

The Law Of Exploding Pagers

written by Arsen Ostrovsky | 24.09.2024

It is hard to imagine a more surgically precise procedure than the destruction of personal devices that were (literally) held by terrorists.

Nasrallah is trapped by his own false propaganda

written by Ofir Gendelman | 24.09.2024

For years, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah repeatedly claimed that “Israel is weaker than a spider’s web.” This message was woven throughout his speeches and echoed in Hamas propaganda. The entire Iran-backed alliance believed it. The goal wasn’t just psychological; it had an operational purpose. It was meant to motivate the organization’s operatives, especially the Radwan Force, to train even more vigorously for the conquest of the Galilee, seen as the first step in Israel’s total destruction.

To be honest, albeit regrettably, some Israeli actions reinforced this message in the narrative of the “resistance axis” and Hezbollah itself, rather than undermining it. The refusal to eliminate armed Hezbollah operatives approaching the border, instead chasing them away; the months-long reluctance to destroy two tents Hezbollah erected on Mount Dov beyond the international border line as a challenge to Israeli sovereignty and a sign of its weakness; along with Israel’s internal weakness displayed in the year before the war – all these strengthened Nasrallah’s belief that Israel was indeed a paper tiger that would immediately collapse once the Radwan Force invaded northern settlements and conquered the Galilee.

The 500 casualties Hezbollah has suffered since deciding to attack Israel on Oct. 8, 2023, and the enormous losses Hamas endured in the Gaza Strip following its terror attacks against Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, began to change the picture, both

within Hezbollah and among the Lebanese public.

Many in Lebanon, even if not among Hezbollah supporters, who witnessed the increasing power of Israeli Air Force strikes in Lebanon and the massive destruction in Gaza, began to express public opposition to the war. This is an unprecedented phenomenon in Lebanon.

The situation took another dramatic turn last week following the pager and radio communication device attack on Hezbollah operatives and senior officials, which took thousands of them out of the fight within seconds. It intensified further with the surprising and, from Nasrallah's perspective, shocking elimination of the Radwan Force leadership in the heart of Dahieh.

Although Nasrallah claimed in his speech responding to these events that they didn't affect the organization's operational capabilities, no one in Lebanon believes him anymore. Hezbollah is perceived as weak, and there's a prevailing understanding that in this conflict, Israel undoubtedly has the upper hand - technologically, militarily, and in terms of intelligence.

The Israeli Air Force bombings in southern Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley over the past two days, which hit hundreds of important Hezbollah assets built over many years, and Israeli awareness efforts directed at Lebanese public opinion, aimed at evacuating civilian populations from villages turned by Hezbollah into weapons depots and launch sites for cruise missiles, rockets, and drones, make it clear to every Lebanese and every member of the Iran-backed alliance that Israel is a real tiger. Everyone now understands that underestimating it was a very costly mistake.

Even in interviews with Lebanese commentators on the country's TV networks, it's explicitly stated: "We thought we could destroy Israel and liberate Palestine. We were gravely mistaken."

Even if Nasrallah publicly maintains that the Lebanese front is linked to the Gaza front and that his organization will continue to fire at Israel as long as there's no ceasefire in the Strip, it seems that, watching the refugee convoys traveling from southern Lebanon to Beirut and the significant casualties his organization suffers daily at Israel's hands, Nasrallah surely regrets now believing his own false propaganda.

The consequences of this mistake are now manifesting in Hezbollah's unprecedented and long-term weakening. Every day that the Israel Defense Forces powerfully strikes Hezbollah's infrastructure and denies it capabilities built over decades to harm Israel brings closer the day when northern residents will return to their homes and enjoy long-term peace.

Alongside the military effort, successful influence and psychological warfare efforts on the Lebanese public, whose trust in Hezbollah has been severely shaken and whose fear of Israel has intensified sevenfold, must continue. This axis - which sears the enemy's consciousness - will also ensure long-term quiet on the northern border.

