



# From Military Stalemate to Strategic Opportunity: Rethinking Israel's Approach in Lebanon

## I. Lebanon and Hezbollah - Continued Failure or Historic Opportunity

### ***1. Territorial control does not provide long-term security.***

During the final year of Israel's presence in the security zone in southern Lebanon (1999–2000), Hezbollah carried out 1,528 attacks against Israel. In the six years following Israel's withdrawal, the number dropped to around 50 in total. The reason is structural: permanent military positions in hostile territory become predictable targets, creating a cycle of violence that in itself is used as justification for continued presence. Over 4,000 rockets were fired at the Galilee during Israel's military presence in Lebanon. The case of Sinai further illustrates this point: Israel controlled a vast territory - larger than the State of Israel itself - yet remained entrenched in prolonged conflict, including the War of Attrition and the Yom Kippur War (approximately 2,900 Israeli fatalities). Only after the withdrawal in the framework of a peace agreement did the southern border with Egypt become one of Israel's most stable and quiet for decades.

### ***2. Territorial expansion will strengthen Hezbollah - precisely when it is at its weakest.***

Hezbollah is currently more isolated and weakened than at any point in its history, including within the Shiite community. However, developments such as "Black Wednesday," in which more than 300 Lebanese civilians were killed, including in Beirut, serve to unite the population behind the very organization Israel seeks to weaken. Prolonged occupation, destruction of villages, and displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians will restore to Hezbollah what time and reality have eroded: a narrative around "resistance to occupation" and renewed legitimacy. Hezbollah of the 1980s emerged from Israeli territorial occupation; renewed military presence risks recreating those same dynamics.

### ***3. Israel is facing an unprecedented diplomatic opportunity***

For the first time in decades, the Lebanese government has defined Hezbollah's military actions as unlawful and proposed direct negotiations with Israel. The United States has encouraged these talks, which have already begun in Washington. Although Israel initially continued military operations and rejected the idea of a ceasefire, the two countries are currently in the midst of a 10-day temporary truce. Maintaining the ceasefire is critical in order to realize the historic opportunity presented by direct negotiations. A stable diplomatic relationship cannot take shape amid ongoing military escalation.

### ***4. Security zones have no clear exit strategy - what begins as "temporary" becomes permanent.***

The Minister of Defense has stated that the IDF will remain in Lebanon "until the security of



northern residents is ensured,” without any clear timeline or specification of parameters that must be met to meet this demand. The previous security zone began as a limited measure, expanded to 850 square kilometers, and lasted 18 years. The reason is inherent: territorial occupation lacks a natural endpoint. Every military position is exposed to fire from the high ground of the next hill, and each newly captured hill exposes another. There is always one more hill.

## **II. The Real Failure - Continued Paradigm of Exclusive Military Force**

### ***1. Military force alone has not achieved strategic goals elsewhere - and will not do so in Lebanon.***

In Iran, military escalation ultimately required a U.S.-brokered ceasefire when it became clear that force alone would not achieve its stated objectives. In Gaza, over two and a half years of devastating fighting have not resulted in the overthrow of Hamas. The pattern is consistent: military force may weaken adversaries, but it does not resolve underlying strategic threats. In Lebanon, without a complementary political process, the outcome will be the same: destruction without resolution, and conflict without a horizon. The prevailing security paradigm is fundamentally flawed. The purpose of diplomacy is to prevent military escalation and achieve long-term stability. Responsible leadership recognizes the prevention of war as a value equal to, if not greater than, victory in war.

### ***2. As a sovereign state, Israel must act proactively rather than reactively.***

External actors have repeatedly influenced Israel's military decisions and strategy, most recently through U.S. pressure to de-escalate in Iran and Lebanon. Additional international actors, including Pakistan, Iran, and France, have called for Lebanon to be included in ceasefire arrangements. Rather than waiting for external pressure to dictate outcomes, Israel should proactively shape a diplomatic reality based on its own strategic vision. The recently initiated direct negotiations with Lebanon are a step in the right direction, provided they are treated as a genuine strategic opportunity rather than a symbolic gesture.

### ***3. A strategic opportunity exists to move beyond conflict management toward meaningful transformation.***

The convergence of interests among Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, alongside the Palestinian Authority, Israel, and the United States, in opposition to the Iran-Hezbollah-Houthi-Hamas axis, creates a rare opportunity to advance a comprehensive and sustainable regional framework. This alignment has the potential to deliver genuine security rather than the illusion of deterrence.

### ***4. Sustainable security is achieved through agreements***

Israel's most stable border, the one with Egypt, has remained secure for over 47 years without Israeli military presence beyond the border. This stability is not the result of military deployment, but of a political agreement, intelligence cooperation, and shared strategic interests. Military force is a tool, not a strategy. It must be used judiciously, not driven by rhetoric or short-term considerations. The key lesson from Israel's historic experience, from Sinai to Lebanon, is that agreements provide the true foundation for security. Therefore, primary efforts should be directed toward advancing diplomatic solutions. Achieving such



agreements necessarily requires engagement with moderate Arab states and the leadership of the Palestinian people, rather than policies that undermine the possibility of a long-term resolution.