

JERUSALEM PAPERS

SWORDS OF IRON AN INTERIM ASSESSMENT OF THE GAZA WAR

MAJ. GEN. (RES.) YAAKOV AMIDROR



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Tel. +972-2-940-6060 | info@jiss.org.il | www.jiss.org.il

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The IDF recovered from Hamas' surprise opening blow on October 7 and embarked on a war to take the Gaza Strip. The possibility of a war against Israel simultaneously on five fronts did not materialize.

The mission the IDF received from the government was clear: To destroy Hamas' military capability and its ability to function as an organization in the Gaza Strip, and at the same time to bring the hostages back home. The intensive phase of the fighting will end with the occupation of Rafah and several other small areas where the IDF has yet to occupy, followed by a year-long mopping-up operation. In the northern Gaza Strip, this mopping-up phase is already being carried out. Toward the end of this year-long phase, the question of responsibility on the ground "the day after" will become clear. The goal is to make the Gaza Strip like Area A in the West Bank where the IDF is not present but operates according to its needs.

Hezbollah joined the fighting cautiously because it did not want to enter a major war for the sake of Hamas – a decision taken in consultation with Iran. It seems that the damage inflicted on Gaza, as well as its losses in the fighting in Lebanon, have reduced its appetite for war. Yet, the situation may deteriorate because of either a miscalculation or an "overly successful" operation by one of the sides – or when a war suits Iranian interests.

As the intensity of the fighting in Gaza decreases and the residents of the South return to their homes, Israel will have to make decisions regarding the return of displaced from the North, who will not agree to return to their homes without a drastic change in the security situation. A war against Hezbollah – the only alternative to a political settlement to push Hezbollah back from the border – would be a much tougher proposition than the war in Gaza, for the home front and the military challenges the IDF would face in Lebanon. The real test at the

end of this war will be whether Israel has succeeded in preventing Hezbollah from improving its military capabilities over time.

In the West Bank, despite intense IDF activity in the territory, the situation has remained relatively quiet. Israel must preserve the separation between the population and terrorists and should even take the risk of allowing Palestinian laborers to work in Israel.

In the face of ballistic and cruise missiles from Yemen, an informal coalition has been formed with the participation of the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel, which has intercepted most of the threats coming from the south. At the same time, the U.S. is leading an international coalition that is unsuccessfully trying to deter the Houthis and undermine their ability to block the Bab El-Mandeb Strait.

As for Iran, it appears that the direct conflict with Israel is over. It began with the elimination of senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force officers in Damascus. It continued with Iran firing from its territory some 300 drones, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles. Israel responded by firing at a single target that made Iran's weakness and inability to defend important targets from Israeli strikes clear. Iran proved its willingness to take risks, even though its attack failed to deal significant harm to Israel. It remains unclear what the rules of the game between Israel and Iran will be in the future. The question of whether an incorrect assessment of the parties' risk readiness will lead to the outbreak of war between Iran and Israel will hover over the region.

So long as Israel and the United States maintain close coordination, the chances of a major war with Iran will decrease, but the more the Iranians feel that Israel stands alone, the more daring they are likely to be.

Relations with the United States will continue to be of ups and downs. The current administration is under pressure from the left wing of the Democratic Party, a few young people and party activists. From the security aspect, however, American support remains strong and admirable. Israel must consider American positions and sensitivities in an election year. But when it comes to important issues concerning Israel's ability to defend itself, we must be determined and make decisions even against American preference.

Concerning the Palestinian issue, the U.S. holds positions that are unacceptable to any Israeli government, at least for the foreseeable future. After October 7, the chances of Israel agreeing to a Palestinian state on its borders are nil. Among other things, the ability of the U.S. to bring about real reform in the Palestinian Authority is small to non-existent. In any case, the U.S. cannot guarantee that a Palestinian state would not be ruled by Hamas, which is likely to oust Fatah by elections or by force (or a combination of the two, as was the case in Gaza). However, the U.S. emphasizes that the solution must come through negotiations, not coercion from outside. Therefore, it vetoed Algeria's proposal at the U.N. Security Council to unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state.

The U.S. has difficulties accepting that the Muslim world, including the Arab states and Iran, is not about to change substantially – and even if there are countries that establish formal relations with Israel and the U.S., radical Islam will continue to flourish. The American failure in Afghanistan and Iraq is no coincidence; Hamas' barbaric attack was not an exception, and the PA's funding of the families of terrorists killed or imprisoned is not a humanitarian matter but a matter of principle – it is the result of ideological and social perceptions.

Israel, which lives in the Middle East, must explain its perspective to the U.S., its great friend, but it must also act per its security needs. Israel will find itself in various conflict scenarios for a long time, in Gaza and against Hezbollah, and its campaign against terrorist elements in the West Bank will continue. There is a good chance that after the current difficult and challenging period is over, Israel's strategic situation will be better, because the threat from the South will be greatly reduced and Israel will regain some of the aura of power that was severely damaged on October 7. Regardless, Israel will still have to fund a larger and stronger IDF and reintroduce the option of preemptive and preventive strikes to its toolbox.

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INTRODUCTION

Israel has fought several major wars. The first was the 1948 War of Independence against several Arab countries that invaded the newly born State of Israel. The war had begun six months earlier as a war between Arabs and Jews in Palestine after the United Nations partition resolution of November 1947.

The next large-scale military encounters were the Sinai Campaign (1956), the Six-Day War (1967), the War of Attrition (1970) and the Yom Kippur War (1973), all wars against neighboring countries, after which the Arab world understood it had no chance of defeating Israel on the battlefield. The results of these wars, especially the sequence of the Six-Day War, War of Attrition and the Yom Kippur War, led to a series of political agreements, the 1979 peace agreement with Egypt being the most important.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict however has not ended, and the Palestinians, under Jordanian and Egyptian rule, and all the more so since 1967 under Israeli occupation, have not given up on their dream of destroying the State of Israel, as expressed by the slogan “Palestine – From the River to the Sea.” They are preoccupied with the Nakba of 1947 and not the 1967 Naksa, even though it was the Six-Day War that led to Israel’s direct occupation of most Palestinians, intensified the struggle and internationalized it, and connected Israeli Arabs to their brethren who until then had been on the other side of the border.

Many in Israel understood the main issue of discord as being the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. This understanding led to many plans, the most important being the Oslo Accords. All these plans were based on the same misunderstanding. The Palestinian problem emerged not because of the occupation of the West Bank in 1967 but because of the success of the Jews in

establishing a nation-state in 1948.

The United States and Europe still promote a two-state solution; eventually, however, they will discover that the Palestinian's real problem is not where the border between the Palestinian state and Israel lies, but the very fact that there is such a border, because, in large parts of the Arab world, there is no legitimacy for a Jewish nation-state in the Middle East.

As part of a broader change in the Arab world, there was a major development in Palestinian society between the War of Independence in 1948 and the October 7 massacre of 2023. Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) – a group established in Egypt about a century ago – was established and became a significant force in Palestinian society. The last time the Palestinian Authority (PA) held democratic elections in 2006, Hamas won a majority in parliament, and a year later violently expelled the Fatah leadership from Gaza. Hamas then ruled the Gaza Strip by force, until October 7, 2023. The organization is part of a network of extremist Sunni organizations that have become a leading force in the Muslim and Arab world, such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, with the common slogan “Islam is the solution,” like the MB. Among these groups there is disagreement about the essence of “true” Islam.

The pre-October 7 reality indicated that the Arab world seemed increasingly accepting of the existence of the State of Israel without ostensibly caring for the Palestinians. At the same time, the forces of radical Islam such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS were greatly weakened, and the MB had lost power in Egypt. Looking at the situation from a broad perspective, the growing gap between Palestinian despair and the acceptance of the existence of Israel by important Arab states (mainly Saudi Arabia) has been the most prominent trend in Israel's relations with the Palestinians over the past 20 years.

Beginning in the early 1980s, a new actor joined the fight against Israel – Iran after the Islamic revolution. Iran is a serious country, with a talented bureaucracy, advanced academia, and impressive industrial capabilities.