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Sorry, AOC: Israel's Precision Attack Against Hezbollah Was Humane—and Legal

written by Arsen Ostrovsky | 24.09.2024

This week, in a scene one would expect from a Hollywood thriller, thousands of pagers and walkie talkies exploded across Lebanon and the Middle East, killing, maiming, or severely injuring thousands of Hezbollah terrorists.

Although the attacks were immediately attributed to Israel, the Jewish state has so far not claimed responsibility. In the event that Israel did carry out the operation, it could only be understood as the most audacious and unprecedented counter-terrorism precision attack in military history, and one that was entirely justified and in full accordance with international law.

The attack not only disrupted Hezbollah's terrorist capabilities and infrastructure; it re-established Israeli deterrence and leveled psychological trauma on the entire terror organization, from its leader Hassan Nasrallah, to the most junior of

Hezbollah foot soldiers, who now know that no-one is safe, and every terrorist can be reached at any time.

Lest you be swayed by the false and malicious narratives of those trying to defend Hezbollah or blame the Jewish state, some necessary context is in order.

First, Hezbollah is a Lebanese-based jihadist terrorist organization and a standing army that is funded, supplied by, and serves entirely at the behest of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Like Hamas, Hezbollah *also* has genocidal intentions to annihilate Israel and kill all the Jews, intentions which they have made repeatedly clear and have continuously sought to act on. Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah has said that the entire Middle East will not rest until the “cancerous gland” that is Israel is removed, and on October 8 last year, a day after the Hamas massacre, Hezbollah formally joined the war in the wistful hope that they might help eradicate the Jewish state.

Since then, Hezbollah has fired more than 8,500 rockets at Israel, each an unquestionable war crime, murdering 47 people, including 12 children who were struck while playing football in the Majdal Shams massacre in July. In the meantime, over 80,000 Israelis have also been displaced from their homes in the north of the country, as a result of the ongoing attacks.

By any stretch of the imagination, Israel is fully entitled under international law, including but not limited to Article 51 of the UN Charter, to exercise its right to self-defense.

Some so-called “experts,” like Ken Roth, former head of Human Rights Watch, and New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, have immediately and reflexively rushed to condemn Israel for violating international humanitarian law, including by unlawfully using booby traps. But what does the law actually state?

Generally speaking, under Article 7 of the Amended Protocol II to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the use of booby traps in communication devices are indeed prohibited *in certain situations*. There is, of course, an overriding caveat, which is that pursuant to Article 52 of the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention I, such acts are permissible in circumstances where the objects in question are no longer used for civilian purposes.

In this case, the pagers and hand-held devices, which were distributed specifically to Hezbollah operatives, were being used for the purposes of communicating, planning and conducting operations. As such, they immediately ceased to be considered “civilian objects” and became legitimate military targets.

Accordingly, their destruction constitutes a clear military objective under customary international law (per Art. 52 of the Additional Protocols), and they are a lawful target of attack.

Under the Principle of Distinction, one of the cornerstone principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), parties to an armed conflict must also at all times distinguish between civilians and combatants.

In this case, the operation was also aimed solely at Hezbollah terrorists. Indeed, only Hezbollah operatives were known to be in possession of these devices, which were *not* widely or generally available, and were in fact ordered by Hezbollah and distributed by Hezbollah leadership specifically to circumvent Israeli intelligence.

Under the Laws of War, parties must also abide by the Doctrine of Proportionality, which requires that any anticipated loss of civilian life must not be excessive in comparison to the potential military advantage to be gained from such an attack and or action, as well as taking feasible precautions in planning and conducting attacks to reduce the risk of harm to civilians and other persons and objects protected from being made the object of attack.

In this case, the clear military advantage would be to stop the ongoing Hezbollah rocket fire, allow for the 80,000 displaced Israeli residents to safely and permanently return to their homes, and render a large part of an enemy army unable to fight.

Of the 4,000 reported Hezbollah operatives injured, only a handful of civilians were reportedly harmed. That is an *extraordinary* feat in modern warfare and the textbook definition of a precision and proportionate attack.

