

Another Unnecessary War: Israel is Planning to Launch a Military Operation against Lebanon

By [Prof. Idan Landau](#)

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The writing is already on the wall: Israel will soon launch a military operation in Lebanon. Not a targeted attack on a weapons convoy or factory, but a simultaneous attack on Hezbollah's missile production and launch sites. The operation will take place at the same time as, or immediately after, a [series of assassinations](#) of known Hezbollah operatives. That organization will, of course, react by launching a massive missile barrage at population centers in Israel, and Hamas may contribute its share in the south. Last week we were informed that missile interceptor systems [have already been deployed](#) throughout the country as part of a joint "drill" between the IDF and the U.S. military. Washington [has already given a green light](#), or so we learn from Thomas Friedman's most recent column — a faithful mouthpiece of American foreign policy.

In this well-orchestrated event, Israel's mouthpieces play a single tune: Iran and Hezbollah have crossed a red line, and if their Russian patron does not restrain them (the crux of Israel-Russia [security coordination](#)), Israel will strike hard (and it will do so because the Russians [cannot](#) restrain them). Defense Minister Liberman [promises](#) that "all of Beirut will be hiding in bomb shelters," while Minister Naftali Bennett has pledged that ([Hebrew](#)) "the Lebanese will pay the price" (an explicit threat to commit war crimes). Of course this is also the finest hour of the retired generals who can now speak freely.

"The IDF is going to use a lot of force. These places will be destroyed almost completely," [promises](#) Maj.-Gen. (res.) Noam Tibon.

Maj.-Gen. (res.) Amiram Levin [tossed another log into the fire](#): "Lebanon will be destroyed."

Which "red line" was crossed this time? According to Israel, it was the establishment of an Iranian missile factory in Lebanese territory. As far as I recall, Israel has at least three factories producing precision-guided missiles (Rafael, IAI and Elbit), but this is apparently not a sufficient pretext for a Lebanese attack. Such pretexts are an Israeli privilege alone. Israel has long warned its neighbor against purchasing arms (long-range, precision-guided missiles), and is careful to [destroy](#) convoys that transfer such weapons into Lebanon.

This is nothing short of Orwellian. There is no "balance" between the precision of Israeli missiles and those in the hands of Hezbollah. Weapons "removing the balance of power" in the organization's hands actually restore balance. But a true balance between Hezbollah's deterrence capability and that of the IDF is an intolerable thought for the top echelons of the Israeli defense establishment. Therefore, it is necessary to bomb any sign of weapons that

“remove the balance of power” — an attack designed to destroy the balance between the two sides. This loop is self-defeating for Israel.

The commentators *still* see clearly that this is a war of choice. “Israel is climbing up a high horse,” wrote Alex Fishman in *Yedioth Ahronoth* last month, “and is approaching with giant steps a ‘war of choice’: without mincing words, it’s an initiated war in Lebanon.” Writing on the putative risk of Hezbollah firing first, *Maariv*’s Ran [Edelist commented](#): “There is no danger of war, Hezbollah has no motive or intent to go to war against an enemy that will overwhelm it easily after a few days of battle.” [Ben Caspit also wrote](#) about a fair prospect of a “war of choice,” while a [Haaretz editorial](#) wrote the following:

The Israeli government therefore owes Israeli citizens a precise, pertinent and persuasive explanation as to why a missile factory in Lebanon has changed the strategic balance to the extent that it requires going to war. It must present assessments to the Israeli public as to the expected number of casualties, damage to civilian infrastructure and the economic cost of going to war, as compared with the danger that construction of the missile factory constitutes.

Pay attention to this diffident tone. Remember it, and compare it to the commentators’ tone *after* the first missile lands and results in casualties. When Israel enters a “war footing,” journalists don their battle vests and salute the flag. Even those who doubted the operation’s initial reasoning will justify it openly in face of fatalities. We were always at war with the Iranian missile factory, they will tell us through clenched teeth. And of course, when the cannons roar, you have to keep quiet. Why? So as not to stop the flow of fatalities.



An anti-war message by ‘Yesh Gvul,’ an organization of Israeli soldiers who refused to serve in the First Lebanon War:

*Come down here, airplane
Take us to Lebanon
We’ll fight for Sharon
And return in a coffin*

Israel has a long history of fabricating “grounds for war.” The Israeli-British-French conspiracy ([the Protocol of Sèvres](#)) that led to the Sinai Campaign was hidden from the public for many years; instead the government resorted to the excuse of “preventing infiltration of terrorists from Sinai.” The Oranim battle plan ([Hebrew](#)) for the First Lebanon war, which sought to replace the government in Beirut, was hidden from the public. Instead the pretext for the invasion was said to be the removal of Fatah from the area 40 kilometers north of the border.

The escalation that led to the Six-Day War was largely the fruit of Israel’s aggression against Syria – as evidenced by statements made by Defense Minister Moshe Dayan and David Ben Gurion in the weeks before the war (documented in Tom Segev’s book, *1967*, and in [Guy Laron’s research](#)). The official cause was Nasser’s closure of the Straits of Tiran. But IDF Chief of Staff Rabin revealed to the Eshkol government that Nasser had promised to allow Israeli ships to pass through the straits accompanied by American warships, and stressed to the members of the government that this was “top secret” information that should not be leaked, since it would undermine the “basis” for the war to a large extent.

