HIZBALLAH'S TERROR ARMY: HOW TO PREVENT A THIRD LEBANON WAR

AN ASSESSMENT BY THE HIGH LEVEL MILITARY GROUP

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FOREWORD

Terrorist Wars, Israel, and the Security of the West

For the longest period of time, when talking about war, we were talking about the Western way of war as essentially described by Clausewitz: the goals and policy of a state, an army fighting to achieve political goals, and a population supporting the war effort against the enemy. But this classical view of warfare is gone: it now belongs to the past. Unfortunately, the strategic community has not yet found an accepted alternative vision. The reasons are obvious: it is not only states who have found new ways of waging war, such as Russia in Ukraine, but non-state actors have grown exponentially in relevance, and can today conduct military operations against regular armies, as the Islamic State does in Syria. Concepts such as hybrid warfare, asymmetric warfare, 4th generation warfare and a few others have all tried to capture the new forms of current wars, from Chechnya to Gaza, from Afghanistan to Syria.

The High Level Military Group was born in 2015 to assess the conduct of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) during Operation Protective Edge in Gaza. Despite the many specific conditions of that limited conflict, multiple relevant factors were present which could affect future operations of other Western armies: How irregular militias might operate when they are religiously motivated; how the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) is not respected by terrorist adversaries, particularly in regard to the separation of combatants from civilians and how our forces should be prepared to deal with the use of human shields and enemies that protect themselves by operating from civilian infrastructure. Similarly, the conflict illustrated how to fight not only in heavily populated areas, but on a multi-dimensional battlefield, horizontal, vertical and underground; and how to fight both in cyberspace and through social networks.

In order to understand how the IDF behaved and performed during the war in Gaza, the HLMG developed a highly sophisticated methodology, setting appropriate accurate standards resulting in our ability to compare the IDF with other military campaigns conducted by other armies over time. Thus, a second volume produced a comparison of national cases, ranging from Colombia and the FARC to Australian forces in the battle for Fallujah, to mention only two of the cases investigated.

Even so, the real nature of modern conflicts was still relatively elusive. An additional 'Home Front' component devoted some time to studying the stabbing and car ramming terrorist campaign in Israel to not only better understand an emerging severe new problem, as we now know all too well in other Western countries, but also to better integrate in the developing vision of modern warfare this low but persistent level of violence and attacks in our own countries. There was and remains a direct connection between what is happening in Raqqa and the litany of terrorist attacks in Europe. These attacks are warfare by other means.

Perhaps there is no better case to explore the transformation of warfare than the new subject of study for the HLMG, Hizballah. The Lebanese group created by Iran is the epitome of what a terror army can be. Hizballah is a sort of state inside the Lebanese state, accumulating more rockets than many European armies. But it is an irregular army since terrorist tactics are commonly employed, and terror as a strategic weapon is used without restraint. Hizballah has the political clout of a government, the firepower of an army and the strategic approach of a terrorist organization. That´s why the group presents such a threat to the Lebanese State, other populations in the region (as seen in Syria), and to Israel. Indeed, its threat extends to the Western world in general, given the proven global reach of Hizballah.

The last war between Hizballah and Israel in 2006 was a severe blow to the terrorist group. But since then, Hizballah has been able to recover militarily, amassing a huge stockpile of weapons, developing and fielding new

and more precise and lethal systems, and gaining combat experience fighting for Iran and Bashar al Assad in Syria. There is nothing predetermined in strategic life, but the new configuration of forces in the region could lead to a new war that, because of the regional dynamics and new security imperatives, will be much more violent and destructive than the previous ones. The HLMG thus presents this new report not only in seeking to understand how such a war may erupt and be conducted, but to urge Western leaders that such a conflict can and should be prevented by implementing the right policies vis-a-vis Hizballah and Lebanon. As in previous reports, the Friends of Israel Initiative supported the effort by the HLMG, without interfering in the group's work, lessons drawn or recommendations made, which are based purely on the accumulated military and strategic experience of its members.

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Israel's Northern Border and the Region

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. THE HIGH LEVEL MILITARY GROUP

High Level Military Group Purpose and Report Parameters

1. The High Level Military Group (HLMG) was formed in early 2015 with a mandate to examine Israel's conduct of military and domestic security operations in the context of a larger project seeking to address the implications for Western warfare of fighting enemies who fight with a hybrid concept combining terrorism with more traditional military methods. Such adversaries show a total disregard for the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC), while exploiting our own nations' adherence to LOAC and our respect for the preservation of life for their gain. Concerned by the propagation of mis-applied legal concepts in conjunction with narratives that are geared towards political outcomes in debates about the Middle East and Western military action, our aim is to make an informed contribution to these debates on the basis of our collective professional experience.
2. This report forms an assessment of the threat Israel faces from Hizballah and developments in Lebanon and Syria, based on an extensive fact-finding visit to Israel of the High Level Military Group (HLMG) and several follow up visits by individual HLMG delegates and staff. Israel's government and military, from the Prime Minister through to junior ranks, offered a level of cooperation in seeking to illuminate their concerns that is highly unusual in such a context, offering open and explicit considerations for discussion. The views contained in this report are our own however, based on our fact-finding and professional experience.

2. THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HIZBALLAH IN LEBANON

Hizballah's Origins and Context: An Iranian Creation that sits as the Crown Jewel in Iran's Regional Strategy of Jihadi Revolutionary Warfare

3. Hizballah is a creation of Iran that serves as the anchor to the Islamic regime's strategy of Jihadi revolutionary warfare and the principal military and terrorist tool in its religiously motivated animus against the State of Israel. Since the Islamic regime's revolutionary takeover in 1979, Iran has been a non-status-quo power, combining radical Islam with nationalism into a potent ideologically driven imperialism which seeks to upend the status -quo in the Middle East. Its Islamic ideology is inherently expansionist, and Tehran has pursued its imperialistic ambitions with unconventional means of warfare that have proven exceptionally suitable for the current era of Middle East instability. The primary method of Iranian aggression is the construction of politico-military proxies and terrorist groups within the borders of regional neighbors. This is coupled to the development of ballistic missile technology, where decades of investment have led to a sophisticated arsenal. Hizballah is a principal pillar in Tehran's strategy of regional domination and the leading manifestation of the model and exporter of its application, is thus not only Iran's proxy in Lebanon, but the crown jewel in Tehran's wider regional approach, especially in Syria where it actively participated in the war on behalf of Iran to great effect, significantly enhancing its warfighting abilities in the process.
4. In this context, Israel is foremost on the receiving end of Tehran's murderous enmity. Iran has no border with Israel, no geopolitical dispute, no area of natural competition or ancient rivalries. Yet the Shia Islamists who rule Iran see the destruction of Jewish statehood as an urgent ideological imperative that they seek to bring about, a drive which finds sustained expression in Iran's politics and export of violence, including in the actions of Hizballah.

The History of Conflict between Israel and Lebanon

5. Having conducted a number of limited military and special forces operations in Lebanon in response to Palestinian terrorist attacks in the 1970s, the increasing intensity of attacks

prompted the Israeli Defense Force to launch a concerted ground operation inside Lebanon in June of 1982. The First Lebanon War ended in a tense military standoff between Iran's newly founded Hizballah, IDF forces and the IDF's local ally, the South Lebanon Army (SLA). Hizballah continually attacked Israeli forces, with the IDF suffering military casualties at an approximate rate of twenty-five soldiers annually. Following failed peace talks between Israel and Syria over the future of Lebanon, Israel unilaterally withdrew military forces from Lebanon in the expectation that, on the basis UN Security Council Resolution 425 and the Taif Agreem5. ent, the Lebanese government would move to exercise its sovereignty in southern Lebanon, disarming Hizballah in the process. Instead, Hizballah staged a de facto takeover of southern Lebanon, rejecting all initiatives to disarm it –while strengthening its military capabilities. It initiated a large number of offensive operations, adopting a strategy of guerrilla warfare largely centered on attempts to abduct Israeli soldiers, coupled with increased support to Palestinian terrorist organizations. Simultaneously, it accelerated its efforts to establish significant defensive ground infrastructure in southern Lebanon.

6. On July 12th, 2006, Hizballah fired rockets at Israeli border towns as a diversion for an anti-tank missile attack on two armored Humvees patrolling along the Israeli side of the border with Lebanon, sparking the Second Lebanon War. Israel responded with significant force, striking Hizballah military targets from the air, and following up with ground operations within southern Lebanon in an effort to thwart Hizballah's rocket launches. The conflict ended on August 14th, 2006, following the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 which called for a full cessation of hostilities, the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Lebanon, and the immediate deployment of both the Lebanese army and UNIFIL soldiers throughout the south of the country. It further called for the long-term disarmament of armed groups in Lebanon that were not formally part of the Lebanese army – an implicit reference to Hizballah. While such disarmament again did not occur, the deterrent effect of Israeli action resulted in a reduction of kinetic events along the Israeli-Lebanese border, amounting to a more pronounced period of calm than at any time since the 1970s. Hizballah's leader Hassan Nasrallah was forced to publicly concede that had he known the abduction operation would have resulted in such intense conflict and destruction, he would have refrained from authorizing it.

7. Hizballah's deep involvement in Syria has given the organization extensive new operational experience in the craft of warfare, yet it also inflicted a legitimacy deficit – Lebanon's population is increasingly asking why the ostensible defender of the Lebanese people from the eternal threat of the Jewish presence in the Middle East is slaughtering Arab civilians in Syria. Israeli policymakers posit this legitimacy deficit as part of the root of Hizballah's rising antagonism, and it renewed focus on menacing their country. Simultaneously, in this new reality, they consider the absence of both established red lines and 'rules' of conflict management in the post-Arab Spring Middle East as a grave factor in considering whether deterrence can hold without asserting an overwhelming display of force in response to expected Hizballah provocations

8. Since the end of the Second Lebanon War, Hizballah has renewed its assault on Israel under similar pretexts it has long propagated, citing three territorial disputes (which are a long-standing feature of its propaganda against Israel) as the ostensible cause of its enmity. The Shebaa Farms in the northern part of the Golan Heights has never been a formal part of Lebanese territory, but Hizballah continues to claim this area as part of Lebanon. Similarly, the area commonly known as the "seven villages" falls into territory which is today on Israel's terrain based on boundaries dating as far back as 1923. Finally, conflicting Israeli and Lebanese maritime border claims were unresolved when UN officials demarcated the land border, but could easily be resolved through appropriate diplomatic mechanisms. Taken together, these pretexts reveal little more than Hizballah's implacable opposition to Israel's existence, given the minor and easily resolvable issues they present upon closer examination.

3. HIZBALLAH

9. Hizballah is a religiously motivated hybrid terrorist organization with an ideological allegiance to Iran's Supreme Leader, utilizing a mixture of terrorist,

traditional military and political imperatives to dominate Lebanese politics by force. It serves as Iran's Arab proxy in its role as the foundational pillar of Iran's strategy of revolutionary warfare, and spreads its modus operandi to other Iranian affiliates, as well as engaging in a wide variety of activity, from politics to international organized crime to support its ideological goals. Hizballah blends this overriding Iranian affiliation with its identities as a pan-Shia Islamic movement and its ostensible specifically Lebanese nature. Bringing about the destruction of the State of Israel is not just a Hizballah objective, but an intrinsic part of its organizational personality, through an Islamic lens, through an Iranian geo-strategic lens, and through a self-justifying Lebanese lens.

Hizballah's Military Capabilities

10. While Hizballah is described as a terrorist organization on account of the ethos and tactics it employs, as well as on account of its significant international network of proven capability for terrorist acts abroad, its core operational structure, capabilities and training are more akin to a conventional military force, equipped to, and in many cases exceeding, the level of the armed forces of many states. It is widely considered to be the most powerful non-state armed actor in the world. Its participation and experience gained in the Syrian civil war has meant a further manifold improvement in the capabilities, size of force and tactical skill it is able to bring to bear on the battlefield. Today, it is a highly robust organization with a clear chain of command – and the infrastructure to protect and maintain its high command, which oversees a force of around 25,000 fighters, with around 5,000 of them having completed advanced training in Iran. In addition, at least 20,000 fighters are organized in reserve units.

11. Hizballah's main fire power is based on a huge arsenal of rockets and missiles. Although Hizballah does not have a conventional air force nor navy, it does have advanced capabilities both in carrying out aerial warfare campaigns using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), and for conducting warfare against naval assets. Hizballah's ground forces are equipped with AK-47 assault rifles, night vision goggles, and advanced anti-tank weapons. Its combatants are highly skilled in deploying explosives and anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM). The combat experience acquired in Syria and the vast increase in numbers also give Hizballah an ability to maneuver and carry out relatively large-scale ground attacks at the scale of company or battalion level. Its forces have also benefitted from tactical improvements and a new armored support unit consisting of modern tanks and Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs). It also now possesses hundreds of UAVs, with surveillance and in some cases munitions capabilities, as well as advanced air defense systems and significant capabilities for naval warfare based on coast-to-sea cruise missiles.

12. Yet the most significant upgrade in Hizballah's military capabilities lies in its missile and rocket launching capabilities. These have increased tenfold since the 2006 war, and present a threat few countries, much less sub-state organizations, on the globe can mount. Israeli intelligence estimates put the number of projectiles in Hizballah's possession today at well over 100,000. The majority of these are short-range rockets, but thousands have a much larger range, up to 250 km and more. Thus, not only has the sheer numeric scale of the threat increased exponentially, but the lethality is greatly increased on account of larger payloads, range and higher targeting accuracy. Hizballah also mounts a greatly expanded intelligence effort. It has numerous intelligence-gathering units focused on Israel, generating an extensive bank of targets, including many vital and sensitive Israeli infrastructure facilities.

13. As Hizballah's involvement in Syria deepened, so supply lines between Iran and Hizballah became even more tightly integrated. In this context, developments first aired in public in June 2017 that indicate that Iran has facilitated the establishment of a minimum of two weapons manufacturing sites in Lebanon, with additional activity of a similar nature likely taking place in Yemen. Such advances amount to a gravely serious change in the military capabilities that Hizballah is able to generate, and have the potential to significantly affect the strategic balance in the region by enabling Hizballah to produce more precise long range missiles without risking their detection in transfer.

Hizballah's Strategic Concept

14. Hizballah's basic strategic concept consists of a tripartite interplay between terrorism, traditional military capabilities and political activity, governed by its religious ideology and the objectives generated therefrom. Hizballah has developed a distinct Jihadi character of its own, mirroring the Sunni terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda in justifying its engagement in military action that is unrestricted by rules, laws or morality in terms of identifying its enemies as 'infidels' and fighting in the cause of Allah. As such, it fights among civilians and under their cover and targets its adversaries' civilians with impunity, often as an explicitly calculated method of gaining strategic advantage.

15. Hizballah has transformed almost every Shiite village in the country's south into a military asset. This is an elaborate, multi-year effort requiring significant investment. Israeli officials estimate that approximately 10 percent of the population of each village are now Hizballah combatants, while the majority of houses play host to various forms of military equipment. Below these villages and urban areas, Hizballah has constructed an extensive array of tunnel systems, enabling combatants to maneuver within confined spaces, mobilize equipment with speed, store heavy weaponry and engage in ambushes, abductions and retreats into civilian areas.

16. At the same time, Hizballah deliberately targets Israeli civilians as an explicit tactical imperative. It will seek to inflict maximum damage on Israel's civilian population when deploying its vast arsenal of rockets and missiles, in the hope of weakening Israel's resolve, and will target specific civilian and critical national infrastructure to gain tactical advantage.

17. A central development in Hizballah's strategic concept today is to take the battle onto Israeli soil in case of conflict. The goal of such operations would be to occupy a vital area in Israel and hold it for as long as possible, with the aim of demonstrating Hizballah's anti-Israeli credentials to the Arab world, and using kidnapped soldiers and civilians as leverage in diplomatic negotiations.

18. Hizballah will also likely seek to capitalize on its improved naval and aerial capabilities in attacking Israel. Further, in the event of hostilities, it is highly feasible that Hizballah would be joined by at least parts of other terrorist organizations within Iran's realm of influence, inviting foreign Shia forces to fight in Lebanon as well as the areas it now controls inside Syria, close to the border with Israel.

Hizballah's Consolidation of Lebanese State, Army and Non-Governmental Institutions

19. Historically, Western policy towards Lebanon has been based upon the assumption that Hizballah represents a 'foreign element' within the country, propagating Iranian and Syrian influence and antagonism towards Israel in the face of a more naturally Lebanese camp who wish to make Lebanon a more democratic and liberal country. In reality, while Hizballah permits the President and the Prime Minister to enjoy the trappings of office, it sustains informal power structures which neither co-operate with the formal structures of government, nor are beholden to them. Similarly, Hizballah has succeeded in overawing Lebanese state structures that were intended to restrain its behavior following the Second Lebanon War.

20. The HLMG delegation was briefed on intelligence assessments of the extensive military use by Hizballah of sites associated with the Lebanese authorities and the increasingly symbiotic relationship between Hizballah and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Hizballah's de facto control over state security and its immense influence over Lebanese political institutions affords it a decisive role in Lebanon's internal deliberations regarding relations with Israel, making it the only political entity in Lebanon capable of determining whether the border with Israel remains calm or whether violence flares up. Serious concerns over the relationship manifest at the border where Hizballah routinely instructs the LAF on the location of military posts along the border, so as to strengthen its reconnaissance capabilities. Further, intelligence passed to LAF personnel, regarding potential violations of UN resolutions, also routinely finds its way to Hizballah. Israel shared evidence with the HLMG that suggests that at least some military equipment which the LAF receives from international patrons, including the United States, ultimately finds its way into the hands of Hizballah units. Lebanese authorities tend to turn a blind eye to Hizballah operations; for example, Hizballah continues to use Beirut International

airport to transport weapons and contraband, and earlier this year Lebanon's President Michel Aoun made several statements in which he confirmed the extent to which Hizballah is integrated into the defensive forces of Lebanon.

Hizballah Activity in Southern Lebanon

21. UNSC Resolution 1701 requires the establishment of an area free of any armed force or infrastructure other than that of the LAF or UNIFIL between the Blue Line and the Litani river in southern Lebanon. However, HLMG fact-finding revealed a vast pattern of activity by Hizballah in southern Lebanon in violation of these requirements, raising serious questions over the LAF and UNIFIL's effectiveness. It is abundantly evident that Hizballah is operating extensively in areas south of the Litani (as well as areas north of the Litani) where its illicit military activities range from command and control functions to weapons and munitions storage and reconnaissance.

Hizballah's Strategic Outlook in Case of Conflict

22. HLMG briefings also reflected an assessment that Hizballah doesn't want a conflict to break out at present, given it is still seeking to consolidate its gains in Syria and continue preparations in Lebanon. However, its actions and propaganda suggest that it considers its ability to fight a war with Israel as a given, and has grown ever more confident on account of its increased capabilities, as reflected in its strategic concept. The timing of such a conflict is likely to be determined by miscalculation as much as decision making in Iran and Lebanon.

4. ISRAEL

Israel's Ethos

23. The State of Israel is a young democracy that has had to contend with attempts at its annihilation since even before declaring statehood. In the face of these constant threats, it has built a liberal democracy with some of the most vibrant political and social debates anywhere, as well as an economic powerhouse. Israel does not fight because it chooses to, has no expansionist ambitions in the Middle East, and an overwhelming Israeli consensus exists that seeks peace with the Palestinians and surrounding Arab nations, as well as with the wider Islamic world.

24. Israel's ethos and military is built on the notion of the preservation of life. It seeks to de-escalate its conflicts, take technical measures that lower the human cost of defending its territory, and adheres to the highest standards of international law and particularly the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC). Often its measures in seeking to prevent loss of life exceed the requirements of the LOAC. Its civilian government and judiciary are accountable as the arbiters of its policies and laws, and the country has one of the most robust political and strategic debates of any democracy.

Israel's Military Capabilities

25. The defense requirements of living under constant threat, since before gaining independence, coupled with the close defense relationship Israel enjoys with the United States, general conscription, highly developed doctrines, command and control and training, as well as some of the best intelligence capabilities in the world, means that Israel today mounts one of the most powerful militaries on the globe, and the most powerful in the Middle East. Israel is equipped with the most advanced fighter jets, high-tech armed drones, and is widely assumed to be a nuclear weapons power. It has one of the world's most battle-ready armies, a force that has fought in four major engagements since 2006 and has experience in securing some of the most problematic borders on earth.

26. Statistical data available for 2014 suggests that the IDF has 410,500 active frontline personnel, 3,657 tanks, and 989 aircraft. The IDF's ground forces are highly trained and experienced and are equipped with the latest standards of modern Western military equipment, which in many cases includes indigenous modifications and innovations, including advanced night-vision capabilities, command-and-control systems and other hi-tech enablers. While the absolute size of the IDF's ground forces has decreased since the 2006 Lebanon War, there have been significant improvements in all aspects of force protection, maneuverability, intelligence gathering, and readiness for offensive combat operations at the brigade and division level, significantly upgrading

capabilities from 2006. Similarly, while the total number of aircraft in the Israel Air Force (IAF) has not changed dramatically since 2006, the quality of the platforms has improved, both in systems performance and, above all, in the effectiveness of ammunition. Based on these new weapons systems, the IAF can today attack thousands of targets per day with precise ammunition and fewer sorties. Israel's Navy has also undergone an extensive upgrade since 2006, equipping vessels with the means to confront multiple threats simultaneously.

27. Active defense systems against missiles and rockets are a crucial part of Israel's military capabilities today also. In contrast to 2006 Israel has four layers of separate systems designed to intercept rockets and missiles of varying sizes and ranges. The main challenge for Israel is a question of capacity, in particular how many rockets can be intercepted simultaneously, given Hizballah's immense arsenal. Yet these active anti-missile defense systems are by no means a catch-all solution. None of the systems currently provide hermetic defense, costs are extremely high, detracting from other capabilities and accuracy is still not as good as could be. Moreover, missile defense systems do not negate other threats, such as short-range mortar attacks.

28. Additionally, Israel's intelligence apparatus has long been one of the most capable of any state – and in briefings with the HLMG, Israeli officials were confident that the intelligence superiority Israel enjoys over Hizballah today is even greater than it was in 2006.

29. Overall, while there has been a decrease in the number of platforms Israel deploys in all services since 2006, there has also been a substantial improvement in the performance of these platforms in terms of firepower, precision weapons capability, as well as maneuverability and self-protection of forces.

Israel's Strategic Concept

30. Israel's strategic analysis of a potential third Lebanon war is sobering. Policymakers expect thousands of casualties in Lebanon, many of whom will be civilians despite the IDF adhering to the highest standards of LOAC. These grave projections are based on a number of factors that would affect the fighting – the proximity of the fighting to Israel's borders will mean a high threat to Israel's civilian population, and as a result, the IDF will have to act fast, reducing the strategic scope for absolute certainty in determining civilian presence near legitimate targets. Ground maneuvers are also inevitable in such a battlefield context, meaning direct potential friction with the civilian population and damage to surroundings, since such operations include the need to conduct fire for reasons such as force protection. Hizballah's deliberate strategy of hiding its military assets among Lebanon's civilian population will mean that various locations will become legitimate military targets where civilians will unfortunately be in harm's way. Hizballah not only operates from within the civilian population, but actively uses them as human shields, deliberately placing them in harm's way for tactical advantage (making the IDF hesitate to attack) and strategic advantage (using images of civilian harm to de-legitimize the IDF). Further, Israeli decision makers fully expect Hizballah will also target Israel's civilians deliberately, in what is likely to be an unprecedented assault. Israeli decision makers thus understand that they will be presented with a scenario that is going to prove intolerable to their citizens.

