



An Assessment of Israeli Deterrence against Asymmetric Threats

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Israel today continues to face a complicated threat environment but since the devastating wars of 1967 and 1973, an Arab recognition of the difficulties in meeting Israeli conventional capacity head-on has pushed threats down the conflict spectrum. The probability of a regional neighbor instigating conventional intra-state war has declined precipitously in the past few decades while low-intensity wars of attrition perpetrated by powerful non-state actors, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, have become the predominant mode of opposition for the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Regional actors, particularly Syria and Iran have shifted their attentions to covert support for these groups, seeing them as low-cost and low-risk mechanisms to continue their resistance against Israel without engendering a direct response. To combat these threats, deterrence has risen to the forefront of Israeli security policy with the intention of preventing asymmetric actors from initiating attacks that would require a large-scale IDF response. An examination of IDF deterrence capacity in the wake of military campaigns against Hamas and Hezbollah reveals a mixed record where tactical successes have not translated into strategic victories.

While deterrence in a non-nuclear context is a developing field in International Relations theory, its basic tenets have been utilized since the dawn of mankind. Used on an everyday level in parent-child, business and international relationships, deterrence at its simplest level is the “generation of fear”¹ to attempt to manipulate future behavior. As such it requires both capacity and credibility; i.e. a proven capability to harm and a credible belief by an adversary of the willingness to use this capability. By wielding both these attributes skillfully, an actor is able to manipulate his adversary’s cost-benefit calculus, persuading him to forswear certain behaviors for fear of debilitating consequences. However in a conventional, and particularly asymmetric context, deterrence strategy gains considerable complexity relative to its Cold War predecessor. Whereas nuclear deterrence focused on the inevitability of mutually assured destruction, asymmetric deterrence, with a limited arsenal of conventional means, requires a much more nuanced articulation of scope and utility.

The bedrock of IDF deterrence strategy today is predicated on managing militancy within certain acceptable thresholds to avoid escalation of asymmetric threats to levels that require a large-scale response. Particularly in an entrenched conflict such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, where an ongoing asymmetric attrition campaign by resistance groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah is an enduring norm, such a policy is sensible and adequate. The ability for deterrence to completely dissuade all forms of violence is an impossible standard. Quite simply put Israel cannot initiate a large-scale conventional punitive campaign in response to every rocket attack or

¹ Austin Long, “Deterrence: From Cold War to Long War: Lessons from Six Decades of RAND Research,” RAND Corporation, 2008, pg. 23.

every shooting. Furthermore it is arguably impossible for many adversaries in Israel's threat environment to fully constrain all violence given inadequate internal control mechanisms. Codifying such an impossible deterrence policy is in fact counterproductive, eroding its credibility to the point of ineffectiveness.

Examining the success of Israeli deterrent strategies against asymmetric actors, namely Hamas and Hezbollah, will require distinguishing between Israel's successes at tactical deterrent measures and its failures in creating strategic deterrence. Loosely defined, tactical deterrents include the building up of capacity to forestall and respond to militancy, reducing expected probabilities of success and thereby deterring attacks. Strategic deterrence on the other hand is significantly more elusive, yet more important. Strategic deterrent measures involve sapping an enemy's will to engage in hostilities by reducing the chances of successes in achieving its most fundamental goals.² Towards achieving both, the IDF has attempted to synergize 'deterrence by denial' and 'deterrence by punishment' strategies. Deterrence by denial entails largely defensive measures fortifying to demonstrate the futility of an adversary's ultimate goal while deterrence by punishment as its name suggests, involves meting out disproportionate response to dissuade future transgressions.³

A successful deterrent strategy also requires the evaluation of various intangible factors such as religion, culture, emotion and historical interactions to tailor a deterrence regime suitable for a specific adversary. A deterrent regime that works against Hezbollah might be inherently unsuitable for other adversaries. Furthermore, particularly in the Israeli context of operations against elusive non-state adversaries, future deterrent capacity is constantly refreshed by battlefield performance. Poor performance erodes deterrence just as surely as good performance creates it.

The Palestinian Territories: Intifada and Reprisals

In many ways the Palestinian territories have been the most visible failure of Israeli deterrent capacity. At the end of the day deterrence is measured by reality, and despite various punitive measures Palestinian militancy has persisted and in many cases drawn strength from previous resistance operations. Significant tactical successes by the IDF have as yet failed to yield strategic successes. Rather, in many cases tactical successes have had the inadvertent effect of galvanizing militant recruitment, legitimacy and operations, essentially degrading Israeli strategic deterrence vis-à-vis the Territories. Today, with a potential Third Intifada looming large in the distance, and Hamas increasingly entrenched in Gaza, it becomes increasingly difficult to see current Israeli deterrence strategy with regard to the Palestinian militants, as engendering anything more than temporary peace between military operations. Such a reality can hardly be called deterrence, but may more accurately be seen as a measure of operational exhaustion and the requirement for a period of recuperation.

