Hassan Nasrallah
Secretary-General of Hezbollah
Eliminated

Ibrahim Aqil
Head of Hezbollah's operations
and commander of the Radwan Force
Eliminated

Fuad Shukr
The highest-ranking military commander
in the Hezbollah terrorist organization
and head of the organization's strategic unit
Eliminated

Ali Karaki
Commander of the Southern Front
Eliminated

Wissam al-Tawil
Commander of the
Radwan Force
Eliminated

Taleb Sami Abdullah
Commander of the
"Nasser" unit
Eliminated

Mohammad Kassim Al-Attar
Commander of Hezbollah's Training
Unit in the Radwan Force
Eliminated

Hassan Yusuf Abed Al-Sattar
Chief of Operations in the Radwan
Force
Eliminated

Hassan Ah...
Head of Radw...
Eliminated

...ad Issam Hamad
...mbat and Operational
...Radwan Force
Eliminated

Abbas Sami Mussalmani
Commander of Border Offensive
Operations
Eliminated

Samer Abed Al-Halim Talawi
Commander of the Border Offensive
Operations in the Golan Heights
Eliminated

Turning Point in the North

> De-Iranization of Lebanon

> Decimation of Hezbollah

> Securing Israel's borders

> Returning Displaced Back Home

> Demilitarization of South
  Lebanon

> International Involvement

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ISRAEL'S DEFENSE & SECURITY FORUM

Research Department

October 2024 / Tishrei 5784

Israeli Achievements in Lebanon

First 11 months of the war
October 8th 2023 – September 16th 2024

The Past 4 weeks
September 17th 2024 – October 13th 2024

First 11 months		The Past 4 weeks
+7,000	Terror Targets Hit	**+5,000**
+439	Terrorists Killed	**+1,661**
12	Leadership Killed	**35**
+100	Terrorists Injured	**+3,500**
Unknown	Stockpile of Missiles and Rockets Struck	**50%** Out of approximately 150,000

On **September 17, 2024**, a coordinated attack saw over **4,000 beepers** carried by Hezbollah operatives explode simultaneously, injuring more than 3,500 and killing dozens. In **the days following**, the Israeli Air Force launched a powerful campaign, striking **thousands of targets** and eliminating Hezbollah's top leadership, including **Hasan Nasrallah**, on **September 28**. This decimated Hezbollah's command structure. A subsequent **ground invasion** on **October 1** uncovered terror tunnels, killed hundreds of terrorists, and dismantled key infrastructure that Hezbollah had built over 18 years.

The IDF's ground in incursion into Lebanon is clearing entire villages of:
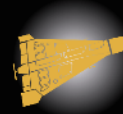
- Anti-Tank Missiles
- Rockets and Rocket Launchers
- Small Arms and Ammunition
- Terror Tunnels
- Attack Vehicles and Jeeps
- Attack Drones and Unmanned Vehicles