No Arab country is as advanced in these respects as Iran. Iran has imperial dreams anchored in its imperial past, and its desire to lead the global Shi'ite population to a better place after many years of humiliation in a Muslim world that is overwhelmingly Sunni.

For various reasons – that are beyond the scope of this paper – revolutionary Iran saw Israel as a demonic enemy that must be destroyed. Iran's strategy vis-à-vis Israel included two components:

1. Efforts to build a military nuclear capability.
2. Building a “Ring of Fire” around the State of Israel.

This created a strong convergence between Iran, which wanted the destruction of Israel, and the aspirations of the Palestinians, many of whom never accepted the very existence of Israel. These are the foundations of the challenge Israel faces today: Palestinian despair over the Arab world's reconciliation with Israel, a stronger religious component among the Palestinians, and Iranian aggression, with an emphasis on the need to eliminate Israel.

The connection between these elements explains the events of October 7. Hamas, which is heavily assisted by Iran and Hezbollah in its force buildup, is an independent organization; Iran helps Hamas, but does not make decisions for it. Hamas' calculations are different from those of Iran, and it does not follow Tehran's decisions.

Therefore, it is no wonder that Hamas did not inform Hezbollah and Iran of its intention to attack, while Iran and Hezbollah did not favor entering a major war in favor of Hamas. For the most part, the war remains a conflict in which the Palestinians in Gaza suffer the most, with limited involvement of Hezbollah and the Houthis. The pressure on Hezbollah to join the war in full force will continue and Nasrallah can still change his decision.

The war that broke out with the Hamas attack on Israel is currently being waged on five visible fronts: Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, Judea and Samaria, and Syria (at a very low intensity), while a sixth, Iran, could re-erupt at any moment.

GAZA

Until October 7, the security and military establishment in Israel (including myself) and the political leadership in Israel shared the view that Hamas in Gaza wanted to promote the economic welfare of the 2 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip, and thus accepted that its dream of jihad would only be realized in the future. Some boldly claimed that Hamas was deterred and feared a war with Israel.

These erroneous views were held for years by various elements and by many people within the defense and foreign policy establishment and outside of it. At certain times, the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) held other opinions, with some senior officials believing that a preventive war should be launched against Hamas because it was building a force that Israel needed to eliminate before it was used. Nevertheless, the Shin Bet was apparently fully complicit in the misunderstanding and failure of October 7.

How and why these mistaken views were accepted by most of those involved in the defense establishment is an issue for historians to deal with. Like everything that happened from intelligence and operational perspectives on October 7, how this perception evolved will be investigated to learn how and why Israel made mistakes. For example, I thought that Israel should initiate a war against Hezbollah – and in the meantime, pay whatever price necessary for not dealing with Hamas, which posed a smaller threat. And so, on the morning of October 7, Israel was dealt a “fundamental surprise.”

The surprise was complete; the whole system failed: Military Intelligence, Shin Bet, operational defense systems – in defense and the immediate response on the ground. This was true for the ground forces, the air force, forces along the border and forces on alert in the area. The IDF's entire defense system on the southern border collapsed.

It is no wonder that the army's immediate holding action against the forces that invaded Israel was characterized by disorder. The response was that of a system that senses the danger at its doorstep and responds instinctively, a healthy instinct, but not based on orderly thinking and without a full awareness of the situation on the ground. The various emergency response teams, most of them small in scope and lacking heavy weapons, were sent to the field or went on their initiative without intelligence or coordination from above because there was no time and no operational picture of the situation available anywhere. Amid the endless chaos, the mission was obvious: to rescue civilians, to eliminate the invaders, and ultimately to restore the status quo ante, including restabilizing the border.

The old British adage states: "When planning is flawed, you end up with Victoria crosses." In the Gaza border area, this was reflected by the fact that three colonels were killed within hours, and special forces units, which usually operate with detailed planning, responded immediately and ran straight into the line of fire. They suffered heavy losses, fighting shoulder to shoulder with policemen, regular infantry units, civilians who rushed to the battlefield in the heart of civilian communities. They were joined by Shin Bet personnel sent as lone combatants in addition to the agency's emergency response team. Everyone, including reservists who came of their own initiative, "went to the sound of cannons" – that is, to fight wherever they heard gunfire or a call for help – and entered the battle.

Amid this disorder, soldiers displayed personal heroism in the absence of a functioning military system operating according to professional rules. The commanders went in at the head of these disorganized forces, because the greater the chaos, the more the commanders felt it was their duty to be the first to read the picture on the ground and lead by example. These messy battles of self-sacrifice halted the advance of the Hamas invasion. Due to the surprise and collapse of the military structure, this was an absolute priority in the first hours. In less than a day (probably within 12-18 hours), the IDF contained the Hamas forces and regained control of the area, even if there were still terrorists

and shooting incidents here and there. Cleaning up the entire area took five days.

This defensive operation will be studied in the future as an example of a military success in reacting instinctively out of shock and in complete surprise. The result stems from the high-level of proficiency of the Israeli soldiers, improvisational ability, flexibility and especially readiness for sacrifice, as well as initiative at both the personal and unit levels.

The initial Hamas' "success" was astounding by any standard. About 1,200 men, women, children, elderly and soldiers were murdered in a violent and barbaric manner. A further 250 people were abducted to Gaza, including children, babies, the elderly, soldiers and corpses. Most of the dead were innocent civilians. More than 25 percent of Hamas' "success" was achieved against participants of a music festival, where about 360 people were murdered and around 40 taken hostage. The level of barbarism of the Hamas operation was quickly revealed in its full, undeniable horror because the invaders filmed themselves and distributed the videos and images on social media. Further horrific evidence emerged upon examination of security cameras around the targeted communities, but the testimonies of Hamas members themselves are enough to shock any decent, civilized person.

The next stage of the fighting was the air force bombardment, which lasted for three weeks and began while the defensive operation was still ongoing. At first, as an automatic response, based on pre-prepared plans, and later, based on intelligence gathering (this made it possible at this early stage to eliminate many terrorists and several Hamas commanders). In the third week, the Air Force focused on preparing for the ground campaign, the plans for which were drawn up during the first two weeks of the aerial campaign.

The ground invasion of Gaza began three weeks after October 7. During that time, operational plans were drawn up, logistics were readied, and forces were trained, because the IDF had not prepared for war in densely urban

areas. The IDF had trained soldiers for pin-point raids in densely populated areas (as part of counter terrorism in Judea and Samaria), but not to occupy large urban areas during war; the ground forces thus required a period of preparation. The knowledge acquired in Judea and Samaria has been clearly evident in the fighting – at the tactical level, in the assignment of forces and in their collaboration with the Shin Bet – but the major plan for the invasion of Gaza was prepared during the air force's bombardment (it would be interesting to question the ground commanders about their assessment of the arial preparation).

The stages of military operations, as taught in military schools, are: “occupation,” “mop-up” and “defense” – the latter, if an enemy counterattack is an option. These stages have been taught for years in military schools and are all the more necessary in operations to capture urban areas.

Before drawing a picture of the situation following seven months of war, I would like to express a few thoughts about how the IDF fights. The occupation phase, or what the army referred to as the “dismantling” phase of Hamas’ military frameworks, was conducted differently than in previous wars, such as the operation to take over the city of Suez at the end of the Yom Kippur War.

The war began with an attack on the northern part of the Gaza Strip focused on the heart of Gaza City, Hamas’ center of gravity. The forces, operating in two divisional prongs, did not move rapidly at any stage. In the past, the rule was that built-up urban areas should be entered from several directions, and that speed of movement is key to taking over a city. Lessons from the past indicated that it is necessary to quickly reach areas that dominate a city, such as intersections through which traffic passes, or communication centers, and from there to progress with cleansing actions from the city center outwards. However, in Gaza, the forces advanced slowly, using extensive cover fire at the expense of speed, in a manner that reduced casualties among the IDF soldiers and civilians.

One of the most important decisions IDF commanders took in preparation for the war in Gaza was to fight with almost no small and isolated forces. Everywhere, the IDF turned up with large forces, creating a great advantage at every point of contact, not only in firepower but also numerically. It also employed armored forces, which in the past hesitated to enter built-up areas.