Lots of people like to claim Israel has the right to self-defense, and yet the moment the Jewish state lawfully exercises that right in an almost unimaginably targeted way, they are outraged, looking to cast Israel as an aggressor. For the record, 8,500 unprovoked and indiscriminate rocket attacks is what might be called an escalation, not the pinpoint accurate response to stop those rockets.

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Will Hezbollah strike back? It depends

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 24.09.2024

Once the full extent of the damage suffered by Hezbollah becomes clear in the near future, the group's leadership will need to recalculate its approach to the war. The primary factor influencing the organization's conduct will likely be the number of casualties, both among Hezbollah operatives and civilians.

All-out war or strikes? This is how Hezbollah can respond

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 24.09.2024

The recent elimination in Beirut marks a new phase in the conflict between Israel and the terrorist organization. Israel must fully utilize its intelligence tools to anticipate future responses. If an all-out war breaks out, Israel would be better off initiating a preemptive strike.

Time to Strike Nasrallah's Soft Underbelly

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 24.09.2024

Alongside targeting senior Hezbollah figures and infrastructures, Israel should wisely exploit Nasrallah's Shiite community vulnerabilities.

The key implications of Hezbollah's Aziz Unit commander assassination

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 24.09.2024

Israel needs to strike these weapon transfers to limit Hezbollah's ability to benefit from the strategic backing provided by Tehran as much as possible.

Our leaders must rally the public for continuation of war

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 24.09.2024

Our leaders must put aside divisive issues and unite in one cohesive front.

Is War With Lebanon Imminent?

written by Dr. Raphael BenLevi | 24.09.2024

As both sides escalate by the day and as the fighting in Gaza simmers down, many Israelis are growing convinced that full-scale war with Hizballah is unavoidable. Are they right?

Deadly Illusions: Reassessing Israel's Military History in Lebanon

written by Dr. Raphael BenLevi | 24.09.2024

As these lines are being written, the war of attrition on Israel's northern border continues, with the threat of further escalation growing each passing day. Unprecedented numbers of Israeli forces are stationed along the border and the military rhetoric talks about "striking Hezbollah," there is a widespread understanding that Israel must deliver a significant blow to Hezbollah in order to restore Israeli deterrence in the region and to enable the residents of the north who have been evacuated from their homes to return and live in security.

Yet when it comes to the practical question of what next steps Israel must take in order to reestablish its security in the north, our national conversation finds itself stuck in an awkward silence. This is because the very question automatically conjures up the scars of Israel's past experiences in Lebanon and the supposed universally acknowledged lessons learnt from Israel's many years of military presence leading up to the withdrawal in the year 2000. It is therefore vital that in our current moment, where it seems that the north could erupt into full scale war at any time, we re-examine some of these supposed 'lessons learned' from the

IDF's past actions in Lebanon, and be prepared for the rapidly approaching moment of decision that Israel may face again soon.

Myth 1: The South Lebanon Security Zone (1985-2000) was militarily ineffective

Following the First Lebanon War, Israel withdrew from Beirut and its surroundings, and the IDF, along with the South Lebanon Army (or the SLA, a mainly Christian Lebanese militia backed by Israel), repositioned itself along a 3 to 12 km wide zone inside Lebanon along Israel's northern border, known as the "security zone." The goal was to create a buffer zone between the Hezbollah terrorists and the residents of Northern Galilee, while continuing to fight them within Lebanon, rather than within Israel's borders.[1]

The IDF's presence in the zone was highly successful in preventing terrorist infiltrations into Israeli territory. However, it was less successful in preventing rocket fire from Lebanese territory north of the zone. Over these 15 years, Hezbollah fired about 4,000 rockets aimed at Israeli towns, killing seven civilians and greatly disrupting the lives of the residents of the north.[2] By the eve of the withdrawal in the year 2000, Hezbollah, with Iranian and Syrian assistance, had accumulated around 7,000 rockets, whose range covered most of Israel's north.[3]

