Is a Sustainable Cease-Fire in Lebanon Realistic?
If Not, What is the Alternative?

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- As intense discussions continue on the terms of a "sustainable cease-fire" and a "robust international force" that would end the latest war in Lebanon and prevent renewed conflict, many of the elements suggested appear highly unrealistic.

- All of the elements envisioned in such a framework are highly problematic, to understate the case. Without realistic mechanisms for long-term implementation, a temporary cease-fire would quickly be exploited by Hizballah, Syria, and Iran in preparation for the next round of attacks against Israel.

- As a result, in parallel to the formal negotiations, the Israeli government should explore a regime based on clearly defined "red lines" which Israel will enforce unilaterally until Lebanese and international mechanisms are shown to be reliable.

- These measures include Israeli military action to destroy weapons shipments to Hizballah, prevent the return of terrorists to the border area, and halt the construction by Hizballah of military fortifications.

- The main Hizballah leaders, including Hassan Nasrallah, should be isolated in a manner similar to Israel's policy with respect to PLO leader Yassir Arafat until his death.

The Issues Involved in Preventing Renewed Conflict

While there is a great deal of talk about a "sustainable cease-fire" that would end the latest war in Lebanon and prevent renewed conflict, the complexities of implementation are formidable. The parameters include:

- Strengthening the Lebanese state and weakening the role of Hizballah as an independent armed force.

- Blocking the ability of Hizballah to import and deploy missiles and other weapons from Syria and Iran, and construct protected concrete bunkers and fortifications.

- Limiting the status and operational capabilities of the Hizballah leadership, particularly Hassan Nasrallah.

- Formulating the parameters, mission statement, and terms of engagement for a "robust international force."

- Evaluating the composition and credibility of this force to implement the terms of any agreement.

- Setting the terms and conditions for the release of kidnapped Israeli soldiers.

- Evaluating the impact of any territorial dimensions (such as the claim to the "Shabaa farms").

All of the elements envisioned in such a framework are highly problematic, to understate the case. Without realistic mechanisms for long-term implementation, a temporary cease-fire would quickly be exploited by Hizballah, Syria, and Iran in preparation for the next round of attacks against Israel. This analysis examines the details and likely limitations of the formal proposals under discussion, and explores the parameters of an alternative approach based on unilateral Israeli policies.

Is a Stable Cease-Fire Agreement Realistic?

Strategically, any sustainable agreement must bring about stability, strengthen the Lebanese state, and end Hizballah's status as a "state within a state." This would be one of the main tasks of the new "robust international force" that is being discussed in all of the cease-fire frameworks.

The combination of a Lebanese government able to assert its authority, and an international force to assist in this process, is to address the core source of the violence and instability - the weakness of the Lebanese state, and the ability of terror groups to exploit this weakness in order to attack Israel.

In the 1970s, Yassir Arafat and the PLO used Lebanese territory as a base following their expulsion from Jordan, provoking Israeli responses and eventually triggering the 1982 war. After Arafat was forced out of Lebanon in that war, Syria, which has maintained a proxy war against Israel via Lebanon, joined the radical Islamic regime in Iran to provide support for Hizballah. Hizballah sought justification for its attacks against Israeli towns across the border through the presence of Israeli forces that continued to control a security zone in southern Lebanon.

Israel's complete unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000, as confirmed by the United Nations, failed to end the violence, and pledges to disarm Hizballah and establish Lebanese government control up to the Israeli border, as later repeated in UN Security Council Resolution 1559, were never implemented. Instead, Hizballah continued to receive huge stockpiles of Syrian and Iranian missiles, and to plan and launch further attacks.

Given this history, the need for the Lebanese government to assume control of the territory up to the Israeli border, in order to end Hizballah's independent status, is obvious. But this is an exceedingly difficult task, and one which will be strongly opposed by Syria, Iran, and Hizballah.

When Israel pulled out of the security zone in 2000, the "international community," particularly the UN and the European Union (which was led by France at the time), failed to implement pledges to provide peacekeeping forces for these tasks. The entirely ineffective UNIFIL force, which, at times, has assisted the terrorists, remained the only international presence, and there is little evidence for Israel to conclude that this time the results will be different.

