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# Prospects of Coming Middle East War

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## Prospects of Coming Middle East War

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### Introduction

Media reports have recently talked about ongoing preparations for a likely Israeli war in the Middle East region. These reports included assumptions that Israel could launch a war against Hezbollah and other pro-Iranian militias on the northern border with Syria, a war on the Gaza Strip and Sinai on the southern border, or a surprise attack on Iran. However, no one confirmed whether such war would include air strikes, land invasion, or both.

*However, these expectations were based on two main issues:*

- 1- An unprecedented media and political escalation against Palestinian resistance factions by high-ranking US and Israeli officials,
- 2- The expected tremendous losses that Israel may be exposed to amid the growing strength of both Hezbollah in Lebanon and resistance movements in the Gaza Strip.

In light of media talk about the re-activation of the axis of resistance (Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Iran), and perhaps due to declaration of the highest level of alert by Hamas' military arm, Ezz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, throughout the Gaza Strip after an Israeli warplane was shot down by a missile from Syrian territory, may have significantly confirmed the likelihood of a war in the region.

*This study will attempt to monitor indicators of likely regional war and suggest its scenarios*

### First: War indicators and motives

When we talk about a regional war, we cannot limit it to fighting between only two parties, but it could include several regional parties. Also, we should not exclude likely international intervention in such a war, whether directly or indirectly.



## 1- Indicators and motives related to the southern front (Gaza and Sinai)

It has become difficult to separate the events taking place in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula from the Gaza Strip and vice versa, due to the geographical location on the one hand, and the schemes aimed at liquidation of the Palestinian issue through expansion of the Gaza Strip at the expense of Sinai on the other. Among the indicators of a likely Israeli offensive against the Gaza Strip, Sinai, or both are the following:

- a) Israeli Special Forces, together with 13,000 US Marines, are conducting military exercises on the borders with the Gaza Strip and Sinai borders, the largest in 19 years.
- b) Israel, the U.S., and some Arab countries believe that it is ideal time for getting rid of Hamas forever amid global chaos and civil wars in the Arab world, according to Bariel, an Israeli analyst.
- c) Statements by Israel's Chief of the General Staff Gadi Eizenkot warned the cabinet about possible threats to Israel in 2018, since the possibility of war in Gaza is growing due to the humanitarian crisis there.
- d) Israel's recognition that there is a political decision to wage a final war on the Gaza Strip, not to make confusion, but to impose a new geographical map, in line with the "Deal of the Century".
- e) The presence of extreme governments in both the United States and Israel.
- f) According to a report by New York Times' correspondent David Kirkpatrick under the title "secret alliance", Israel carried out air raids in Sinai with the consent of Cairo. "For more than two years, unmarked Israeli drones, helicopters, and jets have carried out a covert air campaign, conducting more than 100 airstrikes inside Egypt, frequently more than once a week – and all with the approval of Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi."
- g) There is an Egyptian fear of losing complete control over the situation in Sinai and the Gaza Strip.
- h) Israel's pursuit of preventing arms smuggling to the Gaza Strip through Sinai.



## 2- Indicators and motives related to the northern front (Lebanon and Syria)

a) Following the failure of Saudi Arabia's previous attempts to "arrest" Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri as a prelude to a war against Lebanon targeting Hezbollah, Iran's military arm, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman summoned on March 14 some Lebanese leaders, especially Christians, and asked them to escalate against Lebanese President Michel Aoun and Hezbollah, pledging that Saudi Arabia would not leave Lebanon "prey to Iranian influence."

b) The speech of Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah on the anniversary of the 10th of Muharram, in which he warned the Israelis of the policies of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who - together with US President Trump - is pushing the region towards war, according to Nasrallah.

c) The Israeli army has carried out large-scale military exercises at its northern border with Lebanon, where the sound echo reached deep into the city of Sidon in southern Lebanon after the Israeli fighter jets carried out low-altitude air raids breaking the sound barrier, and causing civilians' fear in Lebanon.

d) Positions of US policymakers: US President Donald Trump has revived the memory of the murder of 241 US Marines in Beirut, 34 years after the incident. This is in addition to Trump's strong bias towards the most extreme Israeli interests and aspirations.

e) An Israeli military source reportedly said that "Israel does not necessarily avoid war, no matter how ruthless, and that the Israelis generally agree that there is no escape from a likely clash; it may be an opportunity given the current situation in Lebanon." This confirms Israel's policy of reliance on its extreme power and pre-emptive strikes as Hezbollah gained combat experience during the war in Syria and increased its missile capabilities 20 times more than its capabilities in 2006.



