Learning to Deter | *Daniel Sobelman*

Deterrence Failure and Success in the Israel-Hezbollah Conflict, 2006–16

What are the sources of stable deterrence? Exploring the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah before and since the 2006 Lebanon War, this article seeks to shed light on this important question. The core argument of the article is that a principal explanation for the decade-long deterrence stability between Israel and Hezbollah is that both actors learned to adopt a deterrence strategy that met the theoretical conditions for deterrence success as laid out in the security studies literature. The article examines the parties' behavior in the lead-up to, and then in the long aftermath of, the 2006 war. And although there are likely multiple explanations for the deterrence stability along the Israeli-Lebanese border from 2006 to 2016, this article concentrates on Israel's and Hezbollah's deliberate efforts to avoid another war. This comparative examination shows that deterrence failed and succeeded as predicted by rational deterrence theory.

In addition, given the vast military disparity between Israel and Hezbollah, this case enables scholars to advance their understanding of how relatively weak actors, including violent nonstate actors, can coerce and deter stronger opponents. I argue that to deter a superior opponent, a weak actor needs to convince its adversary of its ability to render its own tactical capabilities strategic and the opponent's strategic capabilities tactical. A weaker actor can thus deter a superior opponent if it can secure the ability to repeatedly hold the latter's assets at risk and minimize its own vulnerability. For the weak actor, reduced vulnerability means a credible and effective residual ability to inflict pain. While such asymmetric deterrence requires a degree of shared knowledge and military capabilities, this case highlights the role of deterrence communication. Deterrence communication does more than reflect the structural elements of capabilities and resolve. It also amplifies the psychological impact of military capabilities, and thus plays a role in manipulating the perception of threat and shaping assessments.

The mainstream policy and media debate on Hezbollah has traditionally

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concentrated on the organization's military capabilities. Far from belittling this core prerequisite of deterrence theory, this article explains Hezbollah's prowess and deterrence capacity by analyzing the ways in which the group has absorbed the theoretical prerequisites of deterrence into its strategy, and the manner in which it has communicated its capabilities to Israel over the past decade. In this respect, one cannot fully understand Hezbollah's strategic thinking and Israel's current perception of the threat posed by Hezbollah without considering the manner in which the group has communicated its capability and resolve.

The longtime conflict between Israel and Hezbollah offers a particularly useful case for examining the workings and reliability of deterrence theory. It features a vast military disparity between two actors that regard each other as a serious threat, that do not recognize the other's right to exist, and that maintain no direct lines of communication. Israel has come to consider Hezbollah its primary military threat.[1] As regards methodology, this article draws on dozens of speeches and interviews by Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, mostly given in the past decade. Dubbed "the voice of Hezbollah,"[2] the authoritative leader of Hezbollah has led the organization since 1992, and has assumed the exclusive role of communicating its threats and deterrence messages. In his own words, "Through the things I say, I wage a battle against the enemy."[3] He has conducted this public "battle" with great calculation, not merely in terms of his choice of words but also in his body language and his tone.[4]

The issue of deterrence stability, in general, and the case of the Israel-Hezbollah conflict, in particular, matters for both theory and practice. First, deterrence theory is a central element of international relations theory and has been debated vigorously and inconclusively. Second, there is little scholarship on how the weak deter the strong, and even less on the conditions that enable violent nonstate actors to deter states. Understanding how these actors can deter much larger adversaries will become increasingly important given the diffusion of power and technology, to such an extent that groups now have access to communication platforms previously available only to states. Third, the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah remains active and could erupt into a

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1. Judah Ari Gross and Ilan Ben Zion, "IDF Chief: Iran Deal Raises Specter of Proxy Wars with Israel," *Times of Israel*, January 18, 2016.
2. Nicholas Noe, ed., *Voice of Hezbollah: The Statements of Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah* (New York: Verso, 2007).
3. "The Story of July—Special Episode," Al-Mayadin, September 3, 2012.
4. "This Is How I Prepare My Speeches; I Now Decide When I Should Shake My Finger!" *Al-Akhbar*, August 15, 2014.

devastating war. Fourth, Hezbollah is today a regional actor and is perceived by Israel and other actors in the region as playing an integral role in Iran's quest for hegemony in the Middle East. Thus it stands to be a primary beneficiary of the nuclear deal between Iran and the world powers. As such, it has been imparting its expertise to armed groups in the Palestinian arena, to the Houthis in Yemen, and to Iranian-backed Iraqi groups. It is therefore likely that Hezbollah is influencing other conflicts in the region.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section briefly explores some of the statements and indications reflecting Israel's and Hezbollah's acknowledgment that their conflict is currently governed by mutual deterrence. The subsequent section explicates the theoretical prerequisites of deterrence and presents the main criticisms of rational deterrence theory; it also explores the unique features of conventional deterrence and asymmetric deterrence. Then, the article reviews the origins of mutual deterrence between Israel and Hezbollah, beginning in the early 1990s. The next section presents Hezbollah's strategic thinking as expressed by its leader, following which the article evaluates the actors' behavior in the lead-up to the 2006 Lebanon War. The article then lays out its core analysis of the establishment of mutual deterrence between Israel and Hezbollah since 2006, showing how the core prerequisites of deterrence were reflected in their behavior. The concluding section summarizes the main findings of my research.

Mutual Acknowledgment of Mutual Deterrence

Israel and Hezbollah have in recent years come to view their conflict as being characterized by mutual deterrence. On the Israeli side, one of the earliest acknowledgments of mutual deterrence was expressed in 2010 by Northern Command Chief Gadi Eisenkot. Addressing his troops, General Eisenkot spoke of a "pattern of mutual deterrence" between Israel and Hezbollah, adding that Hezbollah's "patterns of action" were "somewhat reminiscent of the Cold War."[5] His successor in the Northern Command, Yair Golan, remarked in late 2014 that "a sort of mutual balance of deterrence" had taken shape between Israel and Hezbollah.[6] Around the same time, Yossi Baydatz, the former

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5. "Northern Command Chief: No Interest in Launching Another Confrontation," Israel Defense Forces website, http://www.idf.il, May 23, 2010. Later that year Eisenkot remarked, "Some may argue that mutual deterrence has taken shape. They, too, have established a very impressive capability; we wield very impressive capabilities, and both parties do not want a confrontation." See Gadi Eisenkot, "The Features of a Possible Conflict in the Northern Arena and the Home Front," lecture given at University of Haifa symposium, November 30, 2010, Haifa, Israel.
6. "What's Hot with Razi Barkai," IDF Radio, October 30, 2014.

head of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Intelligence Research Division, called for a reappraisal of the military's strategy for deterring Hezbollah. In a study he coauthored with Dima Adamsky, Baidatz acknowledged that Israel had "found itself" in "situations of balances of deterrence," which he described as "the way in which the adversary deters Israel, from his standpoint and ours." In such settings, the adversary "deterred" Israel and imposed "balances of deterrence" because it had "a significantly better capacity to absorb blows than that of Israel."[7] Lastly, Israel's policy of deterrence toward Hezbollah was reflected in the statements of retired Gen. Amos Gilad, the longtime director of the Political Military and Policy Bureau in Israel's ministry of defense. The "right thing to do" with Hezbollah, Gilad noted in April 2015, was "to maintain deterrence."[8]

Hezbollah has been more explicit than the Israelis in characterizing its relationship with Israel as one of mutual deterrence. In late 2012, Hezbollah Secretary General Nasrallah announced the achievement of "a mutual balance of deterrence,"[9] asserting that Israel would now be forced to "calculate its moves" against Hezbollah.[10] He would later define deterrence as Hezbollah's "policy" per se, arguing that deterrence was the only way to safeguard Lebanon.[11] In Nasrallah's view, deterrence implied that "just as Lebanon is afraid of Israel—naturally, because it has the most powerful air force in the Middle East and wields vast destructive capabilities—Israel too is afraid of Lebanon."[12] That deterrence was mutual also implied that war was less likely, as "Israel will think a thousand times before going to war against Lebanon."[13] Building on this logic, Nasrallah claimed in early 2016 that it was Hezbollah that was preventing the outbreak of another war.[14]

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7. Yossi Baydatz and Dima Adamsky, "The Evolution of Israel's Approach to Deterrence—A Critical Discussion of Its Theoretical and Practical Aspects," *Eshtonot*, Vol. 8 (October 2014), pp. 38–39, 41.
8. Newscast, IDF Radio, April 18, 2015.
9. Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah, speech at Hezbollah Martyrs' Day, Al-Manar, November 12, 2012.
10. "Comprehensive Interview," Al-Mayadin, January 15, 2015.
11. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at Resistance and Liberation Day rally marking the anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, Al-Manar, May 25, 2014. In January 2015, Nasrallah reaffirmed: "[T]here is deterrence on both sides of the border. Nobody can deny this." See "Comprehensive Interview," Al-Mayadin, January 15, 2015.
12. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at Islamic Resistance's Support Body annual Iftar event, Al-Manar, August 1, 2012.
13. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at Jabal Amil Culture and Literature Club inauguration event, Al-Manar, March 29, 2014. In 2015 Nasrallah remarked that although war was always a possibility, "we rule it out due to the costs that a war would impose on Israel, and Israel knows it. This is thanks to the existing deterrence equation." See Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at Hezbollah Martyr's Day, Al-Manar, November 11, 2015.
14. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, annual speech in honor of Martyred Commanders, Al-Manar, February 16, 2016.

The Sources of Deterrence Stability

Public statements by both Israel and Hezbollah suggest that one of the key lessons the actors drew from the 2006 Lebanon War, which neither side had sought or anticipated, was that they had to thoroughly apply deterrence in order to avoid another war. How then do actors learn to deter? What does the literature say about the conditions for deterrence stability, in general, and about deterrence in asymmetrical settings, in particular? To examine these questions, I begin by exploring the core requirements of deterrence as specified by rational deterrence theory.

RATIONAL DETERRENCE THEORY: THE CORE REQUISITES

Alexander George and Richard Smoke succinctly defined rational deterrence theory as pertaining to one's efforts to persuade one's opponent that "the costs and/or risks of a given course of action he might take outweigh its benefits."[15] Deterrence may appear as fact, as a phenomenon. As a strategy, however, deterrence is actively applied by actors seeking to reshape the cost-benefit calculus of a rational adversary. Anchored in the historical context of post–World War II and the outset of the Cold War, the theory initially pertained to nuclear weapons.

Essentially a psychological exercise, deterrence is achieved through the communication of calculated credible threats designed to shape or reshape the perception and manipulate the behavior of another actor. The conceptual mechanism for achieving this is simple: deterrence is about making credible threats and making threats credible. That is, for deterrence to succeed, the defender, or the status quo actor, must communicate clear and believeable threats to a potential challenger.[16] Threats will derive their effectiveness from the communication of the deterrer's resolve and commitment to employ its capabilities and exploit the adversary's vulnerabilities as a punishment for pursuing unwanted action.[17] Threats will derive their credibility from the reputation of the deterring actor and from shared knowledge acquired through strategic interaction.[18] Properly applied, these standard theoretical prerequisites of deter-

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15. Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 11.
16. Andreas Wenger and Alex Wilner, "Deterring Terrorism: Moving Forward," in Wenger and Wilner, eds., *Deterring Terrorism: Theory and Practice* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 320.
17. Alex S. Wilner and Andreas Wenger, "Linking Deterrence to Terrorism: Promises and Pitfalls," in Wenger and Wilner, *Deterring Terrorism*, pp. 3–20.
18. Resolve is a function of the balance of interests or of the stakes involved for each side. The higher the stakes, the higher the resolve an actor is expected to display in conflict. See Jonathan

rence should persuade a cool-headed rational challenger that any gain he may hope to achieve through a given course of action would be overshadowed by the prospective punishment. Credible deterrence is therefore a function of the perceived certainty of retaliation for defying a threat. While, as Thomas Schelling pointed out, the power to hurt "is most successful when held in reserve,"[19] the mere possession of capabilities does not automatically yield deterrence; instead, as noted by Alex Wilner, capabilities must be "purposefully packaged into coercive threats."[20] Nor will capabilities deter an adversary who perceives the deterring actor as lacking the intention and determination to use them. Likewise, military capabilities will not necessarily deter a challenger that believes that it has devised an effective way to offset their impact or escape them. Inescapable military capabilities are thus conducive to stability at the strategic level.[21]

In theory, deterrence succeeds when a potential challenger, having received a credibly perceived threat, calls off an intended action.[22] Deterrence fails when a properly communicated threat is perceived as credible, but nevertheless the adversary takes action.[23] Then there is the failure to apply deterrence, when one or both adversaries do not fulfill the core prerequisites of deterrence, and so violence ensues.[24]

The scholarship on deterrence distinguishes among several categories of deterrence—most notably, "deterrence by punishment" and "deterrence by denial." The former pertains to preventing action by emphasizing the costs a challenger would incur for taking unwanted action; this category is conceptually associated with nuclear weapons. Deterrence by denial, however, aims at

Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare from 1953 to 1970* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 17; and Joshua D. Kertzer, *Resolve in International Politics* (Princeton, N.Y.: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 8–9.

19. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 3.
20. Alex S. Wilner, *Deterring Rational Fanatics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p. 9.
21. This could come at the cost of tactical instability. See Glenn H. Snyder, "The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror," in Paul Seabury, ed., *The Balance of Power* (Scranton, Pa.: Chandler, 1965), pp. 185–201.
22. This, however, seems to be too strict a coding of deterrence success, given that limited low-threshold violence does not necessarily constitute deterrence failure. See Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "Testing Deterrence Theory: Rigor Makes a Difference," *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (July 1990), pp. 489–490.
23. Alternatively, deterrence fails when the attacker attains its goals under the threat of force. See ibid., p. 490; and Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, "Deterrence: The Elusive Dependent Variable," *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (April 1990), p. 344. See also John Orme, "Deterrence Failures: A Second Look," *International Security*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Spring 1987), pp. 96–124.
24. Deterrence requires more calculation, thought, and skill than actors may appreciate. As Wilner points out, deterrence "rarely springs forth, naturally and on its own, from the mere possession of certain military hardware." Rather, it is something states "purposefully put into motion." See Wilner, *Deterring Rational Fanatics*, pp. 9–10.

reducing the perceived benefits that a potential challenger may be anticipating by taking action; this category is associated with conventional weapons. Denial thus seeks to manipulate an adversary's behavior by making it doubt its ability to succeed.[25] Another important conceptual distinction is drawn between "general" and "narrow" deterrence. Whereas the former pertains to dissuading an adversary from initiating war, including by means of the buildup of military capabilities by the deterrer,[26] "narrow deterrence" refers to intra-war deterrence and is designed to deter certain forms of violence in an already active conflict.[27]

CAN ACTORS LEARN THE REQUIREMENTS OF DETERRENCE?
In the 1970s and 1980s, rational deterrence theory became the subject of a vigorous debate among scholars who questioned its conceptual and empirical validity, their primary concern being that even the meticulous application of deterrence theory does not guarantee deterrence success.[28] Deterrence skeptics argued that psychological factors, misperceptions, and biases prevented states from learning the requirements of deterrence and behaving in accordance with the theory.

