ICT’s Special Project: Lebanon – Where does it go from here?

Special Simulation Summary

Prof. Boaz Ganor

August 2020
Background

1. On the backdrop of the spread of Covid-19 and the worsening economic crisis in Lebanon, the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) at the interdisciplinary Center Herzliya (IDC) conducted a unique four months unique simulation (see methodology herein below) which examined the possible ramifications of various deterioration scenarios in Lebanon. The simulation started in April 2020 and ended just days prior to the explosion at the Port of Beirut.

2. The simulation took place via an online a synchronic platform and had multiple participants, all experts in their fields, that represented the Lebanese and international actors relevant to the scenarios discussed (see Appendix A for a list of the simulation’s participants). These experts chose the preferred strategies of the actors they had represented and by doing so affected the development of the scenarios played. In our opinion, this simulative process is the most appropriate predictor of future trends in Lebanon.

3. At the backdrop of the simulation were the following opening data items: Lebanon has been suffering from a large number of Covid-19 patients which made it difficult for the Lebanese healthcare system to treat all of them and in fact brought it to the brink of collapse. Further, Lebanon has been suffering from an acute economic crisis that has been rapidly deteriorating, accompanied by high unemployment, internal instability, mass and violent demonstrations. On this backdrop, there is an increasing internal criticism as well as protests against Hezbollah and Iran which are being accused inter alia of importing the virus into Lebanon and neglecting the state in its time of need.

4. In light of the above opening data items which led to the collapse of the Lebanese government at the outset of the simulation, three alternative opening scenarios have been examined, each of which posed a different challenge to internal Lebanese system, the regional arena and of course, Israel, as follows:

   4.1. An emergency government is formed which imposes an austerity regime and devalues Hezbollah’s stature.

   4.2. Hezbollah conducts a military coup and installs martial law attempting to recover Lebanon.

   4.3. Lebanon deteriorates into a complete chaos on the verge of a civil war, when every faction tries to fend for itself and survive on its own.

5. Needless to say, in light of the explosion at the Port of Beirut and the resignation of the Lebanese government on August 10th, 2020 it seems that reality has reached a point where each of the
above opening scenarios may happen in the upcoming weeks or months which renders the findings of the simulation even more relevant and valuable.

**Methodology**

6. This particular simulation is a unique process that refines the “wisdom of the experts” (based on the wisdom of the crowd principles) and therefore enables to assess more accurately where certain geopolitical processes may lead and what will the possible outcomes of decisions made within these processes.

7. As aforementioned, in this case three scenarios have been examined, all of which stemming from the same opening position (economic deterioration coupled with a healthcare crisis and the collapse of government). Each scenario was analyzed as a separate process that included several decision making rounds where each decision making round reflected an additional level of the development of the scenario and started from a snapshot created by the former decision making round, which in and of itself enabled the identification of the above processes trend over time. The first scenario *(formation of an emergency government and devaluing Hezbollah’s stature)* had two rounds, the second scenario *(Hezbollah conducts a military coup)* had three rounds and the third scenario *(chaos on the verge of a civil war)* had one decision making round.

8. Each of the decision making rounds was conducted in accordance with the same methodology: on the basis of the opening position, or the snapshot that transpired after the previous round, each participant was required to specify which actionable alternatives they had (without prioritizing them). the process has been transparent to all other participants and any participant as well as observers that took part in the process were requested to shortly opine on the alternatives presented as well offer additional actionable alternatives (“wisdom of the experts” principle”). At the end of this process, the participants were requested to prioritize their alternatives and chooses their most preferred one. The combination of the various chosen alternatives created a new snapshot that served as the base scenario for the following round and so forth.

**Major Insights**

The following are the outcomes of the simulation based on each of the opening scenarios:

1. **Scenario 1 – An emergency government is formed while devaluing Hezbollah’s stature and an imposition of an austerity regime** (final outcomes of both rounds):
1.1. The president of Lebanon declares an overall state of emergency for three months and the Lebanese army runs the country under the president. The president, interested in avoiding a conflict with Hezbollah, order the army to stay away from the areas under the organization’s control.

