

# Israel and Asymmetrical Deterrence

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*This article analyzes the elements of the asymmetry of deterrence in the Israeli context. It reflects my own insights derived from research and my long service in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), including a term as head of the IDF Intelligence Branch. This article contains the personal insights of someone who had the opportunity to be involved in both formulating deterrent positions and observing their effect on “the other side of the hill.” Even taking into account the differences between the Israeli case and others, the Israeli case study may shed some light for other Western parties facing terrorist threats.*

## Introduction

Deterrence has been a fundamental pillar of the Israeli security doctrine since the state of Israel was founded. However, the security challenges Israel has faced in recent years in the Palestinian, Lebanese, Syrian, Iranian, and regional and international theaters have put this pillar to the test. These challenges are numerous; they include (a) the Palestinians’ resolve to employ terrorism and violence despite Israel’s clear military superiority and occasional harsh retaliation; (b) the resolve of Hezbollah, with Iranian backing and Syrian concurrence, to sustain conflict and brinkmanship to the point of opening a front; (c) the Iranian threat, nuclear and terrorist alike; and (d) the increasing danger of conflict with Syria.

Until the Second Lebanon War, Israel was perceived as a strong military power with the capability to prevail in any all-out war, and, consequently, deter belligerent initiatives on the part of its Arab neighbors or any coalition of those neighbors. On the other hand, Israel failed to translate its power and deterrence into an advantage in limited conflicts in the Lebanese and Palestinian theaters. In the Palestinian theater, where the Palestinians have virtually nothing to lose, the question of *whether* deterrence exists is no longer asked; in the Lebanese theater the question is which equation of deterrence exists or can be built, and what has changed after the Second Lebanon War. Is Israel’s deterrence against war initiatives by any neighboring state still valid in the face of “snowballing” scenarios of escalation and deterioration leading to theater crises and even a regional crisis?

The United States also failed to deter international terrorism before and after 11 September 2001, and the American image of deterrence toward terrorism has been further weakened during three years of fighting in Iraq. The American threats to use force to root out pro-terrorist regimes in the global war on terror no longer seem to deter terrorist organizations or their patrons.

## “The Equation of Deterrence”

The equation of deterrence in a given theater is the derivative of an entire gamut of components of the forces and deterrence active in it. These components create a “mutual balance of deterrence” among a wide array of players, not all of which are in direct conflict.

Understanding the balances of deterrence among the various players in a region requires complex analysis that cannot be reduced to a collection of bilateral relationships. This understanding must take into account a labyrinth of forces, constraints, projections, and balances acting on the majority of the players from different directions. An “equation of deterrence” exists when neither side possesses absolute deterrence; rather a state of mutual deterrence exists in which each side possesses deterrent components that prevent the other from acting as it wishes. Furthermore, mutual deterrence may be the result of a multilateral and not bilateral equation; it may be the result of the deterrence of external powers on one of the main protagonists.

The equation of deterrence between a state and a terrorist organization is usually asymmetric. This asymmetry calls for an understanding of two relatively neglected concepts:

- “*Weakness of Power*”—the inability to translate potential force and a clear strategic advantage into effective deterrence.
- “*Power of Weakness*”—the capability of the weaker side, in terms of overall power, to create local or functional power to deter the stronger side and/or extend its room for maneuver asymmetrically.

Notwithstanding the weaknesses of Israeli deterrence, there are equations of deterrence in the Middle East that have produced a few Israeli deterrent successes, not only in total war situations, but also in situations of limited conflict. It would be a mistake to lionize the “weaker” side to the point of it being either nondeterrable or possessing high strategic deterrence.

In Israel’s northern theater, the equation of deterrence has several axes:

- **Israel–Syria:** Israel effectively deters Syria from initiating war, but only partially deters it from opening a second front on the Israel-Lebanon border. However, Israel does not deter Syria from supporting belligerent actions by Hezbollah or providing aid in the buildup of Hezbollah (the Iran-Damascus-Lebanon axis). On the other hand, Syria deters Israel from striking targets in the heart of its territory by maintaining a long-range missile system capable of delivering chemical weapon payloads.
- **Israel–The Lebanese Government:** Here there is no significant equation of deterrence; up to July 2006 the Lebanese government was not considered the predominant player in Lebanon. In any event, up until the summer of 2006 Israel did not create deterrence vis-à-vis the Lebanese government that would cause it to accept security responsibility for what was happening on its soil.
- **Israel–Hezbollah** (and the other forces aligned with it): Until the Second Lebanon War, Israel successfully deterred Hezbollah from initiating strikes against civilian targets but failed to deter it from continuously striking military targets in northern Israel, involving itself in terrorism in the Palestinian theater operationally and logistically, and from acquiring strategic weapons. On the other hand, Hezbollah successfully deterred Israel from striking Lebanese civilians or infrastructures, and even from striking the organization’s high-ranking figures. The deterrent against striking civilian targets was a key factor in keeping the conflict on a limited playing field and preventing its deterioration, which neither side wanted. In contrast, from the moment the situation began to worsen, this component of the deterrent collapsed. Nasrallah’s statement after the Second Lebanon War that, had he known that Israel would “go crazy” in response to the abduction of the soldiers, he would not have taken this step, an interesting facet of this deterrent. On the one hand, his statement shows that he was indeed deterred and would not have consciously crossed this line, and on

the other, it attests to Israel's failure to convey to Hezbollah in a timely manner its willingness to "go crazy" in such cases.

- **Israel–Iran:** Israel is not deterring Iran from developing nuclear weapons and building up Hezbollah's strength in the Palestinian theater, particularly in the supply of long-range rockets.
- **Israel–The Palestinians:** It is difficult to see any equation of deterrence whatsoever in place today, particularly as the Palestinian side does not recognize the expected potential damage from an Israeli response that would be more severe than its present situation (i.e., it has nothing to lose). In the aftermath of unprecedented waves of terrorism (especially between 2001 and 2003), Israel also reached the conclusion that, although the use of excessive force against the Palestinians is liable to harm "strategic assets" (particularly its relations with neighboring countries), continuation of the existing situation causes it even greater damage, particularly in regional-strategic terms.

On the regional level Israel is deterred from taking steps that could combine two theater crises and create a regional one. This was manifested in Israel's restraint in the face of Hezbollah strikes. With regard to Egypt and Jordan in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli and Syrian/Lebanese-Israeli conflicts, a mutual balance is maintained that is not necessarily based on classic deterrent components, but rather on mutual strategic interests.

The international community imposes significant constraints on Israel, restricting its room for maneuver in the use of force at most times. However, the development of the conflict on both sides occasionally enables deviation from the rules of the international game, when such deviations are not constant and flagrant, particularly vis-à-vis the United States.