31. As a result, the IDF has been intensely focused on developing an appropriate strategic concept to deal with such a conflict, the centerpiece of which calls for overwhelming speed and firepower alongside the rapid simultaneous deployment of aerial, ground and naval forces, artillery, active defense as well as cyberattacks. Yet, even with the fullest precautions in such a campaign, the "fog of war" is a natural part of such fighting – no forces have a complete intelligence picture, and there are often technical errors and other mistakes. This is compounded when considering that any future hostilities are likely to be highly intensive, and to occur in urban areas due to the already noted strategy of Hizballah embedding its military infrastructure among civilians.

32. Israel's strategy seeks to quickly penetrate Lebanese territory in order to damage Hizballah's military and political infrastructure – while striking key targets, so as to minimize the period in which Israel's population is exposed. The Israel Air Force (IAF) can be expected to employ a sophisticated, sustained and systematic air campaign of immense scale from the outset of any conflict, seeking to target ballistic missile and rocket sites and other

advanced weaponry. In addition, air strikes are likely to target Hizballah's leadership at all levels, in order to weaken its command and control. This is expected to be the case especially in the Dahieh neighborhood in southern Beirut, where Hizballah maintains its headquarters embedded within the heavily populated civilian surroundings. Such a focus on securing rapid results also characterizes the approach Israel will adopt for any ground offensive.

33. Israeli military action is likely to be very effective in the first days of a conflict, when existing intelligence about Hizballah locations is actionable and Israeli society has yet to suffer the cumulative effect of Hizballah attacks on Israel's civilian areas. However, as a potential conflict progresses, it will become harder for Israel's military superiority to translate into battlefield victory.

Legal and Doctrinal Considerations in the Context of the Threat from Hizballah

34. The HLMG has extensive experience in examining the IDF's doctrines, principles, practice, directives and legal compliance. It is an army that adheres to highest standards of LOAC, sometimes exceeding the precautions our own militaries' doctrines require in the kinds of battlefield contexts the IDF is forced to fight in. Respect for, and adherence to, LOAC are fundamental values which Israel justly takes pride in – and a comprehensive, well-rehearsed protocol exists in the IDF to assert LOAC compliance during active hostilities. Similarly, IDF doctrines adhere to the highest standards of legal and operational practice. Detailed regulations exist in the IDF to ensure the appropriate safeguarding of sensitive sites – and additional doctrines relate to aspects of the anticipated battles that require particular attention, such as the likely requirement to deploy artillery for means of force protection and other operational imperatives.

Diplomatic Considerations in the Context of the Threat from Hizballah

35. Israel has suffered an unprecedented assault on the legitimacy of its actions since its inception. This has intensified markedly in the modern era of warfare against terror-army hybrids – and Israeli officials are acutely aware that international public opinion was severely hostile to some of the actions they felt were necessary during the 2006 war. Yet the international environment has changed since the previous war, and a defensive assault on Hizballah, a terror organization now strongly associated with Bashar Assad's regime in Syria, will generate initial support not only from the United States, but also from other Western countries, in addition to tacit but increasing support from the Sunni Arab world. Judging by past experience, such support is likely to wane as the hostilities carry on, primarily as a result of the expected civilian harm and damage to surroundings in Lebanon – a fact which terror organizations such as Hizballah are acutely aware of, and thus purposefully exploit alleged civilian harm in order to de-legitimize the IDF's actions. Conversely, the realities of the new strategic environment in the Middle East may have unforeseen effects on Israel's operational freedom and diplomatic cover. Questions arise particularly in relations to Russia's entry into the region and its alliance with Israel's adversaries.

36. An even greater question is the calibration of Israel's own diplomatic and legal approach to the next conflict. Its previous strategic concept, as applied in 2006, made Hizballah the adversary in the fighting. However, during the HLMG fact-finding, it was clear that an intense policy debate in Israel's upper echelons increasingly sees some senior voices making the case that a conflict should probably be conceived as including the state of Lebanon as an adversary. This is on account of both the extensive use by Hizballah of Lebanese government facilities for military purposes, the realities of the extent of Hizballah control over (and collusion with) Lebanon's political system and military as well as the strategic imperatives that recommend such a course of action. Such considerations are most acute over the role of the LAF. While some voices encourage making an explicit threat of force against the LAF as a diplomatic signal to encourage their cessation of co-operation with Hizballah (and galvanize international recognition of the problem), this has to be balanced against Israel's delicate diplomatic position vis-a-vis the more pragmatic Sunni states. It is, however, clear that no consensus on the topic exists as of yet – and that Israel will likely keep its room for maneuver by not committing to a declared policy.

Israel's Strategic Outlook in Case of Conflict

37. From HLMG discussions with civilian and military officials, it became clear that Israel assesses that Hizballah does not seek a full conflict at this time, but has begun engaging in operations along the border, and started preparations inside Lebanon which may force Israel to react. Israeli military action would take place in the framework of defending against Iran's enmity and shaping the emerging environment in the next phase of the conflict in Syria (as it affects Lebanon and Hizballah) so as to deny Iran's goal of furnishing a direct line to both Hizballah and to Israel's border. Israeli policymakers consider it possible to deter Hizballah, noting the significant period of quiet since the 2006 war on their northern border, but only in the short term, since Iran's ambitions work to counteract any pragmatic decisions aiding stability. As such, they consider it likely that any war would be the result of a miscalculation by Iran and Hizballah, forcing a response on Israel's part.

5. THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

38. The changes in the regional geostrategic picture of the Middle East have altered drastically since the beginning of the decade. The result has been the emergence of four cohesive blocs of actors, each co-operating in an effort to advance their own interests and solidify control of territory. The most deadly of these blocs is spearheaded by Iran, which is also the most pertinent to a potential conflict. A second bloc is comprised of what could be referred to as the 'pragmatic' Sunni states, namely Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia. The various Muslim Brotherhood groups across the region presently form the weakest bloc, while the 'black flags' of Islamic State and other Jihadi groups such as al-Qaeda constitute the final major bloc in the contemporary Middle East.

39. The United States remains the most consequential external actor in the Middle East. President Trump has realigned the U.S. with Israel and the pragmatic Sunni Arab camp, and vocally acknowledged the danger Iran poses. At the same time, the unconventional nature of the policy making process in the new U.S. administration, and as of yet inconclusive policy reviews related to the region, means that a significant degree of uncertainty exists over the direction of U.S. policy. Similarly, the nature of Europe's response is no longer as easy to predict as it would have been in 2006. The continent is facing grave challenges linked to state-breakdown and civil war in the Middle East. Its response will be guided in part by the U.S.' response, as well as being affected by some of the newly emerging dynamics playing out in European politics around Muslim minority communities and immigration – as well as a growing recognition on the part of European publics that the terrorism threats they face have begun to resemble those faced by Israel since its inception, which may also affect its position. Perhaps the most consequential new external entrant to the politics of the region is Russia, which has executed a formidable campaign of significant and lasting geopolitical consequence for the region, and will be a force in its politics for the foreseeable future. This will likely impact Israel, though its officials have expressed confidence in their ability to manage relations with Moscow and judge the likelihood of Russia intervening on behalf of Hizballah in the event of a third Lebanon war as remote.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

40. UNSC Resolution 1701 mandates that UNIFIL monitor the cessation of hostilities, accompany and support the Lebanese armed forces as they deploy throughout the south, and to take "steps towards the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani river of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL deployed in this area". Given the evident severe failure of the implementation of this mandate, the HLMG delegation spent time examining the issue. There was a consensus that UNIFIL plays an important role in southern Lebanon among Israeli policymakers, and that its presence has had some positive outcomes, including de-escalatory ones. However, our delegation also found that UNIFIL's work is severely restricted by its interpretation of its mandate and Hizballah's active obstruction. The IDF offered significant evidence outlining the steps Hizballah takes to intimidate the international forces. UNIFIL freedom of movement and access is restricted and there are ongoing attempts to curtail

intrusive inspections. IDF officials asserted that they had frequent communications with UNIFIL as to the location of such weapons – and as such, UN demands for evidence appear designed to obscure the problem.

41. A key reason for UNIFIL's lack of effectiveness is its own interpretation of its mandate under UNSC 1701, which it interprets in a very narrow sense with regards to the authority to search for weapons in Lebanon and curtail the activity of armed groups.. A new and improved mandate is required to address the situation. Nevertheless, even under the existing mandate, removing some of the self-imposed limitations from UNIFIL's operations in southern Lebanon that hinder a more effective stance would significantly increase their ability to be an active partner to the international community in preventing an outbreak of hostilities.

6. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND THE DANGER OF A NEW LEBANON WAR: CONSEQUENCES AND PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

42. The implications of a third Lebanon War would be severe both in the Middle East and for the wider international community. The region today presents an extraordinarily volatile mix of religious warfare, non-state actors, weak governments and traditional great power politics. What little stability exists is in danger across the region, both from Iran's imperial ambitions and Sunni radical Islam. The attendant humanitarian crises have not just been felt by the people in the region, but have dramatically affected the politics and security of European nations also. Significant regional interests are at stake in preventing such a conflagration. The greatly diminished stability of the Middle East now depends on countries that have not broken down to form a bulwark of moderation against further deterioration – but perhaps the biggest danger comes with the humanitarian crisis which a conflict could provoke in a region that is already struggling to cope with the immense flow of refugees fleeing the war in Syria.

43. If Hizballah is allowed to instigate hostilities against Israel, Western nations' interests and alliance relationships in the Middle East would also be greatly imperiled. Iran's ambitions are a direct threat to the West, with the Islamic regime's hostility and persistent efforts against Western interests well established. Hizballah is additionally a direct threat to the West, not only as an executor of Iranian regional ambitions, but also through its external wing carrying out operations abroad. As such, curtailing Iran's ambitions and Hizballah's belligerence is crucial for Western security. Similarly, a conflict would have a deleterious effect on the efforts to manage the emerging realities of Syria, as well as the delicate balance of diplomatic relationships as set against Western interests that lie with the various blocs in the Middle East. Relatedly, any additional pressure on refugee and migration flows is likely to exacerbate a problem that Europe already finds itself unable to address adequately.

The Challenge of Hybrid Warfare Against Terror-Armies in the 21st Century

44. There are broader implications of the type of conflict that a new Lebanon war would represent. Western nations today are engaged in numerous kinetic conflicts with media savvy Islamist terror-armies with battlefield successes, resulting in circumstances and situations from which it is neither easy nor simple to disengage militarily. Groups like Islamic State, and in particular Hamas and Hizballah, are extremely well-versed in the desire of democracies to reduce civilian casualties, and are ruthless in their attempt to exploit Western militaries' compliance with the Laws of Armed Conflict for strategic gain. At the same time, democracies' military forces now operate in a more contested media environment than at any moment in historical memory. This allows terrorist groups and insurgent forces to advance their strategic goals through social media, new media sources, and willing or unwittingly complicit actors in democratic nations, all of which allow for the dissemination of a flawed narrative that is detrimental to mission objectives.

45. Perhaps more importantly, contemporary armed conflicts have seen extensions beyond the fight in the 'court of public opinion' through the media, and there are increasing efforts to harm demoractic states' interests through the use of 'lawfare', or the exploitation of political and legal proceedings in international fora. On the basis of past experience,

any future hostilities in Lebanon will result in a number of international investigations, such as by the UN Human Rights Council, which has typically been biased against Israel and demonstrate clear lack of understanding of both relevant military and legal issues. Such investigations are then used to trigger legal proceedings in states (through the use of tools such as 'universal jurisdiction', which allows states to exercise legal authority over serious crimes even if they have no connection to that state or its citizens), or in international bodies such as the International Criminal Court. The result of the politicization of these traditionally legitimate tools can have serious ramifications for a democratic state beyond mere harm to its public image, and can include sanctions, arrest warrants and bans on weapons acquisitions. Such abuses of the international system for 'warfare by other means' are a threat to all democratic nations and a key concern of the High Level Military Group.

46. As such, there is a pressing need for states to consider such risks when they conduct hostilities. Most importantly, states should ensure the dissemination of expert analysis of military conflicts in real time in order to portray a more accurate picture of terrorist organizations, their methods of operation and the realities of the modern battlefield. While Western audiences – having been subjected to the threats from radical Islam that Israelis have faced for decades themselves now -have become more astute in discerning the true moral balance in these conflicts, it remains a consistent challenge to explain how military action in this new environment can result in tragic outcomes for the civilian population, but that such outcomes do not necessarily point to any violation of the law by a state. Political leaders in Western nations will have to show leadership in the face of difficult television pictures and undertake efforts to explain their actions to an audience that typically does not understand how legitimate military actions can sometimes have unfortunate, yet lawful, results.

6.3 Steps Required to Prevent A New Lebanon War

47. On the basis of our fact-finding, our assessment is that a new and grave conflict is only a matter of time, and the international community must act to help prevent it. Urgent steps are required to contain Hizballah and de-escalate the tensions on the border between Israel and Lebanon. First, a clear recognition of the geopolitical ambitions of Iran, its religiously motivated imperialism and its pursuit of Israel's annihilation as the core driver of the danger must be addressed as its root. The international community must take actions to curtail Iran's activities, raise the cost of its behavior and engage in efforts at deterrence. Secondly, the more specific problem of Hizballah must be addressed from multiple angles. Within Lebanon itself, the political cost of the integration of this terrorist organization into the fabric of the state must be raised. Thus, European nations should legally proscribe Hizballah as a whole, ending the fraudulent distinction between ostensible political and terrorist wings of the organization. Similarly, donor nations to Lebanon, led by the U.S., should make new investments conditional on a plan to strip Hizballah of its de facto status as the leading force in the country, not least through financial sanctions and better controls on U.S military assistance to Lebanon. The full implementation of UNSC resolutions 1559 and 1701, enforced by an expanded mandate for UNIFIL and the requisite political pressure, should be a central part of such an effort.

48. Finally, the West should strongly support Israel in its efforts to de-escalate the tensions. There is no plausible legitimate explanation for Hizballah's efforts to arm itself and threaten Israel other than the explicit religiously motivated Iranian drive to destroy Israel. The international community must not only ensure that Israel has the diplomatic cover, but rather also the military means and room for maneuver, so as to send a clear message to Iran and Hizballah that it will be confronted by a superior military force with the full support of its allies. Such a display of strength and unity is the best hope of preventing a conflagration that the majority of Lebanese citizens do not wish to be dragged into by Hizballah – and which Israel's leaders and citizens do not want either.

1

THE HIGH LEVEL MILITARY GROUP

1.1 High Level Military Group Purpose and Background

49. The High Level Military Group (HLMG) was formed in early 2015 with a mandate to examine Israel's conduct of military and domestic security operations in the context of a larger project which seeks to address the implications for Western warfare of fighting enemies who fight with a hybrid concept combining terrorism with more traditional military methods. Such adversaries show a total disregard for the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC), while exploiting our own nations' adherence to LOAC – and our respect for the preservation of life – for their gain. HLMG members have a wealth of experience at the very highest operational and policy levels as regards the conduct of warfare and its attendant policies. Our purpose is to add a professional military and legal element to this debate, which at times has been ill-informed and politicized, and which is of vital importance to our own armies and alliance partners.

50. In the context of Israel, the 2014 Gaza conflict presented a particularly acute problem. In the wake of that conflict, inaccurate interpretations of LOAC have been used effectively to delegitimize Israel's conduct in a manner that, were it to be applied to our own armies, would put our countries at risk. Concern about the appropriate constraints on the conduct of warfare in accordance with laws and norms developed over centuries are necessary and laudable. They are, however, very different from misguided or concerted attempts to misrepresent the requirements of the law in order to harness it as a strategic weapon: a dynamic that has become known as 'Lawfare'. Such efforts are often intended to constrain legitimate military activity, and if successful, will put in jeopardy outcomes deemed necessary for our own nations' respective and collective national security.

51. Following the experience of the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict, we were concerned by the propagation of misapplied legal concepts in conjunction with narratives that are geared towards political outcomes in debates about the Middle East and Western military action. The propagation of these misinterpretations and falsehoods through international fora – and governmental and non-governmental actors – poses a serious risk to the Law of Armed Conflict and thus ultimately to the minimization of harm caused through warfare. This is a vital debate not just for Israel, but for all democratic nations seeking to combat enemies that exploit LOAC for their gain, while showing a total disregard for it at the same time. Our aim is to make an informed contribution to this debate on the basis of our collective professional experience.

HLMG Members at Israel's Northern Border with Lebanon

1.2 High Level Military Group Report Parameters

52. This report forms an assessment of the threat Israel faces from Hizballah and developments in Lebanon and Syria, based on an extensive fact-finding visit to Israel of the High Level Military Group (HLMG) in March 2017, and several follow up visits by individual HLMG delegates and staff.

53. The HLMG had unprecedented access to Israel's decision makers, from the Prime Minister and Defense Minister, through the military top-level leadership to individual unit commanders and soldiers; as well as intelligence and other relevant operatives. Former officials who have significant relevant experience were also made available. The HLMG was able to extensively examine all pertinent aspects of the threat Hizballah presents, as well as the prospects for a renewed conflagration on Israel's northern border. Israel's government and military offered a level of cooperation in seeking to illuminate their concerns that is highly unusual in such a context, offering open and explicit considerations for discussion that went far beyond

The HLMG Delegation in discussion with Israel's Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman

Members of the HLMG Delegation following a discussion with the Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu

what our own countries would expect to reveal even to allied militaries. Some political and military aspects of the subject are naturally classified. The HLMG did not, however, perceive these to be impediments to its gaining of a full and frank understanding of the threat Israel faces on its northern border. The report further builds on the HLMG's previous, unprecedentedly extensive examinations of the country's political, military and legal structures.

54. Based on this comprehensive examination, the report constitutes a professional assessment of the threat Hizballah presents to Israel and the prospects for a third Lebanon war.

The HLMG delegation on a field visit to Israel's northern border with Lebanon and Syria in the Golan Heights

2

THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HIZBALLAH IN LEBANON

2.1 Hizballah's Origins and Context: An Iranian Creation that sits as the Crown Jewel in Iran's Regional Strategy of Jihadi Revolutionary Warfare

55. Hizballah is a creation of Iran that serves as the anchor to the Islamic regime's strategy of Jihadi revolutionary warfare and the principal military and terrorist tool in its religiously motivated animus against the State of Israel. In order to accurately assess the history of conflict between Hizballah and Israel, as well as the current situation and threat Hizballah poses to Israel, it is important to situate Hizballah appropriately in this greater context of Iran and that state's ideological, regional and global ambitions.

> "Hizballah is a creation of Iran that serves as the anchor to the Islamic regime's strategy of Jihadi revolutionary warfare and the principal military and terrorist tool in its religiously motivated animus against the State of Israel."

56. Since the Islamic Regime's revolutionary takeover in 1979, Iran has been a non-status-quo power combining radical Islam with nationalism into a potent, ideologically driven imperialism that seeks to upend the status quo in the Middle East. The Islamic regime draws on the concept of *vilayat-e-faqih* (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist) to assert leadership over the entire Islamic and wider world for the Supreme Leader. Its Islamic ideology is inherently expansionist, and this ideological driver is coupled to a distinct nationalistic sense among Iran's elite that the country, in its current form, has been reduced to an artificial size and importance. Thus, the drive to re-instate Iranian influence in lands which used to fall within the Persian empire is coupled to a distinct form of expansionist radical Islam seeking to dominate the Middle East.

57. Tehran has pursued its imperialistic ambitions with unconventional means that have proven exceptionally suitable for the current era of Middle East instability, benefitting from and fueling it. The Islamic regime's defenders often note that Iran has not instigated a conventional war with any of its neighbors, and its spending on its armed forces (the *Artesh*) has been limited. Though the force comprises over 350,000 troops and a further two million in the reserve forces, it possesses antiquated equipment, such as outdated T-72 tanks produced by the Soviet Union. In terms of conventional warfare then, Iran is not a strong actor. However, it poses a serious threat to the Middle East and global stability through its adoption of a form of Jihadi revolutionary warfare.

58. In pursuing this unconventional capability, Iran has prioritized two forms of warfare that expand its reach exponentially. The first is in ballistic missile technology, where decades of investment have led to a sophisticated arsenal. The second is in the construction of politico-military proxies and terrorist groups, within the borders of regional neighbors. These proxies are the primary vehicle for advancing Iranian state interests, allowing it to initiate asymmetric, revolutionary and guerrilla warfare against its declared enemies.

59. In this context, Israel is foremost on the receiving end of Tehran's murderous enmity. Iran has no border with Israel, no geopolitical dispute, and no area of natural competition. There are no ancient antagonisms or rivalries between Jews and Persians, the core ethnic populations of Israel and Iran respectively. On the contrary, the historical record is largely a positive one. Persian Emperor Cyrus the Great's permitting the Jews to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, after his accession in 559 BCE, is a seminal positive point in ancient Jewish history. Yet the Shia Islamists who rule Iran see the demise of Jewish statehood as an urgent ideological imperative – and this implacably hostile attitude of the Iranian regime towards Israel takes a multitude of sustained expressions in its politics and export of violence. Indeed, the Palestinian cause and the necessity of Israel's destruction have formed a key element of the ideology of the Islamic Regime in Iran since 1979, despite the fact that Iranians are Shia Muslims and non-Arabs, while the Palestinians are an overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim Arab people with no Shia element among them. Yet, in its explicit quest for the destruction of Israel, Tehran has offered extensive ideological, financial and tactical assistance to Palestinian groups engaged in war against Israel. Palestinian Islamic Jihad is dependent

on Iranian funding and support. Tehran established an additional group – al-Sabirin – in Gaza, in 2015.

60. Hizballah is a principal pillar in Tehran's war on Israel and strategy of regional domination through revolutionary Jihadi warfare enacted by politico-terrorist movements. Hizballah is a product of the Iranian regime, which provided it with foundational arms, training and advice via the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). Crucially, Hizballah subscribes to the *vilayat-e-faqih* concept, meaning it is ideologically and politically subservient to Iran's Supreme Leader as a religious obligation, in addition to the tactical and resource dependency on the IRGC. It was created with the express purpose of giving Tehran an 'entry' into the Arab-Israeli conflict. As the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians using Lebanon as a base progressed, Hizballah outmaneuvered Amal – a more prominent and moderate Lebanese Shia organization -with Iran's aid, and declared a Jihad to end the Israeli presence in Lebanon and the Middle East. Though, as already noted, Jerusalem has traditionally never been an issue of particular focus for Shia Muslims, Iran's Supreme Leader considers Israel's destruction a religious obligation. Yet there is an additional, pragmatic element to Iran's founding of Hizballah. Iran suffers from a 'legitimacy deficit' in the Arab world, precisely because of its Shia and non-Arab nature. Championing the Palestinian cause, aiding Palestinian terrorist groups and building a proxy force directly engaged in Jihad against Israel are also intended to generate legitimacy, establishing Iran as the most capable supporter of supposedly pan-Islamic causes.