Most importantly, perhaps, the critics challenged the core underlying assumption of rational deterrence theory, which is that actors behave rationally and engage in cool-headed, cost-benefit calculations.[29] Not only does emotion precede choice, but such calculations could vary from one actor to another. Defying a threat, therefore, does not necessarily reflect irrationality; potential challengers could consider the cost of action preferable to the cost of inaction, even when faced with a militarily superior adversary.[30] For Janice Gross Stein,

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25. Ibid., pp. 26–29; Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence*; and John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 15.
26. Yair Evron, *War and Intervention in Lebanon: The Israeli-Syria Deterrence Dialogue* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 177.
27. Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), pp. 33–34. Intra-war deterrence seems a particularly difficult strategy, given the internal contradiction between deterring and destroying an adversary; a threat cannot dissuade a potential challenger that anticipates punishment regardless of its behavior. On this issue, see Wilner, *Deterring Rational Fanatics*, pp. 184–186; and Alex Wilner, "Fencing in Warfare: Threats, Punishment, and Intra-War Deterrence in Counterterrorism," *Security Studies*, Vol. 22 No. 4 (2013), pp. 748–750.
28. Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 270–275.
29. Patrick M. Morgan defines rationality as "gaining as much information as possible about the situation and one's options for dealing with it, calculating the relative costs and benefits of those options as well as their relative chances of success and risks of disaster, then selecting—in light of what the rational opponent would do—the course of action that promise[s] the greatest gain or, if there would be no gain, the smallest loss." See Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 12–13.
30. Janice Gross Stein, "Calculation, Miscalculation, and Conventional Deterrence I: The View

the fundamental premise of rationality was unrealistic, as was the expectation that actors could learn from history, to draw propositions from past experience, and to apply them appropriately in future encounters or recalculate their plans based on new information. Citing advancements in cognitive psychology and neuroscience, Stein pointed to scientific evidence of the human difficulty of accepting new information that contradicted existing beliefs.[31] Robert Jervis offered a related line of argument, namely, that credible threats could be distorted by motivated and unmotivated biases on the receiving end.[32] Credible threats could further be misread or missed because of inaccurate or conflicting perceptions, reduced sensitivity to new information, overconfidence, or misperceptions of credibility.[33] Any of these possibilities could obviate the question of how well the defender had articulated its threats.

Other criticisms, namely by Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, addressed the difficulty of gathering sufficient and compelling empirical evidence to code deterrence encounters as such. To prove deterrence success or failure, they argued, it was incumbent upon scholars to marshal persuasive evidence that a designated challenger had considered attacking and that an identified defender responded with a credibly perceived counter-threat.[34] The most neglected dimension of deterrence research, they argued, was that it lacked a reliable dataset against which to test the propositions of deterrence success, which left "few if any behavioral traces."[35]

Deterrence theory came under new scrutiny after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.[36] Deterring nonstate actors was deemed harder, if not impossible, and in any case more complex than interstate deterrence. Emanuel Adler, for example, argued that asymmetrical settings made effective communications more difficult. Furthermore, he said, "[T]he territorial state carries legitimacy and responsibility norms that do not apply to non-state actors such as al-Qaeda and Hezbollah." Such actors, therefore, "may not be able to feel re-

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from Cairo," in Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Stein, eds., *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 34–59.
31. Janice Gross Stein "Rational Deterrence against 'Irrational' Adversaries? No Common Knowledge," in T.V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James A. Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 61–62.
32. Robert Jervis, "Perceiving and Coping with Threat," in Jervis, Lebow, and Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence*, pp. 13–33.
33. Robert Jervis, "Deterrence and Perception," *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Winter 1982/83), pp. 3–30.
34. Lebow and Stein, "Deterrence," p. 357.
35. Ibid., p. 336.
36. Jeffrey W. Knopf, "The Fourth Wave in Deterrence Research," *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (April 2010), pp. 1–33; and Amir Lupovici, "The Emerging Fourth Wave in Deterrence Theory—Towards a New Research Agenda," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (September 2010), pp. 705–732.

sponsible for their dead in the same way as states do and therefore may be harder to deter."[37]

Stemming from this discussion are the following three propositions. First, deterrence behavior should be reflected in actors' efforts to meet the core standards of deterrence. Second, not only should one be able to identify actors' deliberate attempts to invest in credible threats, but one should also be able to identify their efforts to eliminate actual or perceived vulnerabilities in their deterrence posture as conditions shift. Third, one should thus be capable of showing variation in actors' behavior and perception, and linking this variation back to a previous deterrence effort by the adversary, as this would be indicative of the ability to gain shared knowledge, learn, and recalculate based on new information.

WHAT NUCLEAR WEAPONS SAY ABOUT CONVENTIONAL DETERRENCE

Actors want to be able to produce desirable outcomes and prevent undesirable ones. For this, their capabilities must be able to have a strategic effect on the adversary. An overarching theme in international relations theory, this quest underlies deterrence theory. Rational deterrence theory, which has been the point of departure for conventional deterrence theorists, pertains to the capabilities that matter most—nuclear weapons.[38] Compared with nuclear weapons, the limitations of conventional weapons appear clearer, as do the structural underpinnings of conventional deterrence.[39] Insofar as deterrence theory is concerned, nuclear weapons carry a simplifying conceptual effect, offering a clear-cut dichotomous classification of deterrence failure and deterrence success. Moreover, the ability of states to use this tool to inflict unacceptable damage and virtually threaten one another's existence renders the structure of any nuclear deterrence relationship symmetric and inescapably strategic. Actors thus share a similar cost-benefit calculus, as no gain could possibly merit one's annihilation. Consequently, nuclear weapons simplify the standard precondition of communication: in the words of one scholar, John Stone, nuclear weapons "did all the talking," and did so very "eloquently."[40]

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37. Emanuel Adler, "Complex Deterrence in the Asymmetric-Warfare Era," in Paul, Morgan, and Wirtz, *Complex Deterrence*, p. 102.
38. In 1946 Bernard Brodie famously wrote that "everything about the atomic bomb is overshadowed by the twin facts that it exists and that its destructive power is fantastically great." Seven decades later, the perception of "the absolute weapon" appears to have stood the test of time. See Brodie, ed., *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1946), p. 52.
39. Deterrence theory could be tested only in conventional settings.
40. John Stone, "Conventional Deterrence and the Challenge of Credibility," *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (April 2012), pp. 116–117.

Joseph Nye took this argument even further, arguing that nuclear weapons have a "crystal ball effect," by which he meant that actors could metaphorically gaze into the future and observe the consequences of nuclear deterrence failure.[41]

None of these characteristics apply to conventional weapons, whose effectiveness hinges on multiple factors including geography, weather, skill, and chance. Conventional settings involve lower stakes, making for conflicts in which victory is always possible, including for the weaker party. As Stephen Biddle informs us, victory in conventional settings thus depends not merely on the possession of military capabilities, but on what actors can do with them in a given strategic interaction.[42] All structural elements governing coercive relationships are therefore rendered relative, including the utility of military capabilities, interests, resolve, and vulnerability. The concepts of deterrence success and failure also become a matter of interpretation.

International relations theory reduces the utility of conventional material capability to two variables—motivation and coercion. Motivation stems from the interests at stake. Low-level threats thus make for low resolve, reducing actors' cost tolerance and willingness to employ military force. Existential threats are expected to produce the highest level of resolve.[43] Coercion depends on more than sheer military capabilities. It requires a strategy that minimizes one's military vulnerability and maximizes that of the opponent.[44] Put differently, it requires the ability to render one's capabilities strategic and the opponent's capabilities tactical. Somewhat counterintuitively, weak actors such as terrorists can coerce and even counter-coerce by circumventing rather than challenging the opponent's advantages head on, and by undercutting the state's resolve and ability to pursue its favored coercive strategy.[45] Indeed, a weak actor that achieves this result will have rendered its tactical capabilities strategic and the opponent's strategic capabilities tactical.

It was in this context that Andrew Mack argued that the explanation for asymmetrical war outcomes—for why big nations lose small wars—was that

41. Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Nuclear Ethics* (New York: Free Press, 1986), p. 61.
42. Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 193.
43. Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence*, pp. 5–33; Evron, *War and Intervention in Lebanon*, pp. 177–180; Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Airpower and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 4–5; and Alexander L. George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1991), pp. 13–14.
44. Pape, *Bombing to Win*, p. 1.
45. Frank Harvey and Alex Wilner "Counter-Coercion, the Power of Failure, and the Practical Limits of Deterring Terrorism," in Wenger and Wilner, *Deterring Terrorism*, pp. 95–114; and Amos Malka, "Israel and Asymmetrical Deterrence," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (January/March, 2008), pp. 1–19.

the weak actors managed to retain a degree of invulnerability while imposing a steady accumulation of costs on the stronger adversary.[46] Building on Mack's theory, Ivan Arreguín-Toft found that weak actors are likely to win if they can confront the stronger side indirectly, through "unconventional defense" (i.e., guerrilla warfare).[47]

The foregoing discussion of the limitations of power, interests, and relative vulnerability has a direct bearing on deterrence stability in conventional settings. What makes deterrence fail or succeed? According to John Mearsheimer, the answer depends on whether or not a challenger believes that it can win quickly and decisively through blitzkrieg. If it believes that it can, then deterrence is very likely to fail. If, however, it expects blitzkrieg to lead to a protracted war of attrition, then deterrence will hold.[48] War of attrition, Mearsheimer concludes, is thus "the bedrock of conventional deterrence."[49]

FROM CONVENTIONAL TO ASYMMETRIC DETERRENCE

A subset of conventional deterrence, asymmetric deterrence occurs when the weak deter the strong. Thus far, Arreguín-Toft remains the only scholar to offer a theory of asymmetric deterrence in international relations. Building on his findings on the outcome of asymmetric conflict, he argues that weak actors can harness the conditions for military victory to deter stronger opponents.[50] The weak will deter the strong, he argues, if they can "credibly threaten an unconventional defense."[51] Arreguín-Toft characterizes this condition as the stronger party's "internalized deterrence,"[52] a term he openly borrows from Lawrence Freedman. In Freedman's writings, however, internalized deterrence occurs when a would-be attacker refrains from action because it is self-deterred by "a self-induced fear."[53] The applicability of self-deterrence, however, appears

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46. Mack argues that to avoid defeat, weak actors must retain "a minimum degree of invulnerability," and to win, they need to complement said invulnerability with a capacity to "impose a steady accumulation of 'costs' on their opponent." See Andrew J.R. Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (January 1975), pp. 185, 200.
47. Ivan Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
48. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, pp. 35–43, 63–64.
49. Ibid., p. 64.
50. Arreguín-Toft argues that the conditions for military victory by the weak are social support, physical or political sanctuary, an idea capable of making self-sacrifice seem both necessary and noble, and a strategy that can tie these advantages into a single effort. See Ivan Arreguín-Toft, "Unconventional Deterrence: How the Weak Deter the Strong," in Paul, Morgan, and Wirtz, *Complex Deterrence*, pp. 213–214.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., p. 205
53. Freedman, *Deterrence*, p. 30.

quite limited in the context of actors' pursuit of deterrence as strategy. Actors could be self-deterred for a host of reasons that may or may not have to do with an opponent's attempts to deter them, which raises questions about the reliability of self-deterrence and its resilience to miscalculation. Keeping in mind that deterrence requires the manipulation and maintenance of the opponent's threat perception, weak actors must credibly communicate their capabilities and resolve, as well as convince their opponents that their limited capabilities should be taken into consideration. I argue that asymmetric deterrence will invariably combine both denial and punishment strategies, and that it stems from the same conditions underlying the growing trend of weak actors escaping defeat and/or defeating their stronger rivals. As previously noted, asymmetrical coercion depends on the weaker actor's ability to render its own tactical capabilities strategic and the opponent's strategic capabilities tactical. Because deterrence pertains to dissuading future action, asymmetrical deterrence will be a function of the weaker actor's ability to manipulate the opponent's threat perception and convince it of its ability to accomplish this objective should conflict break out. In other words, the weaker actor will be able to constantly hold at risk the opponent's assets while minimizing its own vulnerability and securing an inescapable residual capacity to inflict pain. Asymmetrical deterrence will have been achieved when the stronger actor's prewar perception and assessments have come to reflect the weaker adversary's threats and deterrence posture. In an active conflict, unlike deterrence standoffs, asymmetrical deterrence will emerge in the form of rules of the game, which will take shape through a process of violent bargaining over de facto limitations on how each party employs its military capabilities and against which targets.[54] The rules of the game are the elaboration of what Wilner coded "intra-war deterrence."[55]

The following section presents an overview of the emergence and evolution of deterrence in the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah from the early 1990s until the outbreak of the 2006 Lebanon War.

The Origins of Mutual Deterrence between Israel and Hezbollah

Deterrence first emerged in the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah as a result of a shift in the balance of capabilities. Beginning in the early 1990s, the

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54. Such limitations will pertain to the weapons employed in the conflict, the acceptable geographical scope of the conflict, so-called legitimate and illegitimate targets, and so on. In reality, the parties would have to distinguish between so-called acceptable and unacceptable attacks, meaning that acceptable attacks would elicit a pro forma retaliation, a proportionate retaliation, or no retaliation. The stronger actor would thus have to tolerate a level of coercion against it.
55. Wilner, *Deterring Rational Fanatics*, pp. 184–186; and Wilner, "Fencing in Warfare," pp. 748–750.

conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, whose roots go back to Israel's invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, was increasingly shaped by rules of the game. These rules, which subjected Israel's military superiority to substantial limitations, tacitly regulated the conflict. Patterns of behavior evolved, mutual expectations emerged, unpredictability lessened, and each side slowly gained knowledge of the other.