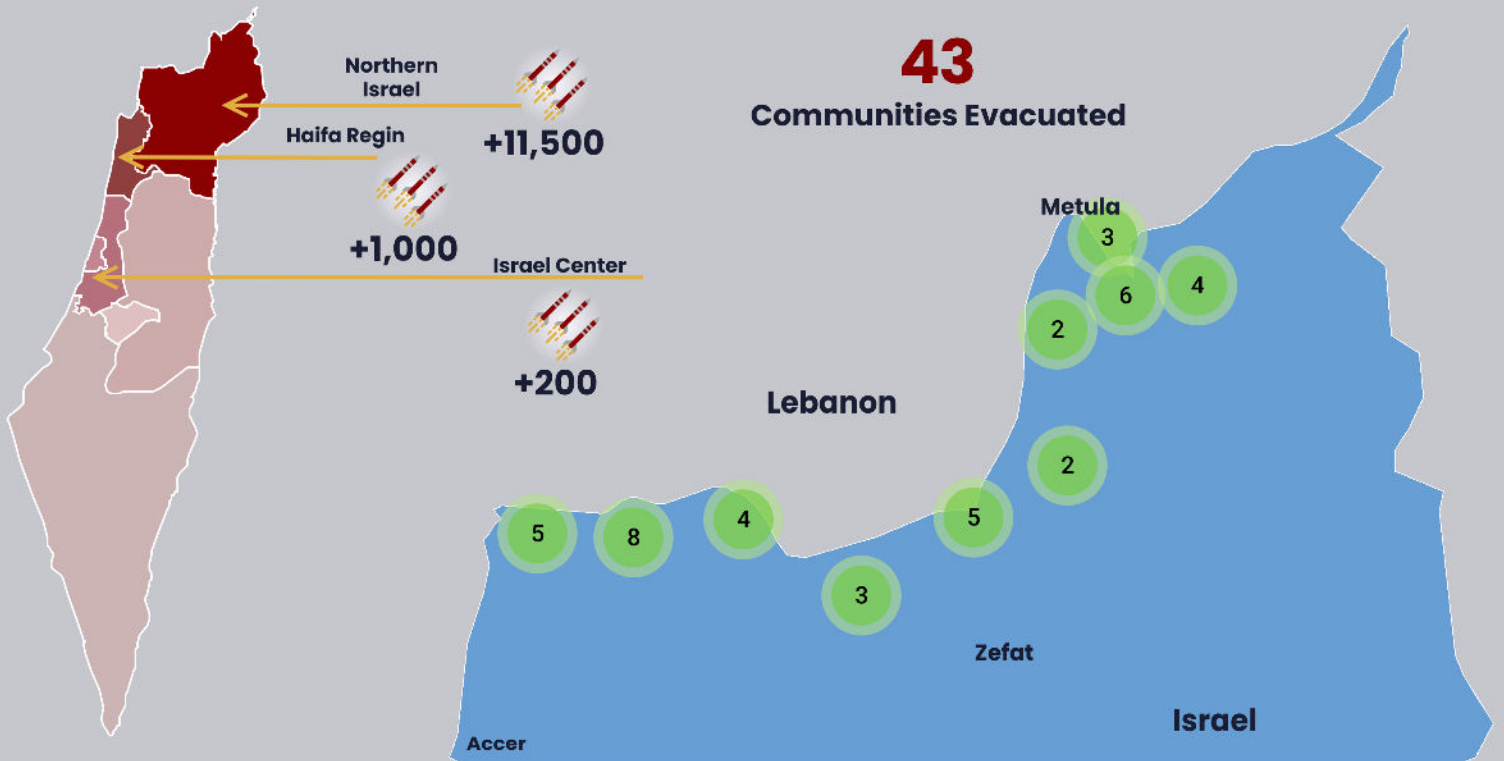# Hezbollahs Threat to Israel

Since October 8th 2023

Sirens heard throughout Israel
+9,400

Kilometers of burnt land
+190,000

Israeli's Forced out of their homes
+62,000

Israeli Casualties
68

Missile, rockets and drones fired into Israel
+13,000

Northern Israel → **+11,500**

Haifa Regin → **+1,000**

Israel Center → **+200**

43
Communities Evacuated

Metula
3
6 4
2

2

5

5 8 4

2

3

Lebanon

Zefat

Accer

Israel

Hezbollah's Leading Arsenal of Aerial Weapons

Heavy rockets
Origin: Iran
Range: -15 KM

Short-range rockets
Origin: Russia & Iran
Range: -50 KM

Cruise Missile DR3
Origin: Russia & Iran
Range: 100-500 KM

Medium-range rockets
Origin: Russia & Iran
Range: 50-200 KM

Fateh missile
Origin: Iran
Range: 75 KM

Fateh-110 missile
Origin: Iran
Range: 230 KM

Zelzal-2 rocket
Origin: Iran
Range: 250 KM

Tactical Aircraft Sayyad 107
Origin: Iran
Range: 100 KM

About the IDSF

IDSF – Israel's Defense and Security Forum, Habithonistim is an association with more than 35,000 senior officers, commanders and combatants in the reserves and civilians who are former members of all the security forces. It was founded in order to defend the state of Israel's security needs in a way that will enable it to exist and prosper for generations to come.

Our policy is clear: We are committed to Israel's right to safe borders, the borders of the land of Israel; we believe that Israel's security needs head the national priorities; and we believe that Israel does not have the privilege of losing any war. The IDF must act freely in the entire area in order to fulfill its responsibility and to defend Israel.

We clarify that the association is non-partisan, but puts the values and the vision that define it at the forefront.

Management team: Brigadier General (res.) Amir Avivi (chair and founder), Lieutenant Colonel (res.) Yaron Buskila (VP), Or Yissachar, Yitzhak Lev, Assaf Voll, Jessica Barazani, Ortal Ron, Moshe Davis, Elie Pieprz, Keren Balila, Ronit Farkash, Eva Nagar, Tal Nir, Ariel Shafir

Board of directors: Major General (res.) Gershon Hacohen, Brigadier General (res.) Haim Ronen, Commissioner (res.) Shlomo Katabi

Among our members: Major General (res.) Yossi Bachar, Major General (res.) Kamil Abu Rukun, Major General (res.) Yossi Mishlav, A., a former senior officer in the Mossad, M., a former senior officer in the General Security Services, former Commissioner Shlomo Katabi, Brigadier General (res.) Hasson Hasson, Brigadier General (res.) Harel Knafo, Brigadier General (res.) Avigdor Kahalani, Brigadier General (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser, Colonel (res.) Tal Braun, Prof. Alexander Bleigh

About the Research Department

The Research Department of the Israel Defense and Security Forum aims to be a leading, relevant and dynamic voice in the public debate in Israel that through actionable research provides the public and the decision makers with the tools necessary to cope with the developing political-defense situation, while implanting the principles and values of the national security of the state of Israel so that it will flourish for generations as the nation state of the Jewish people.

We advance fact-based, professional and inviting discourse that bases itself on the principles and values of Zionism and Israel's national security as a self-evident departure point. These include Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state, based on the Zionist vision, national security that is built from the inside outwards from which the principles of governance and sovereignty are derived, full security control by the IDF in the area, power as a source of peace, nurturing human capital and the principle of the enlisted nation.

The Department's activity revolves around two complementary levels: research and its mediation. We provide reports, studies and position papers that focus on our core subjects, together with professional recommendations. This research is made accessible to the public and to decision makers by different means, from meetings with decision makers through appearances in the media and open lectures.

We set ourselves the aims of education and teaching the public in general and the younger generation in particular.

Head of the Department: Or Yissachar
Director of the Department: Brigadier General (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser
The team of researchers: Major General (res.) Gershon Hacohen, Brigadier General (res.) Oren Solomon, Colonel (res.) Ronen Itzik, Lt. Col. (res.) Maurice Hirsch, Lt. Col. (res.) Dr. Mordechai Keidar, Major (res.) Lilach Eshtar, Dr. Ruth Cabessa Abramson, Dr. Martin Sherman, Att. Yifat Segal, Eran Lahav, Yoram Ettinger, Att. Eli Kirshenbaum, Atar Porat, Jennifer Teale, Shachar Citron, Maj. (res) Itai Katz, Cap. (res.) Omri Goshen, Giovanni Giacalone

Executive Summary

- **Israel has broken the 11 month-long stalemate o its northern border by launching an all-out campaign against Hezbollah in Lebanon.** This has included over 4,000 airstrikes, the elimination of the vast majority of the terror group's leadership including Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, and a limited ground incursion to confiscate weapons and remove the threat of attack tunnels.

- **This followed Hezbollah's unprovoked attacks** that commenced on October 8, 2023, defined by the terrorist group as a "Lebanese support front" of Hamas' October 7 massacre. Hezbollah has so far fired over 10,000 missiles, rockets, anti-tank missiles, and drones at Israel, triggering the evacuation of over 60,000 Israelis from 43 communities in the north, now displaced for over a year.

