



There is Always Another Hill: The Flaw of Security Zones

In the past week, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense announced a move intended to redefine Israel's security policy: the establishment of a permanent security zone in southern Lebanon. The Prime Minister described this as a "shift in the security doctrine," outlining three security zones "deep inside enemy territory" - in Gaza, Syria, and Lebanon - and framing it as an expansion of Israel's borders for the first time since the Six-Day War. The Minister of Defense further clarified that the IDF would control all territory south of the Litani River, that border villages would be destroyed "following the Rafah and Beit Hanoun model," and that hundreds of thousands of residents would not be allowed to return to their homes. He added that the IDF would remain in Lebanon "until the security of northern residents is ensured" - an open-ended formula, without a timeline or defined conditions. At the same time, more and more names of soldiers killed in combat in southern Lebanon continue to be released for publication.

Anyone familiar with past attempts to establish security zones in Lebanon knows that such zones have no natural endpoint. Every military position is exposed to fire from the hill opposite it, and every captured hill exposes the next. It is always possible to justify another kilometer of depth, additional months of presence, and more forces on the ground - because the threat never truly "ends." This is how a zone initially defined as a limited measure expanded within a few years to 850 square kilometers - roughly one-tenth of Lebanon's territory. Israel remained there for 18 years and ultimately withdrew not as part of a political agreement, but through a unilateral exit, as an orderly withdrawal had become impossible. The recent declarations - control up to the Litani, an indefinite presence without defined conditions - risk recreating precisely the same dynamics. This highlights the difference between short-term security thinking, which measures success in territory held and headlines generated, and long-term strategic thinking, which considers where such policies will lead in five or ten years - and at what cost.

Ensuring the security of northern communities is not only a legitimate demand - it is one of the state's most fundamental obligations. Precisely because of its importance, it is essential to examine honestly and carefully whether the proposed policy achieves this goal, or whether past experience suggests that its risks may outweigh its benefits.

1. Experience shows that security zones may endanger the north rather than protect it

Israel maintained a presence in southern Lebanon for 18 years, including 15 years within the security zone established in 1985. In its final year, Hezbollah carried out approximately 1,528 attacks against Israeli forces and northern communities. In the six years following withdrawal, that number dropped to around 50 - a decrease of over 95%. The north experienced six years of relative quiet, economic growth, and a return to normalcy.



Why? Permanent military positions in hostile territory are predictable targets for local guerrilla forces familiar with the terrain. Israeli operations from within the zone trigger retaliatory fire on northern communities, which in turn justifies continued military presence. This creates a cycle in which the presence itself generates the threat it is meant to prevent. Over 15 years, more than 4,000 rockets struck the Galilee - during Israel's presence, not its absence. One of the central lessons of October 7 is the need to resist illusions of security. Policies based on perceived rather than actual security, whether through technological barriers or military outposts, are ultimately unsustainable.

2. The proposed zone does not address the actual threat and relies on outdated assumptions

Most current launches toward Israel originate north of the Litani River, from areas beyond the proposed security zone. Hezbollah's ballistic missile capabilities, the primary strategic threat, are not deployed in the south. A zone extending to the Litani does not address launches from the Bekaa Valley or the suburbs of Beirut.

The underlying assumption, that proximity is required to pose a threat, was already questionable in the 1990s. In the era of drones and precision missiles, it no longer reflects reality. By contrast, Israel's most secure border, with Egypt, has remained stable for 47 years without a single Israeli soldier stationed beyond it. This stability is not due to the absence of threats in Sinai, but to a political agreement, intelligence cooperation, and shared interests. Such partnerships provide a level of security that cannot be achieved through military deployment alone. Notably, the peace agreement with Egypt enabled the transfer of early warnings prior to October 7, warnings that were not fully acted upon, in part due to misplaced strategic priorities. Diplomatic partnerships save lives; security zones do not necessarily do so.

3. Occupation could strengthen Hezbollah precisely when it is weakest

Hezbollah is currently at one of the lowest points in its history, having lost commanders, infrastructure, and funding sources. Criticism of the organization is increasingly heard even within the Shiite community. The Lebanese government, led by figures opposed to Hezbollah, has declared its military activity unlawful and proposed direct dialogue with Israel regarding the group's disarmament. France has also advanced a proposal that includes Lebanese recognition of Israel.

This opportunity risks being lost due to continued political reluctance. Prolonged occupation, destruction of villages, and displacement of large civilian populations may shift the Lebanese government from opposing Hezbollah to defending national sovereignty, unify the Lebanese public around resistance to Israeli presence, and restore to Hezbollah the narrative and legitimacy it has gradually lost. Hezbollah did not emerge in a vacuum; it developed in response to Israeli presence in southern Lebanon. There is no reason to assume that renewed occupation would not reproduce similar dynamics.

4. The IDF lacks the resources, and current policy overlooks this reality



During the previous security zone period (1985–2000), the South Lebanon Army provided thousands of fighters who shared much of the operational burden. No such local force exists today, and the responsibility would fall entirely on the IDF, which is already deployed across multiple fronts, including Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, and in confrontation with Iran.

Senior military leadership has acknowledged a shortage of approximately 15,000 soldiers, with reserve forces under significant strain. Security assessments suggest that maintaining a new security zone would require forces at least four times the current deployment. This gap cannot be bridged through determination or rhetoric alone. A security zone that stretches an already overstretched military across multiple fronts does not enhance security; it risks undermining it.

5. Sustainable security requires strategy, not slogans - the agreement is the real “security zone”

The proposed security zones have been presented as a bold strategic shift. However, they lack a long-term vision and do not address the fundamental question of what the situation will look like in one, five, or ten years. Prior to October 7, Israel managed the conflict through separation and avoidance of political processes. The costs of that approach are well known. The current policy reflects a more forceful version of the same paradigm: military presence deep in hostile territory without a defined political horizon.

Military force is sometimes necessary, and the IDF has demonstrated significant capabilities. However, force is a tool, not a strategy. It must be used judiciously, not driven by rhetoric. The central lesson from Israel’s experience - from Sinai to Lebanon - is that there are no purely military solutions. Lasting security is not achieved by holding territory in hostile environments, but through political agreements. Agreements are the true security zones Israel requires, and this is where primary efforts should be focused.