

Israel is missing a golden opportunity

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 27.11.2024

The emerging ceasefire with Hezbollah may include a strategic achievement by decoupling the Lebanon and Gaza theaters, but it also reveals a missed golden opportunity for Israel. Iran is conspicuously absent from the ceasefire agreement; it is neither a party to the deal nor bound by it, and it is highly unlikely that Iran would relinquish Hezbollah - its leading strategic arm in the Middle East - which plays a key role in advancing the Regime's plans to destroy Israel and for regional hegemony. Iran is expected, immediately after the ceasefire, to initiate a comprehensive plan to rebuild Hezbollah and preserve its dominance in Lebanon.

Hezbollah, for its part, will focus on internal recovery and restoration of its status, especially considering the criticism from its social base in the Shiite community. With its billions of dollars from Iran, it will launch a massive reconstruction effort. Meanwhile, various Quds Force units responsible for arming and strengthening Hezbollah will continue their quiet activities of arms smuggling (Unit 190) and improvement of missile accuracy, range, and destructive capabilities (Unit 340). These units were recently exposed by media coverage of the strategic struggle between Israel and Iran. Additionally, Hezbollah operatives, including the Radwan Force, will resume training in Iran, including preparations to pursue their ambitions of invading Israel as part of their "Galilee Conquest" plan.

The emerging ceasefire agreement brings to light several problems. As evidenced by the experience with UNIFIL, Israel cannot entrust its security to foreign entities tasked with enforcing UN Resolution 1701 in Lebanon. Furthermore, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) - a central pillar of US strategy in Lebanon - is infiltrated by Hezbollah, with some of its officers doubling as operatives. The LAF is outmatched by Hezbollah and lacks the ability or motivation to confront it as the US hopes.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has already declared, including in his most recent speech (Monday), that Hezbollah is the war's victor. Similarly, Iran's Armed Forces Chief of Staff, Mohammad Bagheri, asserted yesterday that Israel's aspiration to restore security to its northern residents is merely an illusion.

Despite the unprecedented blows to Hezbollah, including the elimination of its senior leadership and the death of its leader, Tehran is looking ahead. It is leveraging Hezbollah's survival and the continuous missile and UAV attacks to claim victory and advance its learning process to better prepare for the next war.

The absence of a secure buffer zone guarantees that Hezbollah will return to the border, shielded by southern Lebanese residents, to renew the potential threat even as it rebuilds its infrastructure (with massive Iranian support). Once Israel withdraws from Lebanon and releases its reserve forces, it will face difficulty resuming large-scale combat against Hezbollah. Additionally, the lack of any robust mechanism guaranteeing Israel freedom of action in response to future violations by Hezbollah - likely under Iran's guidance - justifies the grievance and sense of disappointment felt by Israelis.

Israel's significant battlefield achievements in Lebanon have not translated into principles that ensure the goals of the war are met; the agreement does not reflect Israel's freedom from the "October 6 conception." As long as Iran, which directs the proxy network with Hezbollah as its "crown jewel," is not addressed, the Regime is likely to continue its subversion into Lebanon, its security in Hezbollah's dominance, and its grip on the country remains unchallenged and ensured.

Published in Israel Hayom, November 27, 2024.