Armored forces worked in tandem with well-equipped infantry, which in some cases were the first to reach the target, securing the entrance of tanks that brought with them massive firepower. There were also instances in which the infantry felt safe inside its armored vehicles (to the point of sticking to the vehicles that were only supposed to lead the force), but for the most part, infantry gave perimeter protection to the tank force in built-up areas exposed to potential surprises at short ranges. It is worth examining whether this policy did not lead to an excess of use of firepower at the expense of strategy and basic soldiership, because the less controlled use of firepower has a great impact on the IDF's ability to sustain long battles and its dependence on U.S.-supplied ammunition.

The entry of a large force (the 162nd Division) from the northwestern corner of the Gaza Strip was significant from an operational perspective. The force created pressure at a point where Hamas' defense was apparently weaker and it entered the Gaza Strip with its western flank unexposed, along the coast, or as a senior armored corps officer put it, "right tank's track in the water." Along this route, there was a good chance there wouldn't be any IEDs or other unpleasant underground surprises.

The decision that two divisions would move together along the shore and then head eastward towards the border with Israel was also a good tactical move because the Hamas defenses were built facing the opposite direction. As a result, Hamas lost part of its ability to fight per its early preparations. The question that has been raised repeatedly is why the IDF didn't simultaneously invade the southern Gaza Strip to isolate it from Egypt along the "Philadelphi Corridor." This question has no good answer because the "plan that wasn't

executed” always looks good. The planners’ considerations will have to be studied in the post-war debriefing in order to draw the necessary lessons. One possible objection is that if the IDF had entered the South, this would have made it difficult to evacuate the population from the North (which fled south to escape the fighting) and perhaps it would have ended up being a self-defeating move. It is difficult to seriously discuss questions of “what if.”

The IDF has fought a modern war making use of the technological advantages of the “Start-up Nation.” In the ground fighting, the IDF integrated armed UAVs, providing the ground forces with close support, intelligence about what’s “around the corner” and facilitating coordination with other forces to eliminate the enemy just tens of meters away from the IDF units. Ground forces and UAVs work closely at the tactical levels in a way that the UAV has become another tool available to the battalion commander. Of course, putting such means in the hands of lower-level commanders entails risks that junior commanders are making decisions of great importance (including at the cost of error), but this is inevitable on such a decentralized battlefield.

When maneuvering in tanks and Namer APCs, the ground forces (especially the regulars) have outstanding protection against anti-tank weapons provided by systems such as “Trophy” and others. At the battalion and company level, infantry forces made extensive use of drones, primarily for intelligence gathering – including inside buildings. Some were purchased with private donations after their usefulness was proven on the battlefield, and therefore they became very popular in reserve units. Technology was of great significance on the battlefield, and in this respect the IDF force buildup proved itself.

It is important to note that perhaps for the first time in Israel’s wars, the IDF employed combined formations from different branches of the IDF. Almost all ground formations consisted of engineers, armor, and infantry elements operating under one command at the brigade and even the battalion level, giving the combined combat teams a major advantage on the battlefield. The various elements help each other and make up for weaknesses in the individual

components of the force. The need for engineering capabilities, for example, has in many cases made these units the leading force on the battlefield, both in moving to the target and fighting for it. – A much-improved combined action among the branches of the ground forces is one of the most welcome changes that have taken place in the IDF.

Moreover, for the first time in Israel's wars, the IDF's "special forces" were fully integrated within the armored and infantry units. The burden of fighting in the tunnels fell mainly on them. After developing specialized combat techniques and the technological means required to operate underground, these units reached high levels of performance and critical know-how. The IDF has now acquired valuable knowledge in the field of underground warfare that no other army in the world currently has.

The many years of investment in special forces units and the commando brigade, with all its sub-units, has proven itself in this war. By their nature, "special forces" are flexible and can adapt and digest lessons quickly during the fighting, and also respond to new and difficult challenges. They are independent in unique technological developments and procurement. Their flexibility is manifested in combat doctrines and techniques, and in bringing new technological capabilities to the battlefield amid ongoing combat.

The Israeli Air Force has, for the first time in the IDF's history, functioned as an Army Air Force, providing close and rapid support for ground forces (the average time from the request on the ground for fighter jets to an attack on a target in the battlefield was twelve minutes). Relieving the Air Force of a significant part of its mission of defending the country's skies (which was transferred to missile defense systems) and the lack of an enemy air force, released large parts of the IAF for support missions, beyond the allocation of drones.

Noteworthy, the IAF also carried out at the same time strikes in Syria and Lebanon and assisted in several incidents in intercepting UAVs and cruise missiles. During the Iranian attack, it bore the entire burden of fighting against

UAVs and cruise missiles. The drone threat from Lebanon requires the Air Force to allocate more of its order of battle for the mission of defending the North.

Technology has been employed extensively during combat to acquire intelligence. The result being that each brigade and division conducted an extensive intelligence effort, with G.H.Q capabilities at their disposal (SIGINT and VISINT capabilities), with extensive personnel directing the close intelligence effort from headquarters in the rear. At headquarters, extensive work was carried out to understand the enemy deployment and locate targets in densely built-up areas, as well as to provide accurate intelligence for the maneuvering forces.

Combat of this nature, which combines a great deal of technology and multi-corps and multi-branch cooperation, is, as noted, slower than we are used to. But at the same time, it enables a reduction in the number of casualties, because firepower instead of assault can be used to crush enemy resistance. This change led to a significant reduction in the number of casualties not only in the IDF but apparently also among Gazan civilians.

The war proceeded relatively slowly for two other reasons:

A. The need to consider that the enemy holds Israeli hostages. As a result, the IDF froze efforts in areas where there was concern that the hostages would be harmed. The units understood that they had to act cautiously, and therefore even more slowly – certainly after the IDF accidentally shot dead three hostages who managed to escape their captors.

B. The war was fought simultaneously on the ground and in tunnels underground, with commanders making efforts to synchronize these efforts in every sector. This effort to synchronize various dimensions of combat also slowed down the fighting. Nevertheless, the IDF has learned how to fight skillfully in tunnels.

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN GAZA

After seven months of war (more than five months into the ground maneuver in the Gaza Strip), the IDF is transitioning between the “occupation” phase and the “mopping-up” phase. The mopping-up is expected to last about a year and will be carried out by mobile forces that will move in and out of Gaza in raids based on precise intelligence. So far, up-to-date intelligence has been derived from the vast number of documents seized by the IDF when it took over Hamas headquarters throughout the Gaza Strip. Some intelligence stems from the interrogation of captured terrorists, and most will be derived from new intelligence efforts that Israel is investing in. No matter who is responsible for “the day after” in Gaza, the burden of gathering and employing intelligence will fall on the IDF and the Shin Bet.

The IDF operation at Shifa Hospital, which took place over two weeks ending April 1, a month after it had pulled out of the area, is an example of such a raid. During the operation, which began with the encirclement of the hospital within less than half an hour of issuing the order, some 200 terrorists were killed and around 500 captured. This was achieved without harming the medical staff or the patients. The hospital had become a central assembly point for terrorist elements remaining in the northern Gaza Strip. They were mostly deprived of their underground capabilities during the invasion phase, and during the raid, combat took place in and around the hospital above ground. During the initial stage of the war, the IDF needed two divisions to reach the hospital; two months later, three battalions were able to reach it within half an hour without encountering opposition. This is the meaning of “operational control,” and that is what will be achieved at the end of the first phase in all parts of Gaza.

The mopping-up phase, in which the IDF exploits operational control achieved in the first phase, will last about a year and perhaps more. Only after this stage will the IDF leave the area to whoever will be responsible for the “day after” in the Gaza Strip. The nature of the regime in power on the day after will be greatly affected by the outcome of the fighting. The weaker Hamas is, the better the

chances of success for whichever party enters to rehabilitate Gaza.

So far, the IDF has “dismantled” about 18 of Hamas’ 24 battalions, with four of the remaining battalions deployed in Rafah and its environs (two more battalions were destroyed as part of the operation in Rafah after May 2024); they are of great importance and must be destroyed. The other two remaining battalions are located in the refugee camps of central Gaza and will be dismantled during or after the battle in Rafah.