In response to Hezbollah's attacks, the IDF conducted numerous small ground raids and aerial bombings, consistently targeting the terrorist group's forces and capabilities. Two major operations were conducted in 1992 and 1996, during which Israel extensively bombarded both Hezbollah forces and Lebanese civilian infrastructure. During the 15 years of the zone's existence, 256 IDF soldiers were killed, an average of about 17 per year.[4] However, Hezbollah's behavior was also influenced by the nature of Israeli actions: when Israel acted decisively against Hezbollah, as in the early years, Israel enjoyed periods of relative calm. But when Israel, starting in 1992 under Rabin's government, adopted a more accommodating policy with the aim of promoting peace initiatives with Syria and Lebanon, Hezbollah grew in confidence, and its attacks on IDF forces increased.

Throughout this entire period, there was a broad consensus among Israel's leadership, as well as within the public, that it had no choice but to maintain a presence in Southern Lebanon in order to protect the northern region of the

country. Despite the difficulties involved, the zone was perceived as a necessary price for ensuring the security of the Galilee against terrorist invasion.

Accordingly, when the idea of withdrawing from the zone emerged in the late 1990s, it was strongly opposed by the IDF, led by then-Chief of Staff Shaul Mofaz, as well as by the broader security establishment. They maintained that the zone had proven itself to be operationally effective, and therefore necessary to continue for the foreseeable future.[5] In their view, the risks of withdrawal clearly outweighed the costs of continued presence in the zone. The IDF continued its opposition to any withdrawal even after two fatal incidents in 1997: the infamous “Helicopter Disaster,” in which 73 soldiers were killed in an accidental collision of two helicopters en route to Lebanon, and the “Ansariya Ambush,” which killed 12 soldiers from the Israeli Navy’s special forces operation unit, Shayetet 13.[6]

In 1999, the IDF submitted a report arguing that if it withdrew from Lebanon without first dismantling Hezbollah, the result would be disastrous.[7] The IDF claimed that Hezbollah would take over the entire area right up to Israel’s border, thereby increasing its capability to directly threaten Israel’s north; that withdrawal would be interpreted by Israel’s enemies as a sign of Israeli weakness and would damage Israeli deterrence across the entire region; and that it would be understood as an Israeli submission to terrorism, thus encouraging Palestinian and other terrorist organizations to reign fire on Israel’s civilians.[8]

Myth 2: Withdrawal from Southern Lebanon was Politically Inevitable

In 1998, even Ehud Barak himself was still arguing that a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon “would endanger Israel’s security, endanger the security of the residents of the north, and strengthen Hezbollah. To initiate this would demonstrate public irresponsibility.”[9] When, as Prime Minister in 2000, he eventually decided to push through a unilateral withdrawal, this constituted an abandonment of all the accumulated wisdom of Israeli strategic doctrine up to that point. The drastic decision contradicted the hitherto unchallenged strategic principle of maintaining an offensive posture and seeking to shift battlelines into enemy territory. So, what explains this radical shift in policy?

When Barak assumed the role of Prime Minister in 1999, he brought with him a vision of effecting a profound change in the regional order. Immediately upon

starting his term as premier, he declared his intention to secure a peace agreement with Syria, sign a comprehensive and final agreement with the Palestinians, and to withdraw the IDF from Southern Lebanon, all within one year.[10] His original intention was to withdraw from Southern Lebanon as part of the peace agreement with Syria. However, after his attempts to offer far-reaching concessions to Syria to broker a peace deal failed to yield tangible results, he pivoted and ordered the complete and unilateral withdrawal from the security zone.