61. Following the war, Hizballah emerged as the dominant security threat to Israel on its northern front, as well as a potent threat to international forces dispatched to try and bring peace and security to Lebanon. In October 1983, Hizballah helped coordinate twin truck bombs that killed 241 American marines and 58 French peacekeepers. In the decades since, it has morphed into what is perhaps the most sophisticated politico-terrorist organization in existence. The kind of revolutionary Jihadi warfare Iran wages is not very effective against strong states, because strong institutions, cohesive populations and not least effective intelligence services tend to disrupt Iranian proxy groups at an early stage. For example, Iranian efforts to undermine the ruling family in Saudi Arabia by creating a strong opposition amongst the Kingdom's Shia population, has had very limited success. Yet this type of asymmetric warfare is highly successful in weaker states, where governments do not possess

Hizballah Members in Lebanon (Credit: Times of Israel)

absolute control over their territory. As the Middle East's existing power structures have weakened, Iran has been the primary beneficiary due to the specialization in a form of warfare that is uniquely well-suited to the present time. Hizballah, as the leading manifestation of the model and exporter of its application, is thus not only Iran's proxy in Lebanon, but the crown jewel in Tehran's wider regional approach, especially in Syria.

62. As a result, the gravest threat to stability in the Middle East now comes with an Iranian signature. Within Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, Iran's IRGC has succeeded in developing paramilitary groups that are replica versions of itself. In Iraq and Syria in particular, a consequential application of the model is visible in the initial creation of religiously sanctioned 'Popular Mobilization Units', endowed by the IRGC and subsequently swallowing up other militias – while being incorporated into state forces and eventually taking control over key aspects of the state relevant to military and geographic objectives of Tehran. Here, Hizballah not only served as the forerunner of the model, but rather actively participated in the war, significantly enhancing its warfighting abilities.

2.2 The History of Conflict between Israel and Lebanon

2.2.1 Background

63. After Palestinian groups that had settled in Jordan were expelled from their strongholds in 1970, and forced to relocate to Lebanon, they resumed their hostile activities against Israel. Within Lebanon, the Palestinian terror organizations found a supportive local population, especially in the southeastern part of the country, which was home to a cluster of Palestinian refugee camps. By gradually taking control of these areas, the groups secured the ability to operate autonomously, benefitting from high levels of local support, and the weak and fractured nature of Lebanese state authority. Having constructed a new terrorist infrastructure, the Palestinian groups began to fire Katyusha rockets into populated areas in northern Israel, and launch small infiltration units to commit acts of terror inside the country. In 1974, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) infiltrated the Netiv Meir Elementary School in Ma'alot, killing 25 Israeli citizens – the majority of them children.

64. In response to these Palestinian terrorist attacks, Israel conducted a number of military and special forces operations in Lebanon during this time, becoming progressively more extensive. In 1978, Israeli ground forces entered Lebanon and progressed as far as the Litani river, where they remained for three months before withdrawing to the international border. Subsequently, the deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to southern Lebanon was intended to act as a buffer between the Palestinian terrorist organizations and the IDF. However, international efforts to stem the tide of conflict did little to deter hostility. Palestinian attacks continued, with rockets and mortar shells fired into Israel on a regular basis. Efforts to eliminate the threat, in the form of aerial bombing of PLO targets in Lebanon, only prompted further attacks against Israel's northern population. In addition, Palestinian terrorist organizations sought out new ways to widen the conflict, targeting Israeli officials abroad, including the attempted assassination of the Israeli Ambassador to the United Kingdom in 1982.

2.2.2 The First Lebanon War and its Aftermath

65. The increasing intensity of attacks prompted the Israeli Defense Force to launch a concerted ground operation inside Lebanon in June of 1982. During the conflict, the IDF was forced to fight not only Palestinian terrorist groups, but Syrian military forces, which had exploited the instability of the Lebanese state following the civil war in 1975, and established a dominant military position within the country. After intense battles in difficult terrain around the cities of Sur and Sidon, the IDF occupied Beirut, resulting in the deportation of the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) leadership to Tunis.

66. Notwithstanding the successful expulsion of the PLO, the intervention in Lebanon came to be seen by some in Israel as a strategic setback. Despite a belief that the Lebanese population would welcome external military action against Palestinian terrorist groups, public opinion quickly shifted from general support to growing hostility once the IDF began to deploy force within heavily populated areas. Moreover, Syrian forces remained within Lebanon at the end

of the conflict, and gained the upper hand in the country following the Israeli withdrawal. As a result, the war did not lay the conditions for a formal peace treaty between Israel and Lebanon, as proponents of military action had hoped. Israel's choice of allies also prompted widespread condemnation. IDF forces allied with various Christian militias in Lebanon, which shared a mutual hostility towards the Palestinian presence. However, these groups proved not to be the moral and credible allies that Israeli officials had hoped, and their attacks against Palestinian refugees damaged Israel's international standing and shocked its political system and populace.

67. The First Lebanon War ended in a tense military standoff between Iran's newly founded Hizballah and IDF forces and their local ally the South Lebanon Army (SLA) – remaining inside Southern Lebanon in a 'security zone' designed to guard against direct threats to cities and towns in northern Israel that had caused the war. Thus, in southern Lebanon, Hizballah continually harassed Israeli forces, often using hidden explosive devices aimed at IDF infantry and armored forces, detonated from a distance. Hence the IDF suffered military casualties at an approximate rate of twenty-five soldiers each year during this period.

68. In 2000, following failed peace talks between Israel and Syria over the future of Lebanon, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak decided to unilaterally withdraw military forces from Lebanon. Since the IDF would be surrendering the geographic high ground, Israel's motivations were less to do with securing tactical advantage than the fact that Israeli decision-makers had hoped that withdrawing forces to an agreed international border would increase security by denying Hizballah the claim that Israel was occupying foreign territory. Thus, Israel participated in a process to demarcate the international border, separating Israel and Lebanon, an agreement which established the so-called 'Blue Line'. However, the withdrawal was not coordinated with Syria and Lebanon, and did not require either country to take reciprocal steps. Indeed, Lebanon refused to enter into direct discussions with Israel, forcing UN officials to mediate all discussions. Israeli officials expected, however, based on UN Security Council Resolution 425 and the Taif Agreement aimed at concluding the Lebanese Civil War, that the Lebanese government would move to exercise its sovereignty in southern Lebanon, disarming Hizballah in the process.

69. In reality, despite the withdrawal of the IDF and disbanding of the SLA, the Lebanese government refrained from dispatching its army to the south, creating a vacuum which Hizballah moved to fill, staging a largely unopposed de facto takeover of southern Lebanon, reaping the fruits of the Israeli withdrawal on the ground – as well as translating this into increased political power in the Lebanese parliamentary elections that were held later the same year.

70. Once Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon was completed, Hizballah rejected all initiatives to disarm it – and began strengthening its military capabilities, declaring its intention to continue its military activities in the area. Hizballah's continued assault on Israel included various pretexts, chiefly claims over portions of territory on the Israeli side of the Blue Line, as well as unresolved negotiations over prisoner releases, alleged airspace incursions, all of which made plain that its commitment to armed conflict against Israel could not be sated by political concessions.

71. This commitment to warfare against Israel was reflected in the large number of offensive operations Hizballah initiated thereafter, adopting a guerrilla warfare strategy largely based on attempts to abduct Israeli soldiers. It also increased its activities in the Palestinian arena, recruiting, funding, and training Palestinians to carry out terrorist attacks within Israel and smuggling weapons to the West Bank and Gaza Strip by sea and land. Despite Hizballah provocations and incidents resulting in seventeen Israeli casualties during the period 2000-2006, Israel adopted a policy of containment, refraining from any escalation along the border with Lebanon.

72. Of even greater strategic significance were Hizballah's efforts together with Iran and Syria during this period to establish a more favorable operational infrastructure for the assault on Israel. Shortly after the Israeli withdrawal, Hizballah accelerated its efforts to establish significant defensive ground infrastructure in southern Lebanon, enabling it to absorb and assimilate the delivery of rockets, long range surface-to-surface missiles, and various types of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles. The result was growing confidence on the part of Hizballah in its ability to deter Israeli military action in response to the growing threat the organization presented.[1]

1 Daniel Sobelman, "New Rules of the Game. Israel and Hizbollah after the Withdrawal from Lebanon," Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Memorandum No. 69, January 2004.

73. Discussion related to Hizballah's disarmament intensified at the end of 2004, following the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 calling for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon and the disarmament of militias. The Lebanese government rejected the demand, asserting that Hizballah was a "resistance party" and partner in the defense of Lebanon – and that any discussion on the matter must be carried out with the group's cooperation, without international pressure or interference.[2]

74. In May 2006, during a speech marking the fifth anniversary of the IDF withdrawal from Lebanon, Hizballah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah emphasized the importance of Hizballah remaining armed on account of Israel being an enemy state, and that the national defense strategy of Lebanese society had to be formulated with a clear aim at Israel. Nasrallah listed some of Hizballah's military capabilities, claiming it was in possession of missiles that could strike deep inside Israel and had sufficient military capabilities to return land beyond the Blue Line that Israel held. Nasrallah vowed to return Lebanese prisoners convicted and jailed in Israel "very soon".[3]

2.2.3 The Second Lebanon War and its Aftermath

75. The Second Lebanon War was triggered on July 12th, 2006, when Hizballah fired rockets at Israeli border towns as a diversion for an anti-tank missile attack on two armored Humvees patrolling along the Israeli side of the border with Lebanon. The ambush resulted in the deaths of three Israeli soldiers, and Hizballah abducted two further soldiers. Israel lost five more soldiers in an immediate attempt to free its hostages and responded with significant force, striking Hizballah military targets from the air, and following up with ground operations within southern Lebanon in an effort to thwart Hizballah's rocket launches.

76. Although the Israeli ground operation did not expand beyond the boundaries of the previous buffer zone in south Lebanon, the war was significantly more intense and longer in duration than most pre-war estimates. Though Israel's air force heavily assaulted Dahieh, a Shiite suburb south of Beirut that held Hizballah's Headquarters, as well as much of its military hardware and command and control capabilities, Israeli towns and cities were subject to a barrage of indiscriminate fire from Hizballah, targeting an area inhabited by more than a million Israeli citizens. Conversely, Israel invested significant effort in minimizing Lebanese civilian casualties, through the use of pre-warning methods, and efforts to encourage evacuation of the local Lebanese population prior to ground-force operations in southern Lebanon.

77. The conflict ended on August 14th, 2006, following the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 which called for a full cessation of hostilities, the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Lebanon, and the immediate deployment of the Lebanese army and UNIFIL soldiers throughout the south of the country. It further called for the long-term disarmament of armed groups in Lebanon that were not formally part of the Lebanese army – an implicit reference to Hizballah. Other clauses included the requirement that the abducted Israeli soldiers be released, and that all sides fully respect the Blue Line, in addition to the territorial sovereignty of Lebanon.

78. For Israel, the military operation had come with a heavy price in terms of casualties, and ended without the return of the abducted soldiers, a failure to dismantle or completely disarm Hizballah – and was thus initially heavily criticized in Israel. Yet with the passage of time, the assessment of the effects of the conflict have become more positive. In the past eleven years, there have been few kinetic events along the Israeli-Lebanese border, amounting to a more pronounced period of calm than at any time since the 1970s. Though Hizballah continues to pose a major threat to Israel, its use of rocket attacks has ceased, and its tendency to launch cross-border operations has diminished considerably. Due to the massive devastation of Dahieh, caused as a collateral result of the IDF's attacks against Hizballah military targets there, Hizballah was additionally forced to contend with the anger and frustration of the suburb's residents. Following the Second Lebanon War, leaders of the March 14 Alliance – a coalition of political parties and independents united by their opposition to Hizballah – accused the group of dragging Lebanon into an unnecessary war that only served Syrian and Iranian interests. Hassan Nasrallah was forced to publicly concede that had he known the abduction operation would have resulted in such intense conflict and destruction, he would have refrained from authorizing it.

2 "Hizballah has no intention to disarm," The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC), December 18, 2005.

3 "Nasrallah's speeches," The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC), May 28, 2006.

Hizballah infrastructure and attacks on Israel during the Second Lebanon War (Source: Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

2.3 The Status Today

79. As the threat posed by Hizballah rises once more, Israeli policy-makers and defense planners regard a principal lesson of the 2006 war to be that military operations against the organization have significant utility in establishing credible deterrence against the implacable program which Iran and Hizballah pursues against Israel. A variety of views exists whether this deterrence is eroding in light of the deteriorating regional circumstances, in particular the civil war in Syria. Given Hizballah's extensive involvement there, where it serves as the Arabic army of Iran and has, together with Russian air power, saved the regime of Bashar al-Assad, Hizballah has picked up extensive new operational and organizational experience in the craft of warfare. However, it thus also suffers a serious legitimacy deficit – Lebanon's population is increasingly asking why, if it is supposed to be the defender of the Lebanese people from the eternal threat of the Jewish presence in the Middle East is it slaughtering Arab civilians in Syria?

80. Israeli policymakers posit this legitimacy deficit as part of the root of Hizballah's rising antagonism and renewed focus on menacing their country. Simultaneously, in this new reality, they consider the absence of established red lines and 'rules' of conflict management in the post-Arab Spring Middle East as a grave factor in considering whether deterrence can hold without asserting an overwhelming display of force in response to expected Hizballah provocations. Set within the broader context of Iranian regional ambitions – and resultant imperatives acting on Hizballah – they further underscore that whilst a war may be waged due to this deliberate intent, it may also arise out of a minor or accidental incident that results in escalation and miscalculations by either side, given the rising tension on the border.

Location of the Shebaa Farms (Source: Small Wars Journal Online)

2.3.1 International Borders and Hizballah Claims

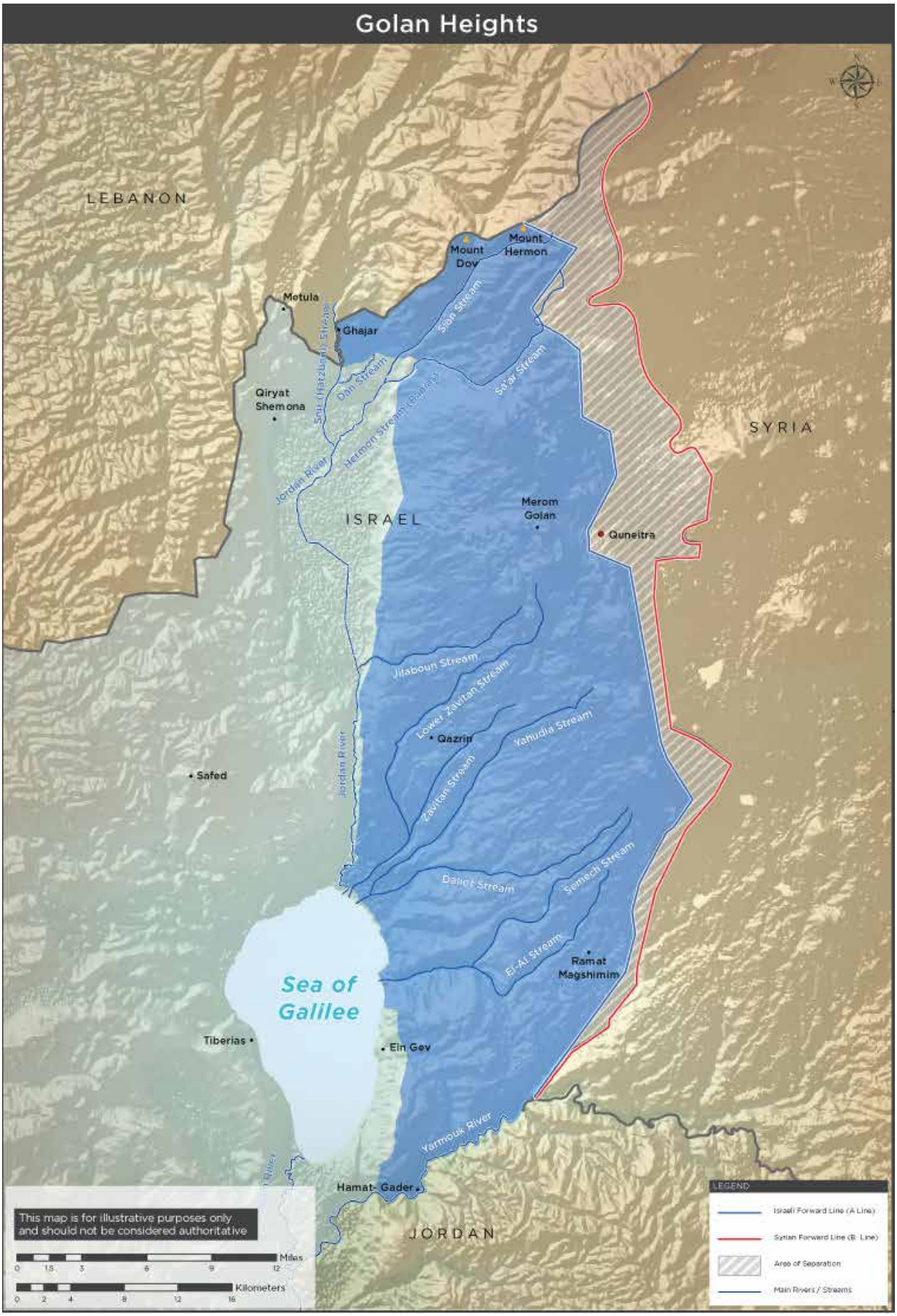
81. Hizballah has renewed its assault on Israel under similar pretexts it has propagated since the end of the Second Lebanon War, citing three territorial disputes as the ostensible cause of its enmity: the Shebaa Farms, the 'seven villages', and the maritime border.

82. The Shebaa Farms is an area in the northern part of the Golan Heights of previously Syrian territory occupied by Israel during the 1967 war. The area has never been a formal part of Lebanese territory, as verified by official UN documents from 1974 and from 2000.[4] Nevertheless, Hizballah continues to claim this area as part of Lebanon, due to the fact that Syrians allowed local shepherds from the adjacent Lebanese Shebaa village to cross over and herd their flocks in the area prior to the 1967 conflict. In 2006, Israeli officials were approached by UN representatives about the prospect of giving up some part of the territory, in exchange for Hizballah surrendering some of its heavy weapons to the state of Lebanon. These preliminary discussions collapsed as a result of the conflict later that year.

83. The second area claimed by Hizballah is commonly known as the "seven villages", whose inhabitants left for Lebanon during Israel's war of independence in 1948. The villages themselves fell south of the armistice line of 1949, as well as of an earlier boundary drawn in 1923, known as the Blue Line, which was used as the benchmark for the border demarcation approved by the UN in 2000.

84. The third, and final area of dispute, concerns conflicting Israeli and Lebanese maritime claims. There are two acceptable ways to determine an international border at sea. The first is to extend the existing land border into open water, whilst the second is to draw the line at a ninety-degrees angle perpendicular to the coastline. Implementing the first method in the Israeli-Lebanese

4 See for example maps utilized by UN peacekeepers at the time the international presence was established.

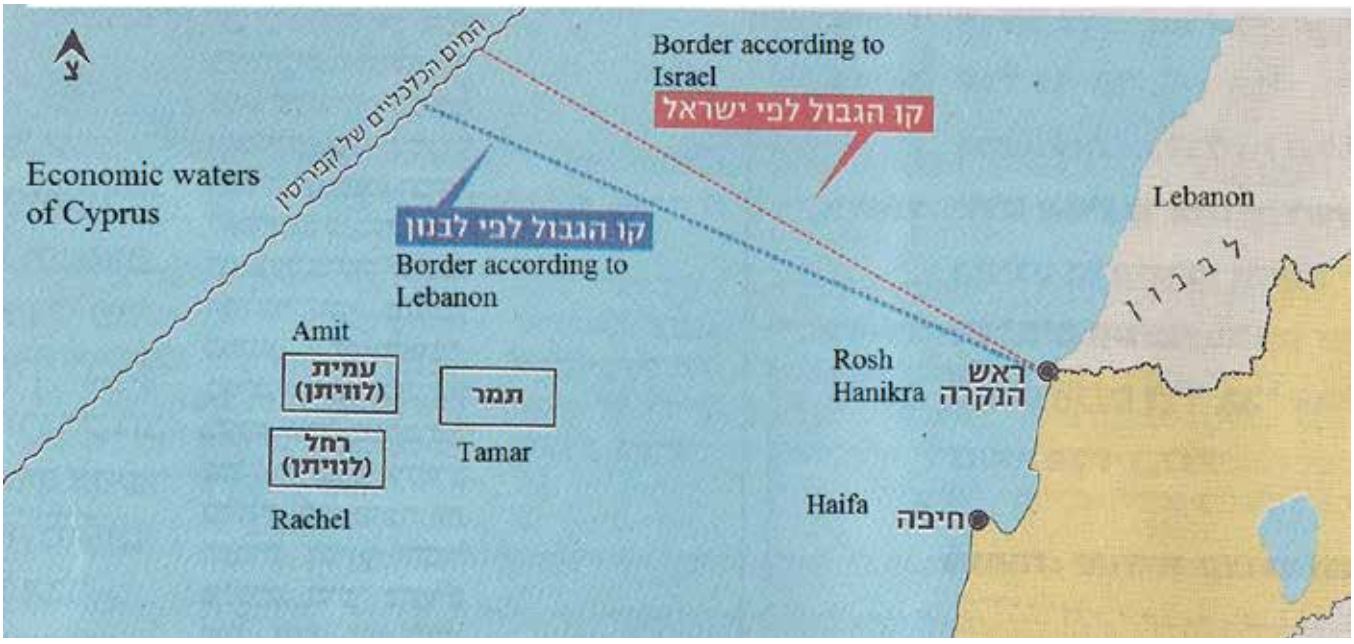


The Golan Heights (Source: Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

The HLMG delegation on a field visit to the Golan Heights on Israel's northern border with Lebanon and Syria

case results in a line at 270 degrees to the west from the edge of the land border, while the second method creates a line of 291 degrees heading north-west, leaving more maritime territory for Israel. In 2000, when UN officials demarcated the land border, they refused to address the maritime dispute, in the hope that the issue could be resolved in a further round of negotiations. However, the emergence of natural gas fields capable of cultivation has made this issue more contentious. Lebanon has awarded contracts for exploration in the disputed areas, without engaging in any discussions with Israel.

85. While the main driver behind Hizballah's threat to Israel is a religious ideological one premised on the imperial ambitions of Iran, these territorial disputes between Israel and Hizballah are a potent pretext in rhetoric, aimed at establishing Hizballah's ostensible credentials as a defender of Lebanon. [but] In reality, they reveal little more than its implacable opposition to Israel's existence, given the minor and perfectly resolvable issues they present upon closer examination.



A Comparison of Naval Boundary Claims by Israel and Lebanon (Source: Makor Rishon)

3

HIZBALLAH

3.1 Hizballah's Ethos

86. Hizballah is a religiously motivated hybrid terrorist organization with ideological allegiance to Iran's Supreme Leader, utilizing a mixture of terrorist, traditional military and political imperatives to dominate Lebanese politics by force. It serves as Iran's Arab proxy in its role as the foundational pillar of Iran's strategy of revolutionary warfare – and spreads its modus operandi to other Iranian affiliates, as well as engaging in a wide variety of activity from politics to international organized crime in order to support its ideological goals.