- **Being Iran's protégé, Hezbollah has been benefiting from economic support and advanced weapons from Tehran,** posing a significant threat on Israel as a frontal Iranian base, impacting the balance of power in the region and strengthening Iran's Shiite axis.

- **During the first 11 months of the war, Israel's tit-for-tat policy maintained a defensive posture in the north,** to allow the IDF to focus on the Gaza front.

- **Since mid-September, however, Israel's renewed momentum has ushered in an opportunity to revise the war objectives** into not only obtaining a ceasefire while enforcing UN resolution 1701, thus bringing the displaced Israeli residents back to their homes, but **decimating Hezbollah in Lebanon, leading to the De-Iranization of Lebanon, thereby weakening Iran's radical axis and advancing pro-Western forces in the region.**

- **This paper overviews the Hezbollah threat as part of Iran's radical axis, and brings policy recommendations to the post-war end state in Lebanon.** This includes a new reality in Lebanon with no Iranian influence, an amended 1701 that includes international forces with a clear mandate to demilitarize South Lebanon, preventing Hezbollah from rearming, and monitoring the Syrian border and the Beirut airport to prevent Iran from smuggling weapons into the country.

- **This new reality could possibly bring about a new dynamic between Israel and Lebanon,** that has been defined for the past half a century by foreign elements – Palestinian group Fatah's takeover of South Lebanon, and pro-Iranian Hezbollah's takeover of Lebanon.

Contents

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Introduction

Following an **11 month-long stalemate,** during which Israel focused the bulk of its war efforts on the Gaza front, the Lebanon front facing Hezbollah's threat and terrorist attacks took a sharp turn. **On October 8, 2023, Iranian-backed Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah launched an unprovoked campaign against Israel as a "war of support" of Hamas' October 7 atrocities** and the ensuing war, attacking its citizens with non-relenting fire. On September 17, 2024, **Israel broke the stalemate and its tit-for-tat policy and defensive posture, and doubled down on the Hezbollah threat.** This sophisticated and coordinated effort went as far as redefining modern warfare while exceeding the expectations of numerous security experts. Israel has defined a clear war objective to **bring the 60 thousand displaced residents of towns evacuated in northern Israel back to their homes.**

Up until that point, Israel maintained a defensive posture towards Lebanon, as well as towards Judea and Samaria, the Houthis, and the Iranian regime. Israel has avoided taking proactive initiatives and an all-out war in these theaters, aware of its operational limitations to conduct multifront warfare. Now, as the Gaza theater has reached a certain "war routine" and an operational opportunity in Lebanon was reached, Israel has discarded its much-criticized reactive, defensive approach, and launched an all-out offensive on Hezbollah.

During the first 11 months of the conflict, after Hezbollah joined forces with Hamas to launch a self-defined "attrition war" on October 8 - the day following the October 7 massacre - **Israel has seen over 10,000 attacks by Hezbollah** on its northern regions. Hezbollah has fired missiles, rockets, Iranian attack drones of the same type that Iran provides Russia for its illegal invasion of Ukraine, anti-tank missiles, alongside other munitions. Israel evacuated over 60,000 residents from 43 communities, and the situation has remained unchanged ever since.

Upon the commencement of **Operation Summer Arrows,** Israel launched over 4,000 airstrikes, a ground incursion into Lebanese border towns that contained attack tunnels and significant military infrastructure and equipment designated for the elite Radwan unit to attack northern Israel, and reportedly carried out a beeper and walkie talkie explosion operation that incapacitated thousands of its militants. Israel also eliminated the bulk of Hezbollah's senior leadership including notorious long-time Secretary General of the terrorist group, Hassan Nasrallah, and apparently also his successor Hashem Safi Al-Din, Hezbollah's chief military official Fadi Shukur, and other officials. Many of them also had **blood of American and French soldiers on their hands** due to their involvement in the 1983 Beirut barracks bombing, killing 241 US military personnel and 58 French paratroopers, and were involved in the 1992 and 1994 bombings against the Jewish community in Buenos Aires.

Unification of fronts: No longer "Defender of Iran"

Hamas' attack on October 7 was followed by a multifront Iranian-led campaign against Iran, which rendered the framing of the war into not only an Israel-Hamas war as part of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but an **Israel-Iran war.** Hezbollah has framed its involvement in the war as a "war of support" of their fellow members of the **"axis of resistance"** in Gaza, making a non-negligible contribution to the efforts to distract Israeli resources and attention. This has been part of the Iranian strategy of **unification of fronts,** integrating war efforts on multiple theaters aimed at distracting and exhausting Israel's war focus. Nasrallah himself, calling it the "Lebanese support front", bragged on multiple occasions about the intensity of the military effort by Hezbollah that makes use of novel missiles and continuously "exhausts" Israel with an "attrition war". The escalation during the summer made Nasrallah declare a new regional dynamic.

Therefore, the offensive military campaign initiated by Israel to tackle this threat holds the potential of not only significantly diminishing Hezbollah's capabilities and relevance, but by extension, affecting other fronts as well. Significant gains on the Lebanon front can affect Sinwar's decisions in Gaza vis-à-vis consenting to a significant hostage deal in more favorable conditions to Israel.

Crucially, **Hezbollah was established from the outset as an Iranian proxy designed to fundamentally alter the regional Shiite balance of power confronting Israel and force Israel to recalculate her defensive and deterrent postures. Israel has no claims nor conflict with Lebanon,** that used to be considered the Switzerland of the Middle East and an obvious candidate to make peace with Israel, yet **Fatah's takeover of South Lebanon, followed by Iran's takeover of the country have fundamentally deteriorated relations** and created the conditions for the present state of war.

Iran established Hezbollah as its protégé in the 1980s in Lebanon, during the First Lebanon War with Israel and the IDF's permanent presence in Lebanon, following years of non-relenting Palestinian terrorism initiated by Arafat's Fatah movement on northern Israeli townships. It quickly gained a foothold in the country as it filled the vacuum that was left by the many years that the country was torn apart by deadly civil wars. It has since become one of the world's richest and most well-equipped militia groups, armed with Iranian advanced weapons and with self-manufacturing capabilities, and has since evolved into a powerful political group that effectively controls Lebanon. The official government bows to Hezbollah's – and by extension Iran's – will.