Rules of the game are understood in international relations theory as encompassing a wide range of cooperation—from formal agreements to tacit understandings, and even the spirit of an agreement.[56] In the context of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, however, the rules were a set of implicit yet mutually understood limitations that regulated the conflict and confined violence to roughly acceptable parameters so as to enable the actors to focus on their strategic interests.[57]

That both parties accepted the rules was an indication that both found the alternative—namely, unpredictable, unregulated violence—even less appealing. On the opposite end of the spectrum from rules of the game lay what Hezbollah refers to as "open war," meaning an unlimited confrontation that inherently favors the stronger side. Although Hezbollah has said that it does not fear all-out war, Nasrallah's constant position has been that "we do not want war. Our strategy as a resistance is not an open war. That is well known."[58]

In that respect, the rules were designed to prevent Israel from employing its strategic advantage—its air force and its artillery—but also to limit the geographic scope of the conflict to Israel's self-proclaimed security zone. Israel accepted the rules, albeit begrudgingly, because they minimized the conflict's impact on its civilian population and enabled it to maintain its presence in southern Lebanon, which was thought to guarantee the well-being of Israel's northern communities at a reasonable cost. In the absence of mutual deterrence, neither actor—especially the militarily superior Israel—would have had a strong incentive to accept rules to begin with.

Rules of the game are a function of deterrence, which, as discussed in the

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56. Raymond Cohen, "Rules of the Game in International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (March 1980), pp. 129–150.

57. Hezbollah's strategic goal was to pursue its armed activity at a tolerable cost, whereas Israel's strategic goal during the 1990s was to reach a peace agreement with Syria, which would end the conflict in Lebanon. Later, its goal was to keep the Lebanese front quiet as it concentrated on the conflict in the Palestinian arena.

58. Nasrallah, speech at Jabal Amil Culture and Literature Club inauguration event, Al-Manar, March 29, 2014. Nasrallah also used the term "open war" at the outset of the Second Lebanon War. See Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, special live telephone address, Al-Manar, July 14, 2006. See also Nasrallah's remarks in the wake of Israel's assassination of Hezbollah's military commander, Imad Mughniyah, in Damascus, which Nasrallah argued occurred outside the acceptable geographical scope of the conflict: "Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah's Address at Funeral of Martyred Commander Imad Mughniyah, al-Hajj Radwan," Al-Manar, February 14, 2008.

previous section, depends on the interplay among relative capabilities, resolve, and interests. Only in 1992 did mutual deterrence begin to emerge as an influential factor in the conflict. On February 16, 1992, Israeli gunships targeted the convoy of Hezbollah Secretary General Abbas al-Musawi, killing him along with his wife and toddler. Hezbollah's retaliation was twofold and reflected a change in the organization's capabilities. First, for five days in a row it fired salvos of Katyusha rockets on northern Israel, disrupting the lives of tens of thousands of civilians. Then, a month and one day later, a suicide bomber targeted the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina, killing twenty-nine civilians and injuring hundreds.[59]

Hezbollah's introduction of Katyusha rockets as a means of exploiting Israel's major vulnerability revolutionized the conflict. Israel's geographical proximity to the actual battlefield lent a strategic quality to Hezbollah's short-range rockets, as for the first time the organization was in a position to apply punishment swiftly and effectively for what it regarded as unacceptable Israeli behavior. From now on, Israel would begin to accept de facto limitations in the fighting—limitations that constrained the IDF's freedom of action. As retired IDF Brig. Gen. Giora Inbar, who commanded Israel's Lebanon Liaison Unity in the years 1994–96, remarked: Hezbollah used the rules of the game to offset Israel's qualitative military edge and "reduce us to the level of their Kalashnikovs."[60]

Describing this new situation, Nasrallah noted in 1993 that whereas in the past Hezbollah refrained from targeting Israeli towns in retaliation for the targeting of Lebanese villages by Israel, it would now change the rules of the game. Speaking to *Al-Safir*, Nasrallah said: "The rules of the game were that we got bombarded while the settlements remained safe. The enemy destroys Maydun, Yatir, and Kafra while we are only allowed to move in the security zone. But the resistance imposed a new formula through the Katyusha. Thus we say that we are committed to a new rule, one which was founded by us."[61]

Israel tried twice during the 1990s to reshape the informal rules of the game to make Hezbollah's use of rockets impermissible, but failed. In both cases, the balance of interests compelled Israel to accept the rules and abide by their limitations to prevent the conflict in the security zone from spilling over and affecting its northern communities.

In July 1993 Israel launched Operation Accountability, a weeklong military

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59. Matthew Levitt, *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God* (London: Hurst, 2013), pp. 75–116.
60. Author interview with Giora Inbar, Tel Aviv, Israel, April 24, 2011.
61. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, "The First Ceasefire 'Understanding' with Israel," in Noe, *Voice of Hezbollah*, p. 107.

offensive aimed at ending all rocket fire on its northern settlements. The operation produced a U.S.-brokered verbal understanding, according to which neither Israel nor Hezbollah would target civilians. Over the next three years, Hezbollah targeted Israel's northern towns on thirteen different occasions,[62] mostly after Lebanese civilians had been killed by Israel, but occasionally also in retaliation for the killing of Hezbollah commanders. Then, in April 1996 Israel launched Operation Grapes of Wrath, a fiercer, sixteen-day-long military operation designed to attain the same objective of ending all Hezbollah rocket fire. This time, the United States brokered a written-but-unsigned understanding, which again prohibited attacks on civilians on both sides of the border.[63] Hezbollah's ability to hold Israel's northern communities at stake deterred Israel from escalating the conflict in the security zone. By punishing Israel's northern communities, Hezbollah compelled Israel, which deemed the security zone valuable enough to justify its losses elsewhere, to abide by the rules of the game.

Israel's decision to unilaterally withdraw from Lebanon in May 2000 ostensibly left the parties with no mutual framework, such as tacit or semi-informal understandings. Four months later, the second Palestinian intifada broke out, with a defining impact on the balance of interests between Israel and Hezbollah. For the next five years, Israel's interests—and its level of resolve vis-à-vis Hezbollah—would be shaped by the violence in the Palestinian arena. Under these conditions, unfavorable to Israel, mutually understood tit-for-tat rules of the game gradually began to emerge.[64] Hezbollah's kidnapping of two IDF soldiers on July 12, 2006, was carried out in blatant violation of those rules, which tacitly confined the conflict to limited disputed areas. The scene of Hezbollah's kidnapping was not one of these. By the time Hezbollah carried out the kidnapping, however, the balance of interests had already shifted. The intifada had come to a grinding halt the previous year, and Israel, which until late 2005 had been preoccupied with its disengagement from the Gaza Strip, found itself relieved of these two strategic constraints. Under these new conditions, the balance of resolve shifted in Israel's favor. In addition, the kidnapping was carried out against the backdrop of Hamas's kidnap of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, less than three weeks previously. Hezbollah failed to foresee that Israel would be highly motivated to protect its reputation. This

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62. Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 174–175.
63. Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 84–86.
64. Daniel Sobelman, *New Rules of the Game: Israel and Hizbollah after the Withdrawal from Lebanon* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 2004), pp. 67–82.

was the strategic state of affairs between Israel and Hezbollah when the 2006 Lebanon War broke out.

How Deterrence Was Misapplied before 2006

The 2006 Lebanon War demonstrated that both Israel and Hezbollah possessed sufficient capability and resolve to inflict considerable pain on each other. Both discovered this through hard experience. Missing in their relationship were two factors: first, a deliberate effort by each actor to persuasively communicate its resolve and willingness to engage in and tolerate the costs of a large-scale confrontation; and second, a calculated attempt to manipulate the other's perception of the costs of such an encounter. Neither party engaged in this elementary deterrence exercise, which could have made war less likely. Elli Lieberman has argued that Israel failed to do so because it did not have "a deterrence framework in mind."[65] Yet Hezbollah, too, could have pursued several paths to manipulate Israel's cost-benefit calculus and enhance deterrence. Hezbollah did not attempt to deter Israel from going to war, probably because it perceived war as a highly unlikely scenario. Nasrallah famously claimed in retrospect, in reference to Hezbollah's kidnapping of the two Israeli soldiers: "We did not think there was even a one percent chance—a one percent chance—that the kidnapping operation would lead to a war of such magnitude." He added that had Hezbollah believed there was even "a one percent chance" that the abduction would touch off an all-out war, "never" would he have ordered the operation.[66] Both parties are at fault for Hezbollah's gross underestimation of the likelihood of war. This condition would have been desirable had Israel indeed been hoping to mount a surprise attack on Hezbollah, but this was not the case. One explanation for Hezbollah's underestimation of the likelihood of war, which can be readily ruled out, is that the organization remained undeterred because it doubted Israel's military superiority. Alternative and valid explanations abound, however. The following section examines the four most salient ones.

FAILING TO DETER: THREATS UNMADE ARE THREATS UNHEEDED
At minimum, deterrence requires that actors issue threats. When an actor communicates a credible threat that the opponent ignores, deterrence has failed. As Wilner points out, however, "A threat unmade is a threat unheeded."[67] In

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65. Elli Lieberman, "Israel's 2006 War with Hizbollah: The Failure of Deterrence," in Robert O. Friedman, ed., *Contemporary Israel* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2009), pp. 317–353, at pp. 319, 343.
66. Interview with Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, New TV, August 27, 2006.
67. Wilner, *Deterring Rational Fanatics*, pp. 9–10.

the weeks and months before the 2006 Lebanon War, Nasrallah explicitly and repeatedly declared that his organization was determined to kidnap IDF soldiers and impose a prisoner swap on Israel. Three months before the war, he indicated that this would take place "very, very, very soon."[68]

Shmuel Bar argues that because Israel never spelled out its "red line," Hezbollah was forced to infer it from Israel's behavior.[69] In any case, Israel never threatened Hezbollah with punishment even remotely as fierce as its military actions in the summer of 2006. According to Shai Feldman, Israel's failure to communicate such threats to Hezbollah arose from the fact that its own decisionmakers did not know how they would react to a successful Hezbollah kidnapping.[70] Feldman's point casts light on another aspect of Israel's failure; the successful abduction was preceded by at least four botched attempts.[71] Rather than informing Hezbollah in no uncertain terms that a kidnapping would elicit an unprecedented military punishment, Israel effectively adhered to a policy of "containment," conceptualized by the IDF as meaning that escalations needed to be quickly contained.[72]

THREATS UNMADE ARE THREATS UNHEEDED (HEZBOLLAH)
As discussed, the sheer possession of conventional weapons does not automatically deter an adversary. It would be erroneous to argue that Hezbollah's military capabilities were unknown to Israel.[73] But given the vast military disparity between Israel and Hezbollah, and given that the parties had never fought an all-out war, Hezbollah should have complemented its military capabilities with deterrence messaging. Yet Hezbollah did not actively indicate to Israel, via credible communication, the costs it would (and indeed did) pay if war broke out.

Communication, a core deterrence element, would have amplified the deterrence value of what was essentially a large stockpile of tactical weapons.

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68. Al-Manar, speech marking 28th anniversary of Samir Kuntar detention, April 25, 2006.
69. Shmuel Bar, "Deterring Nonstate Terrorist Groups: The Case of Hizballah," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 26, No. 5 (October 2007), pp. 470, 487.
70. Shai Feldman, "Deterrence and the Israel-Hezbollah War—Summer 2006," in Anthony C. Cain, ed., *Deterrence in the Twenty-first Century: Proceedings* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University Press, 2010), pp. 279–290.
71. Zeev Schiff, "The Kidnapping—Hezbollah's Fifth Attempt," *Haaretz*, September 19, 2006.
72. Speaking in the wake of an escalation that the IDF regarded as the most severe since the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, a high-ranking Israeli officer remarked, "[A]s long as the quiet is maintained and the Lebanese government meets its commitment, we will not open fire." Defense Minister Amir Peretz said that Israel would do everything not to disrupt the normal routine in northern Israel. See Hanan Greenberg, "Satisfaction in the IDF: Hezbollah Fell into the Trap," *Ynet*, May 29, 2006.
73. The only military hardware in Hezbollah's possession that escaped Israel's intelligence community was its C-802 shore-to-sea missiles, with which it targeted the IDF warship *Hanit* on the second day of the war.