He was also eager to carry out the withdrawal as soon as possible, with the aim of completing the move before the Camp David Summit in July 2000, where he hoped to reach a permanent agreement with the Palestinians.[11] To the public, he claimed that withdrawal would improve the daily security of residents of the north, and that any attack on Israel from Lebanese territory would be met with massive retaliation.[12]

Another contributing factor to the withdrawal decision emerged in 1997 with the formation of the “Four Mothers” protest movement. This movement, driven by bereaved mothers, initiated a public campaign advocating for a full withdrawal from the security zone, emphasizing the human cost and emotional toll of Israel’s continued presence in Lebanon. While highlighting these significant concerns, the movement did not address the strategic concerns that necessitated the IDF’s control of the area. Their push for withdrawal did not offer solutions for preventing terrorist attacks against border communities or for salvaging Israeli deterrence.[13] However, the campaign did receive substantial and sympathetic coverage from major Israeli media outlets,[14] who were deeply committed to the idea that the Oslo accords would lead to “peace in our time.”

The decision to pursue a unilateral withdrawal was not inevitable, but rather the product of the initiative of Ehud Barak, acting within a worldview according to which comprehensive peace deals with Syria and Yasser Arafat were just a matter of offering the right concessions, following which a new era of peace would be ushered in. The Israeli media aided in legitimizing this questionable move by focusing heavily on the costs associated with remaining, while downplaying the costs of leaving.

Myth 3: The General Public and Even the Likud Supported a Unilateral Withdrawal

By the end of the 1990's, voices in the Likud, including Netanyahu, supported the idea of withdrawing from Lebanon within the framework of a political agreement that would see Hezbollah disarmed. In 1998, then-Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai proposed an Israeli withdrawal conditioned upon on the prior disarmament of Hezbollah and ensuring security guarantees for the South Lebanon Army members. However, this proposal did not progress because Syria, which effectively controlled Lebanon at the time and whose consent was essential for any Hezbollah disarmament initiative, rejected it outright.[15]

There is an immense difference between a withdrawal within the framework of an agreement that would lead to Hezbollah's disarmament and a unilateral withdrawal that would abandon the territory to Hezbollah and lead to its inevitable empowerment. For this reason, even the leader of the far-left Meretz party, Minister Yossi Sarid, opposed the unilateral withdrawal on the eve of its execution.[16] Ahead of the May 1999 elections which brought Ehud Barak to power, a Gallup poll found that 61% of the public opposed a withdrawal without an agreement with Lebanon and Syria, while only 31% supported a unilateral withdrawal.[17]

Another factor that contributed to the decision to withdraw was the assessment among some political leaders that Israeli society was particularly sensitive to the loss of soldiers and would therefore be unwilling to bear the costs of a war of attrition. However, this was a misreading of public sentiment, perhaps even a projection of those leaders' own feelings onto the public. Israeli society has demonstrated great national resilience and a willingness to endure significant losses, provided that the purpose of the war was clear and the leadership was committed to a decisive victory over the enemy, even if it would take an extensive period of time.[18] This public patience and fortitude was evident in Operation Defensive Shield and the subsequent counter-terrorism activities in Judea and Samaria in the following years. A similar sentiment was also seen at the onset of the Second Lebanon War.[19] Anyone observing the public atmosphere in Israel today, amidst the threat of Hamas, can clearly see the resilience of Israeli society, and its willingness to accept losses when the goal is the pursuit of decisive victory over its enemies.

Myth 4: The Withdrawal Led to a Period of Quiet for Israel's North

The first years following Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon did indeed see a

decrease in rocket attacks on Israel, with the exception of the areas of Mount Dov and the Shebaa Farms.[20] During this period, however, Hezbollah fortified its presence along the entire Israel-Lebanon border, constructing numerous bunkers for the purpose of executing mortar attacks. Hezbollah persisted in assaulting IDF patrols on Israel's side of the border, to which Israel responded with targeted and restrained actions. The first significant incident occurred in October 2000, when Hezbollah killed and captured three Israeli soldiers, which eventually led Israel to release 400 prisoners in exchange for their bodies in 2004.[21]

After Barak's assurances, Israel was expected to respond vigorously to any post-withdrawal aggression. However, the withdrawal had, as predicted, emboldened Palestinian terrorist organizations, plunging Israel into a series of deadly terror attacks, known as the Second Intifada. The turmoil of this new wave of terror pre-occupied Israel, leaving it unprepared for a rapid response and unwilling to simultaneously engage in forceful retaliation against Hezbollah.[22] After Hezbollah's initial attack Israel's restrained reaction set a new precedent. Its hesitant responses, coupled with its willingness to exchange terrorists for hostages, further strengthened the position of Hezbollah, who went on to attempt additional hostage-taking operations that eventually erupted into the Second Lebanon War in 2006.