The IDF focus on disproportionate use of force as creating deterrence is in part derived from its negative experience following the Oslo Accords. The Israeli government actively sought to resurrect a doctrine of 'Havlagha' (restraint), focusing on fortification and an abstention of attacks on civilians. Then Prime-Minister Ariel Sharon publicly stated that "restraint is power" and between September 1993 and September 1998 terrorists based out of the Palestinian

² Jeffrey W. Knopf, "The Fourth Wave in Deterrence Research," *Contemporary Security*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (April 2010), pp. 1-33.

³ Roger W. Barnett, "*Asymmetrical Warfare: Today's Challenges to U.S. military power*," (DC: Brassey's, 2003), pp. 96-98.

territories attacked Israeli targets more than 90 times, killing over 279 Israelis without engendering any large-scale Israeli response.⁴ Despite these measures, the Palestinian rejection of Ehud Barak's offers in 2000 and the re-ignition of the Intifada dashed Israeli hopes and institutionalized a perception that restraint and accommodation were policies that would yield few tangible security dividends.

The Palestinians themselves have little incentive to abandon collective uprising measures given the strategic successes they gained from previous campaigns. The First Intifada (1987-1993) ended with the Oslo Accords in 1993, which ended once and for all any ideas of Palestinian envelopment into neighboring Arab countries and essentially accepted the Palestinian right to statehood. Similarly the Second Intifada (2000-2005), despite the tremendous internal blow caused by the death of Yasser Arafat, induced the unilateral IDF disengagement from Gaza and the release of several political prisoners. The Palestinian ability to highlight to the international media the severe asymmetry in their resistance against IDF troops has also been a significant counter-deterrent, de-legitimizing the Israeli position and creating international constraints to future Israeli action. Thus far from de-incentivizing the Palestinian struggle, such successes do much to strengthen hardliner positions that violence and resistance truly can bring about political advances, a catastrophic failure of strategic deterrence.

Israeli countermeasures to dissuade such perceptions have predominantly focused on attempting to create 'deterrence by punishment.' Even in the First Intifada, where levels of organized violence were relatively low, the IDF implemented its 'beating policy,'⁵ using various forms of non-lethal violence to brutalize Palestinians into renouncing resistance. Despite its inability to deter militancy, the violence of the Second Intifada, which claimed 1,100 Israeli and about 5,500 Palestinian lives led to the use of much more aggressive constabulary operations, that included large-scale raids, targeted assassinations, house demolitions and aggressive detention procedures. To coincide with such measures, the IDF also sought to strengthen its defensive capabilities along the border, most notably via the creation of the West Bank barrier wall seeking to impede cross-border infiltrations. Since then, IDF doctrine has sought to build upon these tactical deterrents, consciously focusing on 'escalation dominance,' leveraging its ability to escalate a conflict to a level an adversary cannot match. Operation Cast Lead in 2008-2009 was the most visible manifestation of such a strategy, reacting to Hamas's refusal to extend a ceasefire by employing 20,000 IDF personnel⁶ along with air and armor assets in a massive blitz though the Gaza strip. IDF Major General Giora Elad explicitly noted the deterrent effect of such a disproportionate response stating, "This hasn't solved the problem... but it has introduced a new cost calculation for Hamas."⁷

From the IDF standpoint, these new cost-calculations have also been engendered by the use of innovative combat tactics to dissuade militancy. A striking statistic released recently by the Shin Bet notes that 2009 marked the first year in over a decade where not a single suicide bombing was executed within Israel,⁸ perhaps a consequence of the West Bank barrier wall.

4 Or Honig, "The End of Israeli Military Restraint," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, Winter 2007, pgs. 63-74.

5 John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy," (DC: Macmillan, 2007), pg 100.

6 Jason Koutsoukis, "Israeli troops enter Gaza," *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 4, 2009. Available at <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/israeli-troops-enter-gaza/2009/01/04/1231003816897.html>

7 Anthony Cordesman, "The Gaza War: A Strategic Analysis," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, March 3, 2009, pg. 72.