Hezbollah had enjoyed an annual budget of over $1 billion, of which around $700 million originate in Iran, and reportedly held over 150 thousand projectiles including precision-guided missiles, rockets, attack drones, among others. In addition, Hezbollah nurtured the **elite Radwan force** for its masterplan to **take over the Galilee region of Israel,** conquering towns and taking hostages in a form reminiscent of Hamas' October 7 massacre.[1]

Hezbollah has also established a political party, which has made significant gains in the Lebanese

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[1] To learn more see IDSF Research Department, *Hezbollah: On a Brink of Eruption?*, https://idsf.org.il/en/papers/hezbollah-eruption-eruption/

politics as part of the March 8 camp, gaining many seats in parliament and forming a part of the government.

To preclude a potential Israeli attack on Iran, it became clear that the powerful Hezbollah would be activated, raining down thousands of missiles, rockets, and drones on Israeli cities every day, thus significantly complicating the options for Israeli decision-makers. Nasrallah has positioned himself as the **"Defender of Lebanon",** yet now his organization has increasingly become the **"Defender of Iran".**

Now, as the Hezbollah card has been weakened substantially, Israel has a much freer hand to act in Iran itself. Israel pledged to do In the aftermath of the 181 ballistic missiles that Iran fired on Israel on October 1, Israel pledged to retaliate against Iran. Given that Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders vowed not to allow Iran to ever obtain nuclear weapons, and with Hezbollah compromised enough to prevent it from deterring Isreal, it creates more leeway for Israel to seize the opportunity and tackle the Iranian nuclear program head-on, if it so chooses.

IDF troops in southern Lebanon | Source: IDF spokesman

IDF attacks in Beirut Lebanon | Source: Abu Ali Express on Telegram

Policy recommendations

Revised war objectives

The updated circumstances on the Lebanon front now present Israel and the international community with an opportunity to revise the war objectives, from moderating Hezbollah's willingness to launch attacks and enforce UN resolution 1701, to outright decimating Hezbollah and usher in a new era in the history of war-torn Lebanon. Weakening Hezbollah, even taking the Hezbollah card off the table, will also mark a significant blow to the Iranian axis and the pro-Shiite forces in the region.

Israel's allies, first among them the United States, have advised Israel against "escalation" and to accept a ceasefire, during which a final arrangement will be negotiated. However, **Israel has given every opportunity for diplomacy over 11 months of unprovoked conflict and escalation initiated by Iran and its proxy Hezbollah.** Multiple voices in Lebanon disapproved of Iran and Hezbollah's aggression as well, rejecting their country's sacrifice as a pawn in the Iranian masterplan of the Middle East. Israel has also **agreed to settle for the enforcement of UN resolution 1701,** though **UNIFIL has proven itself ineffective** in tackling the grave threat to Israeli civilians and carrying out its mandate to ensure no Hezbollah forces are allowed in South Lebanon.

This is all taking place in the context of the last time that Israel relied upon international diplomacy to secure its northern border, resulting in the aforementioned UN Resolution 1701 and led to Israel vacating south Lebanon in 2006. The result was that less than 20 years later, Hezbollah has significantly enhanced its capabilities, and embedded itself along Israel's borders and right under UNIFIL's watchtowers. UNFIL and UN Resolution 1701 were designed to avoid the exact war that we are now in and has cost numerous Israeli and Lebanese lives.

Therefore, Israel's intense effort to uproot the Hezbollah threat is designed to **create significantly enhanced conditions for stability along the Israel-Lebanon border after decades of war,** and **to augment diplomacy with assertive military actions**.

Israel is therefore facing a trifold challenge:
- Crushing Hezbollah's military capabilities
- Preventing it from rearming and redeploying its forces in South Lebanon
- Ushering in a new reality in Lebanon

The following are advised as Israel's updated strategic war objectives:
1. **Outright decimation of Hezbollah as a relevant fighting force** while continuing to pound its military infrastructure, weapon silos, attack tunnels alongside operatives and senior officials.
2. **Denying Hezbollah the possibility to rearm** by one of the given scenarios.
3. **Bringing the displaced Israeli residents back to their homes in the north, after having been evacuated for over a year due to Hezbollah's unprovoked attack, by securing the northern border** while selecting one of the given scenarios below. **IDF presence will likely be required for the foreseeable future, until an enforceable international arrangement or other tenable arrangement can be forged,**

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driving a wedge between northern communities and Lebanese territory.