> "Hizballah is a religiously motivated hybrid terrorist organization with ideological allegiance to Iran's Supreme Leader, utilizing a mixture of terrorist, traditional military and political imperatives to dominate Lebanese politics by force."

87. Hizballah has developed a distinct Jihadi character of its own, mirroring the Sunni terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda in justifying its engagement in military action unrestricted by rules, laws or morality in terms of identifying its enemies as 'infidels' and fighting in the cause of Allah. However, Hizballah is simultaneously adept at forming partnerships across sectarian lines at times. Under Iran's model of assisting 'enemies of its enemies', Hizballah assists a host of terrorist groups, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas and Fatah, as well as maintaining a dedicated unit for promoting terrorism within Israel, which it coordinates with Beirut-based Palestinians actors. Yet the Shiite dimension of Hizballah's identity is also of vital importance to its raison d'être. Hizballah proclaims responsibility for the well-being of Shia populations as an integral part of a wider Iranian-Syrian axis, and serves as the vanguard of Shia proxy forces throughout the Middle East, including in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. These obligations to a transnational Iranian Shia axis – and operations as a hybrid terrorist organization throughout the wider international arena – are sometimes in conflict with its imperative in terms of its status as a distinctly proclaimed Lebanese organization that dominates the country militarily, participates in its politics, and is sensitive to an extent to Lebanese public sentiment. Its senior leadership regards defending the group's position within Lebanon as their core mission, and thus frequently refers to Hizballah as the 'shield of Lebanon' in public remarks, asserting its importance to the fabric of Lebanon.

88. All of these overlapping identities result in a resolute and irrational hostility towards Israel. Bringing about the destruction of the State of Israel is not just a Hizballah objective, but an intrinsic part of its organizational personality, through an Islamic lens, through an Iranian geo-strategic lens, and through a self-justifying Lebanese lens.

3.2 Hizballah's Military Capabilities

89. While Hizballah is described as a terrorist organization on account of the ethos and tactics it deploys, its operational structure, capabilities and training are more akin to an army, equipped to the level of a state. Indeed, its [Hizballah's] military capabilities exceed those of many nation states and it is widely considered to be the most powerful non-state armed actor in the world. Its participation in the Syrian civil war has meant a further manifold improvement in the capabilities, size of force and tactical skill it is able to bring to bear on the battlefield.

90. For the purpose of combat capabilities Hizballah is neither a terrorist or guerilla organization, but a standard military force. It is today a highly robust organization with a clear chain of command and the infrastructure to protect and maintain its high command, which oversees a force of around 25,000 fighters, with around 5,000 of them having completed advanced training in Iran. In addition, at least 20,000 people are organized in reserve units. These numbers are vastly larger since the 2006 war – when estimates suggested only about 10,000 combatants on active duty – a feature not least of the impetus from the action in Syria. Hizballah's main fire power is based on a huge arsenal of rockets and missiles. Although Hizballah does not have a real air force nor navy, it does have advanced capabilities both in carrying out aerial warfare campaigns using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and for warfare against naval assets.

91. Our delegation was briefed on Hizballah's capabilities extensively – and it is obvious that [Hizballah Capabilities] they present a very serious threat, which has grown substantially since the 2006 Lebanon War.

3.2.1 The Effect of the Civil War in Syria on Hizballah's Capabilities

92. Though Hizballah had been significantly reconstituting and expanding its capabilities in the wake of lessons learned in the 2006 conflict, an overriding factor in the exponential growth of Hizballah's military capabilities is its experience as part of Iran's axis in the Syrian Civil War.

93. By mid-2012, Syria had fractured into sectarian enclaves, largely because the regime of Bashar al-Assad found itself unable to draw upon a sufficient number of loyal troops to restore order. With approximately 200,000 members of the Syrian army – most of them Sunni – not responding to mobilization orders, Iran came to Assad's aid, mounting a multi-pronged intervention. It introduced over 2,000 IRGC personnel into Syria and permitted Assad to make use of its mobilized proxies, chiefly among them Hizballah, which provided vital support to the beleaguered regime and played a major role in ensuring its survival.

94. Hizballah became involved in the Syrian civil war on several fronts simultaneously, including the Lebanese border area and in greater Damascus. The magnitude of the organization's commitment increased rapidly over the course of 2012, from initially mere dozens of fighters assigned to consult and coach Syrian regime troops, to a battalion size force giving Hizballah unprecedented combat experience. By mid-2013, as many as 7,000-8,000 well trained Hizballah fighters were directly involved in combat.

95. Additionally, Iran's IRGC stepped in to create a parallel 'National Defense Force' of some 40,000 – 50,000 fighters, constructed on a sectarian basis. Since the majority of Iranians do not speak Arabic, Hizballah – as Iran's most capable Arab proxy – led the recruitment and training of these Shia militias, especially in the Idlib and Quneitra governorates. By 2015, these forces were ready to be deployed to fill the Assad regime's manpower shortage.

96. While this action has led to unprecedented gains in Hizballah's military capabilities, alliance relationships and ability to field new threat constellations (including large-scale ground attacks and maneuvers unprecedented for a terrorist organization), the toll its Syrian engagement has taken upon Hizballah has been significant. To date, more than 1,700 of its fighters have been killed, and at least a further 7,000 wounded, with its own fighters at times criticizing its involvement in the Syrian theatre.[5] Given the emphasis in its propaganda as a protector of Lebanon and a Lebanese organization, its actions in Syria have garnered angry criticism from both the Shiite population in Lebanon and other political parties there. In 2015, Islamic State succeeded in carrying out major terrorist attacks in Dahiya, the Hizballah stronghold in Beirut.[6]

97. As a result of a combination of Iranian and Russian intervention, coupled with its own military action in Syria, Hizballah now stands as one of the dominant forces within that country. A turning point in Hizballah's effort was its April 2013 capture of the Qalamoun Mountains region and the highway linking Damascus with the Syrian coastal region. Hizballah led the ground assault on al-Qusayr, a primarily Sunni town in the Qalamoun area about 15 km from the border with Lebanon. The victory at al-Qusayr dealt a major blow to rebel forces and marked the culmination of a new phase of substantial overt Hizballah involvement in Syria. Since then, Hizballah has become a major player in the Syrian regime's successes in regaining territory in Homs, Aleppo, and Damascus.[7]

98. Al-Qusayr is of immense strategic importance to Hizballah, due to its proximity to Lebanon and because it dominates the road leading from Homs to the northern Bekaa Valley, home to Lebanon's Shiite population and Hizballah strongholds. This road now serves as a supply route through which Hizballah can receive advanced weaponry from Tehran, Damascus, and indirectly Moscow or any other weapons producer willing to ally with Iran.

99. With the Assad regime's position more secure than at any time since the conflict began, Hizballah

5 Amos Harel, "Hizballah's PR Provocation on Border Comes at a Good Time for Israel," Haaretz, April 23, 2017.

6 Jay Akbar, "ISIS claims responsibility for deadliest attack in Beirut since the civil war: Devastating double suicide bomb rips through heart of city killing at least 43 and wounding 239," Daily Mail, November 12, 2015.

7 Marisa Sullivan, "Hizballah in Syria," Middle East Security Report, No.19, Institute for the Study of War, April 2014.

has intensified the process of formalizing its presence in the country's southwest. Crucially, it has strengthened its presence in the Syrian portions of the Golan Heights. This [Hizballah's success in Syria] has enabled Iranian forces to establish a direct foothold on Israel's border for the first time, a development of immense strategic consequence. Bases in Syria are likely to permit Hizballah to retain a permanent presence of fighters in the country, even after the fighting subsides. These installations will be utilized for several objectives – firstly, to shield against a possible thrust by anti-Assad forces from the southwest to obstruct IDF forces maneuvering against Hizballah defenses in southern Lebanon in case of a new conflict, and secondly, to provide a new platform for terrorist attacks against Israel.[8] Israeli analysts who briefed the HLMG expect Hizballah's new positions to be converted into missile bases that will enable it to threaten all of Israel's territory, particularly if Iran deploys ballistic missiles, such as the Shabab-1 and Shahab-2 in the area. Israeli intelligence briefings suggest that while such assets have not yet been deployed to the area, high ranking officers from the IRGC frequently inspect the positions near Qusayr.

3.2.2 The Composition of Hizballah Forces and Military Hardware

100. Hizballah's ground forces are equipped with AK-47 assault rifles, night vision goggles, and the most advanced anti-tank weapons such as RPG 29 or Kornet missiles. They are also highly trained in operating hidden explosives and booby traps. One of Hizballah's most potent tactics, significantly proven in the 2006 war, is the use of anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM). Hizballah combatants are highly skilled in deploying these, giving them the ability to effectively strike and destroy not only tanks and armored vehicles, but also ground infantry forces taking cover inside buildings and other structures. This presents a significant threat, emanating undetected from distant positions as far as five kilometers away, on account of these systems' low profile and accurate and quick operation.

101. In addition, the combat experience acquired in Syria – and the vast increase in numbers noted above – now gives Hizballah an ability to maneuver and carry out relatively large-scale ground attacks at the scale of company or battalion level; operations that Hizballah would not have been able to conduct in 2006. The HLMG was briefed on intelligence observations which suggest that Hizballah's forces in Syria have seen a tactical improvement, with junior officers being more independent, and thus taking more initiative than Syrian army commanders at the same level. This independence of the lower ranks, combat tested in Syria, will likely improve Hizballah's performance compared to the Second Lebanon War. An additional contrast to 2006 is that the organization now also has an armored support unit consisting of modern tanks, including T72 and T80 models, and many Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs), not only the Russian BMP-3 models taken from Syria but even American M-113 models taken from the Lebanese Army.

"The combat experience acquired in Syria – and the vast increase in numbers – now gives Hizballah an ability to maneuver and carry out relatively large-scale ground attacks at the scale of company or battalion level."

102. Hizballah has also improved its capabilities of aerial warfare. It now possesses hundreds of UAVs, with surveillance and in some cases munitions capabilities. The first reconnaissance flights of a Mirsad-1 drone into Israeli airspace occurred in November 2004. According to a report published at the time, the vehicle was one of eight such drones supplied by Iran, and that some 30 Hizballah operatives had undergone training over a two-year period at IRGC bases near Isfahan in order to learn how to operate them.[9] In August 2006, during the Second Lebanon War, Hizballah launched three small Ababil drones into Israel intended for an attack on strategic targets, each carrying a 40-50-kilogram explosive warhead. On this occasion, Israeli F-16s engaged and destroyed the drones whilst they were airborne. In October of 2012, an Iranian Ayub drone guided by Hizballah

8 Ely Karmon, "The Strategic Imperative to Deny an Iranian/Hizballah Basis on the Golan Border," The Times of Israel Blog, February 2, 2015.

9 Eugene Miasnikov, "Terrorists Develop Unmanned Aerial Vehicles," Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environment Studies at MIPT, December 2004.

flew south from Lebanon over the Mediterranean and entered Israeli airspace via the Gaza Strip. It succeeded in nearing the town of Dimona, where it was finally shot down by Israeli aircraft. Israeli military officials have conceded that the drone may have transmitted imagery of the Nuclear Research Center situated in the area and the incident suggests that attacks on strategically important facilities may be vulnerable to remote attack in a future conflict.[10]

103. An even more consequential development since the 2006 war is Hizballah's acquisition of highly advanced air defense systems such as the SA-17, SA-18, and SA-22 Russian anti-aircraft systems, which were smuggled to Lebanon from Syria.

104. While Hizballah doesn't possess any ships, it still has significant capabilities for naval warfare. This is based on highly advanced coast-to-sea cruise missiles of varying ranges, from 35 km to 300 km of which Hizballah has dozens, possibly hundreds, as well as precision ballistic missiles. While the armored threat

10 Milton Hoenig, "Hizballah and the Use of Drones as a Weapon of Terrorism," Public Interest Report, Federation of American Scientists (FAS), Spring 2014 – Vol. 67, No. 2.

A Hizballah bunker in south Lebanon in 2006 (Credit: Israel Defense Forces)

Hizballah presents is easily outmatched by the IDF, and the aerial defenses are likely to only pose a small surmountable problem to Israeli air superiority, the naval threat is significant since it presents the potential to severely disrupt both commercial shipping, threatening Israel's import and export activity, and Israel's energy supply, 60 percent of which is served from a single offshore gas field.

A Hizballah rocket launcher hidden underground in south Lebanon

A Hizballah rocket launcher in Lebanon

A Fajr 5 Missile Launcher

105. Yet the most significant upgrade in Hizballah's military power lies in its missile and rocket launching capabilities. These have increased tenfold since the 2006 war and present a threat few countries, much less sub-state organizations, on the globe can mount. Israeli intelligence estimates put the number of projectiles in Hizballah's possession today at well over 100,000. The majority of these are short-range rockets, mainly Katyushas, with an effective range of only up to 21 km. Several thousand FAJR-5 and Syrian made B-302 rockets in Hizballah's arsenal have an effective range of 60–80 km – and hundreds of additional ones, like the Fateh 110 and its Syrian version known as the M600, as well as Iranian made Zelzal-2 missiles, carry an effective range of 250 km and more. Additionally, the possibility cannot be excluded that Hizballah has Scud C or D missiles that can carry a one-ton explosive payload over ranges that cover all of Israel.

A Zelzal 2 Missile Launcher

106. Thus, not only has the sheer numeric scale of the threat increased exponentially, but the lethality on account of larger payloads and range has increased also. In 2006, Hizballah could only hit targets in Northern Israel. Today, it has hundreds of rockets that can reach Tel Aviv and beyond. Worse, the accuracy of these projectiles has also significantly increased. Many of Hizballah's rockets are guided by an inertial navigator, which gives them a Circular Error Probable (CEP) of fifty meters. IDF officials believe that a portion of Hizballah's missiles may also be fitted with Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) technology, something that would enable them to be accurate within a few meters. This element of accuracy is crucial since it means that the threat is likely going to be not only against 'designated neighborhoods', where Hizballah will seek to cause civilian casualties and attack Israel's home front, but also in precision strikes against strategic targets such as power stations, seaports, airports and other critical infrastructure.

107. To this end, Hizballah also mounts a greatly expanded intelligence effort. It has numerous intelligence-gathering units focused on Israel, generating an extensive bank of targets, including many vital and sensitive Israeli infrastructure facilities. It possesses capabilities in all types of intelligence: human intelligence using agents, signals intelligence, and visual intelligence through UAVs. Additionally, even prior to 2006, during the 1990s, the organization managed to implement

effective counterintelligence activity, including intercepting IDF radio communications and even cracking codes of IDF encrypted transmissions. In recent years, Hizballah has also managed to uncover several Israeli surveillance attempts in Lebanon and counter them, including on Hizballah's optic fiber network, cameras camouflaged as rocks in their rural strongholds – as well arresting over a hundred-people suspected of spying for Israel.[11]

3.2.3 Iranian Weapons Factories in Lebanon

108. As Hizballah's involvement in Syria deepened, supply lines between Iran and Hizballah became even more tightly integrated. The upgrade in Hizballah capabilities is one discernible result of Iran and Hizballah's ongoing project to equip the latter with more accurate longer-range missiles, so as to be able to more effectively menace Israel. Since this presents a dramatic change in the military balance for Israel, significantly increasing the threat Hizballah poses, Israel is widely assumed to have taken actions in Syria against such shipments. Despite a policy of not commenting on strikes targeting weapons shipments destined for Hizballah, Israel's Intelligence Minister has stated on the record following a strike on a weapons depot at Damascus Airport in April 2017 that "the incident in Syria corresponds completely with Israel's policy to act to prevent Iran's smuggling of advanced weapons via Syria to Hizballah".[12] Prime Minister Netanyahu has also been widely on the record, and reiterated to the HLMG, that Israel would not tolerate the transfer of advanced weapons from Iran to Hizballah.

109. In this context, developments first aired in public in June 2017 that indicate that Iran has facilitated the establishment of a minimum of two weapons manufacturing sites in Lebanon, with additional similar activity likely taking place in Yemen. These developments constitute a gravely serious change in the military capabilities Hizballah is able to generate, and have the potential to significantly affect the strategic balance in the region. Since such operations are highly classified, it is unlikely much detail will emerge over Israel's efforts to prevent Hizballah from receiving weapons that are in danger of changing the current strategic balance between the adversaries. Yet two assumptions are possible to ascertain – Israel is clearly successful in disrupting Iran's efforts to upgrade Hizballah's arsenal, but largely in areas of active conflict and ungoverned spaces. As such, any potential strikes in Syria, Yemen or even Sudan are significantly less complex than in Lebanon. Iran and Hizballah recognize this reality – and the assumption is that underground facilities in civilian areas of Lebanon are harder to attack than convoys in Syria. They additionally offer Iran and Hizballah a degree of independence in the event of disruption to arms shipments or disintegration in Syria. Above all, they offer Hizballah a significantly upgraded ability to produce more precise long-range missiles such as the Fateh 110. However, these installations not only continue a modus operandi of abusing civilian areas for military purposes, but if deemed effective by Israel, are also likely to be the cause of a serious escalation in tensions.

3.3 Hizballah's Strategic Concept

110. Hizballah's basic strategic concept consists of a tripartite interplay between terrorism, traditional military capabilities and political activity, governed by its religious ideology and the objectives generated therefrom. Since 2006, it has reconstituted itself as the most powerful military force within Lebanon, making effective use of these capabilities to dominate Lebanese politics and state institutions, implicitly and in some cases explicitly, not least by way of significant displays of force when necessary. Its military force is hybrid in nature, combining the capabilities associated with a conventional army with a force structure which is decentralized and trained in asymmetric warfare, with a terrorist modus operandi that is entirely indifferent to any moral or legal imperatives governing warfare in the international arena. Thus, Hizballah embeds its military assets among the Lebanese civilians it claims to protect, holds Lebanese politics and questions of war and peace hostage to its Iranian-led regional military imperatives, and has infiltrated Lebanese state organs, including the army, to utilize them for its aims. It fights among civilians (and under their cover) and targets its adversaries' civilians with impunity, often as an explicitly calculated method of gaining strategic advantage.

11 Yiftach S. Shapir, "Hizballah as an Army," Strategic Assessment, 19, no. 4 (2017), p. 65 (in Hebrew).

12 Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Israel strikes arms depot near Damascus airport: sources", Reuters, April 27, 2017

"Hizballah's basic strategic concept consists of a tripartite interplay between terrorism, traditional military capabilities and political activity, governed by its religious ideology."

3.3.1 A Deliberate Strategy Placing Civilians In Harm's Way

111. Since the 2006 war, Hizballah has made a concerted effort to improve the effectiveness of its forces through a review of internal procedures. Investigations conducted following the Second Lebanon War revealed deficiencies on the part of some of the organization's commanders, resulting in a host of senior leaders being removed from their posts.[13] In addition, a review of operational security highlighted a failure to protect strategic facilities. The realization that a security breach allowed Israel to identify and destroy most of the organization's long-range missile systems on the first day of the war, prompted an expansion of Hizballah's internal security branch.

112. However, a graver consequence was a deliberate decision to embed its military architecture even more closely in the civilian areas of Lebanon. In 2006, Hizballah tended to locate military compounds, ammunition bunkers, and rocket-launching sites in close proximity to villages, but outside of populated areas themselves. However, having learned the lessons of the war, and observed the significant utility that arises from directly placing civilians in harm's way on account of Israel's conflicts with Hamas, Hizballah has adopted a similar tactic where civilians are used callously (and against International law) as protective cover to hide military assets in readiness for future IDF operations. These tactics have proven to give the dual advantage of significantly constraining IDF operations on account of its adherence to the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC), as well as substantially raising the cost where the IDF does take action, since collateral civilian deaths, even where legal, aid Hizballah in its propaganda against Israel. Such casualties are amplified by a receptive international media which has little understanding of the applicable legal concepts.

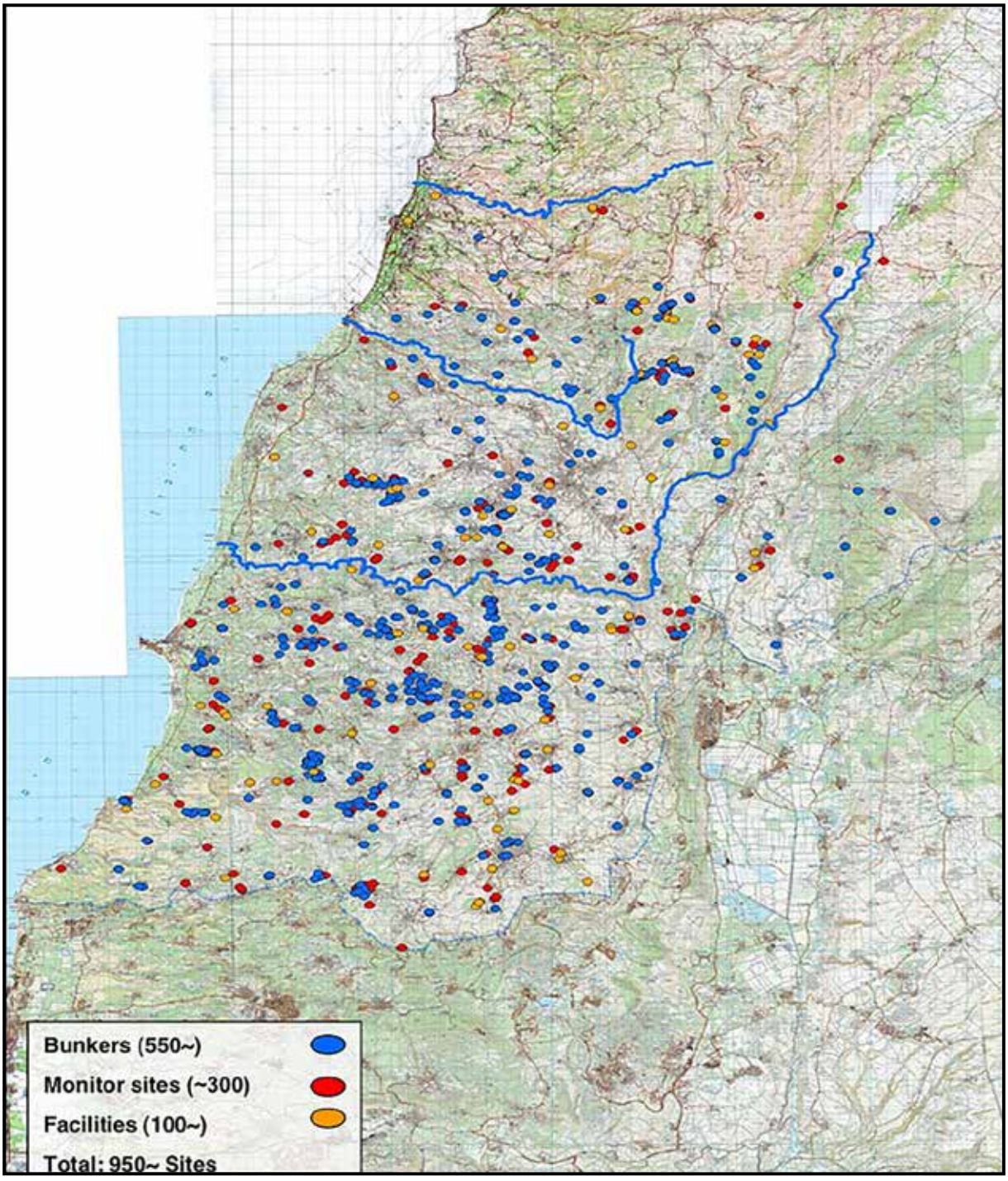
113. Consequently, Hizballah has transformed almost every Shiite village in the country's south into a military asset. This is an elaborate, multi-year effort requiring significant investment. Israeli officials estimate that approximately 10 percent of the population of each village are now Hizballah combatants, while the majority of houses play host to various forms of military equipment and command and control functions. Below these villages and urban areas, Hizballah has constructed an extensive array of tunnel systems, enabling combatants to maneuver within confined spaces, mobilize equipment with speed, store heavy weaponry and engage in ambushes, abductions and retreats into civilian areas. Hizballah forces have also placed much greater emphasis on producing and laying improvised explosive devices (IEDs), in order to restrict Israeli infantry operations.