8 "Shin Bet: 2009 was first year in decade without suicide attacks," *Haaretz*, January 17, 2010. Available at <http://www.haaretz.com/news/shin-bet-2009-was-first-year-in-decade-without-suicide-attacks-1.261589>

Similarly infantry strategies such as “walking through walls” were baptized during the Second Intifada. Involving the blasting through walls to move horizontally through urban battlefields and avoiding defensive positions, it has done much to reduce IDF casualties in urban warfare.⁹ Such strategies are key components of tactical deterrence, and should in theory do much to increase perceptions of futility amongst militants who fail to make military headway against a superior foe. However an adversary, such as Hamas, willing to go to great lengths to embrace tactical diversity inevitably undercuts tactical deterrence. A decrease in suicide attacks can be seen as coinciding with a substitution towards rocket attacks that the Israelis are less equipped to presently handle. The imminent unveiling of the IDF’s Iron Dome system¹⁰, an anti-rocket defensive platform, can be seen as the latest round of Israeli counter-deterrents to Hamas’s tactical substitutions, but ultimately they remain futile as long as they fail to make headway on a strategic level. A sustainable ceasefire requires a Hamas unwillingness not to attack Israeli targets, not merely an inability.

An excellent article by Jonathan Schachter examines how continually worsening an adversary’s status quo might actually induce greater challenger motivation; i.e. it becomes “increasingly difficult to deter a challenger with less and less to lose.”¹¹ “Walking through walls” may reduce vulnerability for urban attackers, but it also alienates the populace, showing little regard for the physical and emotional trauma and humiliation imposed on civilians and their infrastructure.

Aggregating IDF tactics to the doctrinal level, Operation Cast Lead was in many ways a continuation of a campaign of collective punishment designed to erode constituent support for Hamas. It was certainly an operational success, wreaking havoc on Hamas’s carefully collected defensive infrastructure and killing hundreds of Hamas operatives, all the while ensuring abysmal Hamas kill ratios and their failure to gain any tangible tactical victories.¹² It did however tighten the economic noose on the Gaza strip, by bombing tunnels, closing border crossings with Egypt and Israel and destroying civilian infrastructure. Similarly during the Second Intifada, Israeli frustration at the failure of containment measures led to an expanded targeting scope that included destroying Palestinian Authority infrastructure including the Gaza airport, police stations in Jenin and the Military Intelligence building in Safit.¹³ Such devastation, along with deteriorating humanitarian standards and the indiscriminate use of population-control measures, can be seen as paradoxically enhancing incentives to militancy by lowering the opportunity costs of other ‘normal’ labor choices. Former Prime-Minister of Israel, Ehud Barak eloquently summed up the dilemma stating in 1999, “I imagine that if I were a Palestinian of the right age, I would, at some stage, have joined one of the terror organizations.”¹⁴

9 Eyal Weizman, “The Art of War: Israeli Military using Post-Structuralism as Operational Theory,” Frieze Magazine, May 2006. Available at http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/the_art_of_war/

10 Jeremy M. Sharp, “U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel,” Congressional Research Service, September 16, 2010. Available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33222.pdf>

11 Jonathan Schachter, “Unusually Quiet: Is Israel Deterring Terrorism,” Strategic Assessments, Vol. 13, No. 2, (August 2010).

12 Jackson Diehl, “Israel’s Gaza Vindication,” Washington Post, September 21, 2009. Available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/20/AR2009092001295.html>

13 Anthony Cordesman, “Arab-Israeli Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Warfare,” (CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), pg. 80-81

14 Tony Karon, “Are we serious about Arab democracy?” Time Magazine, March 3, 2005. Available at <http://www.time.com/time/columnist/karon/article/0,9565,1034169,00.html>

Collective punishment policies, in particular the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure, have wreaked tremendous damage on the international perception of Israeli responses. Richard Goldstone, who penned the scathing Goldstone report, perpetrating both sides in various abuses of international humanitarian law, noted of the IAF bombing of the Hamas Parliament, “There were non-Hamas people in that parliament. You don’t attack the U.S. Capitol because you don’t like Republicans.”¹⁵ Such international outrage is not lost on Hamas, which has sought to leverage international anger to strengthen its legitimacy by framing the war as one perpetrated against “children, women and the elderly” to “help the upcoming Israeli election.”¹⁶ Admittedly Israeli military planners often face a no-win media situation where the mere existence of power asymmetries between them and their opponents assures criticism. It however must be acknowledged that actions that erode Israeli legitimacy of action relative to Hamas, such as the tragic death of American activist Rachel Corrie by an Israeli bulldozer in 2003 or the extensive coverage of post-Cast Lead civilian collateral, essentially helps Hamas’s ultimate political goals, weakening strategic deterrence. International condemnation is also a potent Palestinian counter-deterrent by creating public perceptions, particularly in key external constituencies such as the United States that can exert external constraints on future Israeli applications of force.