1.2. The legitimate Sunni leadership (Hariri, Karameh et al.) joins forces with the moderate Christian faction (Kahal and Farangia) and the Druze (Junbalat) and they all demand from the president to refrain from forming an emergency government and moreover allocate government ministries in an equal and non-denominational manner.

1.3. Hezbollah issues warning statements which mostly includes threats to its adversaries, either internal or external, increases readiness and allocates resources and manpower to handle Corona patients in the Shiite community. Hezbollah gains Amal’s backing as well as the supreme Shiite council and other Shiite centers of power. Following the above the organization declares a state of emergency, holds many meetings including with Ka’ani, the commander of al-Quds Force, the jihad council and the Russian foreign affairs minister who visits Lebanon. Despite the public threats, the organization delivers a message to Israel via back channels that it is not interested in a conflict with Israel but will not hesitate to act against it if necessary.

1.4. Iran on the one hand calls Hezbollah to hide the correct number of Covid-19 victims to avoid hostility but on the other hand highlights in the media the assistance it provides Hezbollah with. The focus is preserving Hezbollah power and stature at any cost therefore Iran instructs Hezbollah to ready itself for the renewal of the demonstrations and be assisted by IRGC to reinforce their civil defense as well as their military and paramilitary apparatus all while minimizing friction with Israel.

1.5. Israel reinforces its activity to foil armament shipments to Hezbollah. Moreover, Israel acts on a diplomatic level to apply pressure to Lebanon to curb Hezbollah’s activity in the country and simultaneously offers limited humanitarian aid to the Lebanese.

1.6. Syria demands from the president that he refrain from curbing Hezbollah and declares it will not hesitate to use force if necessary. To demonstrate its commitment Syria positions a small force in the northern Baka and together with Iran assists Hezbollah.

1.7. Russia acts to immediately halt the escalation in Lebanon and its borders to protect the military-intelligence-political assets it has accumulated in the region in recent years. Within this framework Russia holds telephonic conferences with various leaders, sends a special envoy to Lebanon, initiates UN Security Council and Arab League sessions and proposes an
international conference to discuss the situation under its auspice. It clarifies that it will collect a steep price from anyone who will threaten its interests in the region.

1.8. KSA conditions a significant economic assistance to Lebanon on pushing Iran out and devaluation of Hezbollah’s stature.

1.9. France – supports the Lebanese leadership’s moves and promises to increase its already promised humanitarian aid (in 2018) by 50%. Additionally, to prevent an armed resistance by Hezbollah France decides to join the German initiative and designates Hezbollah in its entirety as a terror organization while drying out the organization’s French funding sources.

1.10. The U.S. publicly supports the Lebanese government and calls to preserve the unity and borders of Lebanon, while preventing the interference of foreign powers (including attempts by Hezbollah and Iran to take over the country). Additionally, the US imposes additional economic sanctions on Hezbollah and IRGC and threatens to impose similar sanctions on Lebanese financial institutions and foreign exchange services that will cooperate with Hezbollah.

1.11. The UN prepares itself to a situation where it will be requested by Lebanon to increase its activity in Lebanon (economic, social, humanitarian, healthcare). It also prepares itself to the renewal of the UNIFIL mandate and Israel demands in that contexts to refrain from a technical renewal as was the practice thus far and expand the mandate to include Hezbollah’s tunnels and improvement of UNIFIL’s performance.

2. Scenario 2 – Hezbollah takes over the country and installs martial law to recover the country (final outcomes of the three rounds):

2.1. Israel is concerned and believes it is a dangerous maneuver that endangers it and time is not on its side. After having operated in the diplomatic arena and demanded that Lebanon and the Hezbollah government will be boycotted, Israel decides to start an overall war. During the war Israel destroyed 70% of Hezbollah missile launch capabilities (medium and long range). Additionally, Israel hit command and control installations in the Baka, southern Lebanon and Dakhia neighborhood in Beirut. Further, Israel has hurt senior, mid-level and lower level Hezbollah leaders. Among the senior leaders killed by Israel: Naim Qassim, Hezbollah’s deputy secretary general; Talal Khamia commander of unit 910 (foreign operations and terror attacks); Ali Moussa Dakduk, commander of the Hezbollah forces in the Golan Heights sector. Israel also operated against Hezbollah installations and bases in the Golan Heights sector and hit joint Iranian-Hezbollah operations center. Per the assessment, the first strike killed some 100 Hezbollah fighters and injured some 500. The
Israeli operation was coordinated with the US administration and upon its launch, Israeli envoys have been dispatched to several key capital cities around the globe. Israel assesses that the UN Security Council will attempt to reach a cease fire and until then it strives to destroy as much as possible of Hezbollah’s rockets and missiles arsenal.