Rather, Nasrallah made do with opaque messages that concealed more than they revealed. He repeatedly boasted about Hezbollah's "expertise" in Israeli affairs and his own influence on Israel.[74] Weeks before the 2006 war, he received a standing ovation when he told his audience that if he were to "advise" the population in northern Israel to enter their shelters, "they will all be in Tel Aviv." In general, however, Nasrallah offered only general insinuations of Hezbollah's capacity to strike beyond northern Israel.[75] Even on July 12, 2006, after it had already become apparent that Israel was not limiting its attacks in retaliation for the kidnapping, but instead was threatening to "take Lebanon twenty years back,"[76] Nasrallah reacted by threatening Israel with "surprises," saying: "Lebanon is not the same Lebanon as twenty years ago . . . I am in no need of making threats . . . you all know Hezbollah and its credibility."[77] Even as the war got under way, the most explicit warning to come from Nasrallah was that Hezbollah's rockets would reach Haifa as well as "beyond Haifa and beyond what is beyond Haifa."[78]

PUNISHMENT, BUT ONLY ACCORDING TO THE RULES (ISRAEL)

Israel never indicated to Hezbollah that all-out war was a genuine possibility. Rather, its standard operating procedure toward Hezbollah revolved around, first, avoiding preemption and, second, bringing escalations to quick closure. Its military behavior in the years, months, and even weeks preceding the 2006 Lebanon War was in line with what both sides regarded as the rules of the game. When Israel did act militarily, it often stressed that it would not be dragged into a wider confrontation. On other occasions, Israel made it clear that it would not escalate if Hezbollah did not, or that its military activity was "strictly defensive" and devoid of offensive designs toward Lebanon.[79] On several occasions—for instance, in December 2005 and May 2006—Israeli leaders responded to Hezbollah attacks by saying that the IDF would avoid unre-

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74. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at Loyalty to the Resistance rally in Baalbek, Al-Manar, June 10, 2005; and Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at funeral service of Hezbollah men killed in Ghajar, Al-Manar, November 25, 2005.
75. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at Resistance Culture Conference in Beirut, Al-Manar, May 23, 2006. Nasrallah added: "I can state that all of northern occupied Palestine is within the range of our rockets. Of course, this is the very least. As for beyond the north, we shall not discuss that as we do not need to state if we do or do not have such capability. The north is within the reach of the Resistance rockets. Their ports, military bases, factories—everything you've got there. Hence this creates a balance between northern Palestine, southern Lebanon, and Lebanon in its entirety." This statement, however, was made in the context of marketing Hezbollah's military role domestically and not in the context of a deliberate deterrence message to Israel.
76. "Hezbollah Warns Israel over Raids," BBC News, July 12, 2006.
77. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, press conference, Al-Manar, July 12, 2006.
78. Nasrallah, special live telephone address, Al-Manar, July 14, 2006.
79. Amos Harel, "Fearing Hezbollah Attack, IDF Goes on High Alert," *Haaretz*, November 6, 2005.

strained retaliation.[80] Even amid Hezbollah attempts to "stretch" the rules of the game, Israeli Defense Minister Amir Peretz stressed: "We have no intention of leading to escalation."[81] Such patterns misled Hezbollah into expecting a proportionate, if harsh, retaliation even for a blatant violation of the rules.

Rules of the game, however, undercut deterrence by punishment, as the opponent has reason to anticipate retaliation proportionate to its own attack. This implies considerable control over the opponent's response. On the morning of July 12, 2006, Hezbollah was indeed braced for a reprisal commensurate with the existing patterns of behavior—in Nasrallah's words, "a severe but limited" response.[82] Nasrallah's top adviser, Hussein Hajj Hassan, offered further detail, saying that the party had expected "a day or two" of clashes in which "a village or two" would be destroyed. "After all," he went on to say, "these are the rules of the game."[83] It was no surprise, then, that in his first televised message, two days into the war, Nasrallah addressed the Israeli public, saying: "Your government wanted to change the rules of the game? So be it, let the rules of the game change."[84]

THE LIMITATIONS OF DETERRENCE BY DENIAL

Over the years, Israel resorted to public signaling to indicate to Hezbollah that its military preparations were under close surveillance. For instance, on the eve of Hezbollah's abduction of three IDF soldiers in the disputed Shabaa Farms area in October 2000, an Israeli security official told the daily *Haaretz* that the organization was about to initiate a confrontation in this very area "in the next few days."[85] Such attempts, designed to dissuade Hezbollah from acting by causing it to expect failure rather than punishment, fall into the deterrence-by-denial category. The pain that accompanies military failure, however, differs from the pain of military punishment, so that each unsuccessful kidnapping attempt paved the way to the next try and eventually to the successful one.

80. Newscast, Voice of Israel, May 13, 2005; and Amos Harel, "Northern Command Chief: We Will Avoid Harsh Retaliation for Lebanese Fire," *Haaretz*, December 29, 2005.
81. Itamar Eichner, Eitan Glikman, and Goel Beno, "Halutz: Hezbollah Will Not Stand Idly By," *Yediot Aharonot*, May 31, 2006.
82. Talal Salman, "Comprehensive Political Interview with Hezbollah Secretary General on July War Ramifications," *Al-Safir*, September 5, 2006.
83. "Hezbollah Admits Misevaluating Retaliation for Operation," *Al-Mustaqbal*, September 29, 2006. The rules of the game were also invoked when a United Nations representative contacted Hezbollah, hours after the kidnapping, and was informed by his interlocutor that the party "only acted according to the general rules of the game." See Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, *34 Days: Israel, Hezbollah, and the War in Lebanon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 75–76.
84. Nasrallah, special live telephone address, Al-Manar, July 14, 2006.
85. Sharon Gal, "Security Official: Hezbollah Planning Attack at Har Dov," *Haaretz*, September 25, 2000.

Hezbollah's November 2005 kidnapping attempt in the border village of Ghajar is a striking case in point. Not only did the IDF declare a state of high alert along the Lebanese border, specifically citing Hezbollah's intention to kidnap Israeli soldiers,[86] but it accompanied its public signal with a private message to Hezbollah to the effect that its preparations were being closely monitored.[87] Perhaps most strikingly, the operation was carried out merely a day after the IDF chief of staff, Dan Halutz, had issued a public warning of a pending Hezbollah attack.[88] The unsuccessful attempt indeed caused alarm within Israeli military intelligence, which subsequently adjusted its strategic assessment to reflect a heightened risk of escalation in the northern arena in 2006.[89] In retrospect, the attack stood out as a warning sign on the path to war. It reflected the ineffectiveness of Israel's attempts at deterrence by denial. Yet in the subsequent critical months, Israel continued to pursue deterrence by denial in a bid to dissuade Hezbollah from moving ahead with its plans.[90]

Israel could also have learned in real time that, at least in the context of preventing a tactical operation, deterrence by denial was an exercise in futility. Not only did Hezbollah follow up with further kidnapping attempts, but it made a point of dismissing Israel's warning signals. For instance, in March 2006, the IDF declared high alert along the Lebanese border. The following week, Nasrallah declared that the Israeli precaution would not stop Hezbollah from "fulfilling our promise."[91] Indeed, in his press conference following the July 12, 2006, abduction, Nasrallah remarked: "For over a year I have been saying that we want to kidnap soldiers in order to conduct a prisoner swap. Every time I said this, Israel went on high alert along the border."[92]

Explaining Hezbollah's Strategic Thinking

Hezbollah's strategic thinking and operational concept revolve around the fundamental challenge of compensating for its relative weakness vis-à-vis

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86. Harel, "Fearing Hezbollah Attack, IDF Goes on High Alert."
87. Author interview with former chief of IDF Intelligence Maj. Gen. (retired) Aharon Zeevi-Farkash, August 22, 2012.
88. Amos Harel, "Halutz Lashes Out at Syria amid Warnings of Forthcoming Hezbollah Attack," *Haaretz*, November 21, 2005.
89. Author interview with Zeevi-Farkash.
90. The IDF was put on high alert along the Israeli-Lebanese border on at least two more occasions, in January and March of 2006, before the kidnapping took place. See Gideon Alon, "Mofaz: IDF on High Alert, Hezbollah Might Open Fire," *Haaretz*, January 9, 2006; and Eli Ashkenazi and Amos Harel, "High Alert along Northern Border over Fear of Kidnapping," *Haaretz*, March 13, 2006.
91. Al-Manar, speech marking 40th day of Imam Hussein martyrdom, March 20, 2006.
92. Nasrallah, press conference, Al-Manar, July 12, 2006.

Israel and of offsetting Israel's strategic advantages. As such, its strategic rationale and operational concept draw on a strategy designed to circumvent a stronger adversary's advantages—guerrilla warfare. But unlike guerrilla warfare, which involves exploiting the vulnerabilities of an invading military force, Hezbollah's strategy includes the ability to impose significant costs on the opponent's valued assets and population. Hezbollah's operational concept rests on four pillars: (1) geographical proximity creates mutual vulnerability; (2) whereas airpower may be applied effectively in a conventional ground campaign, it is ineffective against guerrilla warfare; (3) rockets and missiles constitute an invulnerable response to air superiority; and (4) the only way in which an opponent can effectively confront rocket strikes is through ground invasion, which invariably works in favor of the weaker actor. As Hezbollah sees it, the state's war effort is destined to come to a grinding halt, at which point the weaker actor will have gained the political upper hand. (The following section expands on these elements, which, as I show, inform Hezbollah's deterrence thinking.)

First, Hezbollah's strategic thinking revolves around the exploitation of Israel's vulnerabilities and the limitations of its military power. This balance of vulnerability is made possible by the geographical proximity of Israel and Lebanon, and by Hezbollah's growing reliance on high-trajectory fire. Weeks before the war, Nasrallah described Israel's coastal plain as its vulnerable "natural habitat," pointing out that "two million Israeli Jews, not Arabs, live there." Northern Israel, he continued, was "where they have nonreligious tourism: the ski resort on Mt. Hermon; ports; beaches; hotels; recreation areas; resorts. The most important factories are located in the north. The most important military bases are in the north. For us, this is a strong spot."[93] Nasrallah was not, in this case, tailoring his message to an Israeli audience, but to a domestic one, as part of his efforts to market Hezbollah's military capabilities. Nasrallah came back to this very theme following the 2006 Lebanon War, but in a different context. This time, Israel's vulnerabilities were invoked specifically in the context of establishing deterrence.[94]

Perhaps the most relevant element informing Hezbollah's strategy is the premise that guerrilla warfare exposes the limitations of airpower.[95] Nasrallah often invokes other historical cases in which airpower failed to decide wars,

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93. Nasrallah, speech at Resistance Culture Conference in Beirut, Al-Manar, May 23, 2006.
94. For example, see Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech on 10th Day of Muharram (Ashura), Al-Manar, November 4, 2014.
95. This claim is substantiated in the literature. For examples, see Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Airpower: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); and Pape, *Bombing to Win*.

such as Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Gaza Strip. Thus, just weeks before the 2006 war Nasrallah argued that geography, topography, and the inherent agility of a guerrilla force confronting a standing army precluded defeat by airpower. Hezbollah, he asserted, was "not a military division that can be destroyed from the air. It is not a battalion whose military barracks can be knocked down over its head. You are talking about people who are living in their houses, schools, mosques, churches, fields, farms, and factories. One cannot destroy them as one would destroy a classic army."[96] This perception was only reinforced by the 2006 war, as well as by Israel's subsequent conflicts in the Gaza Strip, in which the Israeli military relied heavily or exclusively on airpower. The Israeli air force, Nasrallah remarked in August 2012, was incapable of achieving a decisive victory over a "popular resistance" organization such as Hezbollah.[97] The following year he went further, proclaiming that not even the "strongest air force in the world" can destroy a "popular resistance," and concluding that "all cases prove this: Iraq, Yugoslavia, and all the rest."[98] In 2015 he remarked, "All military academies in the world know that air bombings do not produce victory and do not decide a war."[99]

Third, Hezbollah views rockets and missiles as the weak party's primary means of offsetting the opponent's air supremacy. As Nasrallah has argued, rockets are a simple but effective means of coercion, and an inexpensive and invulnerable one at that. In this regard, his statements are replete with references to the advantages that unsophisticated rockets bring to bear. Having already remarked in 2002 that Hezbollah had "created a balance of fear by means of the Katyusha, which military science likens to a water pistol,"[100] Nasrallah noted on the eve of the 2006 war: "Given the Israeli army's highly sophisticated technology, complex strategy, and military tactics, and in light of the most complex [capabilities], one must act in utter simplicity."[101] Two years later, he explained in this context that because Hezbollah "cannot achieve technological parity, the best and most preferred way to cope with advanced technology is with simple means."[102] Continuing in the same vein, Nasrallah argued in 2010: "It has nowadays become possible to obtain rocket capability

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96. Nasrallah, speech at Resistance Culture Conference in Beirut, Al-Manar, May 23, 2006.
97. Nasrallah, speech at Islamic Resistance's Support Body annual Iftar event, Al-Manar, August 1, 2012.
98. "The Story of the July War," Al-Mayadin, August 14, 2013.
99. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, televised address regarding the developments in Yemen, Al-Manar, March 27, 2015.
100. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, annual speech in honor of Martyred Commanders, Al-Manar, February 16, 2002.
101. Nasrallah, speech at Resistance Culture Conference in Beirut, Al-Manar, May 23, 2006.
102. Al-Manar, May 8, 2008.

and use it to establish a balance of deterrence that equals ten MiG fighter jets." Rocket technology, he went on to say, was "neither expensive nor sophisticated nor complicated. Confronting this power is no simple task. All the talk you hear about Patriot-schmatriot, Iron Dome, and so on—none of this will affect our rockets."[103] He again invoked this theme in 2012, saying: "Today, rocket capability is decisive. . . . There is no answer to this rocket capability."[104]

Fourth, ground invasion exposes the weaknesses of the invading power and plays into the hands of the guerrilla organization. Discussing the scenario of an Israeli ground invasion, Nasrallah argued in 2006 that although Hezbollah could not stop Israel from invading, the IDF would "get bogged down, suffer many fatalities and would not be capable of holding on to the territory. This means defeat."[105] Nasrallah later explained, "Defending a geographical area and holding on to certain areas—that's not our strategy. The Israeli can advance [into Lebanon]. We will prevent him from entering some places but enable him to advance into others, so that we can then pounce on him. Our basic goal is to inflict the largest number of fatalities and material damage upon the enemy, as its vulnerability lies in fatalities, whether within the military or among the population. What decides a battle is not the question of whether a certain town is conquered or not."[106] In the wake of Saudi Arabia's declaration of war on the Houthi rebels in Yemen in March 2015, Nasrallah urged Riyadh to cease its air campaign. Citing Hezbollah's experience in coping with Israel's airpower, Nasrallah said: "In the end, you will run out of targets, and the people will not have surrendered. They did not get down on their knees. What do you do now? Ultimately you will be left with no other option except ground invasion. By all means, go for it. This is the stage in which your weakness is exposed. . . . A ground invasion is costly and the outcome is known in advance . . . defeat."[107]

The remainder of this article analyzes the deterrence efforts of Israel and Hezbollah in the decade since the 2006 Lebanon War, with particular emphasis on Hezbollah's deterrence campaign. As I show, the themes discussed above run through the organization's entire deterrence messaging.

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103. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, Resistance and Liberation Day speech, Al-Manar, May 25, 2010.
104. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech marking the sixth anniversary of the 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, July 18, 2012.
105. Nasrallah, speech at Resistance Culture Conference in Beirut, Al-Manar, May 23, 2006.
106. "The Story of the July War," Al-Mayadin, August 14, 2013. In April 2015, Nasrallah stated that "we have not turned into a regular army. We are a resistance movement, our posture is defensive in nature . . . we believe that the resistance method is the most effective and least costly method . . . we prefer resistance wars rather than large-scale wars." See "The Political Domino," Syrian News Channel Television, April 6, 2015.
107. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at Rally in Solidarity and Loyalty to the Yemeni People, Al-Manar, April 17, 2015.