The IDF has also sought to use more precise means of deterrence, particularly through targeted assassinations and house demolitions of the families of suicide bombers. Both strategies came into vogue during the Second Intifada and were employed extensively. Between September 2000 and November 2004, 4,180 Palestinian homes were demolished, 628 as punitive retaliations.¹⁷ Targeted killings also reached unprecedented peaks against high-value Palestinian militant targets. Between September 2000 and April 2004, the IDF initiated 159 targeted killing attempts with considerable success in distinguishing between combatant and noncombatants even in the confused urban landscapes of the Territories: 78% of those killed in IDF strikes were combatants.¹⁸

Both these policies are lauded by Israeli tacticians as rectifying a key shortfall of asymmetric deterrence, i.e. the irrational characteristics and motivators of terrorists. Supposedly undeterred by the threat of death, house demolitions provide a means to extract vengeance from beyond the grave, imposing communal costs on any would-be suicide bomber. Targeted killings too have tactical value in bringing the mortality of terrorist leaders to the forefront and demonstrating intelligence dominance. Beyond the psychological deterrent by creating a tangible “cost to planning and participating in terrorism,” a study of targeted killings by coalition forces in Afghanistan also found that they can decrease the sophistication of militant groups by decapitating key sources of human capital.¹⁹ However studies attempting to measure their success in the Israeli context have failed to support assertions of success. An analysis of targeted killings during the Second Intifada found that violence did not decrease in any statistically

15 Dan Efron “A Necessary Mistake,” Newsweek, May 27, 2010. Available at <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/05/27/a-necessary-mistake.html>

16 Anthony Cordesman, “The Gaza War: A Strategic Analysis,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 3, 2009, pg. 75.

17 Anthony Cordesman, “Arab-Israeli Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Warfare,” (CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), pg. 71-72.

18 Avi Kober, “Israel’s Wars of Attrition: Operational and Moral Dilemmas,” in Efraim Inbar (ed.), “Israel’s Strategic Agenda,” (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), pg. 202.

19 Alex Wilner, “Targeted Killings in Afghanistan: Measuring Coersion and Deterrence in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 33, No. 4, (March 2009), pp 307-329.

significant sense despite one being “hard pressed to find a more consistent repression policy.”²⁰ Similarly despite 252 house demolitions in 2002, the incidence of suicide bombings increased in 2003 from 167 to 225.²¹

Despite often massive Israeli military responses to incidences of militancy, the IDF does adhere to a culture of military restraint described by Edward Luttwack as ‘post-heroic warfare.’²² Primarily the purview of non-existential wars, post-heroic conflict is characterized by a low readiness to sacrifice and a strong loss aversion – with regard to civilian casualties but particularly one’s own soldiers. In the IDF context, this has often entailed a reliance on precision munitions and long-distance bombardment, ignoring various aspects of counterinsurgency. Not only can such a campaign act as a counter-deterrent in terms of lowering incentives against militancy and assisting with civilian alienation and militant recruitment, but such strong loss aversion is also a key motivator for militant groups who understand that even low thresholds of success can induce the perception of victory.

Such policies can also reduce the effect of direct deterrence as noted by IAF Major General Eliezer Shdeky who noted that reliance on airpower and artillery counter-fire could “expect a success of no more than one to three percent of hitting the Katyushas,”²³ a pretty weak deterrent against any determined adversary. Finally occupation duty in the Palestinian territories may have also done much to blunt IDF conventional capability, decreasing its direct deterrence and resulting in its poor performance in the 2006 Second Lebanon War. For the better part of a decade, the mandate of an IDF infantryman has been population-control; manning checkpoints and executing limited raids with the result that “troops now look at mostly empty-handed Palestinian men, women and children as if they were a serious threat.”²⁴

Palestine has constantly engendered a spiral of provocations sapping IDF resources, international opinion and morality. It requires a more effective and sustainable deterrent strategy, likely to involve a more measured approach, synergizing both disproportionate force and restraint. Deterrence by its very nature, involves a measure of persuasion offering a continuation of “a state of affairs both prefer to alternatives.”²⁵ In essence, while deterrence is inherently coercive, it does propose a joint and collaborative strategy of restraint (centering around non-destruction) that allows both adversaries to more actively pursue other policy objectives. It is also appealing from a conflict-resolution perspective, offering a period of calm and semi-stability on which to apply peacebuilding measures. Persuasion can therefore be woven into deterrence in various forms. It can for example include conditional measures such as opening border crossings, releasing prisoners, allowing economic investments but leave them contingent upon militant activity remaining within certain low thresholds of activity. It is worth remembering that the fear of disproportionate force is much more acute when there exists something worth preserving. Unilateral measures to improve Palestinian humanitarian conditions can also help increase

20 Mohammed M. Hafez and Joseph M. Hatfield, “Do Targeted Assassinations Work? A Multivariate Analysis of Israel’s Controversial Tactic during Al-Aqsa Uprising,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 2006, pg. 359-382.