4. **Generating international support for securing a long-term international arrangement in** **Lebanon** that would further promote political and social stability in the country while empowering non-violent factions.
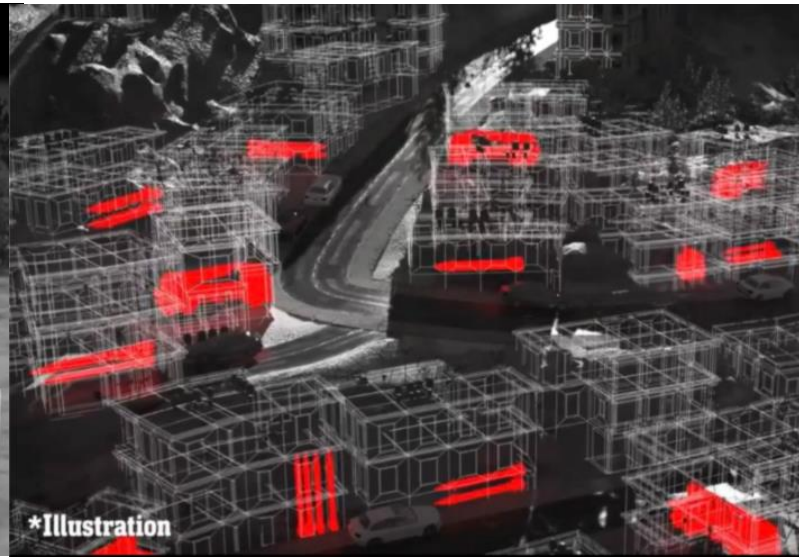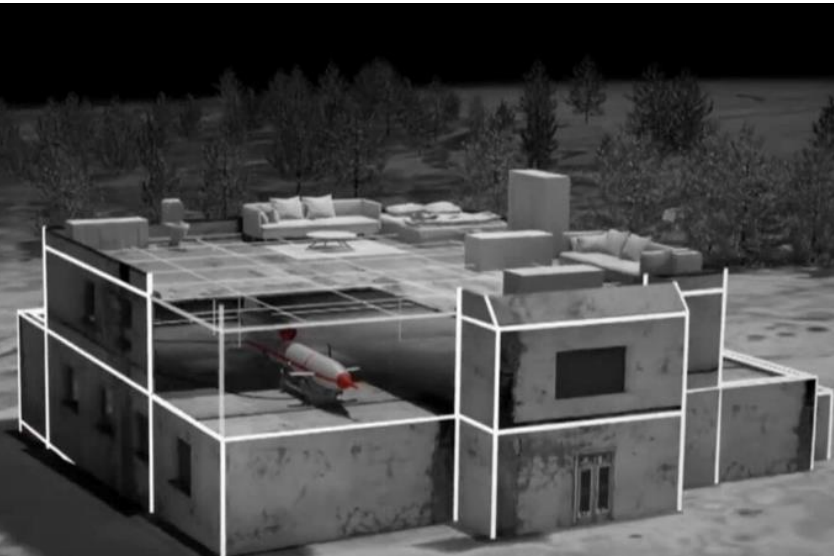

Illustration of Hezbollah's terrorist infrastructure in Lebanon | Source: IDF Spokesperson

Illustration of eliminated Hezbollah senior officials, including Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah | Source: IDF Spokesperson

End-state for the future - a post-war arrangement

Unless a dramatic, fundamental shift takes place in Lebanon, achieving these objectives will not be possible. Lebanon has to regain its sovereignty and assume absolute control over the use of force from its territory.

The following are advised as strategic, long-term guidelines for the final post-war status in Lebanon:

1. **'De-Iranization' of Lebanon:** Dismantling all Hezbollah organizational infrastructure and destroying the bulk of its military capabilities. All Iranian domestic influence in Lebanon must become a thing of the past, much like the 'de-Sovietization' of Eastern Europe following the fall of the USSR. Weakening the Shiite factions loyal to Iran while strengthening other factions should be the **top international priority.** This is a **golden opportunity to uproot the corrosive Iranian influence in Lebanon once and for all,** especially given the **wide-ranging dismay by loyal Lebanese at the Iranian hijacking of Lebanon, and of Hezbollah's aggression toward Israel, by leading Lebanese politicians and multiple voices from among the Lebanese general public.**

2. **Enforcement of UN resolution 1559:** This 2004 resolution called for the disarmament of Hezbollah and any other armed militias in Lebanon, and for free and fair elections.

3. **Ushering in a new political era in Lebanon:** Hezbollah, the Shiite faction loyal to Iran, has effectively taken control of this highly-diverse country, containing multiple ethnic groups e.g. Sunni, Christian, Druze, and others, breaking the subtle balance that has long shaped Lebanese politics and society. **Holding an election for president** as well as broad support to **outright reject any pro-Iranian presence in Lebanese politics, reminiscent of the de-Russification of Ukrainian politics, is vital** to

prevent Lebanon from continuing to be used as a pawn in the Iranian regional game. **Anti-Iranian factions from the March 14 camp should therefore be empowered.**

The following are advised as specific military objectives for the post-war arrangement:

1. **Demilitarization of South Lebanon:** This area closest to the Israeli border has been a launchpad for continuous attacks on Israel and threat on the residents of the north. Any scenario from **total evacuation of the pro-Iran Shiite population** to **excessive and efficient military presence** is necessary to enforce this objective.

2. **Securing the Lebanon-Syria border:** This pathway has enabled the continuous militarization of Lebanon with arms smuggled from Iran. As from 2011, Israel has been pounding weapon deliveries and silos in Syria to prevent advanced weapons, or any weapons to flow from Syria to Lebanon. Any post-war arrangement must include proper and efficient screening of any and all goods flowing from Syria to Lebanon through land crossings in order to prevent these arms smuggling from continuing.

3. **Securing the Beirut Hariri International Airport:** This airport could be used to smuggle Iranian weapons into Lebanon. Proper and effective screening of any and all goods arriving at the airport is imperative to prevent Iran from abusing it.

4. **Training and empowering of the Lebanese Military** to position it as the only armed force in Lebanon, possibly with international support.

Operational scenarios to enforce the renewed security dynamics in Lebanon

With the objective to carry out de-Iranization in Lebanon and deny Hezbollah the ability to rearm, **the following scenarios should be considered with their potential pros and cons:**

1. **Amended UN resolution 1701:** The existing resolution failed to achieve its preliminary objective to deny Hezbollah presence in southern Lebanon (see: [IDSF Research Department - What is UN Security Council Resolution 1701?](#)). Therefore, a robust upgrade to this resolution is needed, *inter alia* in form of strengthening it with more "teeth". **The UN forces have to be replaced by a force that has a clearer mission and mandate to enforce** it rather than the current form of UNIFIL. In addition, land crossings in and to Syria must be monitored.

2. **Buffer Zone in South Lebanon:** A buffer zone should be established in South Lebanon to prevent Hezbollah or any other armed group to ever pose a direct ground threat to Israel. **IDF soldiers must be part of this new reality,** in one form or another. It is to be determined whether all Shiite population should be evacuated from the area close to the border with Israel in South Lebanon, to prevent a future direct fire threat on the part of a pro-Iranian group from ever metastasizing again.