Regardless of U.S. demands, the IDF prepared plans to move the population that had gathered in Rafah en masse. Contrary to leaks from the U.S., there seems to be no way to deal with Hamas in Rafah other than occupying Rafah, with all that entails. The IDF has already begun an operation to take over the city that will enable the dismantling of Hamas’ military formations in this area. This operation needs to be completed. In the meantime, the large population concentrated in Rafah responded to IDF requests, and many left to areas defined by the IDF as safe zones where civilians will receive as much humanitarian assistance as possible during the war.

“Dismantling” is the description of the result of fierce fighting, sometimes from house to house, and as stated, always simultaneously under and above ground. Since the IDF does not intend to control the territory but only to achieve the destruction of Hamas’ military capabilities, the expression “dismantlement” allows more precision in the description of what is required of the army in the first stage. The task in this context is to kill a significant part of the battalion’s chain of command, destroy the battalion’s infrastructure above and below the ground, harm any force that opposes the IDF’s operational control of the area, destroy Hamas’ command and control systems and weapons production capabilities.

The number of terrorists eliminated is also significant, although body counts are not part of the mission enunciated by the political echelon. Nevertheless, eliminating most of the terrorist elements will make rehabilitation easier when “the day after” arrives.

While there will be unlocated military infrastructures, intact tunnels and terrorists at large, there will be no organized resistance under a central command. Thus, the IDF will be able to carry out the mopping-up phase, i.e., the systematic detection and destruction of the Hamas remnants, without the need for a permanent presence in the Strip and with much smaller forces than were required to dismantle the Hamas battalions.

The IDF does not need any definition of “the day after” to clear the area of terrorist infrastructures, weapons production capabilities and Hamas commanders over the coming year. This is a military mission stemming from what the political echelon defined as “the elimination of Hamas’ military capability and its ability to operate as an organization in the Gaza Strip.” IDF commanders know how to translate this directive into military missions. Achieving operational control should not depend on the question of “the day after.”

Therefore, a debate and decision on the nature of control over the territory on “the day after” can be delayed until the end of the process, and this subject to Israel’s provision that it meets two requirements in any future agreement:

- A. The IDF is able to operate freely throughout the Gaza Strip on the basis of intelligence in order to deal with any attempt to generate a threat to Israel or to eliminate terrorist infrastructure and surviving terrorists before responsibility for Gaza is transferred to an agreed entity (in other words, Gaza will be one large Area A, the area of the West Bank where the PA has full security and civil control but where Israel now operates freely).
- B. A buffer zone will be designated along the entire border separating the Gaza Strip and its residents from the border fence. This area will be free of any structures or vegetation, and anyone who enters it will be hit; the area will be mined and the IDF will be able to harm anyone who tries to cross it. The buffer zone will not be transferred to Israeli sovereignty, and the Gaza Strip will remain the same size as before the Hamas attack, but the fence along the border with Israel will be better protected.

The fate of the Philadelphi Corridor is a major issue affecting the future of the Gaza Strip. There are no good solutions to this problem. If, due to security requirements, the route is held by the IDF, Israel will according to international law become the political entity responsible for the Gaza Strip and the IDF will have to take on responsibilities as the “occupying force” and as the sovereign on the ground responsible for the needs of the two million Palestinians living in an almost completely devastated area. Therefore, there will be no choice but to reach an arrangement that ensures the route is sealed. Egypt and the United States must fully share this heavy responsibility, and the IDF should intervene along the Corridor only to thwart threats when necessary. It should do so as long as required, perhaps over a very long period. Solving this complex issue is not easy, but it is not impossible.

THE HOSTAGES

The challenge posed by the hostages held in Gaza has accompanied the IDF throughout the war. At certain points, it restricted or slowed down its movement to avoid harming them. In principle, it is correct to state that the IDF has two parallel missions:

Historic – to eliminate Hamas as a military force and as a functioning organization in Gaza.

Moral – to bring the hostages back home.

Whenever there is an opportunity to release hostages, one must wait with the “historical mission” to carry out the “moral mission.” But under no circumstances should the “moral mission” prevent the IDF from carrying out the “historic mission,” because if this is the case, Hamas, within a few years, will be able to execute another atrocity like October 7. Israel must be prepared to pay a “high price” to obtain the release of the hostages – but not “any price.” The red lines are twofold: the IDF must not withdraw from the entire Gaza Strip, and Israel cannot accept an end to the war; a pause – and even a long pause – yes, but no end to the war.

I would like to conclude the description of the war with a general statement about its broad aspects, especially in Gaza. This is a war fought in three dimensions at the same time:

1. The first is personal security – how do the residents return, without fear, to their communities in the “Gaza Envelope”? How do we prevent the fear that spread in Israel after October 7? And how do we stop the obscene situation in which once every two or three years the madman ruler in Gaza puts half of Israel in bomb shelters?
2. The second is Israel’s status in the region and the world at large. On October 7, Israel lost its status as a strong country. Its intelligence failed, its army collapsed, and its leaders seemed to have lost their balance. Only a resounding victory will allow Israel to regain its regional and global standing in the future. Therefore, the victory must be clearly visible and result in real damage on the barbaric enemy that attacked Israel. This is not revenge, but rather the first step in rebuilding Israel’s image of power and restoring its status as a regional power. This is a necessary condition on the long road to acquire a position that Israel’s neighbors do not consider weak, and so they do not believe its destruction is possible. On October 7, the sharks smelled blood – it is of utmost importance that they see those who shed Israel’s blood dismembered.
3. The third is the international arena – President Biden, as a veteran of the Cold War, understood this straight away. He understood that this war was also an “inter-axis war.” On one side are the countries of the anti-American alliance: Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Houthis, with China rubbing their hands in glee. On the other side are the United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. The U.S. had to prove that it was willing to come to the aid of its allies.

THE DAY AFTER

There are five alternatives for “the day after”:

1. Israeli control – We must consider carefully the advantages and disadvantages of this option and examine whether the security advantages gained by control of the territory is worth the loss of legitimacy in the world by taking on the burden of responsibility for Gaza. Resettling Gaza would be an even bigger mistake. If Israel were to resettle Gaza, the war would be portrayed as undertaken to enlarge the Israeli “empire.” This would have absolutely zero international legitimacy, and probably little sympathy in Israel as well.
2. Palestinian Authority control – The PA is indeed corrupt and ineffective and will certainly not fight Hamas, but Israel knows how to work with it (including in the security sphere); the Americans want the PA to take over Gaza following a reform they believe will make the organization less corrupt and more democratic (an overly optimistic, if not naïve belief); and it has broad international legitimacy.

Opposition to the PA in Israel is mainly political but also stems from the fact that the organization will certainly fail both in its role of exercising effective control on the ground and in everything related to rebuilding the Gaza Strip. The main problem with this solution is that the more democratic the PA becomes – in line with the American dream – the greater the chances that Hamas will take over from the PA in elections and thus any advantage in having installed the PA will disappear.

3. International control – An international body established for this purpose with Arab funds and American/European supervision to rebuild the Gaza Strip and transfer control, preferably to the PA, after it undergoes reform (ostensibly at least), on the way to a Palestinian state. It appears that Arab countries (the United Arab Emirates, for example) will be willing

to contribute considerable sums to the reconstruction efforts, provided they are assured that this is within the framework of progress towards the establishment of a future Palestinian state. Any entity entering the area will find it difficult to accept Israeli security operations, which will undoubtedly be perceived as interfering with Gaza's reconstruction.

4. Control by local elements – Control by Gazan clans, merchants and wealthy businessmen. The problem is that anyone willing to take such a job is in danger of being murdered by Hamas. Therefore, it is not at all clear that this is possible. This is one of the major challenges facing the IDF in parallel with military operations.
5. Chaos or anarchy – A situation such as that in Somalia portrayed in the film “Black Hawk Down,” i.e., gang rule. The chances of such a situation emerging on “the day after” are significant because it is difficult to see the other options materializing, because of the situation on the ground, the fear of Hamas remnants, and the difficulties that would be encountered by any entity willing to take responsibility for a Gaza in ruins, dealing with desperate, even if unorganized Hamas members, and where Israel will operate from time to time. In addition, the expected cost of reconstruction is at least a hundred billion dollars.