21 Sergio Catignani, “The Israel Defense Forces and the Al-Aqsa Intifada: When Tactical Virtuosity Meets Strategic Disappointment,” in Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian (Eds.), *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), pg. 211.

22 Edward N. Luttwack, “Towards Post-Heroic Warfare,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 3, (May/June 1995), pp. 109-122.

23 Kober, “Israel’s Wars of Attrition: Operational and Moral Dilemmas,” pg. 24.

24 *Ibid*, pg. 14

25 Robert F. Trager and Dessimlava P. Zagorcheva, “Deterring Terrorism: It Can’t Be Done,” *International Security*, Vol. 30, Issue 3, (Winter 2005), pp. 87-123.

deterrent value by fundamentally altering the Palestinian cost-benefit calculus and encouraging the foundations for mutual restraint.

Hezbollah: Rockets and Artillery Tantrums

Lebanon has been the graveyard for the aura of Israeli invincibility. The IDF withdrawal from South Lebanon after a futile 18-year occupation was a belated attempt to swap occupation of a security buffer zone for deterrence. Operation Peace for Galilee in 1982 accomplished its initial objectives with maximal efficiency, destroying Syrian air-defense systems and driving the PLO into a headlong retreat towards Beirut, from which they never fully militarily recovered. Two decades later however, the chaotic Israeli withdrawal marked by a disintegration of the SLA²⁶ and punctuated by rocket fire and terrorist attacks, highlighted the IDF's inability to force militant groups into submission and was perceived as unmitigated retreat.²⁷ Rather than deterring future PLO and Hezbollah attacks, the conflict emboldened anti-Israeli forces regionally and highlighted the utility of asymmetric methods to combat the IDF. The 2006 Second Lebanon War was an attempt to credibly re-communicate IDF military capacity to strengthen a weakened deterrence regime, and refute the post-withdrawal perception that "Israeli society is not prepared to struggle anymore. Shed its blood and it surrenders."²⁸ However a strong Hezbollah military showing inflicting higher than expected casualties was generally perceived in the aftermath of the war to have weakened deterrence but today, with the benefit of hindsight and ongoing major structural changes in Hezbollah's role in Lebanon, the net deterrent effect may have ended up being positive.

Deterrence regimes are primarily intended to stop certain behavior, in this case to prevent Hezbollah from initiating an attack that escalates the conflict to war. The July 12, 2006 Zarit-Shtula attack, which ended up killing ten IDF soldiers and abducting two bodies,²⁹ was seen by Israel as a clear violation of acceptable Hezbollah activity and a *cassus belli*. Hezbollah appears to have been taken by surprise at the magnitude of Israeli anger and response as evidenced by its Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah admitting soon after the cessation of hostilities, "if I had known on July 11 ... that the operation would lead to such a war, would I do it? I say no, absolutely not."³⁰ Far from an irrational misperception, Hezbollah's complacency may have derived from the fact that the latest attack had been their fifth abduction attempt³¹, all of which had only entailed limited strikes in and around the border area. The failure of Israel to thus effectively communicate a revision in its deterrence policy to Hezbollah was a serious transgression. "Unclear Israeli declaratory policy" essentially failed to communicate 'red lines' to its adversary, leading to an "inadvertent escalation."³²

²⁶ South Lebanon Army, an Israeli surrogate force

²⁷ Matt M. Matthews, "We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War," *U.S. Army Combined Arms Center Combat Studies Institute Press, Long War Series Occasional Paper 26*, March 12, 2008.

²⁸ Catignani, "The Israel Defense Forces and the Al-Aqsa Intifada," pg. 211.

²⁹ Jack Khoury and Amos Harel, "IDF retrieves bodies of four tank soldiers killed in South Lebanon," *Haaretz*, July 13, 2006. Available at <http://www.haaretz.com/news/idf-retrieves-bodies-of-four-tank-soldiers-killed-in-south-lebanon-1.192932>

³⁰ "Hezbollah leader says he never thought capture would lead to war," AP, August 28, 2006. Available at http://www.khaleejtimes.ae/DisplayArticleNew.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2006/August/middleeast_August736.xml§ion=middleeast

³¹ "Kidnap of soldiers in July was Hezbollah's fifth attempt," *Haaretz*, September 19, 2006. Available at <http://www.haaretz.com/news/kidnap-of-soldiers-in-july-was-hezbollah-s-fifth-attempt-1.197595>

³² Austin Long, "Deterrence: From Cold War to Long War: Lessons from Six Decades of RAND Research," RAND Corporation, 2008.

