the course of the war, lengthening or shortening it, broadening or narrowing its scope, and increasing or decreasing its intensity. But the broad outlines discussed throughout this study would likely hold: a large-scale, intense conflict waged between Israel and some combination of Hizballah and its allies, fought in and over Israel, Lebanon, and Syria, and lasting for weeks.

### How the War Ends

All wars come to an end. One side or the other is defeated or attempts to escape defeat by suing for peace. Exhaustion overtakes the combatants. Peace is imposed. A future war in Lebanon could end by any of these means, broadly defined as follows:

- **With a bang.** One side achieves its aims, or enough of them, and offers or imposes terms for ending the war. Such an unambiguous victory would be difficult to achieve, especially as the war expanded to include additional actors. Only Israel seems to have the military capability needed for this kind of relatively decisive conclusion, which might look something like the end of the 1967 war.

- **With a whimper.** The war simply peters out through exhaustion or military stalemate, and the combatants tacitly agree to stop fighting. This would be a very messy outcome with substantial potential to reignite, akin to the end of the 1973 and 2006 wars.

- **An imposed solution.** Outside forces compel or convince the parties to cease fire. This is another potentially messy ending, leaving no one satisfied and retaining a high degree of volatility.

The stability of the postwar situation would depend on many factors, including the diplomatic activity that would follow the conclusion of hostilities. In 1973, for example, skillful diplomacy transformed an unstable military situation into arrangements that still stand today.

However the war ends, a few conditions would likely prevail:

- The IDF would be occupying some, perhaps substantial, parts of Lebanon and potentially all of Gaza.
- Wherever the course and outcome of the war went badly—defeats, civilian casualties, destruction—there would be political crises. Lebanon in particular would be destabilized.
- Several immediate requirements would emerge: dealing with dislocated civilians, rebuilding and resupplying military forces, and repairing damaged infrastructure.

Even under the best of circumstances (e.g., the absence of renewed fighting), the postwar situation would require a great deal of time and serious political and economic investments before it could stabilize.

### Consequences

If war does come, and if it approaches the scope and scale outlined here, it would have significant long-term consequences, potentially reshaping the regional political and military environment. Casualties and damage would be extensive—the hardest-hit areas would most likely be southern Lebanon and northern Israel, with

most of the civilian losses occurring there. But damage would be significant in other areas as well.

**For Israel.** This would certainly be Israel's most serious war since 1973, and one that the IDF would have to win. Given the likely political, military, and economic costs, failure to achieve core objectives would have the most serious long-term consequences for Israel, as compared with the other potential combatants. If Israel goes to war, it must be demonstrably successful.

Hizballah has the means to strike targets throughout Israel and has specifically stated that it would attack civilian population centers. Although this would be no different in principle than the 2006 war, when the group struck every civilian center in reach of its rockets, its capabilities have since grown. Given the weight of the attack Hizballah plans on conducting in a future war, Israel may face substantially greater civilian losses, damage, economic disruption, and population movements than it did in 2006, even with the active and passive defense measures it has put in place since then.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, much will depend on how effective these measures prove to be and, perhaps most important, the speed with which Israel's air and ground operations in Lebanon deal with the rocket and missile threat.

A war that included direct Syrian involvement would be even more serious. If Syria were to conduct missile attacks on Israel, civilian casualties and damage would increase. Accordingly, the civilian population's resilience would be one of the keys to Israel's prospects in this kind of war. The Israeli people would be hit, and they would have to ride out those attacks until IDF offensive operations took effect.

On the military side, IDF losses were relatively light during the 2006 war and Operation Cast Lead.<sup>2</sup> Air and ground operations on the scale outlined here would likely entail significantly greater losses. Israeli ground forces would face the difficult task of operating quickly in constricted terrain and built-up areas. Hizballah has prepared seriously for renewed war and would vigorously and skillfully defend against Israeli efforts in Lebanon.