Is a "Robust International Force" for Lebanon Realistic?

Structurally, the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) that has monitored implementation of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty is a useful model. The MFO is commanded by Americans and includes trained military personal from Europe and other industrialized countries. But in the case of Lebanon, such a force (perhaps led by France) would have to do much more than observe the activities of two states with diplomatic relations in maintaining an agreed peace treaty.

In Lebanon, the force would have to be able to take military action, similar to the role of NATO troops in Kosovo and Afghanistan. The creation and sustained operation of such a force in Lebanon, including willingness to confront Hizballah, Syria, and Iran, while desirable, would not appear to be very realistic. Instead, history has shown that the deployment of international peacekeeping forces along Israel's borders often creates conflict between Israel and the countries involved. Further opportunities for friction with countries such as France, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Turkey do not serve Israel's interests.

In addition, to be effective, a robust international peacekeeping force would not be limited to or even be necessary along the Israeli-Lebanese border, where the Lebanese Army would take up positions. Rather, its mandate would have to include robust action to prevent Hizballah from deploying and firing missiles from anywhere in Lebanon, and to intercept and destroy new missiles sent from Syria and Iran.

Lt.-Gen. (ret.) Moshe Yaalon and Maj.-Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror have argued that "such a force should be deployed close to Beirut, at the border passages with Syria, and deep in the Lebanese Bekaa Valley." (See "An International Force in Lebanon: Advantages and Disadvantages," *Jerusalem Issue Brief* No. 6-4, 25 July 2006.) Hizballah's arsenal, estimated at 14,000 missiles accumulated over the past six years and stored with launchers in hardened concrete bunkers built under houses, schools, mosques, and hospitals, led directly to the current war.

Hizballah Must Not Be Allowed to Claim Victory

The introduction of a territorial dimension in cease-fire proposals - Israeli withdrawal from the tiny area known as the "Shabaa farms" (Mt. Dov) - is politically undesirable for Israel. This area, which was demarcated by the UN as part of the Golan Heights in May 2000, was invented by Hizballah leaders as an excuse to continue attacking Israel following its withdrawal from Lebanon. If the Israeli government were now to agree to cede even a tiny section of territory, this would be interpreted as a victory for Hizballah and a further sign of Israeli weakness in the face of violence, inviting further attacks in the future, and not only on the Lebanese front.

Finally, if the terms for the return of the two Israeli soldiers kidnapped on July 12 include the release of convicted Lebanese murderer Samir Kuntar, held by Israel since 1979, Hizballah will again be seen as having obtained its objectives through the use of violence. While the cost of Hizballah's "operation" will be seen as having been greater than expected, the overall image of Israeli capitulation to Hizballah's terms will be reinforced, weakening the perception of Israeli deterrence.

Thus, realistically, an analysis of the history of previous efforts and current political conditions indicates that the requirements for a robust and sustainable international force, and other aspects of the proposed cease-fire agreement, are unlikely to be met. On this basis, it is important to consider the alternatives and their implications.

Assessing Unilateral Security Alternatives in Lebanon

In the event that the efforts to create and implement the terms for a credible and robust international force are unsuccessful, Israel should be prepared to implement the goals outlined above on a unilateral basis.

From the perspective of Israeli security and the threat environment, the primary post-war requirements are preventing Hizballah from importing and deploying missiles and other weapons from Syria and Iran, constructing protected concrete bunkers and fortified positions, particularly in civilian areas, or dispatching terrorists and military forces to the border areas. In addition, the degradation of the Hizballah leadership's ability to prepare and lead a similar attack in the future is a central aspect of the post-war framework.

Continued Israeli Interdiction of Arms Shipments

The interdiction of arms shipments from Syria and Iran has been an important part of Israeli military activity during the war, beginning with attacks on the runways of the Beirut and other airports. Additional actions have degraded land routes between Syria and Lebanon, including attacks on highways linking Syria to Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. In addition, a tight Israeli sea blockade has been maintained along the Mediterranean coast.