## **The Causes of the Israeli "Weakness of Power"**

Since the Lebanon War of 1982 Israel has been involved only in limited military conflicts. The extension of peace beyond that achieved with Egypt has introduced an additional dimension to Israel's strategic environment—a dimension that has at the same time improved Israel's position and restricted its freedom of action in the remaining conflicts in the Palestinian and Lebanese theaters. During this period a series of developments emphasized the Israeli "weakness of power" and its implications for deterrence. These included:

1. The public debate in the aftermath of the 1982 Lebanon War sent out the first signals on the absence of consensus inside Israel regarding the goals of the war. Difficulties in contending with casualties in Lebanon led to the first withdrawal from Lebanon in 1985.
2. The outbreak of the first intifada in October 1987 found the IDF unprepared to contend with stone-throwing women and children and Molotov cocktails. During this intifada IDF commanders clearly stated that the intifada had no military solution, only a political solution, a statement that significantly impaired the effectiveness of Israel's deterrence. Furthermore, it is impossible not to link the first intifada with the sets of circumstances and pressures that led to the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991 (the first Gulf War and the American policy of promoting the Arab-Israeli peace process to compensate its Arab allies for their support in the war). On the one hand, the world assimilated the centrality of the Palestinian issue as the core of the

conflict, while on the other, it became understood that political accommodations can be forced from Israel by violent means.

3. The (1991) Gulf War and the launching of missiles at Israel without an Israeli response further affected Israel's deterrence. By and large, the Israeli public accepted the rational considerations for Israel's decision not to retaliate against Iraq, but the Middle Eastern audience perceived Israel's restraint as a sign of weakness, a lack of an appropriate response. They also saw that international constraints imposed on Israel could paralyze it.
4. The Oslo process also contributed to the further decline of Israel's deterrence in the Palestinian context. Israel's agreement to allow the irreversible step of the Palestinian Authority (PA) taking control over large parts of the West Bank and Gaza without clear conditions further impaired Israel's deterrence. The terrorist bombings and the Temple Mount events of 1996, the *Naqba* (the Palestinian commemoration of the "catastrophe" of the founding of Israel) memorials and the outbreak of the second intifada, as an armed conflict attended by unprecedented terrorism, are proof of the absence of minimal deterrence. Furthermore, the Oslo Process engendered a public debate within Israel that led to the assassination of an Israeli prime minister by an Israeli. This debate is not construed by Israel's enemies as the inner strength of an open, modern, and pluralistic society, but as weakness, fatigue, and as a sign that Israelis are unwilling to fight.<sup>1</sup>
5. The first half of the 1990s marked the deepening of Israel's embroilment in the South Lebanon theater: the assassination of Hezbollah Secretary-General Abbas Musawi in 1992 and the IDF strike against dozens of terrorists in the Beka'a Valley in 1994 led to retaliation against the Embassy of Israel and other Jewish targets in Argentina, and the introduction of Katyusha rockets as an integral weapon in this conflict. These responses later constituted a significant component of the Israeli assessment as to whether, and against whom, to act, the question being whether specific actions would bring in their wake retaliation against Israeli and Jewish targets abroad. Hundreds of guerilla and terrorist operations against the IDF and the civilian population in the north of Israel caught Israel without an effective response, and certainly with no effective deterrent. During those years the conflict intensified to new dimensions, which led to Operation Accountability (1993) and Operation Grapes of Wrath (1996). These operations were limited in restoring Israel's deterrence toward Hezbollah and Syria. The fact that Israel's operations were accompanied by launching Katyusha rockets against Israel's northern civilian population centers led the country's leadership to formulate a policy with the primary objective of "preventing the launch of Katyushas," by not providing Hezbollah with pretexts for launching them. This policy further weakened Israel's deterrent image and endowed the Katyushas with the status of a strategic weapon.
6. The IDF's presence in the South Lebanon security zone provided Hezbollah with "legitimate" objectives and targets—fortified outposts and convoys—and consequently the number of IDF casualties increased. The IDF further protected its convoys and entrenched itself in its outposts. The image created was of a cumbersome army on the defensive against swift and effective guerilla warfare, and this deepened the decline of deterrence. Hezbollah's focus on targeting soldiers rather than civilians led to some 20–25 soldiers being killed every year. In military terms, this may be seen as an Israeli achievement in the face of such a threat, but in Israel itself public pressure mounted. The message to the enemy was: The Israeli "affluent society" is mentally fatigued and is not prepared to sacrifice its children for the sake of its objectives, in

contrast with the Shi'a-Lebanese "society of struggle" that is prepared to fight and sacrifice its children (including Nasrallah's own son) to achieve its objectives. Here Israeli resilience was viewed as a significant Achilles heel, and Nasrallah's "cobweb" theory was formulated. Placing the withdrawal from Lebanon at the center of the platforms of the candidates for the Israeli premiership, Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak, in the 1999 election campaign marked a "decisive point" in the conflict.

7. Israel's policy of not exacting a price from Syria for Syria's actions in Lebanon and Israel's agreement to conduct political negotiations with Syria despite its patronage of terrorism broke yet another important rule—negotiations are not conducted under pressure of terrorism and guerilla warfare. Political statements like "We will negotiate as if there is no terror, and fight terror as if there are no negotiations" were perceived as Israeli weakness, not power. In general terms it can be said that Israel had convinced itself with intelligent explanations that it had a strong deterrent, but it disregarded the fact that what really matters in deterrence is not what the deterring side means, but what the deterred side understands.
8. The Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 dealt a severe blow to Israel's deterrent image. For Hezbollah, Iran, and the other terrorist and guerilla organizations, this withdrawal constituted the first humiliating flight and defeat of the great IDF, which had been vanquished by a few hundred resistance fighters. The Arab claim of flight and defeat caught the attention of its main audiences and presented Israel as a "paper tiger," or in Nasrallah's words (in *Bint Jubail*, 26 May 2000): "I say to you, our people in Palestine, that Israel, which possesses nuclear weapons and has the strongest air force in the region, is weaker than a cobweb." In deterrent terms Israel, suffered a heavy blow to its effective deterrence against terrorism and guerilla warfare.
9. Hezbollah attacks in the northern theater between 2000 and 2006, while indicating a mutual equation of deterrence, also point to an absence of deterrence against the continued attacks, despite the complete implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 425. The threats by Israeli leaders prior to and during the withdrawal turned out to be empty.<sup>2</sup> Israel's restraint in the wake of the abduction of its soldiers in October 2000 and several other attacks eroded the credibility of Israel's deterrence even further. The attack on the Syrian radar system in 2001 temporarily and locally rehabilitated its deterrence, but not to the point of shaping a security situation free of terrorist activity. The series of terrorist attacks in 2002 was further proof of the limitations of Israel's deterrence, particularly when the power factors in Lebanon perceived Israel as fearing to open another front with the Palestinian front aflame (thus, too, in October 2000, at the height of the second intifada conflagration, and thus in 2002, in the Palestinian towns during Operation Defensive Shield).