It would be a mistake to try to determine today who Israel prefers to take responsibility for civil affairs and reconstruction in the Gaza Strip. Anyone preferred by Israel will immediately become a “partner” in decision-making during the fighting. A party taking responsibility before the fighting is over inevitably will have a say over the conduct of the fighting – not a convenient situation for Israel. The situation on the ground is complicated even without the involvement of a third party whose sense of responsibility can become detrimental at an early stage.

The big question is: What can Israel achieve once the war in Gaza is over? Probably, toward the end of summer 2024, the IDF will be able to fulfill the

mission defined by the government: destroying the military capabilities of the terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip, headed by Hamas, and eliminating their ability to function as organizations. The assessment is that the mopping-up phase will last about six months to a year from the end of the intensive operation in Rafah.

How will we know that the mission has been achieved? There are two tests:

- A. The return of the Gaza border communities to their homes and the re-establishment of the Gaza Envelope as a prosperous and attractive region whose residents do not fear for their safety.
- B. The IDF does not remain deployed in the Gaza Strip but conducts raids in a similar mode to that it employs in Jenin. In other words, the Gaza Strip will be one large Area A, a situation that will signal that Israel's aims for the war have been achieved.

How long will the IDF have to operate in the Gaza Strip in that manner? Probably forever (even after the signing of an agreement with the Palestinians).

THE UNITED STATES

The actions of the United States from the outbreak of the war onwards were watched not only by the entities of the Axis of Evil but by the entire world. The U.S. did not send an aircraft carrier to the Mediterranean Sea to assist the IDF in its war against Hezbollah, and certainly not against Hamas. The IDF can manage by itself without the involvement of American airpower. The U.S. sent the carrier, and the American president stood by Israel, to prevent a regional conflagration if one of the sides, most likely Iran and its allies with Moscow's encouragement – with China supporting from afar – lost restraint. The U.S. failure to respond to Iran's massive barrage against Israel after an emphatic "Don't" does not enhance its image as a superpower. The fact that it succeeded in building a coalition that helped Israel intercept some of these threats does not subtract from the perceived weakness of the American response.

Yet, it is important to recognize that the U.S. remains an ally of Israel. If there is a need to expand the war against Hezbollah, due to an Israeli initiative or a deterioration on the ground, the relationship with the United States will become even more important.

Nevertheless, there are three points of dispute between the states: The longstanding dispute over the “two state” solution that Israel opposes – even more vocally in the wake of October 7 – primarily on security grounds. This objection is based among other things, on the inability of the U.S. to guarantee that a Palestinian state will not be taken over by Hamas, a terrorist organization that will pursue operations such as October 7. Since a Palestinian state will not outlaw Hamas, it will participate in the elections and probably win them.

In the dispute over humanitarian supplies to Gaza, Israel must accept the demand to increase humanitarian aid to Gaza, even though reports of a serious humanitarian crisis are not based on confirmed data (but they are nevertheless difficult to refute); according to information possessed by the IDF, there is no hunger in Gaza. Israel should probably take more vigorous action against Israelis trying to prevent humanitarian convoys to reach Gaza. This behavior is contrary to the interests of the State of Israel.

The American demand that Israel reduce civilian casualties in the war is baseless. No American military expert has presented the IDF with a better operational model. Moreover, the IDF has caused relatively fewer civilian casualties than armies that have fought terrorism in recent years in urban settings in the Middle East or elsewhere. The UN report revising downward the number of fatalities in Gaza makes the American demand even stranger because the new figures (whose reliability must also be questioned) indicate a truly extraordinary Israeli achievement compared to any other similar campaign in the world, including those of the U.S. Army wherever it has fought since World War II until today.

Israel's relations with the U.S. are very important, for several reasons: Without American assistance in the form of huge quantities of munitions (countless planes and quite a few ships supplied Israel with a large variety of armaments for the army and air force), the IDF would have found it difficult to execute its missions and the war would have inflicted a greater number of casualties on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides (precision munitions reduce collateral damage).

Most important of all however is the strong and public American support for Israel that makes clear to Israel's enemies that Israel is not alone, and therefore they should be concerned about Israel's military reach. Even when there have been disagreements between Israel and the U.S. during the war, they did not affect the American commitment to the IDF's combat needs. The U.S. did not slow down aid even when Israel did not acquiesce to every American request, including on the question of "the day after." Even American anger (partly unjustified) at extremists in Judea and Samaria who harm Palestinians has not significantly changed U.S. support for the war effort – though some of them have been subject to American sanctions, an extreme move in the bilateral relations. Therefore, the president's public threat that the U.S. would stop transferring certain munitions to Israel was extremely harmful. It strengthened Israel's enemies during wartime, and it was not surprising that it resulted in a severe backlash in both Israel and the U.S.

LEBANON

On October 11, it became crystal clear that Hezbollah Secretary Hassan Nasrallah did not want to join the "Palestinian war" (a decision that was apparently taken in consultation with Iran). When the issue was put to test on October 7, after Iran and Hezbollah were surprised by Hamas' move, they left the Sunni/Palestinian organization to deal with the situation and did not enter the war. It is possible that the very rapid response of Israel in mobilizing large reserve forces and deploying them in the North contributed to the decision not to enter a major war with Israel, which was well prepared for such a possibility, while Hezbollah lost the advantage of surprise.

By October 11, it was no longer possible to argue that Hezbollah was still considering a major war with Israel, as the situation on the ground clearly refuted such intention. That same day, Israel decided not to attack in the North, although a surprise Israeli initiative against Hezbollah could have yielded major achievements. Such an attack was proposed to the cabinet with the support of the entire defense establishment and most of the intelligence community but was rejected. Opening a second front seemed too risky. Probably, the decision to concentrate on Gaza was justified (perhaps the most important one made in the first week).

From that moment on, the fighting in the North was restricted as neither side was interested in a major war. The strikes were limited to a few kilometers within either side of the border, and both sides carefully choose targets (mainly civilian structures and outposts by Hezbollah and military installations by Israel). With a few exceptions, the tacit restrictions on the conduct of conflict have been maintained even if from time to time it seems that one of the sides has stepped up its actions.

Of course, an overly successful move by one side or a major failure by the other could deteriorate the situation rapidly, but both sides, each for their own reasons, have tried to avoid escalation. The situation became more complex in May when Hezbollah began to expand its attacks both geographically and in terms of the nature of the targets selected. It is difficult to know whether the change is due to distress or a sense of self-confidence (perhaps due to the lack of American response to the massive Iranian attack on Israel). In any case, Hezbollah's escalation could lead to deterioration.

The IDF's achievements in the North are impressive but are limited to the tactical level. Not a single terrorist team has managed to penetrate Israel, even though Hezbollah sent several Palestinian cells – ostensibly fighting on behalf of the Palestinians – to infiltrate and attack northern communities. All were eliminated. Hezbollah has (according to its account) lost 350 fighters, while losses on the Israeli side are 14 times smaller.

The IDF has significantly damaged Hezbollah's military capabilities along the border area and has also hit its anti-aircraft capabilities. The Israeli Air Force has renewed flights over Lebanon, something it was very careful to avoid before the war. Hezbollah fires mainly at civilian real estate (hundreds of homes have been damaged along the entire northern border, some very badly), while the IDF focuses on military targets to harm the organization's capabilities.

Despite the self-imposed restrictions, Hezbollah has registered two major achievements. It has managed to pin down large IDF forces, resulting in a shortage of forces in Gaza, which limited to some extent the IDF's operations in the South. Moreover, the possibility of war in the North requires the IDF to economize its use of munitions and maintain a reserve of trained units. Therefore, the IDF and Israeli decision-makers are obliged to be more cautious. It is possible that occasionally this caution prevented more decisive measures against Hamas. This was Hezbollah's contribution to the Palestinian war effort in Gaza. Its second achievement is the evacuation of some 80,000 residents from the North. Although there has been a similar exodus from southern Lebanon, it seems that in Israel deserting the North has far greater significance for Israeli decision-makers. Israel will have to find a way to reduce the threat in the North, especially from Hezbollah's commando force (the Radwan Force). It will be difficult to give residents of the North a sense of security if it remains deployed hundreds of meters or even a few kilometers from the border.