Israel's battle losses would increase in the event of direct Syrian involvement. Nevertheless, the IDF is

built for major conventional war, and if necessary it will accept the losses required to achieve its aims.

Direct Iranian attacks would increase Israeli casualties and damage somewhat, but they would not add markedly to the weight of fire coming from Hizballah and Syria. Iran's role in keeping Hizballah and Syria in the fight would be more consequential.

**For Hizballah and its allies.** If Israel acted decisively, were willing to pay the costs in casualties and damage, and enjoyed military success, then a new war could substantially weaken its opponents:

- Hizballah would be broken as a military factor in Lebanon and weakened politically.
- The Syrian regime would be weakened by military defeat and the loss of important military and security assets.
- Iran's activities in the region would be circumscribed by the defeat of its allies, and if Tehran failed to aid them during the conflict, it would lose influence as well.
- Hamas (assuming it became involved directly) would lose its military power in Gaza and at least some of its political power.

Regardless of Israel's level of success, southern Lebanon and its towns and villages would be a major ground combat zone in most any scenario, and therefore subject to significant destruction and high risk to any of the population that remained in place once fighting began. Hizballah intends to fight from within the population, and the IDF intends to fight the group wherever it is.

As for the rest of Lebanon, Israel would plan to conduct operations deep in the country and hold its government accountable for Hizballah actions. This portends significant destruction of government-associated facilities and infrastructure. Hizballah facilities in the Beirut area and Beqa Valley would also be struck, as would lines of communication from these facilities to the South. In addition, Hizballah missile, rocket, air

defense, and ground forces would be engaged wherever they were found. If the group chose to fire missiles from the northern Beqa, then combat could extend well into northern Lebanon.

Damage in Syria would depend on the extent of Syrian involvement. As such involvement expanded, the country would be increasingly targeted by Israeli attacks. At the more serious end of the spectrum, this could include strikes on Syrian leadership, government, economic, and infrastructure targets, in addition to extensive attacks on the military and security apparatus.

Regarding direct fighting, Hizballah and Syria would suffer significant losses to any forces engaged by Israel. Missile, long-range rocket, air defense, and ground forces defending against an Israeli incursion would all suffer heavy attrition.

In addition to personnel and material losses, Hizballah's myth of resistance and military power could be shattered, with the group exposed as unable to defend either Lebanon or itself. This could lead to a reordering of the Lebanese political scene.

In Syria, the war could see the end of the current regime, depending on the extent of its involvement and how skillfully Damascus played its hand. Even if they could hold on to power in the face of a major defeat, Bashar al-Asad and his cohorts would need all the skill and means of coercion at their disposal to weather such an outcome. It is uncertain whether the Syrian people and military/security forces would accept humiliation at Israel's hands as the price of adventurism in Lebanon.

Iran's role and influence would probably be altered by war as well. Even if it retained a strong regional position, it would likely still need time to rebuild its assets and reputation in Lebanon. Political upheaval in Syria could reduce or even end Iranian influence there and sharply limit it within Lebanon.

As for Hamas, the outcome mentioned at the beginning of this section would hold if the group became involved in this kind of war: in all likelihood, it would suffer loss of control over Gaza, the destruction of its military arm, and the scattering of its Gaza-based leadership. Failure to avoid a fateful conflict or defend the population would probably spell an end

to Hamas credibility and legitimacy with the people of Gaza.

**For the United States.** Washington should be taking its own preparatory steps, developing concrete plans for what it would do both in advance of such a war and if hostilities break out. Its prewar efforts should not be limited to pressuring Israel into inaction while verbally chastising Hizballah, Syria, and Iran. Instead, the United States should focus on taking actions that back up its words. To date, nothing it has said or done has had any visible effect on Hizballah's preparation for war, nor on the Syrian and Iranian roles in that buildup. Instead, the threat has continued to grow to its current, very large proportions. Deterrence is under increasing pressure, and permitting the threat to develop further will only make a resultant war even larger, more intense, and more destructive.