Explaining Post-2006 Deterrence Success

The literature on deterrence accentuates the role of capabilities, and with good reason. The increase in Hezbollah's rocket stockpile from about 14,000 rockets before the 2006 Lebanon War to at least 100,000 rockets in 2016 has indeed greatly enhanced its deterrence posture. Moreover, Hezbollah's acquisition of long-range, high-accuracy missiles has undoubtedly introduced a threatening new dimension to its ability to deter Israel. But in addition to acquiring capabilities, Hezbollah has augmented its deterrence posture by actively communicating its capabilities and highlighting their potential impact on Israel. Hezbollah's postwar deterrence signals predate the acquisition of most of its stockpile, including its most threatening components—its precision-guided missiles. This development is telling, because it indicates that the organization had assumed a deterrence mind-set prior to obtaining most of its current arsenal.

As noted in the theoretical section, Nye attributed a "crystal ball effect" to nuclear weapons. John Stone conveyed essentially the same idea by arguing that nuclear weapons themselves had the inherent capacity to communicate. Because conventional weapons lack these qualities, they require a means of amplification to maximize their psychological impact. Although conventional, and especially tactical, military weapons cannot attain the same psychological effect as nuclear weapons, actors can nonetheless amplify their psychological effectiveness and enhance their deterrent value. This point highlights the importance of communication.

HEZBOLLAH ASSUMES A DETERRENCE MIND-SET

Listening to Nasrallah's interviews and speeches since the 2006 Lebanon War, one cannot help but notice his recurring references to "deterrence." Drawing on these statements, I argue that shortly after the war—perhaps as a result of its own postwar assessments of its performance—Hezbollah decided to make deterrence the centerpiece of its strategy to prevent another war, and to prevent a potential confrontation from escalating, whether deliberately or inadvertently, into an open war. Nasrallah has also exerted considerable efforts to preempt potential deficiencies in Hezbollah's own deterrence posture, so as to prevent miscalculation.

As early as the first anniversary of the war, Nasrallah stressed the need for mutual deterrence. In a statement alluding to the core deterrence requisites of capabilities and communication, he said: "Preparing for war is the best way to prevent war. This is what is referred to as a balance of terror, a balance of deterrence. When the enemy realizes—when we make it understand—that we

have the ability to fight and persevere, and that we even have the power to win, that will inhibit it and deter it from another war."[108]

The understanding that capabilities did not automatically produce a lasting deterrence outcome was encapsulated in several of Nasrallah's statements. Six years after the war, he remarked that Israel "must not be relaxed, not even for one second. It must know that if it indeed has any plans to attack, it should re-think its plans a thousand times. Without all of this, you won't have a balance of deterrence—even if you possess weapons." Rather, Israel had to be kept "constantly worried and concerned."[109] On another occasion, he explained that in matters of deterrence and military buildup, "one never reaches a point in which he says: that's it, that's enough. We are talking about Israel here, the Israeli army, one of the strongest armies in the world. That is why it is our duty to develop our deterrence capacities." Hezbollah, he continued, was working "night and day to develop its deterrence capabilities. This worries the enemy, who keeps talking about it. In other words, it is not as if we sit around and make do with preserving our deterrence capabilities. No, we actively develop this deterrence capability."[110]

While I do not argue that Hezbollah's pre-2006 behavior was divorced from deterrence considerations, its post-2006 conceptual mind-set and performance have been entrenched in them; whereas before 2006 deterrence existed as a phenomenon, after 2006 it was implemented as a policy. Hezbollah's postwar deterrence messages thus reflected greater consistency with deterrence theory, a strong appreciation of the prerequisites of deterrence, and a systematic en-deavor to meet them. Prior to the 2006 war, Hezbollah's references to deter-rence were fleeting and off-handed. For example, six weeks before the war, Nasrallah delivered an hourlong speech about Hezbollah's strategy. It was perhaps the most detailed and candid explication of the organization's strat-egy, yet the term "deterrence" was not invoked even once.[111] That Israel was deterred was apparently taken for granted. In contrast, Nasrallah's postwar messages have been replete with explicit references to deterrence, invoking the term with nearly every mention of the conflict with Israel. Nearly every action by Hezbollah, as well as Nasrallah's rhetoric, was made with reference to the need to maintain or augment deterrence, as well as to eliminate potential vul-

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108. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at Divine Victory Rally in Southern Suburb of Beirut, Al-Manar, August 14, 2007.
109. Nasrallah, speech at Islamic Resistance's Support Body annual Iftar event, Al-Manar, August 1, 2012.
110. Nasrallah, speech at Resistance and Liberation Day rally marking the anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, Al-Manar, May 25, 2014.
111. Nasrallah, speech at Resistance Culture Conference in Beirut, Al-Manar, May 23, 2006.

nerabilities, which could inadvertently invite an Israeli challenge or lead to a miscalculation. In what can be construed as a confirmation in retrospect that Hezbollah's postwar behavior has been guided by a quest for stable deterrence, Nasrallah declared in 2012 that "a mutual balance of deterrence" had emerged. "The mission," he added, "has been accomplished. We are done."[112]

Hezbollah's overarching strategic goal had been to convince Israel that the costs of war would outweigh any gain, or in Nasrallah's words, to force Israel to "constantly balance costs and benefits."[113] In this respect, Hezbollah's overt signals suggested a more nuanced deterrence campaign than Israel's, and a stronger correlation between its messages and the core requirements of deterrence. The following section outlines the shift in Israel's deterrence posture after 2006.

ISRAEL'S SHIFT: DETERRENCE BY DENIAL TO DETERRENCE BY PUNISHMENT
Although Israel suffered less damage than Hezbollah, the 2006 war was a defining experience for the IDF, which regarded its inability to win a decisive victory as a dangerous failure that eroded its deterrence capacity.[114] This perceived failure and the subsequent public outcry led to the resignation of senior IDF officers, including IDF Chief of Staff Dan Halutz; it also ended the tenure of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and marred the career of his defense minister, Amir Peretz.

The war triggered a substantial shift from "containment" to deterrence. As Israel's Northern Command Chief Eisenkot remarked in a lecture in 2010, the IDF policy regarding the use of force "has drawn lessons from the years that preceded the war," adding that "the main component" in the military's new policy was "deterrence."[115] As a lesson from the war, the IDF shifted from deterrence by denial to deterrence by punishment. It thus began to stress the enormous costs that Hezbollah and Lebanon would pay in any future war. Israel began by communicating far-reaching threats to Hezbollah, and later to the Lebanese government as well, threats in which it committed itself to achieving a quick and decisive victory if war broke out.[116]

Perhaps the starkest articulation of Israel's new deterrence posture was

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112. Nasrallah, speech at Hezbollah Martyrs' Day, Al-Manar, November 12, 2012.
113. "Comprehensive Interview," Al-Mayadin, March 21, 2016.
114. Elli Lieberman, *Conceptualizing Deterrence: Nudging toward Rationality in Middle Eastern Rivalries* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 174–175.
115. Eisenkot, "The Features of a Possible Conflict in the Northern Arena and the Home Front."
116. "We would have to do everything we can to shorten the battle," Gantz said in 2012. Northern Command Chief Yair Golan added, "We need to prepare to shorten the battle and decide it quickly. The Northern Command is prepared to hit Hezbollah in the fastest and most fierce and decisive fashion." See "What's Hot with Razi Barkai," IDF Radio, October 30, 2014.

made in October 2008 in an interview with Chief of Northern Command Gadi Eisenkot, in which he first introduced a doctrine that he unofficially code-named the "Dahiyah doctrine." The new doctrine took its name from Israel's massive bombing of Hezbollah's stronghold in the southern suburb of Beirut, the Dahiyah (Arabic: suburb), in 2006. In a statement designed to communicate Israel's capacity and resolve to abandon any restraints, the Israeli general, who was appointed IDF chief of staff in 2015, warned that in any future war with Hezbollah "we will apply disproportionate force and wreak damage and destruction upon any village from which fire is opened on Israel. As far as we are concerned, those would be military bases . . . this is not a recommendation. This is the plan. It has already been approved."[117] Eisenkot's far-reaching threat would be ratcheted up even further in subsequent years to include an explicit threat, which had been missing from his interview, to devastate high-value Lebanese assets in addition to Hezbollah targets. Any distinction between Lebanese and Hezbollah assets would from now on be erased.

Referring to a potential war with Hezbollah, IDF Chief of Staff Benjamin Gantz remarked in 2012 that he "would not advise any Lebanese to be in Lebanon" if a war broke out, adding that "I know where things would be harder. They won't ask who won."[118] Gantz used the strongest of terms when, having already threatened to turn Lebanon's clock back "not twenty" years but "dozens of years" in any future conflict,[119] he voiced the staggering threat to "take Lebanon and knock it and everything in it 70–80 years back, and then see what happens."[120] Israel's threat to turn any future war with Hezbollah into a war with Lebanon per se was communicated to the Lebanese government on multiple occasions both publicly and privately.[121] "We have made it clear that the Lebanese Government, which grants legitimacy to Hezbollah

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117. Alex Fishman and Ariela Ringel Hoffman, "I Possess Vast Power, I Will Not Have Any Excuses," *Yediot Aharonot*, October 3, 2008.

118. Newscast, Channel 2, February 18, 2012.

119. Newscast, Channel 2, June 9, 2014.

120. Ben Caspit and Noam Amir, "The War and the Criticism: Benny Gantz in Comprehensive Interview," *Maariv*, October 3, 2014. In April 2015, the IDF Galilee division commander, a brigadier general, raised the bar even higher, to setting Lebanon back 200 years. See Amir Bohbot, "Galilee Division Commander: War Will Take Lebanon 200 Back," *Walla!* April 9, 2015. A year later, a high-ranking IDF officer was cited as telling a Saudi-affiliated, London-based news website that Israel was capable of setting Lebanon back 300 years. See Majdi al-Halabi, "Israel Threatens to Take Lebanon 300 Years Back," *Elaph*, March 8, 2016.

121. Barak Ravid, "Netanyahu Threatens Lebanese Government: Israel to Retaliate against Any Hezbollah Provocation," *Haaretz*, August 27, 2012; Amos Harel and Yoav Stern, "Israeli Security Sources: UNIFIL, Lebanon Not Doing Anything to Restrain Hezbollah," *Haaretz*, November 23, 2008; Shlomo Tzesna, "Barak: Hezbollah Victory Would Enable Us to Act against Lebanon," *Yisrael Hayom*, September 27, 2009; and Hagay Einav, "Barak to Lebanon: You Are Responsible If Situation Deteriorates," *Ynet*, January 12, 2010.

and its armed forces, will be held accountable as a state for every future action it takes against Israel," Defense Minister Ehud Barak warned in 2009.[122]

Explicating the merits of "clarifying in advance, and not just threatening to destroy Lebanese national infrastructure—excluding water supply, hospitals, schools, and the like—in response to any full-scale attack by Hezbollah on Israeli citizenry," Ehud Barak pointed to what he regards as a fundamental Israeli strategic error in the 2006 Lebanon War: Israel's decision to differentiate between Hezbollah and the Lebanese state and attack only Hezbollah, at the request of the United States.[123] The former defense minister went on to say that, by avoiding the targeting of high-value Lebanese assets, "Israel undercut its own well-known, stated deterrence policy vis-à-vis Lebanon and Hezbollah." Had Israel targeted Lebanese main infrastructure assets in 2006, Barak added, "not only would Hezbollah have been forced to choose between its various competing identities and loyalties, but the Lebanese government itself would have been compelled to, and would have found itself effective in acting quickly to put an end to the conflict in order to cut losses and damage and rescue its valued assets. Under such circumstances, Hezbollah would have found it complicated to resist the demand to stop the fighting and rocket-launching." This, Barak argues, "would have cut the war shorter and would have probably reduced the overall death toll. This all-out response policy, in which Israel sees the government of Lebanon as the party ultimately responsible for any major attack on Israel from Lebanese territory, and will therefore forcefully respond accordingly against its main infrastructure targets, must remain Israel's standing policy."[124]

ENHANCING CREDIBILITY THROUGH INTELLIGENCE DISCLOSURE

Another core deterrence prerequisite is credibility. As stressed in the theoretical section, threats need to be perceived by the challenger as credible. One important way in which Israel's postwar actions differed from its prewar behavior pertains to its credibility. In 2010 Israel established a precedent when it made available an intelligence map specifying Hezbollah's military deployment in the southern Lebanese Shiite village of al-Khiyyam. The map featured ammunition depots inside private homes, close to schools, and in proximity to a local hospital.[125] Northern Command Chief Eisenkot later noted in a lecture,

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122. Nir Hason and Elli Ashkenazi, "Defense Minister Barak: Deterrence Restored but Situation in North Remains Volatile," *Haaretz*, July 9, 2009.
123. On this matter, see Charles D. Freilich, *Zion's Dilemma: How Israel Makes National Security Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012), pp. 199–221.
124. Author interview with Ehud Barak, New York, November 26, 2015; and author telephone interview with Ehud Barak, January 13, 2016.
125. Anshel Pfeffer, "IDF Revealed Detailed Intelligence on Hezbollah Deployment," *Haaretz*, July 8, 2010.

"They knew that the data that we published was real, and this caused great anxiety." The disclosure of "hard-earned intelligence" secrets, he said, reflected the need for a different "operational response" given "the elusive component of deterrence, the boundaries of which stretch far beyond the military realm."[126]

A second, far more detailed map was published the following year in the *Washington Post*, disclosing intelligence gathered on Hezbollah installations in hundreds of Lebanese towns and villages.[127] In both cases, the message behind these unprecedented moves was unmistakable. Hezbollah's intimate military secrets and assets were transparent to the Israeli intelligence services, and thus vulnerable to its airpower. This tactic was a display of Israeli resolve as well; Israel was in effect signaling to the international community that large parts of Lebanon would suffer immense damage in another war. Giving away these intelligence maps by Israel could be regarded as a costly signal as well, in light of the intelligence loss to Israel.