### **"The Power of Weakness"**

The power of weakness comprises two interlinked elements that are firmly linked to the weakening of Israel's power. The first is the capability to neutralize the elements of Israel's power and potential deterrence, either by finding an appropriate response or by ignoring it on the assumption that Israel is incapable of exploiting this power. The second is the capability of constructing diverse counterthreats that create a counterdeterrent tool against Israel and greatly inhibits its willingness to act. The two main theaters of fighting, the Lebanese and

Palestinian theaters, have provided numerous examples of the development of the power of weakness, each with its own uniqueness and numerous mutual linkages.

## The Lebanese Theater

Along the time continuum of the conflict in South Lebanon, Hezbollah found several effective solutions, which on the one hand neutralized Israeli power, and on the other created a strategic threat to Israel. It should not be thought for one moment that Hezbollah was not deterred by the IDF, but the aggregate outcome created an equation that acts asymmetrically in Hezbollah's favor.

Hezbollah realized that continuous strikes against civilians in the Galilee cause greater damage to Hezbollah than benefit: Israel retaliates, the public backs the retaliation, the international community understands Israel's response, the citizens of South Lebanon and even infrastructures in North Lebanon are hit, and the danger of escalation on the Syrian front increases. In light of all this, Hezbollah turned its capability to target Israeli citizens into a strategic and deterrent weapon, moreso than a regular tactical weapon. It thus attempted to minimize any expected damage to it from striking at citizens and maximizing its advantage by turning the residents of northern Israel into its hostages. Hezbollah acted in accordance with classic deterrence, that is, not by making empty threats, but rather by issuing threats accompanied by action and supported by a willingness to pay the price whenever its "red lines" were crossed by Israel. This is what happened prior to Operation Accountability, which ended with the creation of mutual deterrence that lasted until Operation Grapes of Wrath, with the latter engendering the "Grapes of Wrath Understandings" that lasted until early 2000.

This power of weakness was exemplified in the fact that the principal objective of the IDF against the Hezbollah threat was to prevent the launching of Katyushas, even if this constituted erosion of Israel's deterrence and enhancement of Hezbollah's counterdeterrence. Even when the IDF retaliated with exceptional force against targets in Lebanon—electricity and transport infrastructures—it was not given a few days or weeks for its operations, but had to obtain permission on a day-to-day basis, and the discussion usually focused on the question of whether or not continued action would result in even more Katyushas being launched into the Galilee. Many claim that, instead of bolstering deterrence, this strategy led to the necessity of embarking on wide-scale operations, "Accountability" and "Grapes of Wrath."

Another component identified as Israeli weakness by Hezbollah, which it translated into power, was Israel's sensitivity to casualties. Twenty IDF casualties per year over several years created a schism in Israeli society, an incisive debate, and calls to withdraw from the Lebanese "morass," and sent messages of reluctance to fight. Thus, Hezbollah created an additional power component that enabled it to exploit numerous advantages in the area of psychological warfare, to enjoy "legitimacy" established by its actions against soldiers on Lebanese soil and by not providing Israel with too many reasons to "go crazy," and to illustrate for various audiences the ability of a resistance movement to defeat Israel in a long series of actions, each of which constituted "one battle in the war."

The next component of power that developed into a strategic threat by Hezbollah against the Israeli home front was "long range" rockets capable of reaching Haifa, Tiberias and even further south, Hadera and possibly even Tel Aviv. It is a reasonable assumption that the Iraqi model of launching missiles against Israel in 1991, and Israel's restraint, served in no small measure as the inspiration for constructing a rocket capability as one

of Hezbollah's central aims. This buildup did not pass unnoticed by Israel, and in fact Israel refrained from neutralizing a threat that would eventually have a deterrent effect against it. Hezbollah further built itself up without providing Israel grounds to take action against it. Massive Iranian aid and Syrian ground and port services assisted in the logistic implementation of the buildup of this threat and in creating a deterrent against strikes during the actual buildup. Israel was in no hurry to take action against Syria and its ground services, and it did not dare strike at Iranian elements lest it create a direct and unessential front vis-à-vis Iran. Hezbollah's relative assurance that Israel would not act with great force against this buildup relied, *inter alia*, on stockpiling weapons in densely populated centers that Israel avoided attacking until 2006. In this sense, one can understand Hezbollah's surprise when in July 2006 Israel broke the rules and decided to attack missile caches concealed in buildings and populated areas. One can only wonder how Hezbollah would have acted had it assumed that Israel would retaliate against a tactical abduction in this way.

After Israel's withdrawal Hezbollah also created an additional power component for itself by exploiting regional opportunities to expand its sphere of activity and by narrowing the field of Israeli retaliation. This was the case when, on the basis of the start of the al-Aqsa intifada, there was fear of an extended conflagration and Hezbollah abducted three Israeli soldiers at Har Dov. Although the abduction was not born in the wake of the intifada, it made it considerably easier for Hezbollah to exploit a situation wherein Israel feared opening a second front, and it was therefore reasonable to assume that it would not retaliate with great force. This was the case in other instances in recent years, with the most notable being the almost daily wave of attacks that began after Israel launched Operation Defensive Shield against the Palestinians in April 2002. Israel's situation in the world in general and the Arab world in particular appeared to be so bad that any retaliation whatsoever in Lebanon was perceived as unrealistic. In this way Hezbollah succeeded in creating action that relied on Israel's reluctance to act.

We may say in summary of Hezbollah's power of weakness that, in the course of Israel's presence in South Lebanon, the organization created power for itself that focused on causing casualties, threatening civilians, a series of "small victories" on the ground that created an effect of victory of the resistance, and a "great victory" in the form of Israel's withdrawal, which irrespective of Israel's explanation was perceived by the entire Arab world and elsewhere as the triumph of the weak over the strong, as the defeat of an Israel that was "weaker than a cobweb." After the withdrawal, Hezbollah's deterrence focused on a strategic threat against Israel's home front, a threat that encompassed almost a million people who in the past had not been part of the traditional "Confrontation Line" (the area of the Israeli border that suffered the brunt of the clashes between Israel and Hezbollah). Hezbollah sensed that this threat provided it with a broad field of action in the Har Dov area without Israel daring to retaliate against Hezbollah targets and/or civilian life in Lebanon.

## **The Palestinian Theater**

In the Palestinian theater, weakness became one of the principal sources of Palestinian power. Arafat's strategy was fundamentally based on the image of weakness and victim, not Israel's image of power and occupation. The target audience in this instance is not Israel, but rather the international community and the Arab world that supposedly exerts influence over Israel.

The Palestinian side developed several tools that were employed at different times and to varying degrees of success.

The principal tool developed by Arafat is the threat of terror to Israel's home front. To this day the 1996 terror attacks are remembered as having had a strategic effect and a significant influence on Israel's internal political structure and as having undermined Israelis' sense of personal security. The deterrent effect against Israel was primarily achieved in the level of Israel's actions against terror; would a particular action bring in its wake a wave of suicide bombings? The public debate in Israel on this issue is ongoing. Did the targeted killings reduce terrorist capabilities or did they lead to a wave of suicide bombings that put their efficacy to the classic test of deterrence? Does Palestinian deterrence in the form of suicide bombings make the feasibility of targeted killings more powerful relative to the expected damage from retaliation to them? It could be said that both sides introduced elements of mutual deterrence into the equation; on the one hand, the suicide bombings constitute a significant threat to the security of the Israeli public, to the point of influencing the outcome of democratic elections, while on the other, Israeli commitment to extreme retaliation led the Palestinians to reduce significantly their use of this weapon.