3. **Potential deployment of international forces around Lebanon, akin to NATO's Yugoslavian model:** Following the Balkan wars, a once-war torn region in Yugoslavia has become relatively quiet and enjoying tourism and prosperity, despite existing tensions. Assisting Lebanon to rise from the current dynamics and enforce the disarmament of militia groups in the country can be done by means of NATO or other international forces securing South Lebanon, land crossings in and to Syria, the Beirut international airport, possibly even **dividing the country into segments while enforcing inter-faction social stability.**

4. **The international community, including the European Union and the UN, should follow the lead of the United States and recognize Hezbollah in its entirety as a terrorist group.**

UNIFIL's failure to enforce peace and security in South Lebanon

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was established in 1978 to oversee Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon and assist in restoring peace. However, since the 2006 Lebanon War, its mandate has expanded, including disarming Hezbollah and monitoring the Blue Line. Despite peaking at over 10,000 personnel, **UNIFIL has largely become ineffective, constrained by Hezbollah's increasing influence in southern Lebanon.** Hezbollah has systematically undermined UNIFIL by creating no-go zones and using civilian fronts, like environmental groups, to disguise military installations, restricting the peacekeeping force's movement and ability to enforce its mandate. **UNIFIL's symbolic presence has failed to prevent Hezbollah's growing military buildup, leaving it powerless to fulfill its core objectives, thereby ensure northern Israel is not threatened by a direct invasion of Hezbollah's Radwan forces nor any of its rocket capabilities.**

UNIFIL's operational limitations are further evidenced by specific incidents where its personnel were blocked, ambushed, or even killed while

attempting to patrol key areas. Hezbollah has consistently restricted UNIFIL's freedom of movement, making critical zones inaccessible, which has allowed the group to expand its military infrastructure unchecked. The strategic manipulation by Hezbollah, combined with legal loopholes and local power structures, has turned UNIFIL into a passive observer, unable to disarm Hezbollah or maintain peace. **Any effective post-war arrangement between Israel and Lebanon must significantly boost the capabilities to prevent Hezbollah's rearming in South Lebanon.**

Uncovered Hezbollah terrorist infrastructure in South Lebanon, including attack tunnels and advanced weapons | Source: IDF Spokesperson

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Background: The trajectory of the war in the northern front

IDF operation in Lebanon 8th of October 2023 - September 17th 2024

In the aftermath of the October 7th attacks by Hamas, Hezbollah began launching rockets, attack drones and anti-tank missiles into northern Israel. At that time, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were primarily focused on responding to the immediate threats in the south. Recognizing the potential for Hezbollah to initiate a similar large-scale ground attack by its elite Radwan force, the Israeli cabinet made the strategic decision to balance the deployment of ground forces by mobilizing several divisions to the northern border. On October 16, Israel began evacuating 43 communities with 61 thousand residents along the northern border to mitigate the risk. From that point until September 17, 2024, the IDF maintained a defensive posture in the north, carefully balancing its response to Hezbollah's provocations in order to avoid escalating the conflict into a full-scale war **for several strategic reasons.**

Focusing on Gaza

On October 7th, Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel, killing 1,211 civilians and capturing 250 hostages.[2] This unprecedented assault caught the Israeli government and military off guard both in terms of intelligence and operational readiness. Lacking a pre-established strategy for handling a crisis of this scale, Israel's leadership decided to focus its full diplomatic, military, and logistical resources on the Gaza front, opting not to divert

significant efforts to other potential threats or additional fronts at that time.

Smaller Army

Between 2006 and 2023, the IDF underwent significant changes in its size and composition, reflecting shifts in military strategy, budget priorities, and technological advancements. This period saw a reduction in the number of divisions, tanks, and active combat soldiers, as the IDF adapted to new security challenges and emphasized high-tech capabilities over sheer land manpower and heavy equipment. Below is a focused comparison of the IDF's size in terms of divisions, tanks, and active combat soldiers in 2006 and 2023.

Comparison Summary (2006 vs. 2023):

- **Divisions**: Shrunk from around **15** in 2006 to **10** in 2023.
- **Tanks**: Decreased from around **3,800** in 2006 to **1,650** in 2023.
- **Active Combat Soldiers**: Reduced from approximately **186,500** in 2006 to around **170,000** in 2023.[3]

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[2] For the full data on the October 7 attacks aftermath and the ensuing war please consult the Israel War Database, warinisrael.org
[3] According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) "Military Balance 2023" report

https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance/
https://english.alarabiya.net/topics/palestinian-israeli-conflict/2023/10/19/Israel-s-military-strength-with-billions-in-defense-expenditure-and-US-aid

Key Reasons for the Shrinking of the IDF:

1. **Strategic Shift**:
   Israel's military strategy shifted from preparing for large-scale conventional wars with neighboring states to handling asymmetric threats like Hamas and Hezbollah. This led to a focus on mobility, special forces, intelligence, and precision air strikes rather than heavy armored divisions.

2. **Technological Advancements**:
   The IDF invested heavily in missile defense (e.g., **Iron Dome**), cyber warfare, intelligence, drones, and precision-guided munitions. This allowed the IDF to maintain effectiveness while reducing its reliance on manpower and heavy equipment like tanks.

3. **Budget Constraints**:

Defense budgets have seen some constraints over the years, with more resources allocated to advanced technologies, missile defense, and air superiority, leading to cuts in traditional ground forces and large tank divisions.

This reduction reflects a broader trend in the IDF's evolution toward smaller, more agile forces, leveraging advanced technology and air power, and a shift away from the large-scale conventional warfare model that dominated Israeli military thinking in the earlier decades.

Due to this strategy's implementation, the IDF did not have the number of forces needed to fight full scale wars in Gaza and in Lebanon. Therefore, the first 11 months of the war were focused on the Gaza front, and the Lebanese front remained a defensive front.