Another common assertion is that Israel's non-state opponents are irrational and immune to deterrence because they are unbound by domestic and international constraints, thereby "more focused on revenge, anger and religion than the cost-benefits of war-fighting."³³ The IDF experience in South Lebanon through the 1980s and 1990s seemed to buttress this assertion. Military strategists found few benefits accruing from the IDF strategy of targeting non-Hezbollah Lebanese targets in retaliation for attacks against Israeli targets. The strategy of applying indirect deterrence via the population was mitigated by Hezbollah's ability to ride out retaliations and retain its most valued assets with little regard for wider Lebanese opinion. For example, Operation Grapes of Wrath in 1996 responded to Hezbollah shelling with a "massive [Israeli] artillery tantrum"³⁴ and killed about 160 Lebanese civilians, caused more than \$500 million in property damage and displaced as many as 500,000 civilians,³⁵ yet caused no discernible change in Hezbollah's behavior which launched 1,100 Katyushas during the operation.³⁶

Since then, Hezbollah has evolved considerably from an Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) sponsored anti-Israeli/Western terrorist group to today moving to "position itself as a Lebanese nationalist organization."³⁷ Hezbollah has accumulated significant power and prestige across the Middle East as the only Arab organization to have successfully fought the IDF. Utilizing Iranian patronage of over \$100-200 million dollars net of arms transfers and black market activity, Hezbollah has continued to expand its social arm and solidify its Shiite base in Southern Lebanon.³⁸ Its May 2008 takeover of West Beirut and subsequent integration into the Lebanese government following the June 2009 elections has led it to become the "most important and powerful actor" in Lebanon, with the capacity to drag the entire state into war.³⁹ This accumulation of power has also come with the acquisition of sizeable official responsibilities and fundamentally altered Hezbollah's cost-calculus. Legitimacy and state attributes are genuine assets for Hezbollah and worth preserving. It does however require being accountable to a broader constituency helps increase Hezbollah's susceptibility to deterrence. This socio-political awareness has the potential to constrain its freedom of military action by creating internal Lebanese dissent against future attacks.

The IDF explicitly sought to leverage this vulnerability by creating an expanded targeting scope that sought to deter by punishment. Often informally referred to as the Dahiya Doctrine,⁴⁰ in reference to the carpet-bombing of a Hezbollah stronghold in Beirut, the doctrine of overwhelming sought to combat Hezbollah's propensity to position military assets in densely populated civilian areas.⁴¹ Gadi Eisenkot, head of the IDF's northern division explicitly

33 Anthony Cordesman and William D. Sullivan, "Lessons of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War," (DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007), pg. 40.

34 E.B. Samuels, "Israel's Demoralization," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (September 1998), pp. 3-12.

35 "Cost of Grapes of Wrath: Reconstruction," *The Lebanon Report*, Number 3, (Summer 1996). Available at http://www.lcps-lebanon.org/pub/tlr/96/sum96/grapes_wrath_cost.html

36 Shmuel Bar, "The Vulture and the Snake Counter-Guerilla Air Warfare: The War in Southern Lebanon," *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, No. 39, (July 1998). Available at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/gordon1.pdf>

37 "Background: Hezbollah," Council on Foreign Relations, July 15, 2010. Available at http://www.cfr.org/publication/9155/hezbollah_aka_hizbollah_hizbullah.html

38 David Schapiro, "Iran-Lebanese Hezbollah Relationship 2009," American Enterprise Institute Critical Threats Project, September 22, 2010. Available at <http://www.irantracker.org/military-activities/iran-lebanese-hezbollah-relationship-2009>

39 Magnus Norell, "A Victory for Islamism? The Second Lebanon War and its Repercussions," *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Focus #98, November 2009.