114. The net effect [Hizballah's] extensive military infrastructure deliberately diffuses its assets into the civilian population, meshing them in an illegal, grossly dangerous and highly challenging setup which confronts Israel in south Lebanon. At the same time, many Hizballah capabilities have been relocated further north – positioned in the Bekaa valley, as well as in and around Tripoli and Beirut[14] – where they are deemed less vulnerable to Israeli military operations. HLMG briefings made reference to Lebanese residents submitting complaints about land being sold for the development of Hizballah military facilities, especially in the Mount Lebanon region.

115. At the same time, Hizballah deliberately targets Israeli civilians as an explicit tactical imperative. It will seek to inflict maximum damage on Israel's civilian population when deploying its vast arsenal of rockets and missiles, in the hope of weakening Israel's resolve, and will target specific civilian and critical national infrastructure – including commercial shipping and air traffic, as well as energy and other resource installations – so as to gain tactical advantage. Hizballah's previous strategy during conflicts was to take a toll on Israel's forces through attrition. However, the group's leadership no longer regards the IDF as Israel's center of gravity. While it still hopes to

13 Felix Frisch, "Senior Hizbollah Commanders Ousted After War," Maariv, April 11, 2007.

14 Mitchell Prothero and Peter Beaumont, "Hizballah gears up for new war"," The Guardian, November 8, 2009.



A 2011 map showing the extent of Hizballah's military infrastructure in Southern Lebanon (source: IDF)

inflict systemic damage upon Israel's armed forces in any conflict, the focus of Hizballah's operational concept has now shifted to the targeting of Israel's civilians and infrastructure on account of a dual calculation. The first is that victory can be achieved by undermining Israel's sense of security, and so by simply conducting a limited operation, even if it falls short of actually destroying the state, Israel may well win a small conventional conflict, but still end up 'losing' the war as Hizballah conceives it, since its population will no longer feel safe. Second, Hizballah calculates that successful attacks against strategic sites will buy the time needed to thrust further into Israel.

"Nasrallah's announced that in a future war with Israel, he would open the border to tens of thousands of foreign fighters drawn from the 'Shiite Legion."

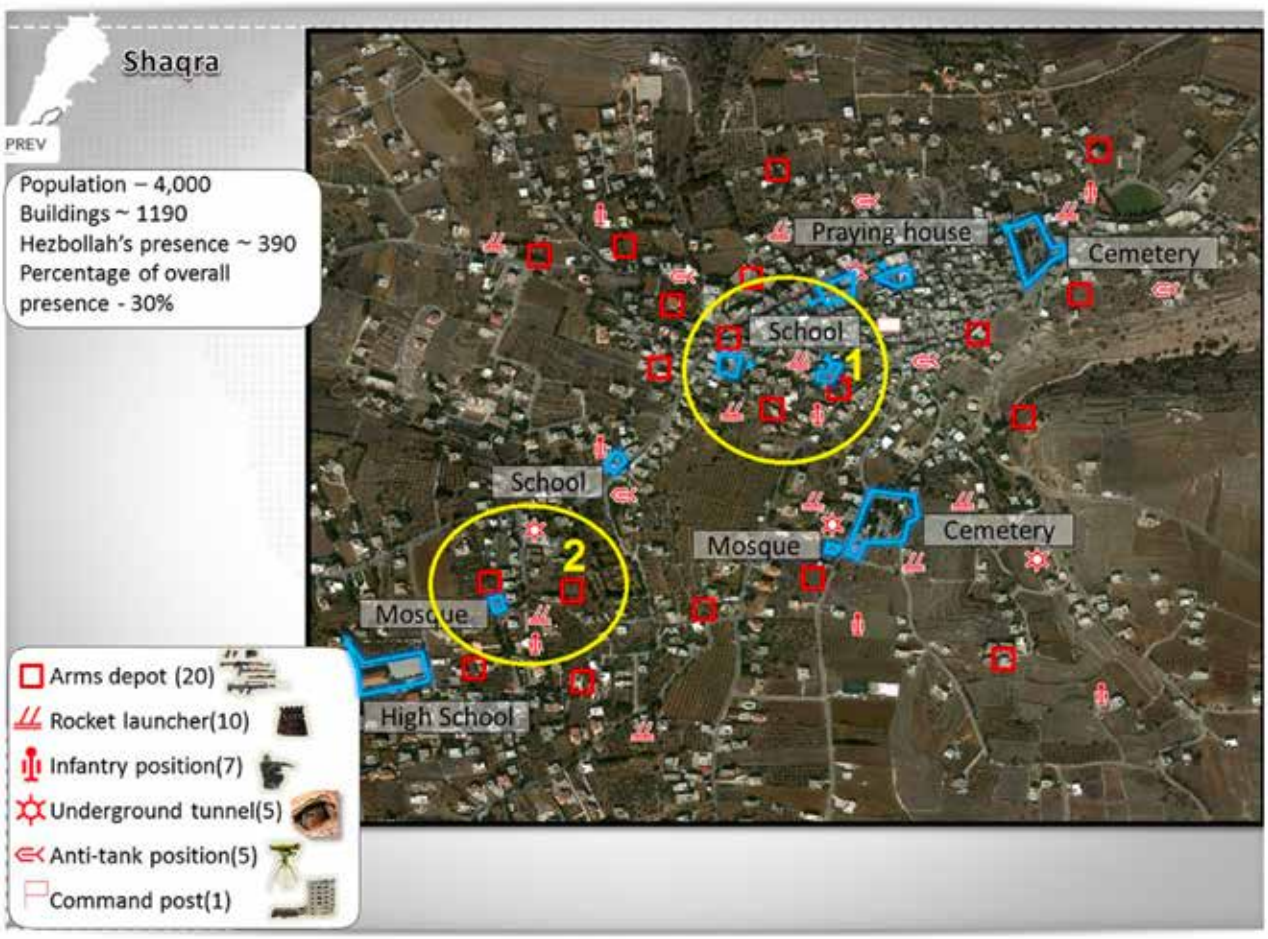
3.3.2 New Offensive Capabilities and Regional Alliances

116. As such, a central development in Hizballah's strategic concept today is to take the battle on to Israeli soil in case of conflict. Hizballah's tactics on the ground in 2006 were largely defensive, with all ground forces deployed instructed to defend their posts inside Lebanon. However, Hizballah's new operational concept now calls for more attacks inside Israel. The goal of such operations would be to occupy a vital area in Israel and hold it for as long as possible, with the aim of demonstrating Hizballah's anti-Israeli credentials to the Arab world, and using kidnapped soldiers and civilians as leverage in diplomatic negotiations. On account of experience gained in Syria, Hizballah is now well-placed to make operational raids into Israel, and simultaneously use rockets to strike settlements and other civilian sites. Hizballah has already formed dedicated commando forces that would be capable of undertaking such missions. These forces would likely use underground tunnels and wadis along the Israeli-Lebanese border in order to infiltrate into the Upper and Western Galilee. The topographic structure is similar to that which Hizballah fighters are used to in Lebanon, while the fighting they would be likely to engage in would be similar to battles Hizballah forces have waged in Syria. Alternatively, Hizballah could engage in cross-border fire and destroy some Israeli sites, before mounting a mechanized injection into Israeli territory. Hizballah has referred to the likelihood of such an operation in numerous propaganda broadcasts, the most prominent of which was a video disseminated by the organization in 2015.[15] Lebanese television, in particular al-Mayadeen, a pro-Hizballah channel, has run reports about the prospect of the organization inserting five teams into northern Israel, each comprised of 5,000 fighters. While those specifics are questionable, it is clear that the prospect of operational raids into Israeli territory are real and a part of operational planning for Hizballah.

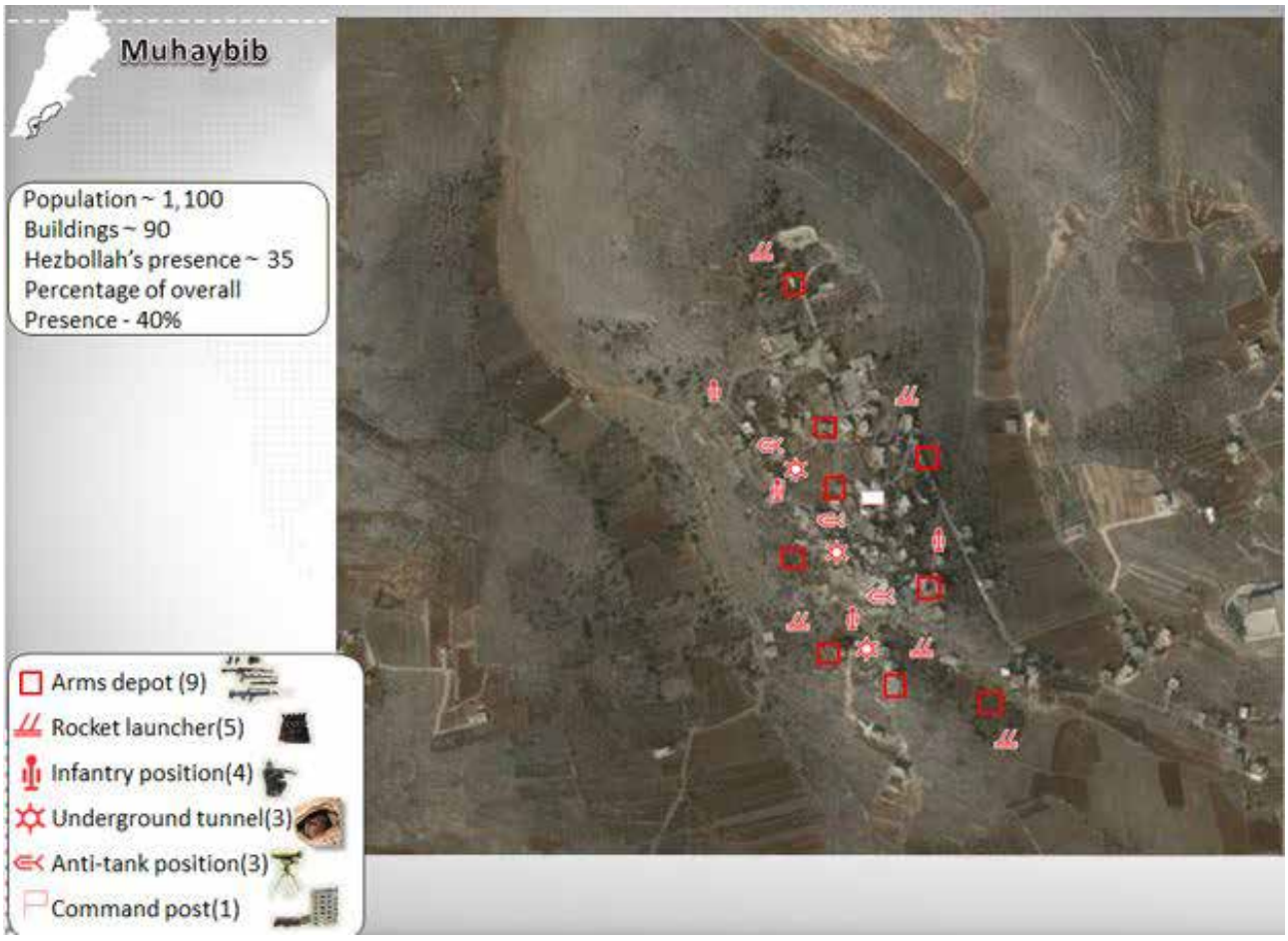
117. A second important development is Nasrallah's announcement that in a future war with Israel, he would open the border to tens of thousands of foreign fighters drawn from the 'Shiite Legion', an Iranian initiative under the IRGC drawing on fighters from Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Iraq. While such an alliance is likely to be affected by the immediate context of the fighting, and the state of the relationships between the groups (as well as wider questions of political and military strategy in the Iranian-led Shiite bloc), it is highly feasible that Hizballah would be joined by at least parts of other terrorist organizations within Iran's realm of influence. Such a possibility stands in stark contrast to the desired image of Hizballah as a Lebanese organization defending Lebanon, but the potential battlefield implications would be significant in the eventuality these forces do enter Lebanon.

"The HLMG saw significant evidence that the Lebanese Armed Forces have completely failed to exert sovereignty in southern Lebanon."

15 Ronen Bergman, "Hizballah 3.0: How Israel's No. 1 enemy is preparing for the next Lebanon war," Ynetnews, July 26, 2015.



Hizballah's military infrastructure in the Shaqra area in south Lebanon (Source: Israel Defense Forces)



Hizballah's military infrastructure in the Muhaybib area in south Lebanon (Source: Israel Defense Forces)

3.4 Hizballah's Consolidation of Lebanese State, Army and Non-Governmental Institutions

118. Historically, Western policy towards Lebanon has been based upon the assumption that Hizballah represents a 'foreign element' within the country, propagating Iranian and Syrian influence and antagonism towards Israel in the face of a more naturally Lebanese camp of Christian, Sunni, and Druze interests, who wish to make Lebanon a more democratic and liberal country, and pursue improved relations with the West. Such a reading of Lebanese politics makes it incumbent upon the international community to offer the government of Lebanon economic and military assistance, on the basis that its state institutions are managed by actors from within the first grouping.

119. Lebanon's perceived fragility underpins this viewpoint. The country hosts hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who reside in the country without a legal identity, in many cases still living in refugee camps. In addition, it has been the recipient of a further 1.4 million Syrian refugees. This influx has created significant pressures upon a country with an estimated population of 4.6 million, and which maintains a delicate ethnic balance, understood to be approximately 30% Sunni, 30% Shi'a, 30% Christian, and 10% Druze. Any proposals which threaten to destabilize the status-quo, such as diplomatic or economic pressure, therefore tend to be dismissed out of hand, in particular given the regional turmoil. The HLMG delegation considered the evidence during its fact finding – however, it came to some concerning insights which suggest that Hizballah has made significant gains inside Lebanese state structures that mean this aforementioned conception is now outdated.

120. The two groupings do exist as described, each operating in accordance with an unwritten accord which allows them to utilize their relative advantages. By demonstrating its commitment to a modicum of political stability, the government of Lebanon qualifies for significant investments from wealthier Arab states. In addition, the Lebanese government's cultivation of international connections enables it to secure political support, financial aid, and the supply of weapons for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), with France and the United States being the main contributors. UNIFIL has also been a donor of military equipment to the LAF.

121. By contrast, while Hizballah permits the President and the Prime Minister to enjoy the trappings of office, it sustains informal power structures which neither co-operate with the formal structures of government, nor are beholden to them. Although Hizballah maintains a formal political party with representation in the Lebanese Parliament, and holds two ministerial posts, its footprint in the country is significantly larger. Hizballah exerts a crude degree of leverage over large portions of the country, owning and operating schools and hospitals, in addition to the administration of religious sites. Hizballah exerts a crude degree of leverage over large portions of the country, owning and operating schools and hospitals, in addition to the administration of religious sites. This level of effective control makes it a state within a state – the de facto ruler of the biggest minority group in Lebanon, while at the same time exercising a controlling stake in the government of Lebanon..

122. In the decade that has passed since the Second Lebanon War, Hizballah has succeed in overawing Lebanese state structures that were intended to restrain its behavior in the period following the war. Following the conflict, UN Resolution 1701 envisaged that the Lebanese government would re-assert its sovereignty in the southern part of Lebanon, disarming Hizballah, and assuming control of the border with Israel.

123. However, the HLMG saw significant evidence that the [Lebanese Armed Forces] LAF has completely failed to exert sovereignty in southern Lebanon on the behalf of its national government. Indeed, these failings began almost as soon as the Second War in Lebanon came to a close. A single incident in February 2007 was emblematic of the problems Lebanese authorities faced. After the LAF stopped a truckload of weapons destined for Hizballah forces, Nasrallah demanded that the truck's contents be returned, on the basis that the organization had a right to hold arms as a means of defending Lebanon from Israeli aggression.[16] Tensions of this kind defined a 17-month political crisis, and resulted in outright fighting in 2008, when the government attempted to shut down Hizballah's military-grade telecommunication network and remove the security chief of Beirut's Airport due to his alleged ties to the group. Nasrallah decried the moves as a "declaration of war" and demanded that they be revoked.

16 http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF_07_046_2.pdf

124. Subsequently, Hizballah fighters seized control of several west Beirut neighborhoods from militiamen loyal to the government, in street battles that left 11 dead and 30 wounded. The army ultimately intervened in the dispute to end the standoff, allowing Hizballah to preserve its telecoms network, and re-instating the airport security chief. Rival Lebanese leaders subsequently reached a political agreement in Doha that reflected this arrangement. The agreement was thus a victory for Hizballah, which had not only demonstrated the ability to assert its will by force over all other factions, but further secured a veto power over matters of state.

3.4.1 Hizballah and the Lebanese Armed Forces

125. The HLMG delegation spent some time deliberating the relationship between Hizballah and the Lebanese Armed Forces, which are today both distinctly inferior to Hizballah forces, and subordinate in operational terms, the consequences of which should be of significant concern to Israel and her Western allies.

126. The LAF are currently able to deploy between 10 and 12 mechanized infantry brigades, not all of which are of the same operational capacity, or deployed in the same sector. While Hizballah is able to mount a larger number of more effective forces from within its own ranks, many LAF brigades – in particular those which are predominantly Shia in their make up – are additionally made up of soldiers who have family members within corresponding Hizballah units. Such informal ties have a significant effect on the relationship between the two organizations, and make international efforts to isolate Hizballah through support of the LAF largely futile.

127. The HLMG delegation was briefed on intelligence assessments of the real-world impact of the increasingly symbiotic relationship between the two organizations as it relates to matters concerning the conflict with Israel. Hizballah's de facto control over state security affords it a decisive role in Lebanon's internal deliberations regarding relations with Israel, making it the only political entity in Lebanon capable of determining whether

Installations belonging to the ostensible NGO 'Green Without Borders' used by Hizballah for reconnaissance purposes (Source: Israel Defense Forces)

the border with Israel remains calm or violence flares up. Serious concerns over the relationship manifest at the border in the fact that we were told that Hizballah routinely instructs the LAF on the location of military posts along the border, so as to strengthen its reconnaissance capabilities, and even carries out joint patrols. Further, intelligence passed to LAF personnel regarding potential violations of UN resolutions also routinely finds its way to Hizballah, recent media reports suggest that at least some military equipment which the LAF receives from international patrons, including the United States, ultimately finds its way into the hands of Hizballah units.

"The deep degree of overlap, if not outright co-operation, between Hizballah and organs of the Lebanese state, especially the Lebanese Armed Forces, is a cause for serious concern."

128. Serious questions arose from our fact-finding over the direction the LAF would take if hostilities were renewed between Israel and Lebanon. LAF units may take no action whatsoever, find ways to provide covert support for Hizballah units by providing it with arms and ammunition, or fight alongside Hizballah outright. This poses grave challenges for Israeli commanders who might come into contact with LAF forces during a future conflict – and would have an immensely complex task in determining the rules of engagement under which they are operating.

129. The deep degree of overlap, if not outright co-operation between Hizballah and organs of the Lebanese state, especially the Lebanese Armed Forces, is a cause for serious concern, not least over the strategy of the international community to distinguish between entities in their support. Lebanese authorities tend to turn a blind eye to Hizballah operations, for example Hizballah continues to use Beirut International Airport to smuggle weapons and contraband. Hassan Nasrallah has further successfully influenced the political platform of the Lebanese unity government, which asserts Hizballah's right – alongside the Lebanese army and nation – to 'complete the liberation' of land it considers to be Lebanese.

130. This neutralizes the effect of any internal demand that Hizballah disarm, and legitimizes its right to engage in terrorism. Until recently, Lebanon's political leadership seemed keen to keep this tacit agreement confidential and vague. Earlier this year, however, Lebanon's new President Michel Aoun – who was only able to take office in 2016 with the support of Hizballah – made several statements in which he confirmed the extent to which Hizballah is integrated into the defensive forces of Lebanon:

131. "…As long as Israel continues to occupy lands and the Lebanese army is not strong enough to stand up to it, we feel the need to have the resistance army [Hizballah] as a complement to the Lebanese army's actions . . . The resistance's arms are not contrary to the state project; otherwise we could have not tolerated it. It is an essential part of Lebanon's defense . . . Hizballah represents the people of the south. They are the inhabitants of the land who defend themselves when Israel tries to occupy or threaten them."[17]

132. By expressing these statements, the Lebanese President not only demonstrated his government's support for Hizballah by granting it authority to operate as a military force, but mirrored and legitimized the group's longstanding justification for refusing to engage in disarmament.[18] The President's views also explain why Hizballah forces have been permitted to encroach further and further north into Lebanon, without encountering resistance from Beirut, and further raise serious questions about any meaningful distinction between the LFA and Hizballah forces.

3.4.2 Hizballah Activity in Southern Lebanon

133. UNSC Resolution 1701 requires the establishment of an area free of any armed force or infrastructure other than that of the LAF or UNIFIL between the Blue Line and the Litani river in southern Lebanon.

17 Haytham Mouzahem, "Lebanese President Provokes Outcry with Hizballah Comment," Al-Monitor, March 3, 2017, http://al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/03/lebanon-president-defend-Hizballah-weapons.html.

18 Since the end of the 2006 war, Nasrallah has frequently proclaimed Hizballah to be Lebanon's main defensive force. On January 25, 2011, he stated that "whatever prevents Israel from attacking Lebanon is not the government and the Prime Minister. It is not the government but rather the balance of deterrence that was created by the resistance in Lebanon, and the Zionists admit this". Al-Manar's TV station, January 25, 2011.

However, HLMG fact-finding revealed a pattern of activity by Hizballah in southern Lebanon completely at odds with the requirements of UNSC Resolution 1701, and raised serious questions over the LAF and UNIFIL's effectiveness. It is abundantly evident that Hizballah is operating extensively in areas south of the Litani, where its activities range from command and control functions to weapons and munitions storage and reconnaissance. We were shown evidence of steps Hizballah takes to intimidate the international forces present in the area, restricting UNIFIL's operations with impunity, in addition to the links between the LAF and Hizballah in determining aspects of its posture in the area.