There were other ways in which Israel's behavior met the theoretical standards of deterrence after 2006—for example, in its repeated communication and enforcement of redlines. As early as August 2008, Israel had been engaging in an effort to deter Hezbollah from obtaining "balance-breaking" military hardware. Such hardware included advanced air defense systems capable of curtailing Israel's capacity to carry out its threats,[128] and potentially compromise the credibility of its deterrence posture. As Syria descended into chaos, Israel's redlines were articulated in ever-more explicit terms.[129]

There were, however, considerable drawbacks to Israel's introduction of redlines, which indirectly legitimated a broad range of below-threshold bargaining. Israel's designation of particular military hardware as off limits was an implicit signal that the Israelis would tolerate Hezbollah's acquisition of other means. Ultimately, Hezbollah proved capable of harnessing its vast stockpile of rockets to obtain more advanced systems and thus enhance its deterrence posture.

In the following section, I analyze the various stages of Hezbollah's quest for credible deterrence. As I show, its deterrence behavior was in part shaped by Israel's own postwar deterrence efforts.

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126. Eisenkot, "The Features of a Possible Conflict in the Northern Arena and the Home Front."
127. Janine Zacharia, "Israel, Long Critical of Assad, May Prefer He Stay After All," *Washington Post*, March 30, 2011.
128. Amos Harel and Yoav Stern, "Hezbollah Accidently Shoots Down Lebanese Helicopter Mistaken for Israeli," *Haaretz*, August 29, 2008.
129. Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon, speech at the Seventh Annual International Conference of the Institute for National Security Studies, January 27, 2014.

Meeting the Theoretical Prerequisites of Deterrence

Whether in the political or military realm, one of Hezbollah's recurring attributes is its gradual and incremental execution of action. In the case at hand, Hezbollah's incremental approach applied to both its postwar military buildup and its effort to satisfy the prerequisites of deterrence theory. In this regard, not only did Hezbollah's deterrence communications shift from general to specific, but Hezbollah gradually and systematically advanced toward fulfilling the various conceptual prerequisites of deterrence. After 2006, Hezbollah's deterrence messages encompassed four prominent themes: developing capabilities, communicating resolve, packaging capabilities into coercive threats, and making its threats credible. These core elements supported Hezbollah's deterrence-by-punishment strategy by emphasizing the costs Israel would suffer in an all-out war.

HEZBOLLAH'S QUEST FOR CREDIBLE DETERRENCE: DEVELOPING CAPABILITIES
Of the theoretical prerequisites of deterrence, one would expect to find a potential deterrer giving priority to military capabilities. Hezbollah has indeed made significant strides in augmenting its material capabilities, both in quantity and in quality since the 2006 war. These efforts were not only a result of the war itself, but a response to Israel's maximalist postwar threats as well.

Hezbollah implemented its military buildup incrementally, in two stages. First, it concentrated on replenishing and enhancing its stockpile of short-range rockets. In early 2010, having amassed approximately 40,000 short-range rockets, the organization shifted to the second stage of its military buildup, this time obtaining long-range missiles. Hezbollah's military buildup was monitored closely by Israel and reported periodically in the Israeli media.

Six months after the war, Hezbollah had already stockpiled more than the approximately 14,000 rockets it had possessed on the eve of the 2006 Lebanon War.[130] Its rearmament with short-range Katyusha rockets continued uninterrupted; and by June 2008, Israel's military intelligence put their number at 30,000.[131] By early 2010, Hezbollah had amassed more than 40,000 rockets;[132] and in January 2014, the IDF intelligence put their number at 100,000.[133]

Whereas until late 2009 Hezbollah's military buildup appeared mainly quantity driven, from that point onward a special focus would be on quality

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130. Gideon Alon, "Intelligence Corps: Hezbollah Stronger Than before the War," *Haaretz*, February 20, 2007.
131. "Lebanon: IDF Generals Brief UNSC Members on Hizballah Build-Up in UNIFIL AOR," confidential U.S. cable, *Wikileaks*, June 10, 2008.
132. Amos Harel, "Rocketland," *Haaretz*, April 17, 2010.
133. "Intel Head: 170,000 Rockets and Missiles Threaten Israel," *Jerusalem Post*, January 29, 2014.

and precision. The first significant upgrade in the quality of Hezbollah's capabilities occurred around the summer of 2009, when Syria supplied the organization with GPS-guided M-600 surface-to-surface missiles.[134] A further upgrade in quality occurred early in 2010 when Hezbollah, in defiance of Israeli threats, received Scud missiles from Syria. Several Israeli media outlets soon carried reports on Hezbollah's further procurement of more precision-guided M-600 missiles.[135] A senior IDF intelligence officer confirmed this development, describing Hezbollah's long-range missiles as "just the tip of the iceberg."[136] By December 2010, according to a Pentagon source Hezbollah was in possession of Scud-D missiles as well as forty to fifty Iranian-made Fateh-110 guided missiles.[137]

Hezbollah's prowess was also exhibited in its core fighting force, which grew from several thousand fighters in 2006 to at least 20,000 a decade later (with another 20,000 to 25,000 in the reservist force).[138] Nasrallah himself alluded to this increase several times, and on one occasion said that Israel would encounter "tens of thousands of capable and trained fighters" in any future war.[139]

Although Hezbollah typically refrains from publicly disclosing its military capabilities, these capabilities are nevertheless reflected in its explicit threats to Israel. Indeed, according to a Lebanese journalist with close ties to Hezbollah, in order "to deter the enemy," the organization made a "conscious decision" after the 2006 war to "break its complete silence surrounding its military capabilities and plans."[140] In a television interview marking the first anniversary of the 2006 war, Nasrallah referred to the organization's possession of long-range rockets, saying that Hezbollah had retained the capacity to hit "any point and target" in Israel.[141] The following year, he warned Israel that its "entire home front" was within reach.[142] In 2009, in a speech marking the third anniversary of the war, he declared that if Israel was under the impression that it could

134. Yaakov Lapin, "Missile Defense Expert Warns of Growing Strategic Threat," *Jerusalem Post*, January 15, 2010.
135. Jonathan Lis and Amos Harel, "Syria Gave Advanced M-600 Missiles to Hezbollah, Defense Officials Claim," *Haaretz*, May 5, 2010.
136. Yaakov Katz and Rebecca Anna Stoil, "Hezbollah Received Hundreds of Syrian Missiles," *Jerusalem Post*, May 5, 2010.
137. Michael R. Gordon and Andrew W. Lehren, "U.S. Strains to Stop Arms Flow," *New York Times*, December 6, 2010.
138. Dan Williams, "Israel Says Islamic State Could Attack It and Jordan after Syria Setbacks," Reuters, January 18, 2016.
139. "Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah's Address at Funeral of Martyred Commander Imad Mughniyah, al-Hajj Radwan," Al-Manar, February 14, 2008.
140. Ibrahim al-Amin, "Why Will Nasrallah Speak Today?" *Al-Akhbar*, March 21, 2016.
141. "Special Meeting," Al-Jazirah, July 23, 2007.
142. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at Islamic Resistance Week rally, Al-Manar, February 22, 2008.

"bomb every city or town in Lebanon, then I hereby tell you that we are today capable of targeting each and every city and town all across [Israel]." Nasrallah said Israel had begun to discuss "a new war strategy, which does not make do with air raids. It is also talking about a land operation and wide-scale invasions." In response, in an apparent allusion to Hezbollah's possession of anti-tank weaponry, he invited Israel to "equip your tanks with whatever you like," adding that Israel's tanks and battalions would still "be defeated and destroyed in our hills, valleys, villages, and mountains."[143]

Hezbollah, Nasrallah warned, had established "a bank of targets consisting of many targets. Their coordinates are in the hands of the resistance, they are within the range of our missiles, and our missiles are already directed at them. . . . What does this constitute? It constitutes capability, strength, and real deterrence."[144]

Lastly, Nasrallah pointed to Israel's conflict with the Gaza Strip to illustrate the distinction between a conflict vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip and a potential war with Hezbollah. Speaking in the wake of IDF Operation Pillar of Defense in the Gaza Strip, Nasrallah addressed Israel, saying: "The enemy should know what awaits it if it attacks Lebanon. Israel, who was shaken by a handful of Fajr-5 rockets in the course of eight days, how could it cope with thousands of rockets that would hit Tel Aviv and elsewhere if it attacked Lebanon?"[145]

COMMUNICATING RESOLVE THROUGH PUBLIC STATEMENTS

Another core deterrence prerequisite is resolve. In this realm, too, a close examination of Nasrallah's verbal statements displays his methodical communication of Hezbollah's resolve. Resolve was communicated by means of public messages as well as by tacit action deliberately designed to be picked up on the southern side of the border.

Statements, interviews, and speeches are perhaps the principal methods for communicating resolve to an opponent as well as to one's own public. Addressing a Lebanese audience weeks before the 2006 war, Nasrallah argued that if the IDF invaded Lebanon it would "suffer many fatalities and would not be capable of holding on to the territory."[146] His postwar references to a potential Israeli land invasion were systematic and far-reaching.

143. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech marking the third anniversary of the 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, August 14, 2009.
144. "The Story of July—Special Episode," Al-Mayadin, September 3, 2012.
145. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech on the occasion of 10th day of Muharram (Ashura), Al-Manar, November 25, 2012.
146. Nasrallah, speech at Resistance Culture Conference in Beirut, Al-Manar, Al-Manar, May 23, 2006.

In February 2008, Nasrallah warned Israel—and even swore by the name of God, a rare act on his part—that "in any future war we shall fight you on the battlefield, on the land, in a manner that you have never experienced throughout your entire history . . . and your military will be wiped out in the south. Your tanks and whatever has been left of your prestige and deterrence will be destroyed. Israel will be left without a military. And Israel without a military will not last."[147] He stepped up this rhetoric even further in 2009, claiming that Hezbollah was now capable of defeating "five divisions, a hundred divisions, and the entire Israeli army," and could even "destroy the entire Israeli army in southern Lebanon."[148] On another occasion, Nasrallah warned Israel that war with Hezbollah "would be very, very, very, very, very, very—I'll go on until I run out of breath—costly."[149]

COMMUNICATING RESOLVE THROUGH INDIRECT MEANS

Whereas direct public communication of resolve could be dismissed as cheap talk or an attempt to boost one's morale, rather than as a genuine effort to deter the adversary, it would be more difficult to apply the same argument to an actor's attempt to communicate resolve through private channels. Hezbollah demonstrated an ability to communicate its resolve tacitly and secretly, outside the public gaze.

In late 2007, it responded to a high-profile IDF rehearsal of an all-out war scenario along Israel's northern border by deploying thousands of combatants in southern Lebanon—albeit in plain clothes and without actual weapons. Hezbollah sources later confided to the pro-Hezbollah daily *Al-Akhbar* that the organization had deliberately used an unsecured communication system throughout the three-day exercise so as to verify that this semi-virtual military "dry run," in which the organization rehearsed a scenario of another war with Israel, was noticed by the latter's intelligence services and resonated with the Israeli military.[150] Doing so enabled a risk-averse Hezbollah to overcome its diplomatic and military constraints, and communicate a low-risk but nonetheless powerful deterrence signal to Israel.

Hezbollah pursued a similar indirect tactic in early 2015, when, as part of its military preparations for a retaliatory attack on Israel, the organization again

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147. Nasrallah, speech at Islamic Resistance Week rally, Al-Manar, February 22, 2008.
148. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at Resistance and Liberation rally in Baalbek, Al-Manar, May 29, 2009.
149. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at International Quds Day, Al-Manar, August 17, 2012.
150. "Nasrallah Commands Largest Resistance Drill," *Al-Akhbar*, November 5, 2007; and Ibrahim al-Amin, "The Message behind the Resistance Drill and Its Internal Lebanese Considerations," *Al-Akhbar*, November 7, 2007.

deliberately conducted its preparations over unsecured communication systems, including cell phones. Referring to the efficacy of this tactic, Nasrallah remarked in retrospect that Israel had indeed realized that Hezbollah was prepared to go "further than anyone in this world can even imagine," explaining that "this had to do with deterrence."[151]

Admittedly, there was at least one instance prior to the 2006 war in which Hezbollah, possibly in an attempt to deter Israel, placed all of its emergency units on high alert and was prepared to fire thousands of rockets into Israel.[152] As far as is known, Hezbollah did not observe similar precautions before its abduction of two IDF soldiers in July 2006, which sparked the war.