Israel will soon have to make a difficult decision concerning the North. As the war in Gaza draws to a close and the IDF moves on to sporadic raids, the number of forces released from Gaza will increase. Moreover, the need to enable the residents of the North to return to their homes will intensify, among other things because most of the residents of the South who were evacuated will return to their homes. The North in the meantime remains empty of most of its residents; the security situation must change for the displaced to return home.

The U.S. and France are heavily invested in efforts to get Hezbollah to withdraw north of the Litani River to reduce its ability to surprise Israel with an October 7-style attack and fire anti-tank missiles at northern settlements. French and American negotiators claim that such a move would constitute the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which was adopted at the end of the Second Lebanon War (2006). The Americans also want to advance measures intended to reduce friction with Lebanon and Hezbollah by “removing” some of Hezbollah’s claims about Israeli deployment that deviates from the international border between the two countries. The difficult question in such an agreement is who will supervise it and who will be responsible for enforcing it. The UN force deployed in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has already proven that it is not up for this mission.

If diplomatic efforts fail, the necessary changes can apparently only be achieved through war, a difficult decision to be taken by the Israeli cabinet; war in Lebanon will be many times more difficult than the war in Gaza, mainly for the home front but also for the IDF. At least six factors must be considered before Israel takes such a tough decision: international legitimacy, the amount of munitions available, the economy, domestic legitimacy, army fatigue/readiness, and the readiness of the home front.

The U.S. does not want to see war in Lebanon, certainly not a war initiated by Israel, particularly not during a presidential election year. It is possible (but unlikely) that Washington’s calculations will change if the American negotiators conclude that Hezbollah will not implement the UN resolution and the threat to Israel remains evident. While the war against Hezbollah will be far more challenging than the war in Gaza, the IDF has several advantages: the army is well prepared after the experience it has gained in Gaza; it has a strong offensive energy and a sense of mission; the intelligence and targeting is much better than in Gaza; and domestic legitimacy is high.

While the war will probably see significant damage and casualties on the home front, the IDF can register major achievements. It has been preparing for war

in the North for quite some time. It is better prepared than it was for the war in Gaza on October 7, both in terms of the number of targets already acquired for the air force and in terms of the ground forces' combat doctrine and training in recent years. Whether to go to war on Hezbollah will be the most difficult issue on the government's agenda soon, certainly more difficult than the "the day after" issue in Gaza.

Israel can take three temporary measures that may postpone the war for a year or two if these are able to provide a sense of security that will enable the displaced to return to their homes:

- A. Doubling or tripling military forces stationed on the border area.
- B. Strengthening regional defenses, including placing heavy weapons and additional military capabilities in the hands of civilians living along the border. This would constitute a return to the concept that led to the establishment of border settlements as an important defensive element alongside regular force.
- C. Better fortification of the border barrier.

In the wake of October 7, regardless of what happens in the short term, Israel will have to initiate a war against Hezbollah in the not-too-distant future. The obvious lesson of October 7 is that Israel should not allow terrorist organizations built by Iran to remain along its border. For the same reason, the campaign in Syria will continue to prevent Iran from building a strong proxy force there.

Noteworthy, the theory of "multi-front war" that many subscribed to did not materialize. This theory postulates that Iran succeeded in creating a unified command that would plunge Israel into a war with Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Palestinians of Judea and Samaria, and Israeli Arabs, as well as the Shiite militias in Syria. Almost none of this happened, and the only two entities that joined the war against Israel are the Houthis, whose active participation, in their arena, is another surprise (their involvement is limited due to the distance to Israel), and Hezbollah, which fought Israel in a limited and cautious manner so far. Syria has not participated in the fighting, and neither have

the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria, nor Israeli Arabs. These sectors have remained relatively quiet. Direct Iranian involvement came only in response to Israel's elimination of senior Quds Force officers in Damascus (a serious blow).

IRAN

The Iranian "Ring of Fire" around Israel is based on six components: Hezbollah in Lebanon, Islamic Jihad and Hamas in Gaza, Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the West Bank – and perhaps in the future in Jordan, an Iranian force and militias in Syria, Shiite militias in Iraq, and a Houthi force – of strategic but also tactical significance in Yemen. The Houthi component was not built to harm Israel, but to realize Iran's desire to become the hegemon in the Persian Gulf by harming Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. But from the beginning, the Houthis declared their commitment to the struggle against Israel, and the Iranians integrated them into the Ring of Fire, arming them with missiles capable of reaching Israel. The potential to block the Bab el-Mandeb strait by controlling the Yemeni coastline did not escape Iranian strategists. Each of the components of the Ring of Fire has a different relationship with Iran, and Tehran's influence on these organizations varies but it is behind their force build-up (money, weapons, training, local production capabilities, etc.).

Hezbollah is without a doubt the strongest of these organizations, but Hamas was also well constructed, especially underground. Hezbollah also serves as a long arm for projecting Iranian power, for example, fighting to help the Assad regime in Syria in the civil war in that country and assisting the Shiite militias in the Golan Heights. The American airstrikes in Yemen apparently also killed Hezbollah operatives who are involved in building the Houthi force and operating missiles. Iran's efforts to build up the Ring of Fire in Syria and the West Bank have met a strong Israeli response, and Iran's success in these two critical locations has been limited.

For a long time, Iran served as the conductor of an orchestra operating against Israel but tried not to play an active part, so as not to put Tehran in danger

of retaliation. The Ring of Fire threatens Israel mostly on its borders, while its managers work remotely in Tehran, at a safe range of 1,500 kilometers.

The elimination of senior IRGC Quds forces in Damascus, in a building that the Iranians called a “consulate” even though no diplomats were among the dead or injured there, and which in practice was the headquarters of all Iranian activity in the Levant, changed the situation. The attack on this installation clarified to Iran that it was vulnerable from an intelligence perspective and that continuing to operate the Ring of Fire would be costly. Iran thus responded forcefully to change the rules of the game that allowed Israel to strike Iranian targets in Syria.

To a certain extent, the massive Iranian attack in April when it fired some 300 ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and drones at Israel was an undesirable exposure from Iran’s perspective, but necessary considering Israel’s “chutzpah” in allegedly carrying out the assassination. It was an event the Iranians would have preferred not to happen because of their desire to keep themselves out of the battlefield, but in this case, Iran was forced to take center stage. Iran’s strategy failed.

A test will come when Israel locates a major Iranian target. Israel will have to decide whether to hit the target and risk an Iranian response. If Israel acts, Iran will face the dilemma of how to react. We may witness an escalation, but no one knows how Tehran will react.

Israel should note that the failure of the Iranian strike was due in part to the work of a coalition of air forces that thwarted the attack. This coalition included Jordan, the United States, France and the United Kingdom, which together employed hundreds of planes. The broad coalition under the umbrella of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) apparently included other partners in the intelligence effort and provided Israel with better intelligence than it would have had on its own. Such a coalition may not be at Israel’s disposal next time around.

Iran was and remains the greatest strategic threat to Israel and the engine behind all the components of the Ring of Fire. The large-scale missile attack served as conclusive proof that Iran is willing to take great risks when challenged directly by Israel. And it is not at all certain that the measured, but precise Israeli response, indicating that Israel has capabilities beyond what has been known so far, will diminish Iran's willingness to take risks in the future.

The Iranian attack also demonstrated Israel's defensive capabilities against multifaceted threats and very large quantities of Iranian munitions. The missile defense array and the Air Force coped impressively with the Iranian threat – even when considering the significant contribution of the international alliance. As a result of its performance, in the face of the growing threat posed by Iran's drones and cruise and ballistic missiles, Israel can feel more comfortable about the future – particularly as its laser-based weapons systems are expected to become operational before long.