- f) The repeated Israeli bombardment of Syrian territory targeting Iranian, Syrian, and Hezbollah interests. The accident of downing an Israeli warplane in Syria cannot be separated from the context of the Syrian conflict which is shifting from its regional form to an international level.
- g) Israeli Channel 10 has recently said that Tel Aviv sent strong messages to Iran through several European countries on the activities of Tehran in Lebanon and Syria, noting that the messages carried a strong warning of the establishment of factories for weapons and missiles in Lebanon or Iranian military bases in Syria. This coincides with a warning by Israeli Army's Northern Front Commander of escalation in the situation and a real war may break out at any moment.
- h) The Lebanon-Israel conflict on oil and gas reserves on the Lebanese and Israeli coasts, most of which fall within the Lebanese territorial water, in light of Lebanese move (by the presidency, the prime minister and Hezbollah) to make use of these reserves.

## Second: War restraints

- a) Israel's fear of a confrontation on all fronts at once, including: the northern (Syria and Lebanon) and the southern (Palestinian resistance movements) in light of its bitter experience in the October 1973 war, when it fought on both Sinai and Golan fronts.
- b) Israel's unwillingness to engage in land excursion, or to impose its control over lands in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria or even Sinai, for fear of likely great losses in street fighting as well as use of tunnels, suicide bombers, explosive devices, and snipers.
- c) Israel does not want to wage war on Lebanon because it is aware that there are 300 thousand missiles in Lebanon and the Syrian territory, including at least 130 thousand missiles with Hezbollah and can reach anywhere in the occupied territories by 1500 to 2000 missiles a day. Therefore, Israel is not ready to enter any war until this moment.

This appeared in the results of a survey of the population of the northern border near Lebanon, which stated that only 38% of the Israeli society are ready for any future war, due to lack of shelters to protect them from missiles.

d) Israel's fear of the combat experience gained by Hezbollah in the war of Syria, which allows it to transfer war into occupied Palestine, not only in Lebanon. Moreover, Israeli estimates expect that Hezbollah will engage in an open war with the participation of multi-national fighters.

e) There are conflicting political views on the war in Israel amid strong opposition on the one hand, and Netanyahu's weakness due to corruption suspicions on the other.

f) Syria is no longer a state in the comprehensive sense of the word, but a only "hybrid" regime, which makes it an open battlefield against Israel.

g) The absence of a US strategy towards the region, especially in Syria, because of lack of vision.

### Third: War scenarios

In the light of talk about the existence of a green light from the United States to Israel on waging war in the region, whether in the Gaza Strip or against Hezbollah and Iranian targets in Syria, it is expected that such war would be very violent, and could cause the killing of many civilians, especially as Israel wants to achieve many objectives, including:

a) Re-mapping the geography of the region,

b) Beginning the first steps for implementation of the so-called "Deal of the Century", and

d) Creation of real deterrence to Hezbollah and the armed resistance movements in the Gaza Strip.

Therefore, the motives mentioned earlier, make the likelihood of war in 2018, very strong.

*Following are the most important regional war scenarios:*

### **Scenario I: War against Gaza**

The likelihood of an Israeli offensive against Gaza is very strong, due to the following factors:

First, the Gaza Strip has become exhausted in all areas after the military strategy based on the pre-war siege was precisely applied.

Second, the Palestinian resistance factions possess limited capabilities compared to Hezbollah's capabilities linked with Iraq and Iran, making it the best option for Israel.