In the absence of conditions for a realistic and credible cease-fire, and a Lebanese or international capability to prevent the rearmament of Hizballah, Israel will have to continue these actions. Intelligence information, including photographs of containers deemed likely to contain weapons, will be used to identify potential targets. On this basis, the Israel Air Force will continue to target these weapons shipments, making such activities very costly for the people, companies, and institutions involved.

To be effective, such direct military interdiction can be infrequent and avoid large-scale attacks and collateral damage. In the post-war reconstruction phase, the Lebanese government and society will be interested in avoiding attacks by Israel and the associated costs of renewed warfare. On this basis, and even without the grand restructuring envisioned under the formal cease-fire framework discussed above, indirect cooperation between Lebanon and Israel in preventing such scenarios is a distinct possibility. Similarly, France and other European governments, as well as the United States, with a strong interest in preventing another round of destructive warfare, can be expected to become actively involved in preventing arms shipments that would lead to such an escalation. Thus, while some weapons may still be shipped to Lebanon, the accumulation of thousands of short-range missiles and launchers deployed within twenty kilometers of the Israeli-Lebanon border, as had occurred over the past six years, may be prevented.

Destruction of New Hizballah Fortifications

Similarly, the Israeli military will have to be prepared to intervene to prevent renewed construction of large, protected, concrete bunkers in civilian areas for the storage of missiles and as facilities for command, control, and communications used by Hizballah. Such bunkers, built under houses, schools, mosques, and hospitals, have provided protection to Hizballah and its leaders during the current war. The images of air attacks against these sites and the injuries to civilians in this process promoted condemnations of Israel for alleged "disproportionate force" and increased Israeli vulnerability to political warfare. By identifying the construction of new facilities and acting politically via the Lebanese government, or militarily, if necessary, to disrupt this construction, scenarios in which such bunkers and fortifications are used by Hizballah in future attacks can be reduced or prevented.

Along the Lebanese-Israeli border, direct Israeli action to control the movement of weapons, the presence of terrorists, and the construction of underground facilities is particularly important. Establishing a new security zone north of the border need not require the continuous presence of large-scale Israeli ground forces, and would be based on high-level intelligence, precision air intervention, and occasional, small-scale, ground operations as necessary. (While the conditions are quite different, Israel has implemented a similar policy in Gaza to degrade Palestinian Kassam missile production and launch capabilities.)

Isolating Hizballah's Leadership

The prospects for stability in Israel-Lebanon relations in the post-war period also depend significantly on the status and operational capabilities of Hizballah's leadership, particularly Hassan Nasrallah. Here, the approach used successfully by Israel with respect to Yassir Arafat and his primary lieutenants in the PLO who were active in the terror campaign, as well as in the case of the Hamas leadership, provides a useful model. Beginning in March 2002, Arafat was isolated and his movements were curtailed, ending his ability to travel abroad, function as a visible political leader, and promote terrorism. From that point until his death, Arafat was essentially under house arrest, with the potential for forced exile in the background. This isolation was a major factor, coupled with active and continuous Israeli military interdiction of terror targets, in essentially ending the Palestinian war that began in October 2000.

In the case of Hamas, the use of arrests, where possible, and targeted interceptions of major terrorist leaders when arrests were not possible (particularly in densely populated areas), greatly degraded its capabilities.

Based on this scenario, in developing Israel's post-war policies with respect to Hizballah, it is important that the leadership of this terror organization be isolated and forced to invest its resources in survival, rather than in offensive initiatives. Hassan Nasrallah, the charismatic leader of Hizballah, may survive the current conflict by hiding in the Iranian embassy in Beirut or perhaps fleeing to Syria or elsewhere, but Israel can insure that he is not able to return to open activities in Lebanon or enjoy freedom of movement. A declaration to this effect should be part of Israel's post-war policy framework.

Finally, in considering a scenario which is not based on a formal cease-fire agreement or on the deployment of an international stabilization force in Lebanon, the terms for the release of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers remain to be negotiated. These negotiations can take place, as in the past, via the Red Cross, and the terms can include the return of Hizballah prisoners and the bodies of its members killed in the current fighting. Such negotiations may be difficult and make take many months, but agreement to release any additional terrorists must be avoided since this would only reward Hizballah and encourage additional kidnappings in the future.

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