2.2. Hezbollah justified its coup as the only solution to the healthcare and economic crisis of the country. Upon the launch of Israel’s operation it launches a volley of accurate missiles at a bank of targets that includes the ammonium tanks in Haifa, Ben Gurion International Airport, the nuclear reactors in Dimona and Soreq, the IDF command center in Tel Aviv, IAF bases, Air Control Traffic unit in Miron and the military installations in Gililot – all at once and without the escalation stages of the 2006 war. Moreover, it dispatches Radouan Force troops, under heavy artillery, to breach the Israeli border at seven points (including Nahariya, Shtula, Avivim, Kiryat Shmona and Metula) to disconnect roads and simultaneously launches surface to surface mid-range missiles from Syria to military bases and civilian settlements in the Golan Heights, Tiberias and the Galilee Panhandle. Furthermore, Nasrallah calls the Lebanese army, Palestinian factions and Iran to join the hostilities and open new fronts and threatens that Israel should expect far reaching surprises.

2.3. Iran - sees the Israeli operation as an opportunity to take over Lebanon and form a Shiite bloc from the Iran to the Mediterranean.

2.4. Syria – Expresses support of Hezbollah but doesn’t go beyond issuing threats to Israel that its forces will step in to assist Hezbollah if Israel doesn’t stop its attacks. Simultaneously Syria elevates the state of readiness of its surface to surface missile arsenal and prepares to launch missiles into Israel.

2.5. In the Shiite camp, a rift between the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council led by Kablan and supports Hezbollah’s coup and Amal who opposes it is revealed. That said, even though Amal supports the demand to dismantle the military regime the Israeli aggression led it to cooperate with Hezbollah.

2.6. An internal Lebanese alliance is being formed among the Druze, the Christian leadership sans Michel Aoun, the Sunni and even some Shiites) that condemns Hezbollah’s coup and declares it an “internal conquest” of Lebanon. The parties arm their men, accelerate their training and prevent Hezbollah from entering certain regions (e.g. with Christian majority).

2.7. The Lebanese president initially finds refuge in a Christian enclave and rallies army, internal security and police units that are still loyal to him and runs a defensive holding battle while
calling for a civil uprising. After the Israeli attack he appoints the commander of the
Lebanese army to manage the state’s affairs and resigns from his office. He seeks asylum in
one of the embassies and leaves Lebanon to form a government in exile.

2.8. Russia initially tries to handle the crisis in a proportional manner without provoking the
Americans decide to act swiftly to change the rules in the field (e.g. removing Assad from
power and appointing a Syrian general close to them, effectively run by them, him in his
stead; a quiet arrest/elimination of the Senior Iranian representatives in Syria and
dismantling all foreign Shiite forces (including Hezbollah); announcing the formal launch of
“peace enforcement operation” in Lebanon which will bring about a deployment if
additional Russian troops, Wagner corp. mercenaries and Chechen militias along the Golan
Heights border, the border in Lebanon and around Russian installations in Syria. Putin
demands Syria, Iran and Turkey to refrain from interfering in Lebanon and attempts to arrive
at a deal with the US per which the US and its Gulf allies will be given a “peace keepers”
status in Lebanon and in return Russia will gain complete control of Syria. Russia also
clarifies to Israel that it must stop its military operations in Lebanon and arrive at quiet
agreements with the various Lebanese factions to be brokered by Russia. In a private
conversation with Netanyahu Putin presents both carrots and a stick in the form of a
potential exposure of Israel’s strategic capabilities and the imposition of an international
supervision and/or sanctions on Israel.