COMMUNICATING RESOLVE THROUGH CALIBRATED COERCIVE ACTION
On a number of occasions, Hezbollah communicated its resolve to Israel by means of calibrated coercive action, designed to signal to Israel that its violations would not go unpunished. I argue that all these signals were in fact costly, given Hezbollah's considerable involvement at that time in the Syrian civil war. One such costly signal took place in August 2013, when Hezbollah detonated two explosive charges on an Israeli ground force that had crossed the border into Lebanon. The following week, Nasrallah announced that from now on "we will not be lenient toward Israeli ground violations of our territory."[153] He later added, "The Israeli tourism along the Lebanese border and beyond it has ended."[154] A more striking case in point has been Hezbollah's efforts to manipulate Israel's perception of the organization's resolve and constraints given its costly preoccupation in Syria. In February 2014, Israel targeted a Hezbollah-bound weapons shipment moments after the convoy had crossed from Syria into Lebanon.[155] Among Israel's military analysts, there was a consensus that Hezbollah's involvement in Syria rendered any retaliation unlikely.[156] Yet over the next three weeks, Hezbollah retaliated, albeit without an official claim of responsibility, in a string of attacks against IDF tar-

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151. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at celebration in honor of "Resistance Martyrs in Quneitra," Al-Manar, January 30, 2015.
152. In March 2002, Hezbollah initiated a thirteen-day streak of shelling, during which it bombarded several IDF positions. Hezbollah's emergency procedures were picked up by Israeli intelligence, which construed them as a "strategic entrapment" designed to drag Israel into a confrontation. Author interview with Zeevi-Farkash.
153. "The Story of the July War," Al-Mayadin, August 14, 2013.
154. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at seventh anniversary of 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, August 16, 2013.
155. Karl Vick and Aaron J. Klein, "Israel Bombs Hizballah Missile Convoy on Syria-Lebanon Border," *Time*, February 25, 2014, http://world.time.com/2014/02/25/israel-bombs-hizballah-missile-convoy-on-syria-lebanon-border/.
156. Newscast, Channel 10, February 25, 2014; and Newscast, Channel 2, February 25, 2014.

gets along Israel's borders with Syria and Lebanon. After a few days of uncertainty regarding the identity of the perpetrators, the Israeli military concluded that the incidents were in fact calibrated "signals" from Hezbollah.[157] Three weeks after the last of those retaliatory signals, Nasrallah claimed responsibility for the attacks, which he described as retaliation for Israel's attempts to "exploit the current circumstances to change the rules of the game." Hezbollah's retaliation for the Israeli air raid, he continued, "does not have to do with the rules of engagement but rather with the issue of deterrence."[158] This last statement indicated that Hezbollah's calculated coercive measures were designed to maintain deterrence with Israel rather than to challenge the status quo. Nasrallah went on to threaten that "in cases when necessary," Hezbollah would go ahead and retaliate for Israeli violations along the international border "in context and in proportion."[159]

HEZBOLLAH LEARNS TO DETER: FROM CAPABILITIES TO COERCIVE THREATS
The acquisition of long-range rockets, and especially of high-accuracy missiles, enabled Hezbollah to introduce a series of redlines, or in Hezbollah's terminology "equations" (*muadalat*), that it would impose on Israel in the event of war. Designed to place limitations on Israel's military superiority, Hezbollah's postwar equations revolved around its ability to hit high-value assets and deter Israel from escalating its actions to the point of all-out war. Explaining the rationale behind Hezbollah's postwar "equations," Nasrallah cited the need to "protect the country"[160] and "to explain to the enemy that any future war against Lebanon will have new rules and new equations."[161] Israel, he noted further in 2012, "is saying that its aggression will not be subject to any limitations. So we will not abide by any limitations either."[162] To put it differently, Hezbollah proposed to Israel a deal of limitations in exchange for limitations.

Hezbollah's equations not only signified the advancement of its military capabilities, but especially emphasized its ability to pinpoint specific high-value assets in Israel. Each new equation thus represented a higher level and more precise threat. The first of these equations, which Nasrallah introduced in

157. Amir Rapaport, "Hezbollah's Attacks, IDF's Questions," *ISRAELDEFENSE*, March 20, 2014; and Alex Fishman, "Road-Side Bomb for Signaling Purposes," *Yediot Aharonot*, March 24, 2014.
158. "Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah in Comprehensive Interview with Al-Safir," *Al-Safir*, April 7, 2014.
159. Nasrallah, speech at Resistance and Liberation Day rally marking the anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, Al-Manar, May 25, 2014.
160. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at rally marking the fourth anniversary of 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, August 3, 2010.
161. Nasrallah, speech marking the third anniversary of the 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, August 14, 2009.
162. "The Story of July—Special Episode," Al-Mayadin, September 3, 2012.

August 2009, was framed specifically as a response to the Dahiyah doctrine. "For over a year now, the enemy has been talking about a Dahiyah doctrine," Nasrallah told his audience. Because Israel was "speaking of a new equation in any future war," he continued, Hezbollah had the right to explain the following to Israel: "In the July War we told you: if you bomb Beirut we will bomb Tel Aviv. Today we are saying: if you bomb Beirut or the Dahiyah we will bomb Tel Aviv."[163]

The second equation was introduced a year later. Turning to Israel's decisionmakers, Nasrallah warned: "If you destroy a building in the Dahiyah we will destroy buildings in Tel Aviv." This warning, he pointed out, "implies different capabilities." He then narrowed down the threat even further: "I am not saying that if you attack the Dahiyah we will attack Tel Aviv. Rather, I am saying that if you attack the Rafik al-Hariri International Airport in Beirut, we will attack Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. If you bomb our ports— we will bomb your ports. If you attack our refineries, we will bomb your refineries. If you bomb our factories, we will bomb your factories. And if you bomb our power plants—we will bomb your power plants!"[164]

Nasrallah would refine this equation further in 2012, possibly in the wake of Hezbollah's procurement of more advanced precision-guided missiles: "Not only are we capable of hitting the city of Tel Aviv. . . . We are capable of hitting very specific targets in Tel Aviv and anywhere else in occupied Palestine."[165] In 2016 he claimed that if a Hezbollah missile were to strike Israel's ammonium facilities in Haifa, it would produce the impact of a nuclear bomb.[166] In 2010 and 2011, Hezbollah introduced another equation, this time implying that Hezbollah had acquired shore-to-sea cruise missiles, a fact that Israel has since confirmed.[167] Speaking on the one-decade anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, Nasrallah warned Israel: "In any future war you may wish to start against Lebanon, if you impose a naval blockade on our shores and ports, all military, private, and commercial ships headed to the ports of Palestine all along the Mediterranean will be within the reach of the Islamic Resistance missiles!"[168] Nasrallah expanded on this equation the following

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163. Nasrallah, speech marking the third anniversary of the 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, August 14, 2009.

164. Nasrallah, speech at rally marking the fourth anniversary of 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, August 3, 2010.

165. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech in honor of the renovation of the Dahiyah following the 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, May 11, 2012.

166. Nasrallah, annual speech in honor of Martyred Commanders, Al-Manar, February 16, 2016.

167. "Full Text of Netanyahu 2015 Address to the UN General Assembly," *Times of Israel*, October 2, 2015.

168. Nasrallah, Resistance and Liberation Day speech, Al-Manar, May 25, 2010.

year. Lebanon, he remarked, was capable of protecting its natural gas fields "not because it possesses a powerful air force, but because of the fact that those capable of hitting those installations—they too have gas and oil installations."[169]

Hezbollah did not introduce new equations after 2012, assessing that those in place were "sufficient for realizing the necessary level of deterrence," as explained by Nasrallah in early 2015.[170] He did, however, make references to Hezbollah's military capabilities in the context of the escalation of the civil war in Syria. In so doing, Nasrallah sought to preempt or dispel any serious thoughts in Israel of exploiting its preoccupation in the Syrian arena or the potential crumbling of the regime to wage an assault on Hezbollah. Nasrallah thus warned Israel in early 2013 that the organization was "fully equipped" should Israel decide to launch a war. "All that we need is already here in Lebanon. We do not need anything, neither from Syria nor from Iran," Nasrallah said in 2013. "We have enough of everything. All that we will need in the next confrontation—if it occurs—is with us, here in Lebanon, and we are safeguarding it here in Lebanon."[171]

Moreover, Nasrallah later presented his organization's involvement in the Syrian fighting as advantageous, arguing that "in some respects, it is a strong point" for Hezbollah, and that for the first time the group's fighters were gaining "qualitative" combat experience in urban warfare.[172] As I show, this argument came to reflect Israel's assessment of Hezbollah's involvement in Syria.

HEZBOLLAH LEARNS TO DETER: MAKING THREATS CREDIBLE

A core theoretical prerequisite of deterrence stipulates that threats must be perceived as credible to be effective. For its part, Hezbollah deems its credibility a source of strength,[173] and Nasrallah has gone to great lengths to convince Israel of the credibility of his threats, saying that Hezbollah's equations derived their importance from their being "founded on facts" and from the fact that Israel "knows that this talk is real."[174] On another occasion, he remarked: "[T]he Israelis confirmed everything I said in my previous speeches," adding

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169. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech marking the fifth anniversary of the 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, July 25, 2011.
170. "Comprehensive Interview," Al-Mayadin, January 15, 2015.
171. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, annual speech in honor of Martyred Commanders, Al-Manar, February 16, 2013.
172. "Comprehensive Interview," Al-Mayadin, January 15, 2015.
173. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speech at Al-Nur Radio Silver Jubilee Celebration Ceremony, Al-Manar, May 9, 2013.
174. Nasrallah, speech at rally marking the fourth anniversary of 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, August 3, 2010.

that "this is important because it means that the message went through. I want the message to go through."[175]

In one instance, as a means of bolstering his credibility, Nasrallah took time to describe the preparations that go into the issuing of a threat. Each threat, he said, was double-checked and confirmed with the relevant Hezbollah commander. "If I am not absolutely convinced and know for a fact that all the factors needed to execute the threat have been established, I cannot utter even one word on the matter," he said, adding that the "slightest reluctance" in the voice of a military commander was sufficient to call off the issuing of a threat.[176] Nasrallah sought to preempt any attempt to dismiss his threats as psychological warfare. In 2007, for instance, he noted: "Some say: you are waging psychological warfare. Indeed, that is correct. It is part of the battle. But I wage credible psychological warfare. I talk about facts, not lies."[177] On another occasion, he added that Hezbollah "has never threatened to carry out something it was not capable of carrying out."[178]

Hezbollah Implements Deterrence by Denial

The aforementioned threats, signals, and statements encompassed Hezbollah's pursuit of deterrence by punishment—that is, deterring Israel by stressing the costs it would incur in another all-out conflict. Hezbollah has pursued a deterrence-by-denial strategy as well, deliberately designed to belittle, even trivialize, the gains Israel may hope to achieve in a future conflict. At the most strategic level, Hezbollah would deny Israel the ability to achieve a quick and decisive victory. It would presumably do this by maintaining a survivable retaliatory force that would be invulnerable to an Israeli first strike, thus leaving open the option of a protracted war of attrition once deterrence has failed. In this respect, securing a significant residual strike-back capability was an important component of Hezbollah's denial strategy.

Deterrence theory expects deterrence to fail when one side believes that it can score a quick and decisive victory (through blitzkrieg). As noted in the theoretical section, Mearsheimer anchored this conceptual argument in the case of Israel's surprise attack on the Egyptian air force in 1967, a first strike that effectively decided the war in Israel's favor. Nasrallah, too, has drawn on that his-

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175. Nasrallah, speech at Islamic Resistance's Support Body annual Iftar event, Al-Manar, August 1, 2012.
176. "The Story of July—Special Episode," Al-Mayadin, September 3, 2012.
177. Nasrallah, speech at Divine Victory Rally in Southern Suburb of Beirut, Al-Manar, August 14, 2007.
178. "The Story of the July War," Al-Mayadin, August 14, 2013.

torical case as part of his preemptive efforts to deter a potential Israeli surprise attack, claiming that surprise first-strike attacks remain a prominent theme in Israel's strategic thinking.[179] Hezbollah's missiles, he said, were not as vulnerable as the Egyptian aircraft were in 1967.[180]

Nasrallah's verbal endeavors to make Israel doubt its own intelligence, and by implication to question its ability to undermine Hezbollah's military strategy, can be understood as part of Hezbollah's attempts at deterrence by denial. Nasrallah went to great lengths to make Israel doubt an achievement that continues to be regarded as its most paramount intelligence and operational accomplishment in the 2006 war—the destruction of the lion's share of Hezbollah's medium- and long-range rocket arsenal. He thus dedicated a good part of his speech marking the sixth anniversary of the 2006 war to a retrospective debunking of this intelligence success, code-named Operation Specific Gravity, a thirty-four-minute, seamlessly coordinated aerial operation in which dozens of Israeli fighter jets largely destroyed Hezbollah's "strategic" rocket arsenal. What Israel had long regarded and portrayed as an outstanding intelligence coup was now being depicted by Nasrallah as an impeccable counterintelligence scheme by his organization, claiming that Hezbollah had secretly relocated its long-range rocket arsenal prior to the Israeli attack.[181] Whatever the factual credibility of this retrospective claim, it offered another important glimpse into Hezbollah's deterrence mind-set. At stake was not the historical narrative per se, but the manner in which this case could be leveraged to support Hezbollah's efforts to manipulate Israel's calculations and instill second thoughts in the minds of its decisionmakers about the quality of its intelligence.

In October 2012, Hezbollah claimed responsibility for conducting an unmanned aerial vehicle mission over Israel—an operation that, according to Nasrallah, illustrated Hezbollah's ability "to conceal its capabilities and maintain deterrence vis-à-vis Israel."[182] It was no coincidence that Nasrallah was later to make the following comment: "Take a huge military with vast capabilities, an air force, tanks, and missiles. Without information about the enemy, it can be likened to a blind elephant that throws punches all over the place and squanders its capabilities and energies on the wrong targets."[183] That Israel

179. "The Story of July—Special Episode," Al-Mayadin, September 3, 2012.
180. Nasrallah, speech marking the sixth anniversary of the 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, July 18, 2012; and Nasrallah, speech at International Quds Day, Al-Manar, August 17, 2012.
181. Nasrallah, speech marking the sixth anniversary of the 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, July 18, 2012.
182. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, televised address following downing of a Hezbollah-operated reconnaissance drone over Israel, Al-Manar, October 11, 2012.
183. Nasrallah, speech at Hezbollah Martyrs' Day, Al-Manar, November 12, 2012.

was a "blind elephant" implied that Hezbollah could always retain a degree of resilience and invulnerability—an integral part of its ability to deter Israel.