134. One of the most troubling examples of Hizballah activity in the area has been the use of an ostensible environmental NGO to cover Hizballah's reconnaissance activities. Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations has repeatedly raised the matter of the 'Green Without Borders' NGO, whose observation positions are being used by Hizballah. The HLMG was briefed on this and similar efforts by the organization to hide its activity in southern Lebanon, which together amount to a largely unimpeded enhancement of Hizballah's capabilities close to the border with Israel.

3.5 Hizballah's Strategic Outlook in Case of Conflict

135. In line with Hizballah's significantly upgraded capability and largely unimpeded consolidation of its position in Lebanon, the confidence in its capabilities has translated into its rhetoric since the 2006 war and its acknowledged miscalculation in the aftermath of that conflict. The organization has disseminated messages from Nasrallah, which emphasize Hizballah's evolution from its tendency to support a fundamentally defensive approach to conflict with Israel. In a November 2009 speech, Hizballah's leader played up the organization's determination not to shy away from conflict, stating "send as many divisions as you want: five, seven, and if you want to send the entire Israeli army, and we will destroy and crush it on our hills and on our mountains. This is the great revolution that will be in the region if such a war breaks out".[19]

136. As part of this return to its aggressively antagonistic posture towards Israel, Hizballah displayed new units and weapons including tanks, artillery, motorized anti-tank units, elite units including its armored regiment and artillery regiment, the Radwan elite force, and an off-road motorcycle unit during a November 2016 military parade commemorating 'Martyr's Day'. This military show of force also enabled Hizballah to exhibit its heavy weaponry, including assets displayed in public for the first time. The display underscored the extent to which Hizballah had evolved from a guerrilla organization into a well-trained military organization, rich in combat experience, and endowed with new units and heavy weapons since the 2006 conflict.[20]

137. In a February 2017 speech timed to honor Hizballah's 'three martyrs' (Sheikh Ragheb Harb, Abbas Mussawi, and Imad Mughniyeh), and again in an interview with the Iranian-based television station Channel 1, Nasrallah claimed that Israel considers Hizballah a "strategic enemy", and the country's "number one enemy" ahead of Iran and the Palestinians. He added that Israel does not initiate war against Hizballah because it is aware of the organization's capabilities and the great damage it could inflict on Israel.

> "Hizballah's concept is clear: Hide among Lebanon's civilians, attack Israel's civilians, and draw on Iran's support in weaponry and manpower."

138. In reality, the HLMG briefings also reflected an assessment that Hizballah doesn't want a conflict to break out at present, given it is still seeking to consolidate its gains in Syria and continue preparations in Lebanon. However, its actions and propaganda suggest that it considers its ability to fight a war with Israel as a given – and it has grown ever more confident on account of its increased capabilities, as reflected in its strategic concept. The timing of such a conflict is likely to be determined by miscalculation as much as decision making in Iran and Lebanon, but the [Hizballah's] concept is clear:

19 Speech by the Secretary-General of Hizballah, Hassan Nasrallah, at a Hizballah rally in honor of "Martyrs' Day," Al-Manar TV station November 11, 2009.

20 "The military show of strength held by Hizballah in the Syrian city of Al-Qusayr," The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC), December 6.

Hide among Lebanon's civilians, attack Israel's civilians, and draw on Iran's support in weaponry and manpower to seek to inflict a state of affairs that can be declared as a victory on account of giving the appearance of denting Israel's military superiority, no matter the actual losses on the battlefield or in Lebanese infrastructure (which like its civilians, is merely a pawn in Hizballah playing its part in Iran's efforts to destroy Israel).

4

ISRAEL

4.1 Israel's Ethos

139. The State of Israel is a young democracy that has had to contend with attempts at its annihilation since even before declaring statehood. As a result, it is not only the most powerful military power in the Middle East, but one of the most powerful among all nation states. In the face of the constant threats Israel has and continues to face, it has built a liberal democracy with some of the most vibrant political and social debates anywhere, as well as an economic powerhouse, not least focused around technology. Largely, this is on account of necessity – the ingenuity behind Israel's high-tech sector emanates in large part from Israel's need to create innovative technologies in its defense sector.

140. These necessities have also forged the military ethos that Israel presents. Throughout the HLMG's fact-finding visits for this project (and previous reports), a number of features have been strikingly present in all sectors of politics, society and the military, from the lowest to the highest rank. Israel does not fight because it chooses to, has no expansionist ambitions in the Middle East, and an overwhelming Israeli consensus exists that seeks peace with the Palestinians and surrounding Arab nations, as well as with the wider Islamic world.

141. Israel's ethos and military is built on the notion of the preservation of life. It [Israel] seeks to de-escalate its conflicts, take technical measures that lower the human cost of defending its territory, and adheres to the highest standards of both international law and the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC). Often, its measures in seeking to prevent loss of life exceed the requirements of the LOAC. Its civilian government and judiciary are accountable as the arbiters of its policies and laws, in line with the highest democratic standards. Indeed, since Israel has had to grapple with terrorism against its civilian population since before its declaration of statehood, its Supreme Court is one of the most respected judicial authorities in the world in seeking to grapple with the difficult problems brought on by democracies engaged in battles with terrorist organizations and hybrid terror-armies. Its rulings present a sophisticated body of jurisprudence in contending with the debates that all Western states confront today in the effort to balance security and freedom.

142. In discussing matters of war and peace with Israel's top echelons, the HLMG has repeatedly been impressed at the extraordinary displays of grace under fire, the search for responses that are effective yet moral, and the complete absence of hatred as a driver for its policies, even after decades of assault from its enemies. In some cases, these enemies have regrettably been given succor, and at times cheered on outright, by voices in our own countries. In this context, we were impressed with Israel's extensive efforts to alleviate humanitarian suffering in Syria – a conflict where all sides consider Israel an enemy – by treating wounded civilians in Israeli hospitals, an effort which has become public knowledge since our visit. Overall, our experience has been nothing short of remarkable throughout this project in terms of the openness Israeli political and military leaders met our inquiries and concerns with. The country has one of the most robust political and strategic debates, and it is the combination of the seriousness of the threats with the [Its] capacity for self-defense, innovation, self-criticism and high standards of morality make Israel a unique and crucial ally to the West in these difficult times for democratic nations.

"Israel seeks to de-escalate its conflicts, take technical measures that lower the human cost of defending its territory, and adheres to the highest standards of international law and the Law of Armed Conflict"

4.2 Israel's Military Capabilities

4.2.1 The IDF's Capabilities and Upgrades Since the Second Lebanon War

143. The defense requirements of living under constant threat since before gaining statehood has meant that Israel has always had to place a premium on military capabilities. One result of this is a highly developed domestic defense industry. Coupled to the close defense relationship Israel enjoys with the United States, ensuring Israel maintains a qualitative edge over all of the region's other militaries, general

conscription, highly developed doctrines, command and control and training, as well as some of the best intelligence capabilities in the world, Israel today mounts one of the most powerful militaries on the globe, and the most powerful in the Middle East. Israel is equipped with the most advanced fighter jets, high-tech armed drones, and is widely assumed to be a nuclear weapons power. It has one of the world's most battle-ready armies, a force that has fought in four major engagements since 2006, and has experience in securing some of the most problematic borders on earth.

144. Statistical data available for 2014 suggests that the IDF has 410,500 active frontline personnel, 3,657 tanks, and 989 aircraft.[21] The IDF's ground forces are equipped with the latest standards of modern Western military equipment, which in many cases includes indigenous modifications and innovations, such as the Tavor assault rifle[22] and the Merkava MK4 Tank,[23] considered to be among the best tanks in the world. Further, IDF ground forces possess advanced night-vision capabilities, command-and-control systems and other hi-tech enablers – and are highly trained and experienced on account of recent conflicts in Gaza, as well as the ongoing low-intensity conflict in the West Bank and on Israel's borders.

145. While the absolute size of the IDF's ground forces has decreased since the 2006 Lebanon War, there have been significant improvements in all aspects of force protection, maneuverability, intelligence gathering, and readiness for offensive combat operations at the brigade and division level, significantly upgrading capabilities from 2006.

146. Similarly, while the total number of aircraft in the Israel Air Force (IAF) has not changed dramatically since 2006, the quality of the platforms has improved, both in systems performance and, above all, in the effectiveness of ammunition. Based on these new weapons systems, the IAF can today attack thousands of targets per day with precise ammunition and fewer sorties. Current technology enables a single aircraft to attack several targets in one sortie, significantly increasing the number of targets the IAF can attack daily compared to the 2006 Lebanon War. This development, coupled with the improved intelligence capability generating more targets, is a potential game changer for Israel's capabilities.

147. Israel's navy has also undergone an extensive upgrade since 2006. It has pursued a program of equipping vessels with the means to confront multiple threats simultaneously, as part of an overall strategic vision in which the navy plays a growing role in the IDF's integrated warfare capabilities. These upgrades include new weapons that will enable missile ships to launch precise, long-range strikes on ground-based enemy targets, the development of the Adir advanced radar which enables improved detection and visibility of threats and targets, the Barak 8 air defense missile, active electronic warfare devices, as well as other enhancements.[24] The Israeli Navy is also altering the design of its Sa'ar-6 Corvette ships in order to fit additional Iron Dome interceptors onboard the vessels. By adding a second launcher, each ship will be able to engage a far higher number of projectiles. This is particularly relevant in light of the increased threat that Hizballah's shore-launched rockets present to Israel's navy.

148. Indeed, active defense systems against missiles and rockets are a crucial part of Israel's military capabilities in general today. In 2006, Israel did not have any such systems, meaning the only way to minimize civilian casualties was based on passive defense measures consisting of early warning and shelter infrastructure. Today, Israel has four separate systems designed to intercept rockets and missiles. The most widely known is the Iron Dome system, deployed to impressive results in the 2014 Gaza conflict with Hamas, protecting against short-range rockets. Israel has recently begun deploying the system known as David's Sling, which forms the middle part of the defensive layer, intercepting missiles larger than Iron Dome was designed for. Such missiles are now deemed to be in Hizballah's

21 Armin Rosen and Jeremy Bender, "The Most Powerful Militaries in the Middle East," Business Insider, October 27, 2014,

22 The Tavor is a futuristic-looking bullpup assault rifle developed by Israel Military Industries (IMI) for the IDF. It is designed to be light, accurate, and reliable.

23 The MK4 features a 120-mm smoothbore gun, and it has the unique capability that other western tanks lack of being able to fire a Lahat, an anti-tank missile from the gun. This tank has a heavy secondary armament consisting of 1×12.7 mm machine guns, 2×7.62 mm machine guns, 60 mm mortars, and twelve smoke grenades. This kind of armament is useful in urban warfare where multiple machine guns and mortars are necessary to engage infantry and concealed threats. The other significant feature of this tank is the Trophy Active Protection System, which can intercept incoming projectiles like anti-tank shells and missiles using a network of tiny radars and hard-kill projectile dispensers.

24 Yaakov Lappin, "The Israeli Navy is Quietly Enhancing its Capabilities For Precision, Long-Range Missiles," Jerusalem Post, May 13, 2014, http://www.jpost.com/Defense/The-Israel-Navy-is-quietly-enhancing-its-capabilities-for-precision-long-range-missiles-352064.

possession in large numbers. Finally, the Arrow 2 and Arrow 3 systems protect against long-range ballistic missiles. The main challenge for Israel is a question of capacity, in particular how many rockets can be intercepted simultaneously. Despite intense efforts to improve the technology and increase the number of batteries and interceptors, results in a future conflict with Hizballah are unlikely to match the success rate seen against Hamas, given that it is a fair assumption that out of the tens of thousands rockets that Hizballah now possesses, thousands will be launched against targets in Israel, and even with the best systems, as many as hundreds of these are unlikely to be intercepted. Such systems do not provide a hermetic defense even when large barrages are not launched, and the threat of harm and damage remains. In addition, the sheer cost of each individual missile interceptor, as well as the costs of the systems themselves and the resources required to maintain them, means that Israel needs to divert significant resources from other efforts (including military efforts). Finally, missile defense systems naturally do not negate other threats, such as the threat of invasion into Israeli territory or short-range mortar fire.

149. Israel's intelligence apparatus has long been one of the most capable of any state. It performed well in the 2006 war, but in briefings with the HLMG, Israeli officials were confident that a significant upgrade has been achieved since then, and assert that the intelligence superiority Israel enjoys over Hizballah today is greater even than it was in 2006. Such intelligence capabilities are likely based on a multitude of strands, but particularly on an upgrade of Israel's signals intelligence (SIGINT) and cyber intelligence efforts.

150. Overall, while there has been a decrease in the number of platforms Israel deploys in all services since 2006, there is a substantial improvement in the performance of these platforms in terms of firepower, precision weapons capability, as well as maneuverability and self-protection of forces.

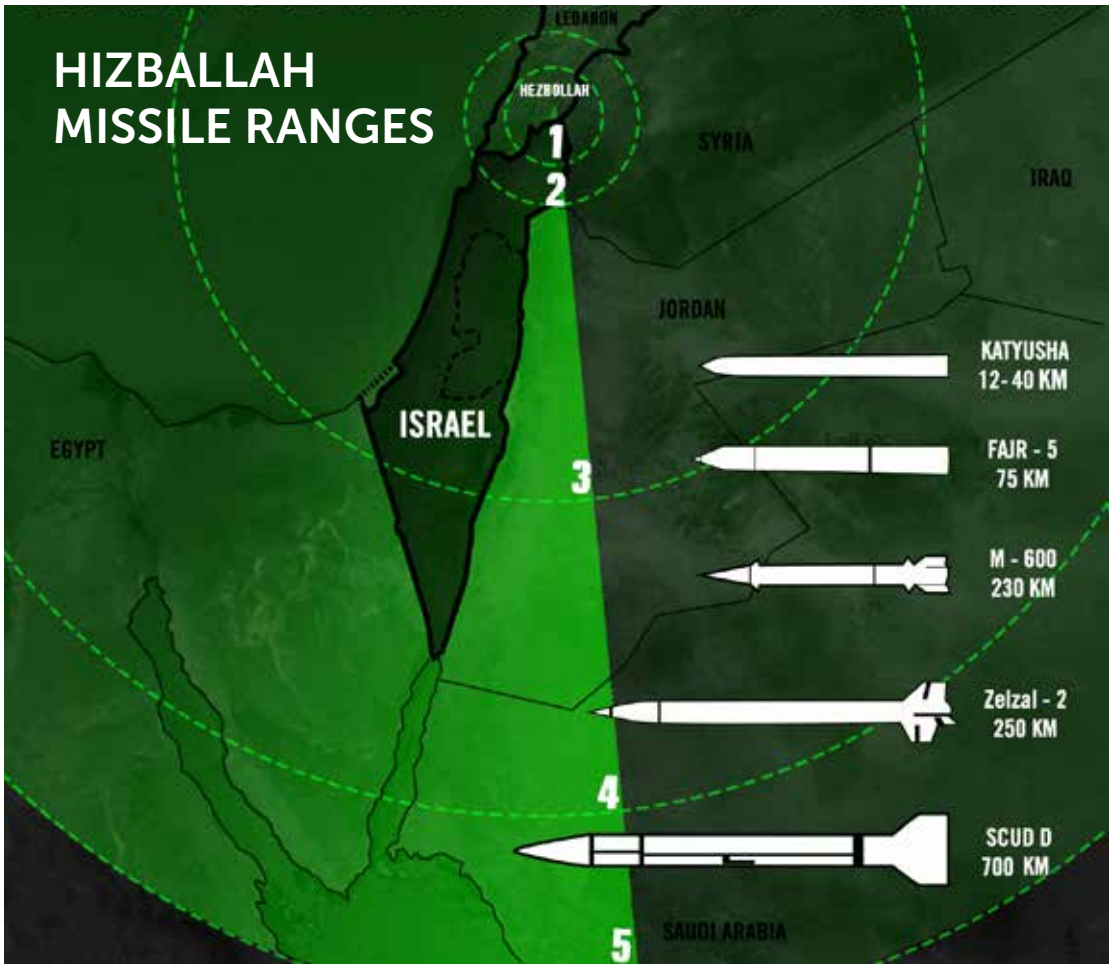
4.3 Israel's Strategic Concept

151. Israel has one of the world's most highly developed intellectual frameworks for analyzing and countering the threats it faces. From policy debates and academic research to military doctrines, research and development, as well as 'lessons learned' feedback from operational experience, Israel's political decision makers and IDF leadership engage in constant refinement of its strategic concept. Since Israel is confronted with a multitude of challenging threat profiles in close proximity, in some cases overlapping, it has developed strategic and operational frameworks specific to a variety of challenges it faces. As such, many of the policies, tactics and doctrines are specific to each adversary and shaped by the history of the battles fought with them. However, all of the concepts and operational plans are governed under the same democratic and legal checks and balances as we would expect in our own countries, in some case exceeding the practices of other Western nations.

> "The Israel Air Force leadership made clear to the HLMG that the scale of the aerial assault in a future conflict would be immense – possibly unprecedented in modern times."

4.3.1 Strategic Imperatives in the Context of the Threat from Hizballah

152. Israel's strategic analysis of a potential third Lebanon war is sobering. The HLMG spent significant time with political and military leaders to understand the nuances of the relevant policy debates. Israel's leaders offered frank and open assessments, including laying out relevant policy disputes, but there was unanimous agreement that a new Lebanon war would result in large numbers of casualties and significant destruction. Policymakers expect thousands of casualties in Lebanon, many of whom will be civilians despite the IDF adhering to the highest standards of LOAC. These grave projections are based on a number of factors that would affect the fighting – the proximity of the fighting to Israel's borders will mean a high threat to Israel's civilian population, and as a result, the IDF will have to act fast, reducing the strategic scope for absolute certainty in determining civilian presence near legitimate targets. Ground maneuvers are also inevitable in such a battlefield



Source: Israel Defense Forces

context, meaning direct potential friction with the civilian population and damage to surroundings, since such operations include the need to conduct fire for reasons such as force protection – since Hizballah's deliberate strategy of hiding its military assets among Lebanon's civilian population will mean that various locations will become legitimate military targets where civilians will unfortunately be in harm's way. Hizballah not only operates from within the civilian population, but actively uses them as human shields, deliberately placing them in harm's way for tactical advantage (making the IDF hesitate to attack) and strategic advantage (using images of civilian harm to de-legitimize the IDF). Further, Israeli decision makers fully expect Hizballah will also target Israel's civilians deliberately, in what is likely to be an unprecedented assault. Israeli decisionmakers thus understand that they will be presented with a scenario that is going to prove intolerable to their citizens. As a result, the IDF has been intensely focused on developing an appropriate strategic concept to deal with such a conflict, the centerpiece of which calls for overwhelming speed and firepower alongside the rapid simultaneous deployment of aerial, ground and naval forces, artillery, active defense as well as cyberattacks. Yet, even with the fullest precautions in such a campaign, the "fog of war" is a natural part of such fighting – no forces have a complete intelligence picture, and there are often technical errors and other mistakes. This is compounded when considering that any future hostilities are likely to be highly intensive, and to occur in urban areas due to the already noted strategy of Hizballah embedding its military infrastructure among civilians. Israel expects to take its customary precautions – sometimes exceeding the requirements of LOAC and the practices of other democratic nations' armies – including leaflets and phone calls urging civilians to leave areas that Hizballah is embedded in, but still expects significant collateral damage. Hizballah's missiles and rockets are stored in heavily populated areas, with the majority in or below residential buildings, meaning such damage will be unavoidable.

Members of the HLMG in Discussion with the Israel Air Force Chief of Staff

153. Similarly, Hizballah's vastly expanded arsenal of missiles and rockets will be aimed directly at Israel's population, since Hizballah will target Israel's civilians as a matter of deliberate strategy in what is likely to be an unprecedented assault. Even where Israel manages to protect citizens using the best defensive measures, there is no doubt that many civilian houses will be destroyed – and significant damage will be caused to infrastructure, with civilian casualties likely to far exceed previous conflicts. As such, the bottom line for Israel's strategic assessment is clear – a future Lebanon War will be much more intensive on all parameters than the previous one. In case Hamas in Gaza joins the war, and opens another front, or forces from Syria open fire additionally, the circumstances would be even more severe.

154. Israeli decisionmakers thus understand that they will be presented with a scenario that is going to prove intolerable to their citizens. As a result, the IDF has been intensely focused on developing an appropriate strategic concept to deal with a [new] conflict [with Hizballah]. Known as the Gideon Doctrine (outlined in a shorter, unclassified version simply as "IDF Strategy"), the centerpiece of it [which] calls for overwhelming speed and firepower with rapid simultaneous deployment of aerial, ground and naval forces, artillery, active defense as well as cyberattacks.[25]

25 David Daoud, "Hizballah's Strategy in Syria Won't Help Against Israel," *Weekly Standard*, August 17, 2016

155. The vulnerability of Israel's population and critical infrastructure to rocket fire guides this overall concept and its prioritization of both speed and military efficiency in order to shorten the timeframe for achieving strategic success. Israel's strategy seeks to quickly penetrate Lebanese territory in order to damage Hizballah's military and command and control infrastructure and strike key targets, so as to minimize the period in which Israel's population is exposed. This focus on speed and efficiency was highlighted repeatedly in HLMG discussions with senior military personnel. They cited the asymmetric nature of any conflict and the history of warfare with Hizballah to warn that though Hizballah will probably suffer more

An IDF training facility simulating conditions in South Lebanon

Members of the HLMG on a field visit to an IDF training facility in northern Israel

Members of the HLMG on a field visit to an IDF training facility designed to train for combat against terrorist organizations using tunnels running between civilian infrastructure as a military tactic

military casualties than Israel, losing a minimum of 50 percent of its military capabilities, Israel will have a far less tolerance for casualties, despite IDF losses being likely to constitute a negligible portion of its power.

156. As such, it is in Israel's interest to fight a short war with overwhelming firepower. HLMG discussions with the IAF suggest operational planning for an unprecedented assault. The IAF can be expected to employ a sophisticated and systematic air campaign from the outset of any conflict, seeking to target ballistic missile and rocket sites and other advanced weaponry. In addition, air strikes are likely to target Hizballah's leadership at all levels, in order to weaken its command and control. Other priorities will be the destruction of defensive capabilities that threaten the maneuvers of Israeli ground forces, as well as air defense systems, some of which will be state-of-the-art Russian and Iranian systems such as the SA-22.

157. The IAF [Israel Air Force] leadership made clear to the HLMG that the scale of the aerial assault [in a future conflict] would be immense – possibly unprecedented in modern times. The improvements in precision munitions, targeting intelligence and operational effectiveness described above, lead the IAF to assert that Israel would be able to achieve the same effect within the first 48-60 hours of a conflict, as it had during the entirety of the 2006 war, during which Israeli aircraft engaged in 34 days of kinetic activity. IDF officials not only spoke of the need to strike thousands of targets throughout the entirety of Lebanon, but expressed confidence that the air force had found a way to multiply its capabilities in order to do so in a short period of time. The IAF also noted that one silver lining to the enhanced capabilities Hizballah presents today is that in coming to resemble a conventional military force, it has made itself easier to target since the advanced nature of its weaponry gives off a bigger signature.