YEMEN

Yemen is 2,000 kilometers from Israel, and even farther from Tehran. The distance meant that until recent events, Israel paid little attention to the threat from Yemen, even though it was aware that Iran was transferring ballistic and cruise missiles, and UAVs to the Houthis. There are two features to this somewhat surprising Houthi involvement:

- A. Following the launch of all long-range weapons in the Houthi arsenal – missiles, cruise missiles and UAVs – an informal “new regional network” has been created, including the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel. Considering the mutual threat from the Houthis, the three countries apparently share (along with Egypt?) information from their radar systems under the regional umbrella of CENTCOM. The Saudis and Americans intercepted Houthi projectiles in self-defense, but some of these threats were on their way to Israel, which intercepted targets that the other two “partners” failed to intercept. Indeed, Israel deployed its Arrow 2 and Arrow 3 systems for the first time in combat, and successfully intercepted incoming targets launched from Yemen.

B. The blockade of the Bab El-Mandeb Strait poses a greater challenge to the U.S. than to Israel, as restriction of freedom of navigation impacts the global economy. The damage to Israel from the obstruction of the southern shipping route is limited because most of Israel's trade goes via the Mediterranean. The attacks on shipping in the strait are of global strategic and political importance. The U.S. understands this and is leading the military effort. The new threat may lead to the strengthening of the Israeli navy to confront threats before they reach its shores.

JUDEA AND SAMARIA

Israel has achieved real success in terms of security in the West Bank over the past few years because it has managed to differentiate between the civilian population and the terrorist elements – this even though a significant part of the population is sympathetic to the terrorists. As a result of continuous and astute work, most Palestinians have not shifted from passive sympathy to active terror; Moreover, the area is relatively quiet, and large crowds have not taken to the streets (only about 3,000 Palestinians participated in the protest demonstrations after the assassination in Beirut of Salah Arouri, a West Bank native who was responsible for Hamas operations in the West Bank).

Of course, things would be substantially different if the PA did not educate its citizens to hate Jews, did not support the families of killed and arrested terrorists, and if most Palestinians in Judea and Samaria were not Hamas sympathizers. Until this is the case, Israel's focus must be on preventing terrorism and maintaining the gap between most of the uninvolved population and the terrorists. While the need to fight terrorism persists, Israel must continue to refrain from punishing the population. Allowing Palestinian workers from Judea and Samaria into Israel seems justified in line with this principle. There is an element of risk, but doing so has a welcome result, as stated, by creating separation between the population and active terrorists. This is the main task faced in Judea and Samaria.

The possibility of a Gaza-style assault on communities in Judea and Samaria has been raised, leading to the conclusion that Palestinian laborers should be treated as potential collaborators with such an attack. Approaching Judea and Samaria and Gaza as identical arenas, prone to similar events, misses the two major differences between the two regions. While there was no Israeli presence in Gaza, its presence in Judea and Samaria is broad, even if incomplete. In addition, the level of intelligence coverage in Judea and Samaria is many times better than in Gaza pre-October 7.

While neither Gazans nor Palestinian residents of Judea and Samaria have any love for Israel, the nature of the population and the leadership in the two arenas also differ greatly. In Gaza, Hamas made the decision to launch the October 7 attack, but in Judea and Samaria it does not have the ability to make a similar decision and it is unlikely that it will be able to do so anytime soon. Unlike Hamas, the PA does not have a fundamental worldview that holy war must be waged immediately against the Jews (although it cannot be ruled out that it will adopt such a view in the future). In the absence of a strong leader such as Yahya Sinwar, a sophisticated organization like Hamas Gaza, and the physical infrastructure that existed in Gaza, it would be extremely difficult to turn sympathy for Hamas among Palestinians in Judea and Samaria into an October 7-style attack.

During the Gaza war, the IDF expanded the campaign against terror in Judea and Samaria, primarily in the refugee camps in Samaria. Since the beginning of the war, the IDF has arrested more than 4,000 terrorists in Judea and Samaria, about half of them Hamas members, and killed some 450 terrorists, most of them carrying weapons or incriminated by intelligence. Operations have ranged from the elimination of a lone terrorist at a checkpoint to large-scale operations involving hundreds of soldiers for several days, with the help of armed drones and sometimes (rarely) F-16 jets that have mainly been deployed to destroy targets deep under buildings.

The purpose of all these operations was to severely damage the infrastructure of Hamas and the other terrorist organizations. Military intelligence and the Shin Bet were mostly familiar with this infrastructure and the war provided an opportunity to destroy it, thus denying the terrorist organizations the ability to operate in a coordinated manner at a high level. The results of these efforts will be seen on the ground for a long time to come, because the blow dealt to the terrorist organizations is significant, even though other young people will take the place of the casualties and the detained. Terrorism will not stop because of these operations, but it probably will not increase and might be reduced.

Israel's success in getting through the month of Ramadan quietly, without riots and mass rampage on the Temple Mount, despite the efforts of Hamas and Iran (which has lately intensified its efforts to bring money and weapons into Judea and Samaria), is a major achievement. This also suggests that the theory of a multi-front war is faulty. Yet, this is a danger that may face Israel in the future, certainly if its behavior unites these arenas in practice. The current war in Gaza has not proven this theory right regarding Israel's Arab population and Palestinians in Judea and Samaria.

As part of the effort to maintain quiet in Judea and Samaria, it is important to prevent those few incidents in which Jews unjustifiably harm Palestinians. Although such incidents are few, elements hostile to Israel inflate them and this damages Israel's reputation. As the war in Gaza continues, Israel must not ignore the fact that even a few cases could lead to an escalation at a time when the situation in Judea and Samaria is highly tense.

SUMMARY

The theory of a multi-front war launched simultaneously on five fronts did not materialize, and the IDF recovered from Hamas' surprise blow and launched a war to take the Gaza Strip.

The mission set by the government was clear: to destroy Hamas' military capability and ability to function as an organization in the Gaza Strip, and at the same time to free the hostages. The intensive stage of the fighting will end after the conquest of Rafah and will be followed by a year-long mopping-up phase, which in practice is already underway in northern Gaza. Towards the end of that year, the question of responsibility on the ground "the day after" will need an answer. The goal is to make the Gaza Strip similar to Area A in the West Bank (where the IDF does not have a permanent presence but can act when it deems necessary).

Hezbollah joined the fighting cautiously because, in consultation with Iran, it did not want to engage in a major war on Hamas' behalf. The destruction wrought upon Gaza, as well as Hezbollah's losses in Lebanon, have reduced its appetite for war, but the situation could escalate due to an error or an overly successful attack by one of the sides, or when a major war suits Iranian interests. Down the road, and as the war in Gaza declines in intensity and Israeli residents of the South (the Gaza Envelope) return to their homes, Israel will have to reach decisions regarding the return of civilians displaced from the North, who are unlikely to return to their homes without a drastic change in the security situation. A war against Hezbollah, which is the alternative to a political settlement that brings about the distancing of its units from the border, would be far more difficult than the war in Gaza, both in terms of military challenges and those faced by the home front.

Within the IDF, there have been discussions about reviving the concept of a "security zone" in Lebanon, a zone that would not need a permanent IDF presence but would prevent the return of Hezbollah ground forces to the vicinity

of the border with Israel. The test at the end of this war will be whether Israel succeeds in creating a military reality that prevents Hezbollah from improving its military capabilities, without fear of the organization's aggressive reactions.

Judea and Samaria have remained relatively quiet despite the IDF's intense operations. Israel must maintain the separation between the civilian population and terrorists, and even take the risk of allowing Palestinian workers into Israel.

An informal coalition of the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Israel has formed vis-à-vis the Houthis and together they have intercepted most of the incoming threats from Yemen. At the same time, the United States is leading an international coalition trying to deter the Houthis (unsuccessfully) and undermine their ability to block the Bab el-Mandeb Strait (with little success).