Study of the Lebanese model led the PA under Arafat's leadership to the conclusion that it needed to acquire capabilities that would have the same effect that Katyusha rockets had, and still have, in Lebanon. A concerted effort both for independent production and smuggling with the aid of Hezbollah and Iran led the PA to employ mortars and Qassam rockets as a response to attacks against deep targets, but these short-range weapons did not have the same effect as Katyusha rockets. Consequently, a concerted effort was made to acquire long-range capabilities, namely smuggled Qassam 2 and Katyusha rockets. The intention was primarily to deter Israel from attacking deep targets and institutions in the PA with the threat of striking Israeli coastal cities and in the Ashkelon-Sederot area. The working assumption, that acquiring these capabilities would deter Israel, was refuted by the severity of the potential threat: incursions deep into Palestinian refugee camps and cities to destroy infrastructures and stockpiles. In other words, this weapon became an operational problem, but not a deterrent factor.

During the Arafat era, maintaining Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad as powerful organizations also constituted part of the Palestinian response to the balance of power and the Palestinian attempt to deter Israel. These organizations are clearly a potential threat to the PA leadership and oppose its election in the political process. It was natural to expect the PA to take steps to significantly neutralize these organizations, but it made a conscious decision to maintain their power while monitoring their activities in order to employ them against Israel at a strategic moment in time. According to Arafat's perception, neutralizing these organizations, i.e., truly fighting against terror, would have met Israel's principal wish—security—and enabled the PA to avoid fulfilling its own obligations. Today the Palestinians, too, understand that Arafat nurtured his successors from within the ranks of his internal enemies.

Another tool developed by Arafat to a level of partial but existing effectiveness is the threat of a regional crisis, a threat to the region's stability. This threat was intended primarily to deter Israel from taking action to reoccupy PA territory and/or bring about the Authority's collapse. It could be said that this tool was effective as long as the political process was relevant and as long as the armed conflict was low intensity. However, when the political process in its familiar form collapsed to all intents and purposes, and the conflict escalated to state terrorism killing dozens of civilians and soldiers every day, this deterrent tool became eroded or neutralized, since for Israel the cost of not taking excessive action was higher



than the cost of taking it. Conversely, in the first months of the conflict, this deterrent tool did work on Israel when it came to deciding how to act.

What occurred and is still occurring in the Palestinian theater since the end of 2000 indicates the collapse of all the components of deterrence from both directions, and engagement in a war in which in certain instances a deterrent exists that could be termed “deterrence during combat.” This is a deterrence that is not designed to prevent the central events but rather to demarcate its boundaries and prevent the introduction of undesirable players into the conflict.

## **What Causes Asymmetric Deterrence?**

It is only natural to ask, “What caused what?” Do the principal causes of the decline in Israel’s deterrence in a limited conflict stem from internal (military, social, leadership) and international reasons, or is there a counterdeterrence that neutralized a significant proportion of its potential deterrence? Another question that arises is whether the strengthening of the “weak” was enabled as a result of Israel’s weakening or as an asymmetric response to an Israeli advantage. There is a tendency to ascribe the reasons for asymmetric deterrence to the weakening of the Israeli side, and only few analyze the effect of counterdeterrence. Several reasons are proposed here to explain the decline of Israeli deterrence, and include military and social reasons, and reasons associated with the leadership, policies, and decision-making process.

## **Military Reasons**

Three military tests reflected the erosion of the IDF’s image of deterrence: the First Lebanon War, which presented the IDF as incapable of achieving a decisive result until Israel was forced to opt for the “damage control” approach by withdrawal, which the other side perceived as defeat; the first intifada, which exposed the IDF’s lack of preparedness and ability to act decisively; and Palestinian terrorism, for which no appropriate military response was found for a prolonged period.

These tests are typified by their continuation over several years. Consequently they led the other side to the conclusion that, contrary to Israel’s preparedness and capabilities to achieve the upper hand in all-out war situations, the IDF finds itself cumbersome, sluggish, vulnerable, and lacking a decisive response. True, Israel has developed the means to carry out targeted killings and has achieved results in close contact and special operations, but it has not translated them into an effective deterrent. Some maintain that the heads of the terrorist organizations doubted whether Israel was capable of exacting a price that exceeded the benefits of the operation they were attempting to prevent.<sup>3</sup> Others cite the IDF’s declining curve of victories as one of the reasons for the asymmetric deterrence.

The first intifada found the IDF unprepared. For many months IDF sought an appropriate response to the Molotov cocktails, stone throwing, and the mass demonstrations involving women and children. Failure to swiftly quell the uprising led to declarations from IDF commanders and state leaders that this conflict “has no military, but only a political solution.” Some maintain that the military failure led to the Rabin government’s recognition of the PLO and subsequently to the Oslo Accords, a notion that neither Rabin nor many others would have even entertained earlier.<sup>4</sup>

In the area of combating Palestinian terrorism, for many years the IDF and the Israeli security services were unable to seal the borders of Judea and Samaria or cause significant

damage to the terrorist organizations' infrastructures and leadership. This enabled these organizations to continue multiple-casualty terror attacks and show how the Israeli security services lacked a response.

In the fighting in Lebanon, Hezbollah shaped a reality of hundreds of individual battles, many of which could be presented as "victories," either by inflicting casualties, raising a flag on a military outpost earthwork, or by sending the entire Confrontation Line population into bomb shelters. Although some of its operations failed, in this type of guerilla conflict the "10:1 principle" applies: Israel can thwart ten armed operations, but if one succeeds in inflicting casualties or "photographs well," then the effective result is a perceived victory for terrorism.

In this context, some maintain that for a long time the IDF Northern Command's policy of carrying out search and destroy operations against terrorists deep into Lebanon (without great success) increased the effect of IDF's failure vis-à-vis Hezbollah. They assert that it was precisely the policy of active defense along the line of contact, attended by increased intelligence, that should have led to a reduction of Hezbollah's successes, reduced IDF casualties, diminished intensity of the public debate in Israel, and a slowdown in the erosion of Israel's deterrence. Indeed, anyone examining the years 1999–2000 will find that as IDF policy shifted toward active defense founded on increased intelligence, the number of casualties was halved. Hezbollah experienced a period of humiliating defeats in close contact, failures that led it to change its *modus operandi* and shift toward distant contact, i.e., employing antitank missiles. Absurdly, this impressive operational-intelligence success came strategically too late, for the Israeli election campaign in early 1999 marked a Hezbollah victory in that both premiership candidates accorded top priority to withdrawal from Lebanon in their election platform.