11 months of Defensive war with Hezbollah

Over the course of the 11-month conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, an unofficial status quo emerged, dictating the scale and depth of each side's responses. Both parties appeared to calibrate their reactions based on the size and impact of the other's attacks. For instance, when Hezbollah launched a rocket that struck 5 miles into Israeli territory, Israel would retaliate proportionately within a similar range. Similarly, if Hezbollah conducted a larger-scale missile barrage, Israel's response would be significantly more forceful. At a certain point, the IDF announced that it was shifting its tactics to pre-emptive strikes of militants preparing for rocket launches, and elimination of senior officials to gradually undermine Hezbollah's

command and control. As per this shift, senior officials were eliminated, such as Wisam A-Tawil, commander of the Radwan forces, on January 8, 2024; and Talib Abdullah, commander of the Nasser unit, on June 11, 2024.

Throughout the conflict, Hezbollah largely set the pace, having initiated hostilities by declaring war against Israel on October 8, 2023. Their actions, as per instructions from Tehran, dictated the escalation and nature of the exchanges.

Hezbollah attacks

During the stalemate period, Hezbollah shot into Israel **approximately 9,800 rockets, missiles and drones**, mostly into northern Israel including the upper galilee, Western galilee, and the Golan Heights. **25 IDF soldiers and 23 civilians lost their lives**. Over **62,000 Israeli citizens from 43 different communities were evacuated** during that time period.

Notable attacks:

- The constant barrage of missile attacks on northern Israeli towns in 2024 has caused widespread devastation and forced the evacuation of entire communities. Cities like Metula and Kiryat Shmona, close to the Lebanese border, have been hit particularly hard by Hezbollah's relentless rocket fire. **Over 50% of the houses in Metula were damaged, with many homes completely destroyed, while Kiryat Shmona suffered severe damage to 40% of its residential structures.** The intensity of the attacks and the threat the drones pose to Israel's air defense systems forced thousands of residents to flee southward to escape the danger. These attacks have not only destroyed infrastructure but have also disrupted daily life, with schools, businesses, and public services coming to a standstill. The humanitarian crisis continues as Israel struggles to defend its northern border and protect civilians from further harm.
- **Majdal Shams massacre** -The Majdal Shams massacre occurred on July 27th 2024 when a Hezbollah missile struck a soccer field in the Israeli-Druze town of Majdal Shams, located in the Golan Heights. The missile hit during a children's soccer game, killing 12 young kids and injuring dozens more. The attack shocked both local and international communities, as it targeted and murdered children.

- **Arab al Aramshe drone attack** - The Arab al-Aramshe drone attack occurred on April 17, 2024, when a Hezbollah drone struck a community center in the Israeli-Bedouin village of Arab al-Aramshe, located near the Israel-Lebanon border. The attack injured at least 18 people, including 14 Israeli soldiers and 4 civilians
- **Kfar Yuval anti-tank missile attack** - The Kfar Yuval anti-tank missile attack occurred on August 12, 2024, Hezbollah militants fired an anti-tank missile at the northern Israeli town of Kfar Yuval, near the Lebanese border. The missile struck a residential area, causing severe damage to buildings and resulting in multiple casualties.

Israeli attacks

During the defensive period, **the IDF conducted around 7,000 attacks** in Lebanon, mostly southern Lebanon. The IDF's focus was hitting Hezbollah operatives, infrastructure and missile launchers. During that period, Israel assassinated around 12 Hezbollah terrorists in leadership positions, most notably Tawiland Fuad Shuker, The most senior military commander. According to the Lebanese Ministry of Health and Hezbollah's publications, **around 439 Hezbollah militants and estimated dozens of Palestinian and other Lebanese terrorists** were killed, though that figure could not be independently verified.

Notable attacks:

- **March 14, 2024: Destruction of Hezbollah Weapons Depots**
  Israel carried out a series of precision airstrikes on Hezbollah weapons depots located near the Bekaa Valley. These depots were reportedly storing advanced missiles and munitions provided by Iran. The destruction of these

stockpiles was seen as a major blow to Hezbollah's military capabilities, reducing its ability to conduct missile strikes against Israel.

- **July 29, 2024: Bombing of Hezbollah Command Centers**
In retaliation for a deadly missile attack that killed 12 children in Majdal Shams, Israel launched a powerful strike on Hezbollah command centers in southern Lebanon. The attack targeted key Hezbollah leadership and operational hubs, aiming to disrupt the group's command-and-control capabilities. The strikes caused significant damage to Hezbollah's operational infrastructure.

- **November 22, 2023: Assassination of Senior Hezbollah Commander Ali al-Moussawi**
In a covert operation, Israeli intelligence agents successfully targeted and killed a senior Hezbollah commander, Ali al-Moussawi, in southern Lebanon. Al-Moussawi was a key figure involved in coordinating Hezbollah's missile attacks on Israel. The operation was carried out using a precision-guided drone strike while he was traveling in a convoy near the town of Nabatieh. His assassination dealt a severe blow to Hezbollah's strategic leadership.

- **February 5, 2024: Assassination of Hezbollah's Head of Logistics Mustafa Shukr**
Another high-profile assassination occurred when Israeli forces eliminated Mustafa Shukr, Hezbollah's head of logistics, responsible for smuggling weapons from Iran into Lebanon. The attack took place near the Lebanese-Syrian border as Shukr was overseeing a shipment of advanced missile systems. Israeli drones struck his convoy, killing him and several of his associates. This assassination further disrupted Hezbollah's supply chain of weapons and arms into Lebanon.

- **June 20, 2024: Targeted Strike on Hezbollah Military Compound**
In a major escalation, the Israeli Air Force bombed a Hezbollah military compound in southern Lebanon that served as a training center and storage facility for advanced weaponry. The strike, carried out after intelligence reports indicated the presence of senior Hezbollah operatives, resulted in the death of several key figures, including Khaled al-Safadi, a prominent military strategist. This attack significantly hampered Hezbollah's ability to plan future operations and coordinate large-scale attacks against Israel.