The direct conflict with Iran that began with the elimination of senior IRGC Quds Force officers in Damascus and continued with Tehran launching a barrage of 300 drones and cruise and ballistic missiles at Israel appears to be over. Israel responded to the Iranian attack by firing at a single target, but in a manner that underscores Iran's inability to defend important assets. Although the Iranian strike on Israel ended without causing significant harm, Iran has proven its willingness to take risks. It is still unclear what the future rules of the game will be in the direct confrontation between Israel and Iran. The extent Iranians will be willing to absorb blows in the future before they hit back against Israel remains to be seen. The uncertainty concerning the assessment of the parties' willingness to assume risks that might lead to the outbreak of war between Iran and Israel will hover over the region and the corridors of power in Israel and Iran. If close coordination between Israel and the United States is maintained, the possibility of a major war with Iran will decrease, and, conversely, the more the Iranians feel that Israel is isolated, their audacity will increase.

Israel will find itself engaged in various combat situations for a long time, in Gaza and against Hezbollah, and its efforts to neutralize the terrorist elements in the West Bank will continue. There is a good chance that after this challenging

period, Israel's strategic situation will improve because the threat from the South will almost disappear, and Israel will regain some of the aura of power that was severely damaged on October 7.

Relations with the United States will remain complex. The current administration is under pressure from the left wing of the Democratic Party and cannot ignore the calls against Israel by a significant number of young people and party activists. However, purely from a security perspective, American support is strong and admirable.

On the Palestinian issue, however, the Americans hold positions that are unlikely to be welcomed by any Israeli government, at least for the foreseeable future. After October 7, the chances of Israel agreeing to a Palestinian state on its borders are zero, especially when in smaller fora the Americans who deal with the issue admit that they cannot guarantee that it will not be a Hamas state. However, the U.S. also continues to emphasize that the solution must come through negotiations, not coercion from outside. Therefore, it vetoed Algeria's proposal at the UN Security Council to unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state.

The chances of the U.S. bringing about real reform of the PA are minuscule, or non-existent, and, in any case, Washington cannot guarantee that the PA or a Palestinian state will not be ruled by Hamas, which will oust Fatah by elections or by force (or a combination of the two, as was the case in Gaza). Israel, which continues to live in the Middle East, must explain its perspective to the U.S., its great friend. Israel must consider American positions and sensitivities, particularly in an election year. But when it comes to important issues relating to Israel's ability to defend itself, it is sometimes necessary to demonstrate determination and even to take decisions against American preferences. Israel must act per its security needs.

It seems that the U.S. has difficulties accepting that the Muslim world (including the Arab states and Iran) is not about to change substantially. Even if there

are states that normalize their relations with Israel and enhance their relations with Washington, radical Islam will continue to flourish. The American failure in Afghanistan and Iraq is no coincidence; Hamas' barbaric attack is not an exceptional story, and the PA's funding of the families of killed or incarcerated terrorists is not on humanitarian grounds, but a matter of principle. It is the result of ideological and social preferences.

In conclusion, some lessons from the war are offered with the utmost caution, mainly because the investigations that have commenced are a long way from ending. Moreover, one of the greatest dangers is drawing lessons from one war and projecting them on future force buildup. Since every war is a unique event, we must be careful not to make long-term decisions based on a single and unique experience. The IDF's combat and security doctrine have been continuously developed and tested during many years of experience and after much thought. Though the national security doctrine is an oral understanding, its strategic and tactical tenets should not be changed unless the lessons are of long-term significance.

For example, the Six-Day War was an unusual war from several perspectives, among other things because after the first 24 hours in which the air forces of the Arab armies were destroyed, the IDF had absolute superiority over the battlefield, without any resistance (largely a similar situation to Gaza in the current war). The IDF concluded that there was no need for artillery because the air force was a "flying artillery." Yet, in 1973 the IDF paid the price for implementing this conclusion as the conditions it faced had changed. "The missile bent the wing of the plane," in the words of former Air Force commander Ezer Weizmann, and the ground forces were left without artillery. Even today, the IDF does not have enough artillery, but on the eve of the war in 1973 the situation was worse, as the result of a mistaken conclusion.

It seems that there are seven lessons to be drawn:

1. Israel, like most democratic countries, has neglected the option of preventive wars. "Wars of Choice" became unthinkable because public opinion in

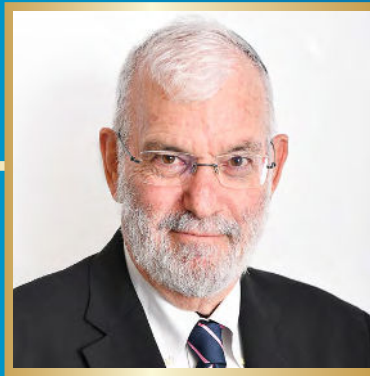
liberal democracies (Israel is one of them) adopted the slogan “there are no good wars.” This ignores history (Was the war against Nazi Germany not a good war?). Israel must internalize that as a small country, it must be prepared to fight “preventive wars” when the need arises. Figuratively, the “Begin Doctrine” should also be applied in the conventional arena. Israel must prevent the strengthening of terrorist armies in its immediate vicinity, as well as end certain threats that endanger its ability to defend itself, even over the long term.

2. Another important lesson concerns both force build-up and its use. In the end, the principles of the military profession are the proper foundation for the activities of the army. When not followed, failure is guaranteed. For example, when the defense plan assumes that the “line of contact” is where the enemy will be brought to a halt, when there is no depth to the defensive deployment, when there are no reserves in the area and no artillery available for the defenders lack of success should not be a surprise.-All these could have been deduced from the failure of the defensive phase of the 1973 War. All these mistakes occurred on October 7 when the IDF was professionally deficient. Once again, the need to greatly enhance the study of the military profession at all levels has been made clear.
3. For reasons not entirely clear (at least to the author) the IDF has abandoned the concept of “territorial defense,” subsequently greatly reducing the defensive capabilities of the communities along the border. A plan must be prepared and implemented so that within a year, these communities are able to defend themselves as part of a territorial defense system based on the residents of the area. They should be well equipped, even with artillery, to be able to operate with zero warning time.
4. There is an ongoing controversy over another lesson concerning force buildup. The ground forces, especially the reserves, were small primarily due to budgetary constraints. It seems that at least one additional reserve division or its equivalent is essential to meet the missions of the current

war. Several simulations and General Staff war games must be conducted to test whether this proposition is valid for the next war. The conclusion will be clear.

5. Israel has become too dependent on supplies, especially munitions, from the U.S. Israel must invest significant sums of money in increasing its production capacity in several areas and increasing the amount of ammunition stored. These efforts are considered uneconomic, but in the emerging international reality they are a necessity.
6. Another lesson, which should have been adopted a long time ago, is the need for the IDF to have a missile arm that is not under Air Force command. Work on building this force needs to begin immediately for the purposes of intensive combat in Lebanon – ranges should be around 100 km, and these should be gradually expanded. The ability to hit fixed and other quality targets, at least at distances up to Lebanon's northern border, must be independent of IAF aircraft, which will remain responsible for striking at greater depths.
7. At the tactical level, drones seem to be the great innovation of the battlefield in this war. On the one hand, more must be done to defend against them, because the enemies will possess many (including large swarms) in the future. On the other hand, the IDF must invest in capabilities that can be employed by spearhead platoons and later by all maneuvering forces; drones are an essential tool for intelligence gathering by ground forces and for destroying the enemy at short ranges in various shelters.

In addition to the seven lessons listed above, there is a need to investigate two prevalent phenomena of the Gaza War. Slowness of execution and the use of massive firepower against an enemy that does not possess great firepower capabilities on the battlefield must be fully understood.



Major General (res.) Yaakov Amidror

The Anne and Greg Rosshandler Senior Fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security

General Amidror was National Security Advisor to Prime Minister Netanyahu and chairman of the National Security Council (April 2011-November 2013). He served for 36 years in senior IDF posts (1966-2002), including commander of the Military Colleges (including the National Defense College, Staff and Command College, and Tactical Command Academy), military secretary to the Minister of Defense, director of the Intelligence Analysis Division in Military Intelligence, and chief intelligence officer of the Northern Command. He is a distinguished fellow at JINSA's Gemunder Center. He is the author of three books on intelligence and military strategy, *Reflections on Army and Security* (Hebrew, 2002), *Intelligence, Theory and Practice* (Hebrew, 2006), and *Winning Counterinsurgency War: The Israeli Experience* (JCPA, 2008).

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