The withdrawal from Lebanon had a profound impact on the Israel-Hezbollah balance of deterrence. The IDF presents the complexity of the withdrawal operation and its execution under very difficult conditions without casualties as a praiseworthy achievement. However, the other side examines the withdrawal by its urgency, the vast quantities of materiel left behind, the collapse of the house of cards that was the South Lebanon Army's outposts, and indeed of the SLA itself. This event is unquestionably etched in the consciousness of the other side as proof that the IDF is not "invincible." It is with good reason that in the wake of the withdrawal, Nasrallah directed most of his messages towards encouraging resumption of the intifada by the Palestinians, for only by means of resistance can Israel be defeated with complete success. Some who addressed the connection between the withdrawal and resumption of the second intifada ascribed great weight to the withdrawal. Intelligence bodies also identified this potential connection immediately after the withdrawal. In a review presented to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on 30 May 2000 I noted, in my capacity as head of the IDF Intelligence Branch, that in the eyes of the Palestinians, the withdrawal created an image of Israel being humiliated by Hezbollah and withdrawing from Lebanon under pressure from it. In other words, similar pressure is also required in the Occupied Territories in the direction of a popular armed struggle against Israel in order to gain concessions in negotiations.

It should be noted that since the second half of the 1980s (the attack on the PLO headquarters in Tunis in October 1985 and the Maydoun operation in 1988), the IDF has not undertaken any notable operations, with the exception of attacks on high-ranking terrorist figures. The scant list of IDF victories did not enhance Israel's deterrence in the eyes of the Arabs, but rather damaged it.

## The Decision-Making Process

Many Israeli researchers have analyzed this aspect of the erosion of Israel's deterrence. As a participant in numerous political discussions and the decision-making process, I can say that this component has a decisive impact on shaping the perception of Israel's deterrence and the perception of Israel's reluctance to contend with external threats. True, the IDF and its representatives have considerable influence on shaping the debate and decisions, but it is not military considerations for the fulfillment or rehabilitation of Israel's deterrence that play a central role, but rather political ones.

The main reasons for the weakening of Israel's deterrence presented by Israeli strategic researchers are as follows:

1. **The credibility of deterrence**—the image of Israel's lack of resolve to fulfill its deterrence and its being prepared to pay the price. Some indicate a clear tendency toward increased hesitancy in the leadership and public regarding the employment of force and adopting a strategy of attrition or defense rather than victory and elimination. This image leads the other side to cast doubt on Israel's willingness to employ force and its determination to make good on its threats.<sup>5</sup> One of the most striking examples illustrating the disparity between Israeli leaders' statements and the nonfulfillment of Israel's deterrence is the statement issued by PM Ehud Barak after the withdrawal from Lebanon regarding Israel's resolve to react with extreme force to any Lebanese provocation.
2. **Leadership**—Deterrence against an adversary in a limited conflict requires a type of leadership that is widely perceived as inconsistent with Western democratic principles and has not generally emerged in democratic countries since World War II. It must be willing to endanger its popularity rating by telling the country the bitter truth that the conflict will be long and bloody and to call on them to stand firm, and at the same time to raise the ante for the terrorist adversary and to be willing (and politically capable) to extract a high price even at the risk of paying a high price.<sup>6</sup>
3. **Israel's image as seeking and upholding agreements**—Some maintain that it is precisely Israel's attempts to reach agreements with its neighbors that have impaired its deterrence image. In the aftermath of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israel's relinquishment, within the terms of the disengagement agreement, of most of the territorial assets achieved in an unprecedented military victory, broadcast encouragement to those exerting military pressure on Israel.<sup>7</sup> Israel's entrance into the political process, commencing with the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, is also presented as a turning point in Israel's policy of employing force and deterrence. Since the accords Israel has voluntarily limited its use of force even when it should have been used. Another claim is that the willingness of Israel's leadership to conduct negotiations under fire signaled to the other side that violence pays off and that the statements issued by its leaders are groundless.
4. **Restraint vis-à-vis provocations**—Israel's policy of restraint during the Gulf War was logical per se, but it nonetheless impaired its deterrence, since those who were potentially deterred translated this stance as weakness. Later, in Israel's different governments, including the national unity governments in which the "peace camp" and the political left were represented, an incisive debate emerged between the approach advocating the employment of force, uncompromising retaliation, expulsion, toppling the PA, and striking at its leadership, and the approach advocating

moving as quickly as possible toward the political phase, even if terrorist attacks continued. This latter approach opposed in principle the policy of retaliation and the efforts to create deterrence.

5. **Not exacting a price from the “patrons”**—Israel mistakenly preferred to contend with the Palestinian terrorist organizations in the occupied territories without clearly placing responsibility on the PA leadership, and the pointless debate that ensued a few weeks after the start of the second intifada on Arafat’s control over events manifested the attempt to release the *Rais* from responsibility for the situation. This was also the case during Abu Mazen’s first term in office, when it was stated that he wanted to fight terrorism but was insufficiently strong to do so. This is still the case today, with the attempt to separate Abu Mazen’s responsibility in his capacity as PA president and the responsibility of Hamas in its capacity as the PA’s government. Thus, too, exempting Syria, the Lebanese government, and Iran from paying the price for their part in terrorism from Lebanon severely impaired Israel’s deterrence.
6. **Relinquishing any attempt at deterrence**—Israel’s leaders declare that “it is impossible to create full and effective deterrence against terrorism” and that Israel’s deterrence has to focus on “deterrence against existential threats” (i.e., conflict with Syria, Iran’s nuclear threat). They also declare terrorism does not constitute an existential threat, for it “has no military, but only a political solution,” and they set about trying to lower the flames of terrorism instead of extinguishing them. This rhetoric played into the hands of the other side and encouraged it toward brinkmanship.<sup>8</sup> These statements by high-ranking officials conveyed a message of relinquishing in advance any attempt at deterrence in a limited conflict.
7. **Accordinging undue weight to international constraints**—Some maintain that international constraints gained excessive preference over national ones. I consider this point to be one of the primary reasons for the decline of Israel’s deterrence. Indeed, Israel assigns great weight to the international community with the United States at its center, and this negatively impacts on deterrence, for the strong is “encircled” by the international community that expects a greater degree of control in its conduct than it does from the weak. In contrast, the Palestinian leadership is encircled by all-inclusive opposition to compromise of any kind.
8. **The deficiency of Israeli policies**—The level of resolve and proactive purposefulness of Israel’s policies does not measure up to that of Palestinian policies. Basically, Israel is conducting a defensive campaign, whereas the other side is conducting a struggle aimed at achieving clearly defined objectives.<sup>9</sup>

## Israeli Society

The intense public debate in 1982 surrounding the issue of a “war of choice” marked the beginning of a process of significant erosion in Israel’s resilience. It began in a trenchant debate on the justness of Israel’s course of action, signaling a degree of weakness, but as yet not critical weakness. The transition to protests and pressure groups on the Lebanese and Palestinian issues, and expressions of panic in the media whenever a soldier or civilian was wounded or killed, conveyed an encouraging message to terrorist and guerilla elements that Israeli society was nearing the breaking point. The principal message was that Israeli society is fatigued and lacks endurance, its national unity and strength are divided and torn, and it is unable to reach a consensus on the justness of its course of action and consequently is unwilling to fight and pay the necessary price in casualties.