Let's return to the lie of "deterrence" against Hezbollah. In Fishman's article, he notes: "Classical deterrence is when you threaten an enemy not to harm you in your territory, but here Israel demands that the enemy refrain from doing something in its own territory, otherwise Israel will harm it. From a historical perspective and from the perspective of international legitimacy, the chances of this threat being accepted as valid, leading to the cessation of enemy activities in its own territory, are slim." I have [previously written](#) about the distorted perception of "Israeli deterrence":

What other country in the world sees the armament of its rivals as a pretext for military attack? There is almost no such example in Israel's military history before the 2000s. For many years, Arab armies equipped themselves cheek by jowl alongside Israeli armament (sometimes from Uncle Sam's swollen pockets). Israel has never considered this a pretext to bomb Cairo or Damascus. Only Hamas and Hezbollah have to make do with bows and arrows against the lethal technology of the IDF. Countries that feel threatened by the arming of their enemies do one of the following: either they better arm themselves (and Israel faces no competitors in this regard) or they reduce the level of risk by means of reconciliation and non-aggression agreements (in this regard, we are ignoramuses.) The audacity to demand that the enemy not dare arm itself is a unique Israeli chutzpah.

You will say: long-range missiles that endanger the civilian population have changed the rules of the game and our level of tolerance. But again, this game is mutual, and Israel also possesses such weapons — often more effective and lethal than those of its opponents. Somehow, Israel's acquisition of weapons that endanger the lives of every Arab in the Middle East is not perceived by Arab countries as a "upending the balance of power" that [justifies launching missiles](#) at Ben-Gurion Airport or the Kirya defense headquarters in the heart of Tel Aviv.

Consider the following subversive thought: in the absence of a non-belligerence agreement between Israel and Hezbollah, the latter's military consolidation *reduces* the risk of war in the north. Simple logic is derived from game theory. As long as there is a huge power gap between the IDF and Hezbollah, Israel can afford to attack targets in Syria and Lebanon dozens of times without fear of endangering the home front.

This is an illusion, a strategic rigidity whose bounds are narrow as the crosshairs of a rifle. These attacks raise the level of hostility and fuel the enemy's motivation to exact revenge — a factor that is never understood well enough by the defense establishment. Israel's aggressive "deterrence," the utter contempt for Lebanese sovereignty, sows future calamity. And so, we have reached this explosive situation in which Hezbollah has every reason to strike back. And therefore, of course, a pre-emptive strike is needed again — this time much larger, which risks leading to war.

On the other hand, in a scenario in which Hezbollah acquires capabilities to actually threaten Israel's home front — hundreds and thousands of long-range precision missiles — the IDF will fear striking first. The unbearable lightness of violating Lebanese sovereignty through air strikes and bombardments will stop. Finally, Israel will be deterred. Incidentally, Hezbollah itself will have fewer reasons to attack us, and the feelings of hostility and retaliation will not burn as brightly as they do today.

The following are the two scenarios that we face at the moment:

1. In the current scenario, Hezbollah already [has](#) around 130,000 missiles, of which only a few dozen are precision-guided. Israel's relentless provocation ([approximately 100 bombings](#) over five years) has emboldened a bitter enemy across the border that is looking for an opportunity for revenge. When war breaks out, the IDF plans to launch a "pre-emptive strike" on all known concentrations of missiles. Israel's Air Force commander [admits](#) that "it will not be over in three hours."

The defense minister [mutters](#) something about "casualties." Allow me to translate: for several hours, perhaps a few days, thousands of missiles will be launched into Israel. According to assessments, Hezbollah is believed [to have the capability](#) to launch 1,200 rockets a day. There is no defense system capable of responding to such a threat. Yes, there will be very many losses. How many? The same assessments speaks of hundreds of Israelis killed. Yes, on the Lebanese side there will be even more losses, villages will be crushed, but this is very small comfort for our bereaved families. They will explain to us, over and over, that this was necessary to prevent Hezbollah from acquiring accurate missiles.

I am sure that anyone struck dead by a non-guided "dumb" missile will, in their last breath, let out a sigh of relief, knowing that in their death they prevented the enemy from acquiring precision-guided missiles.

2. In the second scenario, which is completely imaginary, Israel comes down from its high horse and stops dictating which weapons its neighbors are and are not allowed to have — just as our neighbors do not stick their noses in Israel's arsenals. As a result, every state and armed group in the region will know that as long as they refrain from violating the sovereignty of their neighbor, that neighbor will do the same. That is classical deterrence between rivals whose mutual destructive capacity is so hideous it does not even cross their minds to press the button.

After so many years of military stockpiling, which exhausts the entire civilian budget and makes no use other than for "deterrence," fresh faced politicians are appearing on both sides of the border with the strange idea that, perhaps, it is possible to achieve the *same* quiet with a smaller army. Perhaps it is possible to sign a non-aggression pact and store all those glittering missiles in the museum?

An imaginary scenario, of course. Its main drawback is that civilians are not sacrificed. There is no unnecessary spill of blood, no fire and smoke, the blood does not rush to the head, and in short: there is nothing to conceal the veneer of the political leadership. The public is not led to slaughter, is not called to the flag, is not required to unite against an imaginary enemy, and may still demand from its leaders accountability for their own actions.

If that's the choice, war it is.

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Idan Landau is a professor of linguistics at Ben-Gurion University. This article was first published in Hebrew on his [blog](#). Translated by [Yoni Molad](#) for the Middle East News Service, edited by Sol Salbe, Melbourne, Australia. Reprinted, with permission, from [+972 Magazine](#).

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