If war comes, Washington should not necessarily take immediate steps toward ending it quickly. That is the natural reaction to conflict, based on the belief that war is so terrible that it needs to be stopped above all. And yet changes must occur: Hizballah's military capabilities need to be broken and its political power reduced; Syria needs to be disabused of the notion that it can play violent games in Lebanon as a means of furthering its own cynical interests without incurring any significant cost; and Iran needs to see its Hizballah proxy militarily defeated and politically humbled. Only successful IDF operations can achieve those goals, and that may take some time. Accordingly, the United States should consider giving the IDF that time—no easy task.

Washington must also look to the Iranian role in such a conflict. Any Iranian troublemaking in the Persian Gulf should be met with a forceful response. Iran should understand that the United States will use military power if necessary, thwarting any attempts to take advantage of the situation created by the war.

Washington will also face some difficult questions about its own role in the war. Would it provide diplomatic support to Israel, and if so, to what extent? Is it prepared to ensure freedom of the seas in the face of potential Hizballah disruption of eastern

Mediterranean shipping? Would it participate directly in defending Israel against missile attacks? Would it resupply critical Israeli weapons systems and munitions lost or expended in the fighting, and if so, how quickly? The answers to these questions would have an important influence on the course of the war.

Finally, regardless of how the war is concluded, the United States would have a major role to play in the aftermath. In particular, it would be called on to help steady the situation politically and militarily in the near term, facilitate rebuilding efforts, and set conditions for long-term stability.

## Notes

1. During the 2006 war, 53 Israeli civilians were killed, 250 severely wounded, and 2,000 lightly wounded. There was extensive damage to housing, and some damage to public utilities and industries. Some 250,000 people reportedly evacuated northern Israel. Economic activity was disrupted for the course of the war, and approximately one million people were required to stay in or near shelters. Uzi Rubin, "Hizballah's Rocket Campaign against Northern Israel: A Preliminary Report," *Jerusalem Issue Brief* (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs) 6, no. 10 (August 31, 2006), <http://www.jcpa.org/brief/brief006-10.htm>.
2. The IDF lost 119 soldiers in 2006 and 10 (4 by friendly fire) in Cast Lead.

## 6 | Conclusions

IN SOME WAYS, the current situation in the Israel-Lebanon arena echoes the pre-World War I period. We are witnessing a long buildup<sup>1</sup> for war—including massive armament efforts, detailed military planning, and alliance structures that increase pressure toward wide rather than limited conflict—with the sudden outbreak of large-scale hostilities as a potential outcome. None of the contestants would likely welcome such a war. Although they have prepared for it and would seek to exploit the military and political opportunities it presented, they seem to realize that such a conflict would have fateful consequences for all of them.

On one side, Hizballah has prepared seriously for war and seems confident in its capabilities. Some of this bravado may be due to its increasingly tight relationship with Syria and Iran. Indeed, Damascus would likely become a combatant in the next war, and perhaps Tehran as well. The extent of this participation is difficult to foresee, but substantial involvement by either or both patrons should not come as a surprise.

On the other side, Israel has also prepared seriously—its extensive military measures, combat exercises, improvements in home-front defense, and experience gained from Operation Cast Lead give it a significantly enhanced ability to fight Hizballah and its allies while weathering their attacks. In all respects, the Israeli military is stronger, more capable, and more ready than it was in July 2006, and it too seems confident about its prospects.

Whether or not war will erupt soon or ever is uncertain. Both sides have good reasons to avoid it, but deterrence seems to be weakening, and the next war will not look much like the inconclusive 2006 conflict. Rather, all signs point to it being wider in geographic scope and more destructive, with high-tempo operations evident from the start. Finally, when one weighs this study's assessment of the combatants alongside the situation's numerous uncertainties, Israel would most likely prevail in the kind of war envisioned here, though not without substantial costs.

### Notes

1. Or, in Laurence Lafore's memorable description, "the long fuse." See his book *The Long Fuse: An Interpretation of the Origins of World War I*, 2nd ed. (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1971).

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