Following the withdrawal, Hezbollah additionally focused on expanding its missile arsenal and extending its range. By the outbreak of the Second Lebanon War, Hezbollah had amassed approximately 16,000 rockets and Katyushas, with some capable of reaching as far as Hadera.[23] As early as 2003, high-ranking security officials were raising alarms about Hezbollah's evolution from a tactical concern to a significant strategic threat, with the capability to unleash a barrage of rockets across the entire northern region of Israel and to target strategic Israeli infrastructure.

Myth 5: Israel's Military Responses after the Withdrawal Received Greater International Legitimacy

Between the withdrawal and the Second Lebanon War, Israel's security establishment came to believe that the threat of conventional armies invading Israel had all but ceased to exist, particularly after the disbanding of the Iraqi army in 2003. A new doctrine was being formed, which focused on creating a "smaller and smarter army," focused on advanced technologies, virtual command

and control systems, and a strong reliance on the Air Force and its use of precision-guided missiles, while de-emphasizing the need for a large, maneuverable ground force.[24]

As the Second Lebanon War unfolded and the political leadership determined that a substantial response was required, the favored approach was to conduct air strikes targeting civilian infrastructure in Lebanon as well as Hezbollah positions. However, these air strikes proved ineffective against the small, dispersed rocket bunkers in southern Lebanon, primarily because their locations were unknown. The concession of territorial control had also brought a significant loss in essential elements of intelligence gathering.

At the outset of the Second Lebanon War, Israel initially received considerable international support. However, this support waned as it became evident that Israel's military efforts were mainly causing damage to Lebanese infrastructure, rather than effectively targeting Hezbollah — a goal that necessitated ground operations. In Washington, there were high expectations that Israel would critically weaken Hezbollah, a goal which aligned with the US' broader objectives in its War on Terror. However, the approach Israel pursued led to great disappointment in Washington. Instead of a decisive ground campaign to dismantle terrorist infrastructure — similar to Operation Defensive Shield in Judea and Samaria — Israel continued to prioritize air strikes. The element of ground invasion that eventually occurred was belated, ineffective and lacked clearly defined objectives.[25]

The Second Lebanon War ended with several strategic shortcomings for Israel. The most notable was its failure to effectively neutralize Hezbollah's rocket fire, which persisted until the ceasefire and was touted as a victory by Hezbollah. Israel also missed a vital opportunity to substantially dismantle Hezbollah's military infrastructure in Southern Lebanon. This oversight not only weakened Israel's military impact, but also spoiled the opportunity to bolster its reputation as a vital security ally of the United States. As the conflict progressed, international support dwindled, creating a new status quo, in which any future Israeli actions would come at a substantial diplomatic cost. Israel's withdrawal, rather than granting it greater international legitimacy to respond to attacks, instead resulted in raising the diplomatic price of future military action in that same territory.

Myth 6: International Institutions are Key to Any Effective Solution

According to the UN Charter, decisions made by the Security Council are binding. However, in practice, these decisions are only implemented in circumstances where there are state actors who are willing to enforce them. Already in 1978, the Security Council decided (per Resolution 425) that Israel must make a full withdrawal from Lebanon, and that the UNIFIL force should assume security responsibility in the border area. This meant that for the entire 15 years of the security zone, Israel acted contrary to the Security Council's decision.[26] Israel's justification, it argued, was that in the absence of a peace agreement with Lebanon and in light of the threat to its territory, its military presence there was necessary, as UNIFIL was incapable of fulfilling its mission.[27]