The other side was very quick to perceive the signs of distress in Israeli society and directed the main thrust of its efforts toward exploiting this distress. Thus Hezbollah focused most of its efforts on psychological warfare accompanied by film footage of its operations, with the primary purpose of intensifying internal Israeli pressure on its leadership, of intensifying the internal rift and eroding Israel's resilience. Hezbollah succeeded in convincing the Israeli public that the actual cumulative cost (in human life) of remaining in Lebanon surpasses the marginal advantage (security for the northern settlements) to be gained by doing so.<sup>10</sup> In July 2006, despite Hezbollah's surprise at the force of Israel's response, and although the first days of fighting indicated significant damage to Hezbollah's long-range missile capabilities and its strongholds in Beirut, and notwithstanding the Israeli public's strong support for the operation and the price it was required to pay, which engendered Olmert's "web of steel" in response to Nasrallah's "cobweb" speech, Nasrallah did not abandon the "cobweb" conception and believed that, in the final analysis, 150–200 Katyusha rockets a day would wear down the Israeli public and consequently its leadership.

In contrast, the other side—Lebanese and Palestinian alike—persisted with the message of high resilience, perhaps even higher than expected. In the Lebanese theater we saw that even in operations in which the aim of the IDF was to exert pressure on the population and through it on the leadership, it did not succeed. At the height of the violent conflict in the Palestinian theater (2001), the Israeli media and even high-ranking security personnel were preoccupied with the collapse of the PA, erosion of the Palestinian public's support of its leadership, along with other voices, and subsequently with anticipation of whether such a development would lead to the anticipated change. Are signs of the pressure being exerted on the population becoming evident and leading to achievements? The reality was far removed from the assessments of these factors, which were apparently analyzing what was happening through Israeli eyes and not Palestinian ones. Arafat turned the issue of casualties into an art form. As far as he was concerned, not only did the fact that Israel was causing multiple civilian casualties, including women and children, constitute a trauma, but it also presented an image of the helpless victim who needed international protection against the strong, the occupier, and the killer. Arafat personally believed that, like a "marathon runner," he and the Palestinian people possess immeasurably greater resilience than the Israelis, and consequently the end of the conflict would bring about the attainment of Palestinian objectives. In the past year we have seen that when support for the corrupt Palestinian leadership began to wane, it was translated into the rise of Hamas rather than moderation on the Palestinian street.

## **Counterdeterrence**

The question of what caused the adversary's increase in strength has a twofold answer: part of its increase in strength occurred in order to provide a solution to the disparity in Israel's favor, while another stemmed from identifying Israel's weaknesses and the efforts to exploit them. A number of examples illustrate this:

Development of new and asymmetric capabilities by the Arab side stems first and foremost from Israel's successful deterrence against conventional wars. Consequently, the Arabs developed two new tools and strategies—ground-to-ground missiles, terrorism and guerilla warfare.<sup>11</sup> By the same token Hezbollah's increased strength vis-à-vis IDF targets can be ascribed to an asymmetric solution to its limitations, particularly in the wake of Operation Grapes of Wrath, by launching Katyusha rockets and causing damage to civilian life. Hezbollah's increased strength in long-range weapons and unprecedented quantities of

Katyusha rockets stems primarily from the experience of Operations Grapes of Wrath and Lapid Eitan in February 2000, when the Israeli Air Force attacked infrastructure targets around Beirut and the Beka'a Valley. The equation formulated by Nasrallah, whereby "Beirut = Haifa," indicates that Hezbollah was not happy that the IDF was capable of striking at Beirut while Hezbollah was incapable of striking at a major Israeli city.

At the same time, reducing the disparity and providing a strategic solution lean in no small measure on identifying Israel's weaknesses, which was demonstrated during the Gulf War. Namely, the Israeli public is fearful of its home front being hit and damaged, and Israel has no protective response for the population. Indeed, in July 2006 we witnessed Hezbollah's attempts to demonstrate its long-range capabilities when it launched rockets at Haifa and Hadera after the IDF attacked targets in the Beirut area. It is safe to assume that had the IDF not dealt a critical blow to the long-range missile system, Hezbollah would have attempted to demonstrate its ability to strike at the center of Israel, especially the metropolitan Tel Aviv area.

Hezbollah's boldness prior to the IDF's withdrawal from Lebanon by attacking IDF targets to the point of reaching its outposts without doubt stemmed from the conclusion that the IDF was becoming cumbersome, providing targets, not functioning in the way mandated by guerilla warfare, not retaliating meaningfully to strikes against it, and carrying out ineffectual "attack" operations beyond the Red Line, instead of first and foremost neutralizing the effectiveness of the threat. In other words, Hezbollah concluded that the IDF had become weakened. In the Palestinian theater, suicide bombers were introduced both as a strategic tool vis-à-vis Israel's weakness in enduring multiple-casualty terrorist attacks on its home front, and as a response that would neutralize Israel's capabilities to strike against Palestinian targets and public figures.

Instances can be identified whereby restricting Israel's activities stemmed primarily from effective counterdeterrence. This was the case in the restriction of retaliatory operations in Lebanon so as not to provoke Katyusha fire; after the withdrawal when Israel refrained from striking at Hezbollah leaders for fear of terrorist attacks abroad; and until recently when Israel refrained from striking a significant blow against the PA and causing its collapse, for fear of regional ramifications.

This mutual deterrence situation was identified by Israeli intelligence as far back as the withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. In a special assessment I authored in my capacity as head of the IDF Intelligence Branch on 7 March 2000 (two and a half months prior to the withdrawal), I devoted a significant part to deterrence. I emphasized two components: (1) the impracticability of creating a deterrent that would be able to completely overcome the other side's motivation to continue its actions, for in light of the new types and ranges of the weapons at Hezbollah's disposal any attempt to introduce real content into deterrence would mandate a wide-ranging conflict and escalation, and the introduction of new field and civilian components; and (2) acknowledging the existence of a mutual balance of deterrence in which Hezbollah has a say, that is, the ability to pose and neutralize threats, and that would ultimately lead to sustaining a limited conflict confined to accepted rules of the game and a mutual effort to prevent the conflict spilling over into civilian life on both sides. This assessment stated that any deviation from these rules would escalate the conflict into the worst possible scenario for both sides. In the course of the past six years we have experienced the realization of this assessment in many respects, more so than in Ehud Barak's vision of deterrence. This assessment was realized *de facto* in the Second Lebanon War, when Israel's leadership failed to prepare the population for a situation of protracted conflict, one that mandates defined targets, a plan of action, and resilience.