A similar theme was particularly salient in Nasrallah's discussion of the resilience of Hezbollah's strike-back capability. The Hezbollah leader appeared to be drawing on nuclear deterrence and the absolute, inescapable nature of nuclear weapons (i.e., when both parties can secure second-strike capability) when he claimed that even if Israel mounted a devastating first strike on Hezbollah, the latter was certain to retain a residual capability sufficient to inflict unacceptable pain on Israel. Addressing Israeli decisionmakers, he explained at length: "At the end of the day, there will be missiles or launchers that you will not know about and will thus remain invulnerable to your first strike. Even if these missiles are the last and only ones remaining—that is, the worst-case scenario for us and the absolute best-case scenario for Israel—even that small number of missiles could turn the lives of hundreds of thousands of Israelis into hell. In other words, don't bank on first strike. . . . This forms a real deterrence capability and a deterrent force."[184] On another occasion, he addressed Israel's decisionmakers, saying: "In any future war, we know what your opening move will be," adding, "We are expecting it, and we shall surprise you as you act to carry out your first strike."[185]

Hezbollah's attempts at deterrence by denial, aimed at denying Israel a quick and decisive victory, did not end at that. On several occasions, Nasrallah acted to dissuade Israel from attacking by claiming that the relatively underdeveloped Lebanon could not suffer more than limited damage. In fact, it was the far more modernized Israel that had more to lose from war, thus rendering it more vulnerable. He therefore noted, "We have half an airport. They have several. They have seaports. We have one power plant, but they have several large ones. We have half a refinery, which I'm not even sure works. They on the other hand have been blessed with many refineries. We have several factories; they have huge industrial zones, of all types and all kinds. The infrastructure in Israel is bigger and more significant than what we have here."[186] Alluding once again to this balance of vulnerability, Nasrallah said in 2012 that "whereas we need to replace and upgrade our power plants," Israel "has power plants—several of which are in central Israel. If those were to be targeted, not only would they live in complete darkness but the economic implications would also be vast."[187] A year later he remarked, "We have to re-

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184. "The Story of July—Special Episode," Al-Mayadin, September 3, 2012.
185. Nasrallah, speech marking the sixth anniversary of the 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, July 18, 2012.
186. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, annual speech in honor of Martyred Commanders, Al-Manar, February 16, 2010.
187. "The Story of July—Special Episode," Al-Mayadin, September 3, 2012.

place our power plants anyway, isn't that so? They, however, have several power plants, which [can be destroyed] with no more than a few missiles. Israel will submerge into darkness. A few missiles and Israel will be in complete darkness." Referring to the largest power plant in Israel, located in the northern city of Hadera, Nasrallah commented: "There is a power plant in northern Palestine, not far from the center of the country, which the Israelis themselves are saying it would take six months to repair if it was bombed. Can Israel endure six months of darkness? We in Lebanon are used to it."[188] Whether he was bluffing, somewhat bluffing, or not bluffing at all, that Nasrallah has repeatedly communicated such messages is reflective of the deterrence value Hezbollah believes it derives from them.

How Hezbollah's Deterrence Messaging Shaped Israeli Perceptions

That Hezbollah's deterrence effort has reshaped Israel's threat perception can be seen in the latter's assessments of the costs of another war with the organization. Israel's overarching strategic concern pertains to the robustness of Hezbollah's military apparatus, which renders it potentially invulnerable to Israel's air superiority. An invulnerable Hezbollah military apparatus means that an Israeli air campaign will fail to destabilize the organization's military strategy; Israel would thus fall short of delivering a decisive blow to Hezbollah's military apparatus at a tolerable cost. The resilience of Hezbollah's military strategy means that it would likely retain a capacity to inflict potentially unacceptable pain on Israel regardless of the latter's first strike. Under these conditions, a quick and decisive war is unlikely. This reality is reflected in the "IDF Strategy," a document in which the Israeli military explicates the new threats Israel faces. These new threats, the document says, challenge the IDF's operating concept: "The main change is the development of the sub-state enemy, such as Hezbollah and Hamas, and threats from states that do not share a border with Israel."[189]

Of all the military hardware that Hezbollah has acquired since 2006, its precision-guided missiles have had the most compelling impact on Israel's threat perception. Hezbollah's ability to issue threats, which Israel deems credible, to destroy specific strategic assets within Israel, is what ultimately enhanced its deterrence posture and made deterrence mutual. As explicated by former IDF Intelligence Chief Amos Yadlin, it is not the overall number of

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188. Nasrallah, annual speech in honor of Martyred Commanders, Al-Manar, February 16, 2013.
189. Israel Defense Forces, "Deterring Terror: How Israel Confronts the Next Generation of Threats—English Translation of the Official Strategy of the Israel Defense Forces" (Cambridge, Mass.: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, August 2016), p. 49.

rockets and missiles that Hezbollah possesses that renders it Israel's top enemy. "What does matter is the fact that Hezbollah is constantly improving the accuracy of those long-range missiles, and their ability to carry warheads. Such missiles could hit population centers and Israeli strategic installations."[190] Recall Nasrallah's August 2010 warning that if Israel targeted Lebanon's international airport or the Beirut seaport, Hezbollah would retaliate in kind against the same assets on the Israeli side.[191] One of the Israelis who echoed this threat was no other than the IDF northern command chief, who in 2014 stated that if another war broke out, Israel's international airport and Haifa seaport would be shut down from the first day.[192] Recall also that in 2011, Nasrallah revealed that Hezbollah possessed the capacity to hit "very specific targets" in Tel Aviv.[193] That this message shaped Israel's perception is evident in the words of former IDF Chief of Staff Gantz, who in 2013 said that the next war could start off "with a precision-guided missile that hits the IDF general headquarters in the Kiryah in Tel Aviv. . . . If Hezbollah chooses to hit a specific target anywhere in Israel, it knows how to do it."[194] He subsequently added that "if war breaks out it will be a long and hard one."[195]

Another of Nasrallah's messages that appears to have been adopted by Israel regards Hezbollah's costly preoccupation in the Syrian arena. Until 2014, senior Israeli commanders accentuated the high costs that Hezbollah had been incurring in the Syrian quagmire.[196] Israel's focus later shifted from Hezbollah's losses to the operational advances and expertise the group was presumably gaining in the fighting.[197] This shift is attributable to Hezbollah's verbal messaging and costly signaling, both designed to project resolve and

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190. Ariela Ringel Hofmann, "We Are Surrounded with Threats, but We Have Time to Prepare," *Yediot Aharonot*, January 14, 2016.
191. Nasrallah, speech at rally marking the fourth anniversary of 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, August 3, 2010.
192. Gili Cohen, "High-Ranking IDF Official Criticizes United States: Wrong about Fighting ISIS," *Haaretz*, October 31, 2014.
193. Nasrallah, speech in honor of the renovation of the Dahiyah following the 2006 Lebanon War, Al-Manar, May 11, 2012.
194. Newscast, Channel 2, October 8, 2013.
195. Caspit and Amir, "The War and the Criticism."
196. Perhaps most notably, in June 2013 IDF Chief of Staff Benjamin Gantz said that the Syrian "flames have begun to lick Nasrallah's robe," and that Hezbollah was experiencing its lowest point in years. See Lilach Shoval, "IDF Chief of Staff: 'Nasrallah's Robe Has Caught Fire,'" *Yisrael Hayom*, June 28, 2013.
197. For example, see Gantz's remark that "the bad news for us is that even though Hezbollah is busy, it is gaining offensive experience, which we will encounter." See Ariel Kahana, "Gantz on Iran: 'Faced with No Other Choice, We Would Be Capable of Using Force,'" *NRG*, June 9, 2014. In September 2014, a senior IDF officer said that Hezbollah was "gaining operational expertise in the war in Syria and is improving its capabilities. This is why we are in a completely different situation." See Newscast, Channel 2, September 14, 2014.

maintain deterrence vis-à-vis Israel. As regards the prospects of Israeli deterrence by denial, Israel clearly accepts Nasrallah's assertion that its Iron Dome system, which has proved itself against incoming barrages of rockets from the Gaza Strip, is no match for Hezbollah's vast rocket capacity.[198]

Conclusion

The theoretical purpose of this article has been twofold: to examine the reliability of rational deterrence theory, and to contribute to scholars' understanding of the conditions under which relatively weak actors, including violent nonstate actors, will deter vastly superior opponents. The article explored these related but distinct issues through the prism of the conflict between Israel and the Lebanese Hezbollah before and after the 2006 Lebanon War. This conflict offers a good testing ground, as the parties appear to have developed a robust deterrent relationship, albeit one that has required extensive learning and maintenance over a period of some two and a half decades. That this has taken nearly a generation is an important lesson—stable deterrence requires learning over time. But learning and gaining shared knowledge is indeed feasible, and for a state to deter a nonstate actor (and vice versa) is apparently possible as well.

Apart from the parties' learning process, which included some painful stumbles along the way, the fact that Israel and Hezbollah have not engaged in another war since 2006 stems from the convergence of several developments. Perhaps the most salient of these, and the one most relevant to deterrence theory, pertains to what the parties have purposely done to avoid conflict, which is to manipulate each other's cost-benefit calculus and establish deterrence. Both Israel and Hezbollah have exerted a distinct effort to meet the conditions of deterrence and stabilize the conflict. In that sense, both have learned to deter.

In the case of Hezbollah, the weaker and—as some deterrence skeptics would put it—the less rational of the two parties, the quest for deterrence has been systematic, sophisticated, and highly rational. Hezbollah's behavior reflected a strong understanding of the requirements of deterrence and a clear attempt to meet them. Indeed, deterrence has become Hezbollah's actual policy. The application and maintenance of the core conceptual prerequisites of

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198. For example, in late 2014, IDF Northern Command Chief Yair Golan characterized the rocket threat posed by Hezbollah as "much greater" than that of the Gaza Strip. He said, "[W]e will not be capable of providing the same protective umbrella that was provided by the Iron Dome systems in the south." See "What's Hot with Razi Barkai," IDF Radio, October 30, 2014.

deterrence by both actors is a leading explanation for the current condition, which both refer to as mutual deterrence. That both actors are using deterrence to frame their conflict conceptually is an important development in and of itself, and arguably contributes to deterrence stability.

Apart from the all-too-obvious prerequisite of military capabilities, an area in which Hezbollah has improved considerably in recent years (Israel's military superiority remains constant), this case underlines the importance of communication to deterrence stability. Both parties have invested in the communication of tacit as well as explicit threats to the effect that each other's vulnerability has become inescapable. Hezbollah, in particular, employed verbal messaging to amplify the psychological utility of its military capabilities, reshape Israel's cost-benefit calculus, and cause it to doubt its ability to score a quick victory. If Israel had previously pledged to attain a decisive victory in any future war with Hezbollah, its current challenge, in the words of a top IDF general, is to explain to the public that war with Hezbollah would "not look like a confrontation in the south," with the Gaza Strip.[199] And whereas Israel had previously accentuated the destruction that it would inflict on Hezbollah, its focus has gradually shifted to the costs Israel itself would suffer in case of war. The fact that Israel's own perception and assessments have come to reflect Hezbollah's warnings and threats shows that the latter's deterrence messages were communicated effectively and have been internalized on the southern side of the border.

On the other side of the deterrence fault line, I view Nasrallah's recurring references to deterrence and its core standards, his acknowledgment that deterrence requires more than the sheer possession of military power, and his continuous efforts to eliminate vulnerabilities in Hezbollah's deterrence posture as evidence that deterrence was a volitional effort on its part. Interestingly, whereas Israel's threats have grown increasingly general, Hezbollah's threats have grown focused and specific, to the degree that the organization can credibly threaten to pinpoint specific assets in Israel. The precision aspect in Hezbollah's capabilities has enhanced its deterrence posture. Hezbollah's acquisition of such capabilities begs the question of whether this enhancement will have happened had Israel not communicated such far-reaching threats—namely, the Dahiyah doctrine. Although this question remains unanswered, it nonetheless illustrates the fact that deterrence can bring unintended detrimental consequences.

As noted, this article seeks to fill a gap in scholars' understanding of how weak adversaries deter and coerce states. I argued that the weak will deter the

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199. The statement was made by Golan. See ibid.

strong if they can convince them of their ability to render their own tactical capabilities strategic and the latter's strategic capabilities tactical. At the broadest strategic level, this was reflected in Hezbollah's efforts to convince Israel that its repeated commitment to a quick and decisive victory was unrealistic and that, in fact, not only would Hezbollah prove capable of absorbing a massive Israeli blow, but it would also retain sufficient residual capability—namely, precision-guided missiles—to inflict unacceptable pain on Israel. That Israel today doubts its ability to mount an effective first strike on Hezbollah, and that it openly admits that some of its vital assets would be paralyzed by Hezbollah if war broke out, reflects Israel's understanding that its vast military superiority might not prove effective against Hezbollah's military strategy—at least not at a reasonable cost.

That Israel appears to be taking Hezbollah's threats at face value validates my aforementioned theoretical proposition regarding the reduction of the stronger actor's capabilities to the relatively tactical. The fact that Israel now believes that its vast military advantages could prove ineffective against Hezbollah's military strategy suggests that Israel views the organization's military apparatus as largely resilient to its strategic superiority. While the 2006 war itself, as well as Israel's subsequent confrontations in the Gaza Strip, contributed to this perception, the current case illuminates the significant role of communication in the manipulation of beliefs. Hezbollah's communication efforts reflected its capabilities and its appreciation of the requirements of deterrence. But more than simply reflecting capabilities, Hezbollah's communication efforts projected them, as well as amplified and refined their psychological impact.

Another important implication emanating from this case regards scholars' understanding of the very concept of military asymmetry. Bearing in mind that deterrence theory pertains to the exploitation of vulnerabilities to inflict pain, this case shows that a vast asymmetry in military capabilities does not necessarily spell a similar asymmetry in vulnerability. Hezbollah's military strategy and the geographical proximity between Israel and Lebanon make for relative symmetry in vulnerability. If the weaker actor can impose its preferences on the stronger actor, the relationship becomes essentially symmetrical. It is perhaps at the moment at which the nonstate actor succeeds in getting the state to play by its rules that it begins to take on state-like attributes, and so it becomes a quasi state, which, again, begins the collapse of an asymmetry into symmetry. What does remain asymmetric, however, are the parties' relative gains from mutual deterrence, as it seems that the weaker party stands to gain more from deterrence, and from the stronger actor's acceptance of limitations.

Although this seemingly inescapable reciprocal vulnerability between Israel and Hezbollah has had a stabilizing effect on the conflict, it is hardly an iron-clad guarantee for lasting success. Mutual deterrence proved sufficiently robust to absorb Israel's enforcement of its redlines in Syria and Hezbollah's retaliatory coercive signals. Mutual deterrence withstood several Israeli assassinations of senior Hezbollah commanders, as well as Hezbollah's attempted and successful reprisals in other parts of the world. That said, when it comes to conventional settings, deterrence often works, until it does not. And although Israel and Hezbollah currently seem to accept that deterrence has become inescapable, this could change as well, in which case miscalculations could more easily occur. For instance, potential technological advancements in Israel's multilayered air-defense systems could lead a future decisionmaker to assess that a reasonable answer has been found to Hezbollah's precision-guided missiles. Similarly, shifts in the balance of power could introduce or eliminate new strategic constraints for one actor or another and prove destabilizing. In this respect, the shifting center of gravity in Syria is likely to put the deterrence relationship between Israel and Hezbollah to new tests as the crisis in Israel's northern neighbor potentially leads to a redrawing of Syria's political map.