158. This focus on securing rapid results also characterizes the approach Israel will adopt for any ground offensive. Since the 2006 conflict, the IDF has expanded and intensified its training program dedicated specifically to dealing with Hizballah's tactics and the Lebanese terrain. Many training sessions occur at night, when the IDF will likely have to fight a good part of a campaign, while tunnel and underground warfare has become a central component of infantry training. The HLMG was able to inspect Israel's training facilities, and found an impressive effort, unique among Western militaries, to simulate urban combat against terror-army hybrids embedded among civilian populations and utilize extensive pre-prepared tunnel networks. A mock southern Lebanese village, complete with civilian housing, disguising tunnel networks and wooden areas with extensive tunneling, help the IDF's forces prepare for the scenarios they will encounter in southern Lebanon should conflict break out. Since Hizballah has located its command and control, personnel and weaponry throughout southern Lebanon, the IDF expects to find most villages containing a heavy presence of Hizballah fighters. However, whilst these forces act like those of a regular army in many ways, they do not have the capacity to maneuver over long distances. Israeli ground forces are therefore likely to identify areas where Hizballah's force presence is weaker, and thrust through such corridors in order to reach ballistic missile locations and other objectives. Internal reviews assessing the IDF's performance

An Iron Dome Battery (Credit: Israel Defense Forces)

The David's Sling System designed to project against medium sized projectiles (Credit: Military Edge Online)

in 2006 concluded that progress was too slow – ground forces tended to cease their advance once they had taken casualties, and were also instructed to do so when UN officials signaled their intention to intervene in the conflict. In a third war in Lebanon, the Israeli army is unlikely to allow such distractions to hinder its advance penetrating deep into Lebanon, given the strategic concept outlined.

159. At the same time, briefings the HLMG received made clear that due to the scale of Hizballah's arsenal, Israel's aerial and ground proficiency will still not be sufficient to prevent Israeli territory from being struck by rockets and missiles throughout a conflict. During Protective Edge, some 4,200 rockets were fired, and Israeli missile defense systems were able to destroy 90% of those it sought to intercept. However, in a conflict with Hizballah, Israeli officials expect 1,000 – 1,500 missiles and rockets to be fired daily. Given the necessity of protecting areas with a high density of population as well as strategic assets, such a volume of projectiles will require missile defenses to be prioritized. Hence, Israel will struggle to meet the expectations set during Protective Edge in terms of missile defense of near total protection and will face a likely impact of the kind not seen since 1948.

160. This reinforces the core assumption of the IDF's strategic concept that Israel will need to move with lightning speed within hours of a conflict getting underway and overwhelming firepower. Israeli military action is likely to be very effective in the first days of a conflict, when existing intelligence about Hizballah locations is actionable – and Israeli society has yet to suffer the cumulative effect of Hizballah attacks on Israel's civilian areas. However, as a potential conflict progresses, Israel's military superiority becomes harder to translate into battlefield victory. The nature of asymmetric warfare means that however effectively it hits Hizballah, Israel will not be able to declare a clear victory. The number of civilian casualties, the continued interruption of normal daily life and economic damage for Israel will become more difficult to manage the longer a conflict lasts. As a potential conflict goes on, pathways towards an outcome that could be conceived of as a victory for Israel narrow. Conversely, Hizballah's rocket attacks reap more strategic benefits the longer a conflict endures, given that an inability by Israel to curtail the rocket fire, even after heavy action, will give the appearance of Hizballah strength in the face of an assault by a far superior force. This is compounded

The Arrow Missile Defense System (Credit: U.S. Navy)

Members of the HLMG in discussions with the IDF's Military Advocate General's Legal Unit

by the fact that in 2006, most of Hizballah's rockets were located between the border and the Litani river (10-15 km). Today, on account of the extended range of the rockets, many of them are stored significantly further from the Israeli-Lebanese border, meaning the IDF will have to maneuver a much greater distance to destroy them. As such, the concept of an overwhelming assault at speed is important for this reason too.

4.3.2 Legal and Doctrinal Considerations in the Context of the Threat from Hizballah

161. The HLMG has extensive experience examining the IDF's doctrines, principles, practice, directives and legal compliance. It is [The IDF] is an army that adheres to the highest standards of LOAC, often exceeding the precautions our own militaries' doctrines require in the kinds of battlefield context that [it] is forced to fight in. Respect for, and adherence to, LOAC are fundamental values which Israel justly takes pride in: something evident throughout our discussions with political and military leaders, as well as throughout all ranks of the IDF we met. Israel's military makes an immense effort to instill the details of LOAC, attendant Rules of Engagement (ROEs) and resultant operational realities throughout the IDF. Instruction in LOAC is a linchpin of IDF training, from basic training to the most senior level, while IDF personnel with particular responsibilities, such as target planning or officers responsible for humanitarian affairs for example, receive further specialist instruction on LOAC. The IDF additionally directly integrates adherence to LOAC into its combat training. Officers are issued relevant training manuals for different theatres and circumstances, and troops train regularly at the IDF's unique facilities preparing soldiers for the specific challenges which the modern urban battlefield presents in the battle against terror-army hybrid organizations.

162. Israel further ensures the IDF's strict adherence to LOAC by tightly integrating its Military Advocate General (MAG) Corps – which is independent of the chain of command and answerable to the civilian authorities – into all aspects of IDF activity, including specific operations. In the context of a potential new Lebanon war, this includes the ability to surge legal advisers drawn from all parts of the IDF, including reservists, to supplement the Operational Law Apparatus which applies during active hostilities. These LOAC experts advise all levels of command, including the General Staff Command, and are deployed at the Regional Command and Divisional levels, where they advise on the legality of decisions concerning ROEs, targeting, weaponry, detainee treatment and humanitarian efforts.

163. Where Commanders do not have legal advisers specifically as part of their command, they are able to request legal advice from representatives of the Operational Law Apparatus at any time, through the MAG Corps situation room which operates 24/7, accessible to any rank or unit in the IDF as necessary. Commanders additionally rely on their legal training and education, coupled to any applicable IDF orders, regulations or directives. Such binding directives implementing applicable rules of LOAC are issued regularly, formulated in coordination with military lawyers and addressing specific scenarios, reactive to the extremely challenging battlefield conditions warfare against terror-army hybrids brings with it.

164. Further, a comprehensive, well-rehearsed protocol exists in the IDF to assert LOAC compliance [with the Law of Armed Conflict] during active hostilities. Given the intelligence acquired and operational planning underway in the IAF, it is likely that the IDF has significant numbers of pre-planned targets for attack against military objectives in case of conflict with Hizballah. Such planning follows a multi-stage process for approval in order to ensure LOAC compliance. This procedure ascertains that the potential target constitutes a valid military objective – and that the conditions for proportionality are met, as well as to assess any civilians, infrastructure or sensitive sites that may be affected by the attack. Commanders determine objectives for the action, including conditions such as the extent of destruction warranted, the necessity of enemy presence and similar considerations, while operational planners advise on options for a specific attack, geared towards the further minimization of collateral damage for example. Officers examine all parameters and make a professional assessment of the target. This includes a binding assessment by a legal adviser about the legality of the attack and any necessary stipulations. The input provided into the decision by the various different branches of the military is updated and re-evaluated on a timely basis in advance of any attack. A senior commander will ultimately review the information prior to initiating any attack.

165. Some of the members of the HLMG have in the past expressed explicit concerns that these procedures are excessive in some of the lengths they go to, and even suggested that they are not necessary, particularly when the IDF is educated in the application of the LOAC throughout their training. They expressed concern in particular that these elaborate procedures may establish an unwarranted precedent that yields significant advantage to an adversary such as Hizballah that intentionally violates LOAC to achieve tactical, operational, and strategic advantage. HLMG members are aware that Israel, as with other states, variously imposes restrictions on its conduct, over and above the legal requirements, for a range of reasons – policy, ethics, and even concerns over legitimacy. Israel's interest is in mitigating the risk of civilian harm, and thus undertakes steps to achieve this even where not mandated by the law. However, some HLMG members are concerned that Israel will be judged according to the standards it has set in the past, and that the restrictions states impose for themselves will be extrapolated when assessing the conduct of others. For example, the precautions taken in the Gaza Strip, such as calling individual homes warning of an impending attack, are likely not to be repeated in Lebanon, due to the expected higher intensity of the hostilities (which will require faster action, and a reduced capability to divert offensive resources such as surveillance drones for such purposes) and the lower intelligence capabilities Israel enjoys in Lebanon. Indeed, Israeli officials have explicitly expressed concern to the HLMG that they may not be able to exceed the stipulations of LOAC in a future Lebanon war, since the threat picture presented is significantly more challenging than against Hamas in Gaza. However, the IDF will likely still be citicized for not undertaking such practices when fighting Hizballah, even though they are not mandated by the law. Similarly, policy restrictions that may suit one state in a particular context (such as precautions taken in aerial operations against lower capacity terror organizations) may not be suited to another state in another context – nevertheless, HLMG members are concerned that the same standards will be applied when assessing the conduct of both.

166. Similarly, IDF doctrines adhere to the highest standards of legal and operational practice. For example, where acute combat realities prevent real-time legal input and do not allow for such a deliberative targeting process, commanders are instructed to be diligently reliant on their training, specific relevant directives and other relevant factors to ensure their compliance with all aspects of LOAC. Further, detailed regulations exist in the IDF to ensure the appropriate safeguarding of

sensitive sites, objects that are considered to have special protection from attack under LOAC or warrant special consideration on account of policy decisions, such as for example, hospitals, schools, religious sites, large food factories, power stations and UN facilities. Notice of the location of sensitive sites is distributed to all levels of command, and updated on a real-time basis by an assigned officer. This data is widely accessible, including to relevant commanders in the field. In limited circumstances where sensitive sites may be damaged, either on account of an attack in their proximity, or directly in circumstances where they are legitimate military targets on account of their use for military purposes (thus invalidating their protected status), detailed IDF regulations mandate additional precautionary measures and require attacks to be granted specific approval which can go all the way to the Chief of Staff and, in certain extremely sensitive cases, to the Minister of Defense and even the Prime Minister.

167. Additional doctrines relate to aspects of the anticipated battles that require particular attention such as the likely requirement to deploy artillery for means of force protection, and other operational imperatives. Deployment of such weapons in this type of combat is governed by strict doctrines and directives forbidding their use outside a set of clearly defined conditions of specific military necessity. For example, in the 2014 Gaza conflict, artillery fire support was only available to ground forces as they traversed open fields, requiring a set of stringent safety margins – and ceasing once the ground forces reached the outskirts of built up areas, where artillery could not be used. The IDF further employs a number of technical and operational means beyond what other comparable militaries' practices consist of, to ensure the accuracy of its artillery fire.

4.3.3 Diplomatic Considerations in the Context of the Threat from Hizballah

168. Israel has suffered an unprecedented assault on the legitimacy of its actions since its inception. This has intensified markedly in the modern era of warfare against terror-army hybrids. The HLMG was called into life partially to furnish an understanding of how the ill-informed or nefarious representation of the realities of the type of warfare Israel is engaged in – and all of our nations now confront in the fight with the terror-armies of radical Islam across an archipelago of theatres across the globe – affects the ability of democracies to defend themselves from such threats. This challenge isn't Israel's alone, but Israel is confronted with a unique campaign of propaganda from its enemies, amplified by sympathizers in the West and international institutions that often display a flagrant bias when dealing with the country, the United Nations above all.

169. As such, Israeli officials are acutely aware that international public opinion was severely hostile to some of the actions they felt were necessary during the 2006 war, such as the bombing of Dahieh, and portions of Beirut airport that were in use by Hizballah. Yet it is likely that Israeli military action will greatly exceed these limited measures in the event of a new conflict. This will be exacerbated by Israel's experience in previous conflicts that no matter how clear the evidence is that their adversary, Hamas previously or Hizballah in this case, seeks to purposefully maximize civilian casualties, and no matter how far the IDF's action exceed even the most stringent interpretations of LOAC, the international community will condemn its military action in stark terms once a conflict begins to result in civilian casualties. This is likely to be exacerbated by Israel's doctrine requiring substantial and immediate damage to Hizballah in the opening stages of any new war, with the television pictures and attendant battle over the narrative of the fighting likely to prove highly contentious.

170. Yet the international environment has changed since the previous war, and a defensive assault on Hizballah, a terror organization now strongly associated with Bashar Assad's regime in Syria, will generate full support not only from the United States, but likely also from other Western countries, in addition to tacit but increasing support from the Sunni Arab world. Such support will provide Israel enough time to accomplish its military objectives before the United States, the UN and other actors in the international community exert sufficient pressure to affect the course of action. However, as per Israel's strategic concept, it is in its interest to fight a short war, meaning that it is possible that international pressure does not affect, or even aids, Israel's operational freedom in a future conflict. Conversely, the realities of the new strategic environment in the Middle East may have unforeseen effects on the Israel's operational freedom and diplomatic cover. Russia's entry into the region

– and successful pursuit of its objectives in Syria – includes the supplying weapons to Israel's adversaries and stationing personnel close to Israel's border, while the new U.S. administration, though a strong and steadfast ally in principle, has so far sent mixed signals about its approach to and policies in the Middle East.

171. An even greater question is the calibration of Israel's own diplomatic and legal approach to the next conflict. Its previous strategic concept, as applied in 2006, made Hizballah the primary adversary in the fighting. However, during the HLMG fact-finding, it was clear that an intense policy debate in Israel's upper echelons increasingly has some senior voices making the case that a conflict should probably be conceived as including the state of Lebanon as an adversary. This is on account of both the realities of the extensive use by Hizballah of Lebanese government facilities for military purposes, the extent of Hizballah control over, and collusion with, Lebanon's political system and military, as well as the strategic imperatives that recommend such a course of action.

172. A number of senior current and former officials advocated such a posture on account of the strategic imperatives. Their view is that victory against Hizballah alone is impossible to achieve when the conditions of democratic nations fighting against terror-armies are considered. That is, where a state does not control the territory of a terror-army adversary, and where the adversary enjoys the full support of another state i.e. Hizballah in Lebanon – it is exceedingly difficult to accomplish strategic success while that state supporter remains immune from action. As such, an alternative strategy may be called for, with Israel operating against Lebanese entities as well as Hizballah. Based on such a revised concept, any hostilities instigated from the Lebanese side of the border would be met with a military response not just against Hizballah, but lead to an official recognition of war with Lebanon. Israel will likely target all assets deemed to be militarily enabling Hizballah in any case, but such a clear recognition of war as a matter of policy – where the factual and legal situation supports such a determination – has significant other benefits. For example, while the main military targets likely would still consist of Hizballah assets, Israel would at the same time be unconstrained in striking lawful targets in Lebanon, including those of the LAF.

"Israel assesses that Hizballah does not seek a full conflict at this time, but has begun engaging in operations along the border and preparations inside Lebanon that may force Israel to react."

173. Given that Israel's strategic concept is geared towards a short, intensive conflict, such a course of action has the additional benefit of likely shortening any conflict. If Lebanon per se is an adversary, interest seeking to stop a conflict will multiply. While much of the Western and Sunni Arab world is likely to tolerate and even welcome heavy Israeli action against Hizballah, such tolerance will be more limited if it comes to a war with Lebanon as a whole. Hizballah itself will struggle greatly in terms of its legitimacy if it brings a devastating war to the Lebanese people. External stakeholders, both Western and Arab, will be loath to see the investments in Lebanon – and the residual hope in the idea that Hizballah is a foreign agent in an essentially pro-Western country extinguished. As such, such a course of action might work to shorten the conflict.

174. While HLMG delegations always meet with a variety of serving and former personnel to understand the multifaceted nature of many of the challenges inherent to Israel's security dilemmas, it is clear that no consensus on the topic exists yet and that Israel further will likely keep its room for maneuver by not committing to a declared policy. Such considerations are most acute over the role of the LAF. Most interlocutors made the case that the close level of coordination between the LAF and Hizballah would make some level of incidental damage inevitable. The IDF would likely target 'dual use' facilities, but refrain from attacking the LAF itself, absent more specific political guidance. While some voices encourage making an explicit threat of force against the LAF as a diplomatic signal to encourage their cessation of co-operation with Hizballah – and galvanize international recognition of the problem – this has to be balanced against Israel's delicate diplomatic position vis-a-vis the more pragmatic Sunni states.

175. Some members of the HLMG delegation expressed skepticism about the wisdom of this approach, suggesting that far from prompting a diplomatic response that curbs Iran's role, or results in the disarmament of Hizballah, weakening the Lebanese state through military action would allow Iran to exert even greater control in the post-bellum period. However, senior policy-makers offered an alternative view, noting that Israeli domestic political opinion was not prepared to insulate Lebanon from the effects of military action. It is ill-understood in the public debate why such nuance would even be relevant, and policymakers noted that it is only in the international sphere that there is talk of separating out Hizballah and Lebanon, and avoiding certain targets. The government of Israel would likely enjoy significant domestic support should it make the case that military action is warranted against Hizballah and against Lebanon as a whole.

4.4 Israel's Strategic Outlook in Case of Conflict

176. In HLMG discussions with civilian and military officials**,** it is clear that Israel assesses that Hizballah does not seek a full conflict at this time, but has begun engaging in operations along the border and preparations inside Lebanon that will force Israel to react. Israeli military action would take place in the framework of defending against Iran's interminable project of deadly enmity. This means shaping the emerging environment in the next phase of the conflict in Syria – and as it affects Lebanon and Hizballah – so as to deny Iran's goal of furnishing a direct line to Hizballah and to Israel's border. Israel seeks to prevent the Syrian portion of the Golan Heights, where Iranian special forces are already known to operate, from becoming a staging post for attacks in the region – and multiple officials expressed concerns about the prospect of Syria becoming a 'second Iraq' in which Iranian influence is extensive, noting the grave possibility of an Iranian naval base being established on the Syrian coast, enabling Iranian vessels to resupply Hizballah from the sea.

177. More specifically, Israeli policymakers consider it possible to deter Hizballah, noting the significant period of quiet since the 2006 war on their northern border, but only in the short term, since Iran's ambitions work to counteract any pragmatic decisions which aid stability. As such, they consider it likely that any war would be the result of a miscalculation by Iran and Hizballah, forcing a response on Israel's part.

178. Though Israel enjoys a range of immense economic, diplomatic, and military assets, it is at serious risk from a successful attack. Hizballah's missile and rocket capabilities enable it to strike civilian targets across Israel. This represents the culmination of a conscious shift in approach by Israel's adversaries, who, unable to defeat Israel militarily, have increasingly embraced means of targeting Israel's population directly, in order to put indirect pressure on its government. Indeed, the amount of rocket and missile fire on Israel could be ten times greater in a new conflict with Hizballah than in 2006. Policymakers expressed concerns about how prepared the Israeli public is for the level of devastation that would be wrought in a major military clash with Hizballah – younger Israelis are less familiar with the threat of direct attack than older generations, and Israel's success in neutralizing less sophisticated rockets fired from Gaza may have led to inflated expectations of its capacity to intercept the volume of rockets likely to be fired by Hizballah. Some interlocutors estimated that a third Lebanon war would lead to hundreds of Israeli civilian casualties, and thousands of damaged buildings, meaning that support for sustained hostilities would diminish considerably in the early days of a conflict. With Israel unable to eliminate the threat of missile attacks against its civilians completely – and Hizballah targeting critical infrastructure such as Ben Gurion airport, Israel's main international gateway – such a conflict could quickly prove challenging for Israel. As such, Hizballah's strategic concept, coupled to the gains Iran has made regionally and the absence of any regional understanding on red lines and any modus vivendi in the new regional strategic environment, mean that Israeli decision makers are firm in the belief that they will have to respond with overwhelming force and at great speed to any escalation forced upon them.

5

THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

5.1 Regional Realignments and the Role of the Islamic Republic of Iran

179. The changes in the regional geostrategic picture of the Middle East have altered drastically since the beginning of the decade. Starting with the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011, the borders that characterized the region for the last century began to unravel. In the subsequent six years, this process of fragmentation has only accelerated. The result has been the emergence of a region in which few governments exercise complete control over their territory. Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and Egypt have all become fractured nations, ceding control to sub-state groups to varying degrees.

180. This change in Israel's strategic environment has placed a huge burden on its intelligence services. Israel survives and thrives in an extremely hostile region and under constant assault from myriad enemies not least on account of its exceptional intelligence apparatus. The HLMG delegation discussed the difficulty of gathering intelligence in Syria with officials at length – it is obvious that a complicated array of Jihadis, rebel groups and anti-Assad fighters in various and ever shifting constellations is far harder to monitor than the Syrian armed forces prior to the civil war, for example. Intelligence analysis has also become more complicated because many actors in the region claim ideological motivation but are guided by self-interest rather than ideology, making their intentions prone to change at short-notice, and their actions harder to predict. As such, while Islamic State has not exhibited any intention of attacking Israel, a short military encounter occurred in January 2017, when its forces fired upon an IDF patrol from a deserted UN position. Though this incident did not represent a significant change in ISIS' strategy, it does show how quickly threats to Israel can emerge in this new, more complex environment.

181. The breakdown of authority has been driven by assertive, state-led efforts to intervene across borders, in support of sub-state insurgent groups, a tactic perfected by Iran, is implementing its religiously driven imperial ambitions in the region through its mode of revolutionary Jihadi warfare utilizing proxies. To engage in this process – and defend against it – states have increasingly resorted to partnering with like-minded actors. The result has been the emergence of four cohesive blocs of actors, each co-operating in an effort to advance their interests and solidify control of territory.

182. The most deadly of these blocs is spearheaded by Iran. The Islamic Republic has cultivated a range of allies and proxies over many years, giving it the capacity to stoke unrest and crush dissent across the Middle East. A view the HLMG heard in Israel suggests that Iran has established not one but two 'Shia crescents' in the region: a northern network of influence stretching from Tehran to the Mediterranean, incorporating Shia militias in Iraq, the Assad regime in Syria, and Hizballah in Lebanon; and a southern crescent including Shia minority groups in the Gulf states, and the Houthi rebels of Yemen. These networks are overseen and coordinated by the IRGC's overseas operations arm known as the *Quds* force and headed by General Qassem Suleimani. On almost every front in the new Middle East, be it in Yemen, Iraq, Syria or Lebanon, Iran is on the offensive. Through its deployment of its own forces, affiliated terror-armies and transfer of weapons, Iran has rescued the Syrian regime from collapse, established de-facto control over large swathes of Iraq, and endowed Hizballah with capabilities that have greatly enhanced its threat vis-a-vis Israel. The weakness of this bloc is its unabashed identification with Shia Islam, which acts as a natural ceiling on its ability to affect developments in the region. Nevertheless, Iran has strayed across sectarian lines to support terrorist groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, actions which must be understood in the context of its intent to fight a permanent war of attrition against Israel until it fulfills its aim of destroying the Jewish state.