Third, the Gaza war has a priority because it is part of the "Deal of the Century".

Fourth, the military campaign in Sinai by the Egyptian army will prevent any likely support for the Gaza Strip in any Israeli offensive.

Fifth, the likelihood of US participation in a war on Gaza, especially after including Ismail Haniyah, head of the Hamas political bureau, in the terrorist list.

*In the event of a war on Gaza, we have three likely paths:*

#### 1- Devastating war

The devastating "blitzkrieg" war is Israel's favorable kind of war: Such war can be summarized in Israel's launching of fierce airstrikes on everything in Gaza leading to the surrender of the Gaza Strip in a few days.

#### 2- Short-term war

A short-term war could take weeks, such as the aggression against the Gaza Strip in 2014, but the result of such kind of war depends on the Gaza people's ability to resist.

#### 3- Long-term War



A long-term war on Gaza is not desired by both Palestinians and Israel, as it would be destructive to the Palestinians, and could have great economic, social and political problems to Israel.

### ***Scenario II: War on Lebanon***

There are many motives that make Israel seek to destroy Lebanon, including:

1- Making for Israel's defeat in Lebanon in 2000 that resulted in its withdrawal from southern Lebanon; and the 2006 war, which witnessed great steadfastness from the Lebanese Hezbollah guerrillas.

2- Israel Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman's maintained accusations against the Lebanese army of cooperation with Hezbollah, threatening of a strong response. In the case of attacking Lebanon, we have three likely scenarios:

a) The outbreak of a Lebanese civil war, which is Israel's favorite. After the recent Israeli and American failure to involve UNIFIL in an internal war with Hezbollah, they try to push Hezbollah towards an internal confrontation with the Lebanese army.

b) The excessive power: Israel's reliance on its excessive power and pre-emptive strikes would prompt Hezbollah, according to military experts, to wage a conventional war similar to the Israeli war that led to the invasion of Beirut in 1982.

c) United Lebanon in the face of Israel: This means the involvement of the Lebanese army in war along with Hezbollah against Israel, which will make things difficult for the Israelis through increasing targets in addition to a possible clash between the Israeli army and the Lebanese military brigades located in South Lebanon.

### ***Scenario 3: War on both northern and southern fronts***

Eyal Zisser, a Middle Eastern studies professor at Israeli universities, said that Israel is preparing for a likely war on three fronts: Syria, Lebanon and Gaza, given the recent security tensions in these three regions, taking into account Iran's use of its affiliates in the region in confronting Israel, especially Hezbollah in Lebanon and Palestinian



resistance factions in Gaza. This scenario may be the worst for Israel which prefers to confront its enemies separately. The results of such scenario, in the case of taking place, will be open to all possibilities. A strategic study prepared by the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) described the current situation as the most dangerous circumstances to Israel in seventy years.

Israel expects that if a war broke out in the southern front in Gaza, Tel Aviv is likely to be attacked from the northern front, and vice versa. This makes Israel tend to "take the pulse" from time to time on both fronts; sometimes in the south by targeting fighters of Islamic Jihad Movement in the Gaza Strip, and sometimes in the north by targeting vehicles and sites inside the Syrian territory.

## Conclusion

Some may see all that is going on in the region can be: psychological wars, intelligence wars, or even proxy wars, that may probably continue in this way in 2018. However, these are more of wishes than reality. While Hamas is being "destroyed" by the tight siege, Israel has strategic differences with Iran and Lebanon. Also, Israel believes that the development of Hezbollah's capabilities and the presence of Iranian militias near its borders are seriously threatening its national security. Therefore, the current state of high military alert is due to awareness by all parties (Iran, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and other Arab and regional parties) of the dangers of a likely regional war. Accordingly, any likely qualitative military action in the region – such as abduction of Israeli soldiers, killing a senior commander, or targeting aircraft or installations – could lead to a destructive war in the Middle East region that is much like a barrel of explosive powder which can be ignited at any moment, repeating the scenario of World War I (1914-1918).