On more than one occasion Israel's willingness to voluntarily restrict its actions encouraged the other side to increase its activities. These restrictions include, *inter alia*, the following: (a) the IDF refraining from striking at Hezbollah targets located in densely populated areas encouraged Hezbollah to transform these areas into strongholds, headquarters, and mortar- and rocket-launching bases; (b) the IDF refraining from causing damage of any kind to the Lebanese government and its institutions provided Hezbollah with room for maneuver without fear of a frontal confrontation with the Lebanese government and civilians; (c) Israel refraining from "touching" Syria and Iran during Hezbollah's buildup encouraged them to accelerate the rate of buildup unhindered and achieve strategic capabilities to the point of neutralizing Israel's deterrence; and (d) the Israeli decision not to strike at Palestinian leadership figures encouraged members of that leadership toward brinkmanship.<sup>12</sup>

## The Second Lebanon War—A Missed Opportunity

The Second Lebanon War was a missed opportunity to change the asymmetric equation of deterrence. For the purpose of this examination I permit myself to outline a scenario, which, had Israel implemented it, would have scored a victory that might have changed several components in the asymmetric equation of deterrence.

Nasrallah's working assumption when embarking on the abduction operation on 12 July 2006 was that Israel would retaliate more or less as it had in the previous six years; it would attack immediate targets of a military nature, perhaps Syrian targets, headquarters that were not situated in the heart of a city, and perhaps try to strike at high-ranking Hezbollah figures. However, the first week of Israel's operations marks a breach of the rules of the game and it "goes crazy"; Israel does not restrict itself to tactical targets but immediately attacks strategic ones; it attacks buildings occupied by civilians in which rockets are being stockpiled, knowing full well that these attacks will bring in their wake Katyusha fire at Israeli centers of population; it attacks Hezbollah centers in the heart of Beirut; it gains unprecedented support from the Israeli public that is prepared to sustain rocket fire for a just cause; it gains extensive international support, unprecedented support from the Arab world, a declaration of support from the G8 Forum, and a declaration from the Lebanese government regarding its willingness to assume responsibility for the South Lebanon sector; and above all it sees signs of distress from Hezbollah's leadership that wants a ceasefire.

Had Israel opted for an aggressive retaliatory operation such as this, limiting its targets to changing the rules of the game and instigating a meaningful change in the security situation in South Lebanon, and had it terminated the operation at the end of its first week or thereabouts, it could have emerged victorious before the entire world as the instigator of change in the rules of the game, as determined to respond aggressively to any attack against it, and as prepared to pay the price for achieving its objectives. Had this been the case, military weaknesses and failures would not have been exposed. Israel would not have faced the question of ultimate victory and would not have measured the outcome against unreasonable and unattainable objectives. This hypothetical situation could have significantly changed the regional perception of Israel's "weakness of power" toward "power of power." As we know, operational reality, and especially leadership reality, engendered a situation whereby Israel was unable to conclude a very successful operation and got dragged into a cumbersome, unresolved war with unattainable supreme objectives. The overall result was failure and national trauma, which in the context of deterrence increase the "weakness of power," at least until the next test.

Analysis of the reasons for missing the opportunity to rehabilitate deterrence conjoin with the components of conducting a campaign on a national-political level, conducting a military campaign, and preparedness and capability. In the context of the present paper, national decision making constitutes a key component, for the political leadership has to understand wherein lies opportunity and wherein lies risk, just as it has to understand that the army should execute the directives of the leadership and not just submit its recommendations for leadership approval.

Notwithstanding all of the above, it is still too early to judge the long-term outcome of the war from the aspects of deterrence, for Israel *did* breach the rules of the game, it *was* prepared to sustain damage to the home front, and it *was* prepared to attack population centers. Moreover, just as the failure of the Arab armies in the 1967 Six-Day War spurred them into another conflict and proved their rehabilitation, Israel's failure may constitute a catalyst for rehabilitation and improvement that, when put to the test, may be a crucial factor. I assume that the power factors in Lebanon, headed by Hezbollah, Syria, the Lebanese government and even Iran, have conducted and will conduct a different assessment of the situation and accord different weight to key parameters than they did in the past. I would not be surprised if within a year or two Israel will witness a situation in South Lebanon that is more amenable to it, whereas the power factors are bound by rigorous constraints.

Many seek a direct connection between the operational results of a war or an extensive military operation and the level of deterrence derived from them. The 1967 Six-Day War proved this connection does not necessarily exist; the Six-Day War serves as an historic example of an unparalleled crushing victory, when three countries on three separate fronts were defeated within six days. If we had analyzed the level of deterrence at or around the end of that war we would surely have concluded that, "in the foreseeable future the victory and the level of deterrence derived from it obviate any possibility of another attack initiative against Israel . . ." Yet less than a year later Egypt initiated the notorious War of Attrition, and the Yom Kippur War broke out a few years after that (1973). Consequently, the current trend of correlating the operational results of the Second Lebanon War and the level of deterrence derived from it is examining the effectiveness of deterrence too soon and too close to the end of the fighting.

In the Lebanese theater, at least in the short term, Lebanese resilience triumphed over Israel's decisive capabilities. Consequently, it can be stated inarguably that Olmert's "web of steel" theory did not pass the test, whereas from the Arab perspective Nasrallah's "cobweb" theory is still valid, even though a reexamination from the perspective of the lessons learned for the future would be appropriate. A central point for examination henceforth is whether the Israeli government is suffering from "post-Winograd Commission trauma," which will be translated into hesitancy and further erosion of Israel's deterrence image or, conversely, into motivation to demonstrate enhanced power at the first opportunity. In the Palestinian theater, as I have stated throughout the present paper, there is virtually no equation of deterrence, since the Palestinian side does not identify significant losses that will result from continued conflict.

## Summary

In the wake of the Second Lebanon War, the Hezbollah leadership thinks that its "Cobweb Theory" of Israel has been vindicated. The United States has, so far, declared an uncompromising war against world terrorism. While there have been victories in this war, they have not been translated into factors that can deter terrorism. Alongside successes vis-à-vis



such countries such as Libya and Saudi Arabia, which have brought about changes in their overt support of terrorism, there have been no successes in reforming Syria, Iran, Hezbollah, various terrorist organizations in Iraq, and the Palestinian government. Consequently, some Axis of Evil players would also view the United States using the “cobweb” theory.

In the above discussion I have attempted to conduct an analysis of deterrence that is specifically relevant to the Israeli case. Yet it is increasingly relevant for many other Western nations for whom conflicts with terrorist and guerilla organizations are occurring with greater frequency. In these situations it is imperative to understand the “mutuality of deterrence,” the “asymmetry of deterrence” inherent in the conflict between the “weakness of power” of states and the “power of weakness” of terrorist and guerilla organizations. While this asymmetric reality cannot be changed drastically and we may be destined to maneuver within its boundaries in an attempt at damage control, awareness and in-depth analysis of these equations can yield policies that endeavor to change significant parts of them.