183. The second bloc is comprised of what could be referred to as the 'pragmatic' Sunni states, namely Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia. This bloc has prioritized the maintenance of political order in the region, and has worked to sustain as much of the existing status quo as possible. Its cohesion is derived from its resistance to the advances made by the pro-Iranian axis, as well as its opposition to the extreme Sunni vision of politics espoused by the Muslim Brotherhood. Former Israeli officials were candid in discussions with the HLMG about the ways in which this bloc may serve as a possible partner for Israel in future discussions, especially those focusing on the threat posed by Hizballah and its Iranian sponsor. Like Israel, all of the countries

in the pragmatic Sunni bloc retain close political ties with the United States, making Washington a potential power-broker in any co-operative endeavor. The serious diplomatic tensions that have broken out between the majority of this bloc and Qatar since the time of our fact-finding delegation can be read as a conflict on the border between the blocs described, with the Saudi Arabia led grouping accusing Qatar of being involved with elements of other blocs, most prominently the Muslim Brotherhood groups and to an extent the Iranian one also.

184. The various Muslim Brotherhood groups across the region form the weakest bloc. At the time of Mohammed Morsi's election in Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood had been considered a rising star. However, the failure to hold on to power in Egypt, and the distinct weakness of the Brotherhood in Tunisia, has prompted a far-reaching reassessment. In discussions with the HLMG some interlocutors noted one could consider the Brotherhood as falling somewhere between a religious faction and a political phenomenon, rather than a disruptive politico-military force or quasi-state actor in the region, an idea reinforced by the fact that despite dozens of insurgent and anti-regime groups being active in Syria, not a single one of them is affiliated with the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood does however remain a potent force underlying Radical Islam and should not be underestimated, not least for the threat its ideology and adherents pose to the West. Its current low fortunes are to an extent linked to the failures of Turkish and Qatari policies – two supporters who failed to exhibit the requisite means to follow through on the regional stage. But the potent ideological driver that the Brotherhood represents for Sunni Islam is likely to survive, even if it is currently less successful than the even more extreme groups.

185. The 'black flags' of Islamic State and other Jihadi groups such as al-Qaeda constitutes the final major bloc in the contemporary Middle East. While concerns about the threat such groups pose on the ground in the Middle East diminish as the gap between their ambition and capabilities widens ever more and their gains are rolled back by both Iranian and Western action, no certain conclusions can be reached on how the threat from Islamic State would evolve were it to be fractured as a geographic entity. There are reasons to believe that its fighters would seek out new ways to escalate when cornered by the prospect of military defeat, such as targeting Damascus with more suicide bombings, intensifying attacks in European countries, and retreating to ungoverned rural areas to regroup. Defeating Islamic State will however also empower Iran to strengthen its influence throughout the region even further. Given the potent danger Iran poses to the Western interests, outside powers focused on defeating Islamic State – there are over a hundred countries in the anti-ISIS coalition – will need to rapidly develop a strategy to deal with Iran's able exploitation of the regional geopolitical breakdown.

"President Trump has realigned the U.S. with Israel and the pragmatic Sunni Arab camp, and acknowledged the danger Iran poses vocally."

5.2 International Actors in the Region

186. The United States remains the most consequential external actor in the Middle East, however recent history has seen its role change dramatically. Under President Obama, the U.S. upended traditional relationships and empowered Islamists. In Egypt, it allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to emerge as a government, putting at risk a cornerstone alliance and signaling to other Arab allies that its commitments were potentially not as firm as assumed. Of even greater consequence is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the so-called Iran deal, which the Obama administration struck with Iran, empowering the latter's regional ambitions and mortifying the U.S. Sunni regional allies as well as Israel. The period was marked by an antagonistic relationship with the U.S. closest ally in the region, Israel.

187. Subsequently, with the election of President Trump, the tone and outlook on the region has shifted drastically. [President] Trump has realigned the U.S. with Israel and the pragmatic Sunni Arab camp, and acknowledged the danger Iran poses vocally. At the same time, the Trump administration has sought to re-engage in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) between Israel and the Palestinians, is reviewing its policies in Syria and vis-a-vis Iran, and has yet to commit to a wider regional strategy. Coupled to the unconventional

nature of the policy making process in the new U.S. administration, the net effect is the generation of a significant degree of uncertainty over the direction of U.S. policy in the region, and in particular its actions in case of a deterioration such as a potential conflict between Israel and Hizballah. While it is clear that the U.S. will stand with Israel and the Sunni Arab bloc against Iran and its proxies, it is far less obvious how U.S. action will manifest specifically, either in terms of medium or long-term strategy or in reaction to a potential regional crisis or conflagration.

188. Similarly, the nature of Europe's response is no longer as easy to predict as it would have been in 2006. The continent is facing grave challenges, not least in the form of its migrant crisis, linked to state-breakdown and civil war in the Middle East. As such Europeans have a significant stake in outcomes in the region and have been willing to commit some resources to the fight against Islamic State. However, in general Europe and the European Union (EU) have a far less clear view of the Iranian threat, expressed both in efforts to engage and trade with the Islamic Regime and not least in the refusal to recognize Hizballah as a terrorist organization indivisible, thus sanctioning only a part of the group. The absence of any meaningful European power on the regional stage will likely mean that in the case of conflict it is a question of diplomatic influence. Europe can be expected to condemn any fighting and call for its cessation, though its response will be guided in part by the U.S.' response, as well as be affected by some of the newly emerging dynamics playing out in European politics. Such factors consist chiefly of the effect of the views of a large, politically vocal Muslim minority that has been indoctrinated against Israel for decades and repeatedly shown to exercise an effect on European political responses to events in the Middle East. This dynamic is set against a growing recognition on the part of European publics that the terrorism threats they face have begun to resemble those faced by Israel since its inception. As such, European responses to any future conflict with Hizballah will likely take the form of international and public diplomacy, and can be expected to fail to be unequivocal in rising to the challenge Iran and its proxies present to Western interests and security.

189. Perhaps the most consequential new external entrant to the politics of the region is Russia. Many of the interlocutors the HLMG held discussions with were impressed by Russia's actions on account of its intervention in the Syrian civil war having been based on a clear assessment of Russia's interests and goals, and supported with sufficient political will and competent military execution. In addition, Russia has quickly established a modus operandi vis-a-vis Israel, whose officials expressed confidence in their ability to manage relations with Moscow. Evidence for this can be found in the rapid negotiation of an aerial deconfliction agreement between the two countries, and the establishment of a tacit understanding in which Iranian and Russian arms are prevented from falling into Hizballah's hands by Israeli actions. Hassan Nasrallah has invited deeper Russian engagement in the hope that it will prevent Israeli attacks against his organization yet Moscow has been hesitant to tie itself to Hizballah. While the danger of escalation exists in this dynamic – in March 2017 an Israeli air raid led to some tensions with Russia – the likelihood of Russia intervening on behalf of Hizballah in the event of a third Lebanon war is judged to be remote, since Russian interests do not include the Iranian led project of the annihilation of Israel.

190. However, Russian involvement in the region was acknowledged by Israeli policymakers as a game changing event, not least since they consider it to have essentially put the Assad regime, and thus Iran, on a glidepath to victory in the Syrian civil war. While Russia remains weakened by a combination of low oil prices and continued sanctions which challenge its ability to afford a high level of military engagement in the Middle East, none of our interlocutors were in any doubt that it had executed a formidable campaign of significant and lasting geopolitical consequence for the region and would be a force in its politics for the foreseeable future. Israel will likely be impacted by this new situation, as is already the case in Russian actions on the Golan heights, where Russian military police has been deployed to prevent Hizballah from manning the border with Israel, an arrangement that was made without Israel's consultation and potentially heralds new complications for Israel's diplomatic and security needs on its borders.

5.3 The United Nations

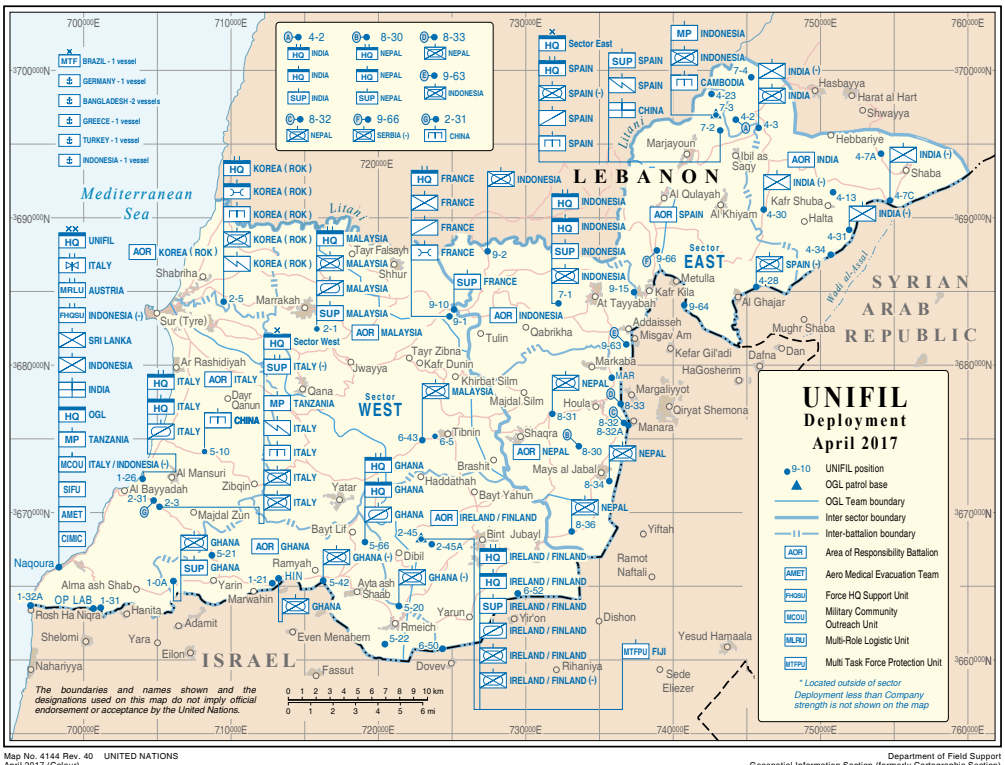
5.3.1 United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

191. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was created in 1978, with modifications to its mandate 1982 and 2000. Following 2006 Second Lebanon War the UN Security Council enhanced the mandate again. UNSC Resolution 1701 mandates that it monitor the cessation of hostilities, accompany and support the Lebanese Armed Forces as they deploy throughout the south, and to take "steps towards the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani river of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL deployed in this area". In practical terms, this makes it the responsibility of UNIFIL to ensure that the government of Lebanon re-establishes a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, by working to disarm Hizballah, and preventing it from re-arming.

192. Given the evident and severe failure of the implementation of this mandate, the HLMG delegation spent time both on a field visit to assess the realities on the Israeli border with Lebanon, and in discussions with senior officials from the political, military and intelligence fields, to gain a full understanding of this problematic situation. There was a consensus that UNIFIL plays an important role in southern Lebanon among Israeli policymakers, and that its presence has had some positive outcomes, including de-escalatory ones. An example cited was an incident in October 2016, which resulted in an Israeli soldier being wounded by gunfire with UNIFIL, playing an important role in cooperation with the IDF to prevent a more serious incident, and avoid escalation.

An IDF handout showing incidents of Hizballah abusing UNIFIL forces and installations.

193. However, our delegation also found that UNIFIL's work is severely restricted by its interpretation of its mandate and Hizballah's active obstruction. The IDF offered significant evidence outlining the steps Hizballah takes to intimidate the international forces.



Overview of the UNIFIL deployment in south Lebanon

(Source: Israel Defense Forces)

UNIFIL troops stationed on the Israeli side of the Golan heights overlooking Syria and Lebanon (Credit: HLMG)

UNIFIL freedom of movement and access is restricted amid ongoing attempts to curtail intrusive inspections. Such realities discourage UNIFIL from taking the steps necessary to fulfill their mandate to ensure no armed presence other than the LAF is present in southern Lebanon. UNIFIL forces back down when they are turned away from specific areas, and do not enter private properties, making a mockery of inspections in a situation where a terrorist organization has converted a majority of private houses in many locations into weapons stores and other military functions.

194. UN reports on UNSC 1701 frequently claim that Israel has not provided specific evidence of weapons located south of the Litani river. However, IDF officials asserted that they had frequent communications with UNIFIL as to the location of such weapons. Evidence for Hizballah's enormous build-up in weaponry comes not only from Israeli satellite and ground-based imagery, revealing the construction of buildings in southern Lebanon designed to house and mask the presence of advanced projectiles but also via a number of accidental detonations throughout Lebanon, observed by both Israeli intelligence and UN officials. As such, the UN demands for evidence appear designed to obscure the problem. UNIFIL has also been accused by academic experts consulted by the HLMG of at least partially coming to see Hizballah as a positive factor for stability in Lebanon, mistaking a quiet situation for a stable one.

195. A key reason for UNIFIL's lack of effectiveness is UNSC 1701, which itself represents a compromise, in that it curtails the authority of the UN forces to undertake more assertive actions within southern Lebanon. A new and improved mandate is required to address the situation. Nevertheless, even under the existing mandate, the UNIFIL forces could be more active than they are presently in pursuing UNSC 1701's stated objectives. Removing some of the limitations from UNIFIL's operations in southern Lebanon that hinder a more effective stance would significantly increase their ability to be an active partner to the international community in preventing an outbreak of hostilities. Since our visit, these concerns over the UNIFIL mandate have further been aired rather more directly in a reported confrontation between Israel's Deputy Chief of Staff and the Commander of the UN peacekeeping force during a tour of the border with US Ambassador to the United Nations Haley.[26] It is imperative that UNIFIL evolves from a situation where it has become a de facto defender of the status quo – i.e. effectively Hizballah's preparations for war against Israel – to a key enabler of conflict prevention. The force could play an important role in de-escalating tensions and it is incumbent on the UN and international community to reset the parameters for its deployment accordingly.

26 "Top Israel and UN officers spar in front of Nikki Haley – report", Times of Israel, June 11, 2017

The HLMG delegation on a field visit at a UNIFIL post on Israel's northern border overlooking Lebanon and Syria

6

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND THE DANGER OF A NEW LEBANON WAR: CONSEQUENCES AND PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

6.1 Regional and Global Dangers from a Third Lebanon War

196. The implications of a third Lebanon War would be severe both in the Middle East and for the wider international community. The region today presents an extraordinarily volatile mix of religious warfare and traditional great power politics. What little stability exists is in danger across the region, both from Iran's imperial ambitions and Sunni radical Islam. The attendant humanitarian crises have been felt not just by the people in the region, but have dramatically affected the politics and security of European nations also.

> "The implications of a third Lebanon War would be severe both in the Middle East and for the wider international community."

197. Significant regional interests are at stake in preventing such a conflagration. The greatly diminished stability of the Middle East now depends on countries that have not broken down to form a bulwark of moderation against further deterioration. A number of these nations could be gravely affected by a renewed outbreak of hostilities, with Jordan being particularly vulnerable. Similarly, efforts to stabilize the rolling diplomatic crises, latterly between the Saudi-led alliance and Qatar, as well as between Arab countries and Israel, would be complicated and move into a new and even more dangerous phase.

198. Perhaps the biggest danger comes with the humanitarian crisis a conflict could provoke. A region already struggling to cope with immense flows of refugees fleeing the war in Syria putting immense pressure on neighboring countries, including inside Lebanon, would have grave difficulty coping with another theatre of war that would see large numbers of people displaced. The humanitarian consequences would not just constitute great suffering on account of overwhelmed governments and agencies, but could lead to significant political instability in areas already suffering from near unmanageable turmoil.

199. Western nations' interests and alliance relationships in the Middle East would also be greatly imperiled. Iran's ambitions are a direct threat to the West, with the Islamic regime's hostility and persistent efforts against Western interests well established. Hizballah is additionally a direct threat to the West, not only as an executor of Iranian regional ambitions but also through its external wing carrying out operations abroad. The organization has engaged in terror attacks on European soil – and the Director of the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center recently emphasized again the assessment that Hizballah "has the capacity to operate on a world-wide scale, to reach out in asymmetric fashion… to turn that capability that they have against the United States including here in the homeland."[27] As such, curtailing Iran's ambitions and Hizballah's belligerence is crucial for Western security. Similarly, a conflict would have a deleterious effect on efforts to manage the emerging realities of Syria, as well as the delicate balance of diplomatic relationships as set against Western interests that lie with the various blocs in the Middle East.

200. However, for Western powers too, the humanitarian crisis a conflict may induce would be the gravest consequence, not only from a moral perspective, but a geopolitical and security standpoint. The politics of Europe are already fraying in light of the unprecedented migrant crisis brought on by the Syrian civil war and European political missteps. While the fallout from a new conflict between Hizballah and Israel would have unpredictable consequences on the neighboring theatres, the additional pressure on refugee and migration flows is likely to exacerbate a problem that Europe already finds itself unable to address adequately.

6.2 The Challenge of Hybrid Warfare Against Terror-Armies in the 21st Century

201. There are broader implications of the type of conflict that a new Lebanon war would represent. Western nations today are engaged in numerous kinetic conflicts with media savvy Islamist terrorist groups that straddle the line delineating states from non-state actors; such as is the case in the conflict between Israel and Hizballah. Conflicts with these terror-armies mean decisive victories become

27 "U.S. Counterterror Chief: Hizballah Poses Direct Threat to America"

increasingly elusive, with battlefield successes resulting in circumstances and situations from which it is neither easy nor simple to disengage militarily.

202. Crucial to an understanding of this challenge is the fact that at the heart of Islamist terrorists' strategy to defeat conventionally superior military forces is an effort to generate maximum collateral damage. Terrorist groups are well aware of the political benefits that can be derived from the negative media attention that attends the loss of civilian life. Striking from densely populated areas and using human shields, terrorist groups enjoy a first-mover advantage, while also benefiting from civilian casualties caused by military retaliation due to their propaganda value. Groups like Islamic State, and in particular Hamas and Hizballah, are extremely well versed in the desire of democracies to reduce civilian casualties, and are ruthless in their attempt to exploit their compliance with the Laws of Armed Conflict for strategic gain. Their tactics succeed in evading punitive action by prompting excessive caution in the professional militaries of democratic nations, which are liable to engage in forms of self-deterrence when employing force in populated areas. Hizballah has extensive experience deploying this playbook against Israel's forces, but it is a problem for all democracies' militaries engaged in similar battles with Jihadi organizations across the globe.

203. At the same time, democracies' military forces now operate in a more contested media environment than at any moment in historical memory. This allows both terrorist groups and insurgent forces to advance their strategic goals through social media, new media sources, and willing or unwittingly complicit actors in democratic nations, all of which allow for the dissemination of a flawed narrative, detrimental to mission objectives. Indeed, the information warfare efforts of terrorist groups have often proven more sophisticated than those advanced by the governments of democratic nations. As such, this arena represents one of the most serious challenges today and extensive information operations are an important and legitimate dimension of current conflicts with radical and terrorist groups.

204. In particular, there is a pressing need for the dissemination of expert analysis of military conflicts in real time in order to influence domestic and international public opinion – and advance the interests and perspectives of democratic governments by bolstering domestic support for their efforts, and portraying a more accurate picture of terrorist organizations, their methods of operation and the realities of the modern battlefield.

205. Democracies' military forces need to adhere to the Law of Armed Conflict meticulously, and address shortcomings quickly whenever they are discovered. Yet tolerance for casualties and legitimate collateral damage has collapsed in recent years, due to intense media coverage of specific errors, a misguided public perception that civilian casualties are now avoidable on account of the development of precision weapons, and the fact that domestic debates on these issues in democratic nations tend to be led by individuals who are highly critical of military operations. Thus, professional military forces face the prospect of becoming increasingly hamstrung, unable to achieve missions of vital national security interest despite possessing the capabilities to do so.

206. To reverse this trend and meet this challenge, political leaders in Western nations will have to show leadership in the face of difficult television pictures. Western audiences, having been subjected to the threats from radical Islam that Israelis have faced for decades themselves now, have become more astute in discerning the true moral balance in these conflicts. But it remains a consistent challenge to uphold both the legitimate faith in the systemic superiority of democratic values, and ensure that military action, in this new environment where the symbolism of victory has been replaced by fluid calculations of operations designed to degrade and deter, can lead to the necessary kinetic outcomes.

"At the heart of Islamist terrorists' strategy to defeat conventionally superior military forces is an effort to generate maximum collateral damage."

207. This is exacerbated by democratic nations now having to cope with a threat to their home fronts, and in Europe in particular, challenges to their social cohesion. Publics must be made aware of the link between conflicts which Western nations fight abroad and their security at home – and it is

"The international community must take actions to curtail Iran's activities, raise the cost of its behavior and engage in efforts at deterrence."

likely that the ongoing efforts by Western nations to defend themselves from radical Islam's onslaught will require new frameworks of international cooperation so as to define the shape of these battles in ways that democratic nations' citizens can recognize as not only necessary, but both just and contested with the same moral standards that make democracies worth defending in the first place.

6.3 Steps Required to Prevent A New Lebanon War

208. Given the obvious interest the international community and Israel as well as the people of Lebanon have in averting a conflagration, urgent steps are required to de-escalate the tensions on the border between Israel and Lebanon. These fall into three broad categories, for each of which the United States, Europe and their allies must cooperate in resolute determination. The first is a clear recognition of the geopolitical ambitions of Iran. Its religiously motivated imperialism and its pursuit of Israel's annihilation is the core driver of the problem and must be addressed as its root. The international community must take actions to curtail Iran's activities, raise the cost of its behavior and engage in efforts at deterrence. The new U.S. administration has begun to condition an environment in which Iran is no longer able to act with impunity, but Tehran's strategy of revolutionary warfare through proxies in the region is well advanced, and efforts to counter it have been insufficient. Such efforts can and must not only focus on the Islamic regime's nuclear ambitions – but have to include the full gamut of Tehran's regional export of coercive influence and terrorism.

209. Secondly, the more specific problem of Hizballah must be addressed from multiple angles. Within Lebanon itself, the political cost of the integration of this terrorist organization into the fabric of the state must be raised. Thus, European nations should legally proscribe Hizballah as a whole, ending the fraudulent distinction between ostensible wings of the organization. Similarly, donor nations to Lebanon, led by the U.S., should make new investments conditional on a plan to strip Hizballah of its de facto status as the leading force in the country, not least through financial sanctions and better controls on U.S military assistance to Lebanon. The full implementation of UNSC 1701, enforced by an expanded mandate for UNIFIL and the requisite political pressure, should be a central part of such an effort.

210. Finally, the West should strongly support Israel in its efforts to de-escalate the tensions. There is no plausible legitimate explanation for Hizballah's efforts to arm itself and threaten Israel other than the explicit religiously motivated Iranian drive to destroy Israel. The international community must to ensure not only that Israel has the diplomatic cover, but rather also the military means and room for maneuver, so as to send a clear message to Iran and Hizballah that it will be confronted by a superior military force with the full support of its allies were they to seek an escalation. Such a display of strength and unity is the best hope of preventing a conflagration that the majority of Lebanese citizens do not wish to be dragged into by Hizballah – and which Israel's leaders and citizens do not want to see happen either.

"The international community must send a clear message to Iran and Hizballah that they will be confronted by a superior military force with the full support of its allies. Such a display of strength and unity is the best hope of preventing a conflagration."

HLMG

HIGH LEVEL MILITARY GROUP

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