September: Shift to Offensive Warfare

Israeli Attacks

On September 17th 2024, Israel initiated its first offensive move with a beeper and Walkie-talkie explosion **hitting over 4,000 Hezbollah operatives** all over Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. This operation was one of the most targeted attacks in the history of warfare, focusing solely on militants carrying operational devices. **Just 12 civilians were reported killed while dozens of Hezbollah operatives were killed, over 500 became non-operational, and another 3,500 wounded and hospitalized.**

In the following week, the IAF launched Operation Summer Arrows, targeting **thousands of Hezbollah missile storage facilities, rocket launchers, and hundreds of targets all across southern and central Lebanon.** One estimate claimed that within

two days of operations, the IAF managed to dismantle around a half of Hezbollah's firing capabilities. The casualty rate in Lebanon ballooned from 439 pre-September 17th to **over 2,100** on October 13th, less than a month after the IDF began its offensive war. It is estimated that **the vast majority of these fatalities are attributed to Hezbollah militants.**

On September 28th, Hezbollah experienced another massive blow with the **targeting and killing of Hasan Nasrallah** and over a dozen high ranking officials in their Beirut bunker. A senior IRGC commander, Abbas Nilforoushan, was present on site and was also eliminated. Just five days later, on the night of October 3, Israel targeted Nasrallah's cousin and successor and a long-time Hezbollah senior official, Hashem Safi A-Din, who was likely also eliminated.

On October 1st, Israel launched a ground incursion into Southern Lebanon with the objective of removing the threat that the Radwan forces posed to northern Israel, who had plans to only launch their own 'October 7' in the north, but they actually had plans to conquer the Galilee (northern Israel). Hezbollah spent over 18 years preparing and training for an assault on northern Israel with over 9,000 fighters trained to capture large swaths of the Galilee. The goal was to capture territory which would become the battleground as opposed to southern Lebanon, and take hundreds if not thousands of hostages to completely shake the state of Israel. The IDF admitted to having previously conducted dozens of clearing operations in southern Lebanon that remained confidential until that moment.

In parallel, **the IDF went to great lengths to minimize civilian casualties** by taking several steps, that include **the evacuation of a total of 46 villages in Southern Lebanon,** as well as sending warnings by dropping leaflets, sending text messages and taking over the national radio. Reportedly, **over 1.2 million Lebanese have evacuated northward.**

Since the ground invasion, **4 IDF divisions have entered Southern Lebanon** and are clearing the villages right on the border with Israel. The forces have uncovered a wide array of weapons used and stored by Hezbollah. The most commonly found items include:

1. **Anti-Tank Missiles**: Hezbollah has stored and utilized advanced anti-tank guided missiles, such as **Kornet missiles**, which have been a major threat to Israeli armored vehicles.
2. **Rockets and Rocket Launchers**: IDF forces discovered rocket launchers, including some hidden in civilian homes, loaded and prepared to fire at Israeli northern communities. Hezbollah has fired thousands of rockets during this conflict, including medium- and long-range varieties.
3. **Drones**: Hezbollah has increasingly used drones for reconnaissance and attacks. The IDF has encountered drones and drone launch sites as part of Hezbollah's expanding drone warfare capabilities.
4. **Small Arms and Ammunition**: Large caches of **AK-47 rifles**, grenades, and other small arms have been found in Hezbollah compounds and bunkers, some of which were hidden in underground tunnels and bunkers beneath residential areas.
5. **Tunnels**: In addition to weaponry, the IDF uncovered underground tunnels used by Hezbollah for smuggling and positioning troops. The tunnels found were heavily equipped by advanced communication lines, equipment storage rooms, toilets and other means to sustain long-term fighting, and ample ammunition. Some of these tunnels crossed

into Israeli territory, reinforcing the strategic significance of Hezbollah's underground infrastructure.

6. **Attack Vehicles**: The IDF found jeeps and motorcycles in the tunnels jeeps and motorcycles equipped with weapons ready for the command to invade Israel, reminiscent of Hamas' technique on October 7.

Hezbollah Attacks

In the immediate aftermath of Israel's beeper attack and widespread airstrikes across Lebanon, Hezbollah's response was initially delayed. However, within weeks, Hezbollah began launching aerial assaults targeting northern Israel, specifically Haifa, Yokneam, and the Jezreel Valley, with attacks quickly progressing southward toward central Israel. Over the course of four weeks of intense warfare, Hezbollah fired more than 2,000 missiles, drones, and rockets into Israel. Casualties in northern Israel increased from 42 to 68, a rise of 26. During September and October alone, over 5,400 sirens were sounded in response to attacks on northern Israel, compared to approximately 4,000 sirens in the previous 11 months combined.

Notable attacks:

- **Constant shooting at the north,** which also includes **regular shooting at around Haifa and the Krayot region** as well as **fires in open fields.** Hezbollah also ramped up attacks on the Tel Aviv region, firing multiple times at central Israel – which it avoided doing over the first 11 months of the war.
- **Drone attack on Herzliya:** On October 12th, on Yom Kippur, a drone attack from Lebanon targeted Herzliya, marking a significant escalation in cross-border hostilities. The drone, launched by Hezbollah, breached Israeli airspace hitting a building in Herzliya. The attack occurred during one of Israel's holiest days, further intensifying the impact of the incident. While no casualties were reported, the attack underscores the growing threat posed by unmanned aerial vehicles

- **Drone attack on Golani base:** A Hezbollah drone struck the dining hall of the Golani Brigade base during dinner, killing four Israeli soldiers and injuring 58, including seven seriously. The attack involved two drones launched from Lebanon, with one drone successfully evading Israel's air defense systems before hitting the base. The incident has raised concerns about the effectiveness of Israel's air defense capabilities against Hezbollah's growing use of drones. Investigations are ongoing to determine why the attack was not detected in time to trigger sirens and intercept the drone.

- **The Drone Problem:** Tackling drone attacks in the Israel-Lebanon conflict presents significant challenges, much like in the ongoing war in Ukraine. The proliferation of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) by Hezbollah complicates traditional defense strategies, as drones can evade radar systems, penetrate deep into enemy territory, and deliver precise attacks on key infrastructure. Israel, like Ukraine, must contend with the difficulty of detecting and intercepting smaller, more agile drones, which can overwhelm air defense systems and create new vulnerabilities, especially when combined with conventional missile attacks.