The main components that require change in Israel’s policy are as follows:

1. Depriving the adversary of achievements should be accorded top priority. And even if the adversary achieves a local victory in a number of tactical incidents, preventing the creation of overall victory is of vital importance. A good example of this is Israel’s “blocking wall” policy against Arafat and Palestinian terrorism from 2001 to 2004. This policy prevented the Palestinians from gaining a national achievement as an outcome of terrorism.
2. Israel must be willing to employ force, in spite of the price in casualties and/or international relations. The terrorist or guerilla organization must take into consideration that Israel can “go crazy” and lash out far beyond its standard responses.
3. Israel must enhance its “perceived deterrence” (in contrast to its “declared deterrence”). Israel must ensure that the deterrence perceived by the adversary is identical to, or even more severe than, the deterrence itself. Only then will it be possible to create a change in the equation. For example, in the summer of 2006, Israel’s perceived deterrence in the eyes of Nasrallah was lower than it actually was. Had the perceived deterrence been closer to the reality, perhaps Nasrallah would have employed different considerations. Here it is the duty of the military professionals to offer the leadership new messages of deterrence and explain the disparity between declarations of deterrence and perceived deterrence.
4. Israel must enhance the credibility of deterrence, i.e., reduce the disparity between leaders’ statements regarding “what would happen if . . .” and “what is actually happening when . . .”
5. In Lebanon the Lebanese government, as the “landlord,” must accept responsibility for everything that takes place on its soil. Pressure must be exerted on it to fulfill this responsibility, and it must be cautioned that failure to do so is liable to result in damage to it. In a private meeting with the minister of defense on 1 June 2006, I submitted, on my own initiative, an assessment of the situation in Lebanon, which included, *inter alia*, the following message: “Israel’s policy vis-à-vis Lebanon has to be one directed toward the Lebanese government fulfilling its responsibility for its entire territory, including South Lebanon, including deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces along the border . . . In my estimation the greatest change to occur in Lebanon in the past year, and which has not yet been translated into a strategic change, is Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon and international support for Lebanon’s autonomy. This must bear immediate significance on Israel’s and the IDF’s policies

and Israel must unequivocally and publicly demand that the Lebanese government fulfill its sovereignty and assume responsibility for South Lebanon in its entirety. The apparently obvious called-for action is deployment of the Lebanese Army along the border.” Syria, which for years has adopted a policy of “war by proxy,” has to understand that Israel will not be deterred from dealing with it if it does not implement its influence in Lebanon or if it continues to provide ground and financial services to Hezbollah and Iran. The Palestinian government has to understand that Israel does not deal with terrorist organizations of any kind but delegates the entire responsibility to the government and the presidency.

6. There must be a correct assessment of regional and international risks that are liable to develop as a consequence of implementing attack and deterrent policies. Here I must admit that when I served as head of the IDF Intelligence Branch and participated in every security and political assessment of the current situation, the security services, including myself, tended to present severe assessments regarding the possible risk of a regional conflict or disagreement with the United States and the European Union. Reality proved that these risks can be managed and it is possible to maneuver without leading to the situation’s deterioration.
7. Israel must deter the arming of the terrorist organization with weapons that change the balance or pose a serious threat to Israel. These include Hezbollah arming itself with thousands of short- and long-range rockets, the Palestinians arming themselves with Qassam rockets and, of course, Iran arming itself with nuclear weapons. Here there are only failures. There has not been a single success since the attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981. Any hostile entity can arm itself with any weapons it can obtain, unhindered by Israel. It seems that only an effective and tangible operation, or a campaign of operations, can contribute to deterrence of such actions. This entails risk, but the risk of encountering these weapons in the event of escalation is vastly graver and more dangerous.

I will conclude with a reservation regarding the contention of some experts who claim that the decline in deterrence in limited conflict situations inevitably impairs deterrence in all-out war situations. In my opinion this claim is at least partially groundless. The majority of intelligence evidence indicates that Israel’s deterrence against an all-out war stands firm, and if cracks have appeared in it, this has only occurred in the wake of the Second Lebanon War, for until that time we witnessed twenty-five years of conflict against terrorism and guerilla warfare while overall deterrence vis-à-vis the countries in the region helped to shape peace agreements in the case of Jordan and Egypt, and in Syria’s case to maintain the status quo.

## Notes

1. Some draw a direct line between the success of guerilla warfare in Lebanon and the first intifada and between the unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 and the second intifada. Levran, Aharon, “The Decline of Israel’s Deterrence,” *Nativ*, vol. 14, no. 2 (79), Ariel Center for Policy Research, 2001: 6. I do not accept this argument per se. During the second intifada, Israeli intelligence estimated as early as 1999 that without progress in the political process the Palestinians were likely to adopt violent measures toward the fourth quarter of 2000. It is clear, however, that the Palestinians in particular and the Arabs in general perceived the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000 as a victory for resistance and it provided a tailwind for the already existing trends on the ground

2. On 25 May 2000, Prime Minister Barak said that he held Syria and the Lebanese government responsible for what was happening in the evacuated territory. On the eve of the withdrawal Prime Minister Ehud Barak said, "I would like to see anybody dare to fire on our soldiers or settlements now. We will know what to do, the IDF is free to fight back."
3. Inbar, Efraim and Shmuel Sandler, "Israel's Deterrence Strategy Revisited," *Maarachot*, no. 328, (January–February 1993): 10–12.
4. Levran, Aharon, "The Decline of Israel's Deterrence": 7.
5. Inbar and Sandler, "Israel's Deterrence Strategy Revisited," *ibid*.
6. Shiftan, Dan. (December 2001). *Deterrent Capabilities: Challenges and Response*, p. 4. Second Herzliya Conference, Herzliya, Israel.
7. Levran, Aharon, "The Decline of Israel's Deterrence": 6.
8. In a lecture he delivered in May 1991, Yitzhak Rabin said: "Let us not forget that terrorism always has been, remains and shall ever be the weapon of the weak. Therefore in the context of the intifada I do not believe that it is possible to create full and effective deterrence against it. Consequently we must state explicitly that in matters of deterrence we must restrict ourselves to deterrence against major existential threats."
9. Heller, Mark, "Assessing the Israeli-Palestinian Balance of Power," *Strategic Update*, vol. 3, no. 2 (August 2000), Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University: 3.
10. Heller, Mark, "The Implications of the Israeli Withdrawal from Lebanon on Israeli-Palestinian Relations," *Strategic Update*, vol. 3, no. 1 (June 2000), Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University: 6.
11. Shiftan, Dan, *Deterrent Capabilities: Challenges and Response*, p. 1.
12. Shai Feldman presents political considerations for employing restrained force in the second intifada and emphasizes the following: Israel's desire to prevent escalation that would lead to a regional conflict the desire to refrain from causing the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, and the desire to refrain from causing multiple civilian casualties and consequently having to accept enforcement from international involvement. Feldman is indicating, without explicitly stating it, effective counterdeterrence against Israel and fear of a regional conflict restricts action and fear of enforcement from international involvement restricts action. Feldman, Shai, "The Second Intifada: A 'Net Assessment,'" *Strategic Update*, vol. 4, no. 3, (June 2002), Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University: 4–12.

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