40 Yaacov Katz, "The Dahiya Doctrine: Fighting dirty or a knock out punch?" *Jerusalem Post*, January 28, 2010. Available at <http://www.jpost.com/Features/FrontLines/Article.aspx?id=167167>

41 Reuven Erlich, "Hezbollah's Use of Lebanese Civilians as Human Shields," *Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies*, November 2006. Available at <http://www.ajcongress.org/site/DocServer/Part1.pdf?docID=861>

explained: “What happened in the Dahiya quarter of Beirut in 2006 will happen in every village from which Israel is fired on... We will apply disproportionate force on it (village) and cause great damage and destruction there. From our standpoint, these are not civilian villages, they are military bases.”⁴² With such tactics in mind, the aerial campaign over Lebanon caused much damage, killed 1,200 Lebanese civilians, destroyed 130,000 homes and caused over \$7 billion in infrastructure and economic damage.⁴³ Israeli air-strikes included non-Hezbollah targets including ports and water-drilling trucks in the Christian cities of Achrafieh, Amsheet and Jounieh⁴⁴ with the overarching intention to coercively imprint upon Lebanese society an understanding of the costs that would be imposed should they fail to restrain Hezbollah.

Despite the harsh application of long-distance precision firepower, poor IDF performance on the battlefield was a major blow to future Israeli deterrent capacity, perhaps incentivizing Hamas’s intransigence two years later. IDF shortfalls were seen by some, including the Pentagon, as demonstrating the price of extended counterinsurgency and policing campaigns on conventional capabilities⁴⁵ but Hezbollah’s strong showing must also be attributed in part to their meticulous pre-war preparations. Fortified and camouflaged defensive positions sought to exploit the infantry-centric terrain, the acquisition of AT4 and AT14 anti-tank missiles sought to offset the IDF’s up-armored Merkava tanks while sophisticated anti-ship missiles such as the Iranian C-802 missiles were intended to deny Israeli monopoly on sea-based power projection.⁴⁶ Such preparations are a demonstration of how only tactical deterrence driven by Hezbollah’s understanding of its operational inferiorities was maintaining some level of restraint since the Israeli withdrawal in 2000. It does not however indicate that Hezbollah’s will to fight has been diminished.

During hostilities too, the bulk of Hezbollah’s most experienced fighters were believed to have sat out combat, having been deployed at the Litani River with the expectation of a much faster and much deeper IDF assault than what actually materialized.⁴⁷ This combined with a strong showing in villages such as Maroun al Ras and Bint Jbiel by often non-Hezbollah fighters dulled the perception of Israeli military capacity, weakening the perceived costs of future engagements. Such attitudes have been hardened by the IDF’s adherence to the norms of post-heroic warfare, engaging in what IDF Chief of Staff referred to as a “no casualties approach”⁴⁸ which, while sating domestic opinion, sent signals of an unwillingness to engage forcefully on the ground, further eroding strategic deterrence.

With the passing of time after the cessation of hostilities, more credence has been lent to the assertion that the IDF did credibly communicate to Hezbollah the consequences of imprudent action. Hezbollah remained studiously quiet even as Hamas was pummeled during the 2008

42 Joseph Nasr and Douglas Hamilton, “Israel warns Hezbollah war would invite destruction,” Reuters, October 3, 2008. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUKTRE4923I020081003>

43 William K. Mooney, “Stabilizing Lebanon: Peacekeeping or Nation-Building,” United States Army War College, Autumn 2007. Available at <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/Articles/07autumn/mooney.pdf>

44 Andrew Exum, “Hizbullah at War: A Military Assessment,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus #63, December 2006. Available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/pubPDFs/PolicyFocus63.pdf>

45 “Pentagon learning from IDF’s disaster,” YNet News, April 6, 2009. Available at <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3697924,00.html>

46 Mark Mazzetti and Thom Shanker, “Arming of Hezbollah reveals U.S. and Israeli blind spots,” New York Times, July 19, 2006. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/19/world/middleeast/19missile.html?pagewanted=print>

47 Exum, “Hizbullah at War: A Military Assessment”

48 Avi Kober, “The Israel Defense Forces in the Second Lebanon War: Why the Poor Performance?” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (February 2008), pp. 3-40.

Operation Cast Lead. Noted Israeli military historian Martin van Creveld has postured that Hezbollah had the “fight knocked out of it” and points out the war created more than a year of complete peace along the Lebanese border, “by far the longest period of peace in four decades.”⁴⁹ Hezbollah has also as of yet failed to respond to the assumedly Israeli assassination of Imad Mughniyeh, their chief military planner. Mughniyeh was allegedly integral to the organization⁵⁰ and his death marked a serious setback for Hezbollah’s operational capacities. Previously such targeted assassinations had engendered a Hezbollah response to create a “balance of deterrence”; Hezbollah responded to the IDF assassination of Sheikh Abbas Musavi in 1992 by bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, stopping Israeli assassinations of Hezbollah leaders for 16 years until Mughniyeh. IDF officials consciously noted such reluctance as a success of deterrent policy, with Maj. General Amos Yadlin, Israel’s Military Intelligence Chief, stating, “Hezbollah is driven by its desire to carry out an attack as revenge for Mughniyah but they do not want to start a war.”⁵¹ Operation Cast Lead in 2008 also augmented Israeli deterrence capacity by demonstrating an ability to learn the lessons of the Winograd Commission and re-tool for any future high-intensity asymmetric conflicts.