In 2004, the Security Council also decided (Resolution 1559) that all militias in Lebanon must be disarmed.[28] This decision has not been implemented to this day, because it requires the Lebanese government to disband Hezbollah, which it does not have the power to do. In 2006, at the end of the Second Lebanon War, Security Council Resolution 1701 called for an immediate ceasefire, reiterating the call to disarm all militias, again planning to ensure peace through the deployment of UNIFIL forces south of the Litani River. This time, Israel decided to rely on the UNIFIL forces, who are supposed to prevent Hezbollah from accumulating weapons. In practice, the UNIFIL force has failed miserably in its mission, being itself under threat by Hezbollah not to act and thereby turning a blind eye to arms smuggling.[29] Foreign soldiers, it turns out, are not willing to risk their lives for the sake of Israel's security — nor for the sake of the implementation of Security Council resolutions.

Myth 7: Every Threat Has a Diplomatic Solution

Will we forever “live by our sword?” Unfortunately, it seems that the answer is yes. We must abandon the ill-conceived dream that we are on the precipice of a fundamental change in reality, or that concessions will diminish our enemies' desire to destroy us. It is precisely our willingness to accept the truth of the matter that will bring about improved security, put our enemies on defense, and allow for a thriving and prosperous national existence.

Since the Second Lebanon War, Hezbollah has refrained from actions that would inevitably trigger a full-scale escalation, but this relative calm is misleading. Iran

and Hezbollah share the ultimate objective of dismantling the State of Israel, and are gearing up for a direct confrontation. In 2006, Hezbollah possessed 16,000 rockets, with their farthest range reaching Hadera; in 2023, they have a stockpile of 150,000 missiles and rockets, with tens of thousands capable of striking central Israel. Their arsenal has expanded to include attack drones, advanced anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles, and a commando unit equipped to conquer areas in the Galilee.[30] In the broader context, the past two decades have been utilized by Iran to create a land corridor under its dominance, extending from Iraq and Syria to Lebanon and the Mediterranean.

Prior to the withdrawal from Lebanon, the public debate surrounding withdrawal centered on the price of maintaining our presence there. Today, it's crucial to acknowledge the price of our absence from this territory. In the aftermath of the Six-Day War, it became clear that our northeastern border remained indefensible as long as the Golan Heights were under Syrian control. Similarly, we must now recognize that our northern border remains fully indefensible so long as whoever controls Southern Lebanon harbors hostility towards Israel. From a geographic standpoint, the Litani River represents the only logical boundary between Israel and Lebanon, not the arbitrary line that was set in the middle of a mountain range by the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916.

Looking back, it's clear that when Israel was active in Lebanon, Hezbollah posed only a tactical threat, primarily affecting the immediate northern Galilee; whereas following Israel's withdrawal, Hezbollah has evolved into a strategic threat to the entire State of Israel. This has allowed it to function as a tool of deterrence for Iran, thereby raising the price of any potential Israeli actions against Iran's nuclear capabilities or its regional military presence.

In 2000 we left the security buffer zone in Lebanon's territory; in 2023 we have effectively created a security buffer zone within Israeli territory, having evacuated some 60,000 Israelis from their homes along the border because we couldn't guarantee their safety there. This war must not end without Israel fully dismantling the threat from Hezbollah. A range of strategic options must be considered, beginning with the offer of a diplomatic solution by insisting on the implementation of UNSC 1701 — meaning Hezbollah's disbandment — through air operations, and potentially a ground occupation of Southern Lebanon. A complete analysis of the long-term alternatives is beyond the scope of this article, but what should be clear is that after dealing with the immediate threat from

Hezbollah, decision-makers must not dismiss the possibility that Israel may need to control territory in Southern Lebanon for the foreseeable future in order to prevent its re-emergence as a threat to Israel. From our experiences with withdrawals in Gaza and Lebanon, one lesson stands out: shying away from conflict by pursuing territorial withdrawal inevitably results in the emergence of greater and more severe threats.

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