Time to Strike Nasrallah's Soft Underbelly

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 28.07.2024

In Israeli society, there appears to be an almost unanimous consensus that a war with Hezbollah is an inevitable necessity, with opinions differing only on the question of its timing. Israel has a long score to settle with the organization, and a personal one with its secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah.

The current war in the northern front is an important reminder that Israel, within the framework of its updated security doctrine, cannot accept the existence of an Iranian-backed terror conglomerate operating on its border.

It must therefore carry out a thoughtful offensive against Hezbollah, including effective psychological warfare aimed at undermining the organization's firm standing within the Shiite community in Lebanon. This can give Israel a significant advantage in the strategic struggle against Hezbollah. Doing so will better prepare Israel for a full-scale war and enable it to strike the organization more effectively.

The deadly attack in Majdal Shams has stirred public expectation in Israel for a more decisive response, one significantly stronger than what the IDF has employed so far. The rules of engagement adopted by Israel and Hezbollah in the current conflict have limited the intensity of military operations, even if not their depth, with neither side (Iran included) seemingly interested in escalating to a full-scale war.

However, Hezbollah's unbridled use of the various weaponry at its disposal as evidenced in the indiscriminate attack in Majdal Shams may lead to such an outcome. Contrary to the interpretation proposed by some commentators, Hezbollah's deadly strike cannot be understood as "operational accident." A more plausible explanation is that the bloody attack was intentional and should be viewed as part of Hezbollah's effort to wear Israel down and prevent it from crushing Hamas in Gaza.

It seems that an appropriate response to the massacre in Majdal Shams should include a broad attack on Hezbollah's strategic infrastructure in southern

Lebanon and the targeting of senior commanders. Hezbollah is expected to tolerate this within the informal rules of the current conflict.

At the same time, Israel must act with greater sophistication in its fight against Hezbollah by emphasizing to the Lebanese public the cost Lebanon will pay if the war continues in its current form. Israel's pressure should focus on the Shiite community, Hezbollah's social base, making the community realize that the cumulative damage of a prolonged war would set Lebanon back decades.

Hezbollah is aware of this vulnerability and accordingly allocates substantial resources to influence campaigns targeting the Lebanese in general and the Shiite community in particular, using social media. The goal is clear: to persuade the Lebanese that Hezbollah's (and Lebanon's) participation in the current war is beneficial, despite the fact that this war does not concern Lebanon at all, having been dragged into it solely due to Nasrallah's desire to assist Hamas.

One effective tool Israel holds in this regard is IDF's spokesperson for the Arabic media, Avichay Adraee. Israel can and should use him to counter Hezbollah's awareness efforts directed at the Israeli and Lebanese populations. Adraee can expose Nasrallah's lies in his various war speeches, reveal sensitive intelligence that would embarrass Hezbollah, and present to the Lebanese public the enormous danger they face when they serve as a human shield for the organization's infrastructure and personnel.

An important message Adraee can broadcast for the residents of Beirut is the heavy toll taken on the residents of southern Lebanon. The destruction of villages there can serve as a warning to those sitting in cafes and clubs in Beirut. Indeed, Adraee is taken quite seriously in Lebanon. He has been blocked on social media by Nasrallah's son, Jawad, himself a senior Hezbollah figure. Not only is this a mark of honor for Adraee, but evidence that his messages resonate with the Lebanese people and touch a sensitive nerve in the terrorist organization.

Despite its great potential, psychological warfare has not yet been sufficiently utilized by the IDF. In addition to targeting senior figures and infrastructure, it is time for Israel to more broadly use this tool in its fight against Hezbollah.