It remains to be seen if such deterrence will prove to be sustainable or will prove to end up being another tactically driven pause re-supply and re-consolidation purposes. Already Hezbollah has mounted a major re-armament, recruitment and training drive. With the help of Iranian and Syrian re-supply is now believed to field as many as 40,000 missiles, including advanced SCUDs and Iranian Fateh-110s, almost thrice the 15,000 it possessed prior to the hostilities in 2006.⁵² This buildup of capacity is a rational strategy in a quest for some semblance of parity with the built in acknowledgment that a future IDF response will have learnt from the lesson of the 2006 War. Politically, IDF actions weakened an already anemic Lebanese political structure, further eroding the potential for another institution such as the Lebanese Armed Forces to replace Hezbollah as defender of the Lebanese people. Hezbollah elites, notably Nasrallah have also found their stature elevated greatly in the Arab world. Polls have shown him to be one of the Middle East’s most admired leaders,⁵³ decreasing the ability of even Sunni Arab opponents to criticize Hezbollah. In the international sphere, the extent of civilian collateral damage is another blow to IDF legitimacy of action. With these dynamics in play, Israel would be well-advised to invest in political means to strengthen internal Lebanese constraints on Hezbollah to enhance its strategic deterrent capacity.

Conclusion

While tempting to suggest that Israel focus solely on upgrading its retaliatory capacity as the prime focus for future deterrence, it is not an ideal allocation of resources. Firstly it is worth remembering that any requirement to actually field IDF military capacity in itself represents a

49 Martin van Creveld, “Israel’s War with Hezbollah was not a Failure,” The Jewish Daily Forward, January 30, 2008. Available at <http://www.forward.com/articles/12579/>

50 Dan Darling, “Mind of Mughniyeh: The Iranian Architect of Hezbollah’s Terror,” The Weekly Standard, July 25, 2005. Available at <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/012/466aubsk.asp>

51 Nicholas Blanford, “Israel, Hezbollah: Has Deterrence Worked?” Christian Science Monitor, February 2, 2009. Available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2009/0213/p07s01-wome.html>

52 Katherine Zimmerman, “Arming Hezbollah: Syria’s Alleged SCUD Transfer,” American Enterprise Institute Critical Threats Project, May 11, 2010. Available at http://www.criticalthreats.org/lebanon/arming-hezbollah-syrias-alleged-scurd-missile-transfer#_ednref10

53 Alistair Crooke and Mark Perry, “How Hezbollah Defeated Israel, Part 3: The Political War,” Asia Times, October 14, 2006. Available at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HJ14Ak01.html

failure of deterrent capacity. Secondly, military upgrades do strengthen tactical deterrent capacity but despite decades of combating asymmetric forces, as of yet the IDF has been unable to land a knockout blow against either Hamas or Hezbollah. Their organizational structure and abstract centers of gravity also make a decapitating strike unlikely in the near future. Furthermore a constant string of provocations emanating from these crises, most recently in the botched raid against a Turkish flotilla inbound to Gaza,⁵⁴ has done more to decrease Israeli legitimacy and thereby its strategic deterrence than any concerted militant campaign could hope to do.

A more comprehensive and sustainable IDF deterrent strategy would involve moving beyond the preoccupation with tactical deterrence to also utilize political and economic assets to attempt to change the cost-benefit calculus of militant groups. It would ensure the maintenance of adequate communication mechanisms through which to signal its ‘red lines’ to adversaries and ensure they credibly acknowledge the inevitability of a disproportionate and large-scale response to any violations. But during periods of compliance, the IDF would do well to look beyond its arsenal of coercive tools to buttress its strategic deterrence. A failure to adequately develop such a regime is likely to have adverse consequences on Israel, as noted in 2002 by former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon who fretted that “I do not want to have our country mobilized forever to sit in Nablus.”⁵⁵

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⁵⁴ Jeffrey Goldberg, “Says one Israeli General: Everyone thinks we are bananas,” *The Atlantic*, June 1, 2010. Available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/06/says-one-israeli-general-everybody-thinks-were-bananas/57514/>

⁵⁵ Sergio Catignani, “*Israeli Counterinsurgency and the Intifadas: Dilemmas of a conventional army*,” (NY: Taylor and Francis, 2008), pg. 124.