2.9. KSA – backs Israel in an informal statement and works with it in clandestine channels.

2.10. The US, Germany and France – work together with other partners and condemn Hezbollah
and Iran. The US publicly back the Israeli operations in Lebanon and Syria and within this
framework it hurries military aid to Israel, mainly smart bombs. Further, the US delays and
prevents a session of the UN Security Council to discuss a cease fire and stop the Israeli
aggression. Moreover, the US started bombing operations in Western Iraq against weapons
caravans and Shiite militias heading to Syria and Lebanon however simultaneously continues
to evacuate foreign civilians from Lebanon by sea.

2.11. The UN forms a “Lebanon designated consultation forum”. Simultaneously it prepares legal
opinions on a variety of issues (e.g. who is Lebanon’s lawful representative in the UN; the
status of Hezbollah as a terror organization on the backdrop of the US sanctions etc.). as soon
as the hostilities start the Secretary General dispatches a senior envoy to discuss a cease fire.

3. Scenario 3 – Chaos on the Brink of a Civil War, Every Faction Tries to Fend for Itself and Survive
on Its Own (outcome of a single round):
3.1. Hezbollah prepares for a potential Israeli aggression while stepping up its intelligence gathering efforts to find out the Israeli intent. Hezbollah warns of a disproportionally fierce response should Israel violate the Lebanese sovereignty and hit Hezbollah operatives either inside or outside Lebanon. Additionally, Hezbollah approaches Iran to increase its military aid to the organization and asks other Shiite militias to enter the Syrian arena, Golan Heights sector and send reinforcements to Lebanon. Further, it calls the other factions in Lebanon to set aside their differences and come together vis a vis the Israeli threat to annihilate Lebanon. Amal aligns itself with Hezbollah and undertakes to protect the latter’s interests from the enemy’s aggression. In contrast, independent Shiite clerics (such as Said Ali Amin), intellectuals and journalists who oppose Hezbollah and Amal stress that they support Lebanon as a state and see fit to cooperate with all other factions to thwart any Iranian attempt to convert Lebanon into an Iranian protectorate. Per them, one must strive to make Lebanon a democratic and equal state for all its citizens.

3.2. The Lebanese president closes himself in Baabda palace and surrounds himself with units loyal to him and attempt to keep business as usual as if nothing had happened. France tries to convince him to renounce the alliance with Hezbollah and declare a state of emergency that will neutralize Hezbollah’s power in parliament. Should the president agree France will send a special expeditionary force to protect the presidential palace and guarantee the president’s safety. In lockstep with the US France even advances the aircraft carrier Clemenceau toward the Lebanese shore and notifies the president that French forces are ready to go to shore and keep the peace should the president green light it.

3.3. Israel conducts clandestine negotiations with KSA and the US to arrive at a joint position on the status in Lebanon. Within this framework Israel requests that the US and other friendly western countries increase their pressure on Hezbollah by designating it in its entirety as a terror organization, step up the sanctions against it and expand the sanctions to other European countries. In addition, Israel conducts talks with Russia to review the possibility that Russian elements will act to stabilize Lebanon while pushing Hezbollah out of the central government institutions in Lebanon.

3.4. Iran sees the collapse of Lebanon as an opportunity to activate Hezbollah and its military, economic and political organs to take control over Lebanon, including control strategic installations, communications institutions and government institutions. Moreover, Iran pushes Hezbollah to declare the formation of an Islamic republic in Lebanon.
3.5. **Syria** deploys troops in the Baka and the border crossings with Lebanon to prevent Lebanese citizens to cross into Syria. In coordination with Iran, Shiite militias stationed in Syria are dispatched to Beirut to reinforce Hezbollah.

3.6. **The US** issues an official warning to Iran and Syria to refrain from interfering with the Lebanese civil war and assigns blame to them for the bloodshed in Lebanon. Moreover, the US imposes additional sanctions on Iran, Syria and Hezbollah and clarifies that it will attack from the air, without warning, any expeditionary forces and weapons caravans headed to Lebanon.

3.7. **KSA** accuses Iran of the decline in Lebanon and supports, militarily and financially, the Sunni leadership while sending a clandestine message to Saad al-Hariri calling him to join forces with Jahja and Junbalat to prepare military cadres to fight Hezbollah. On the diplomatic front KSA promotes clandestine moves vis à vis Israel and the US to prepare a plan of action to contend with the situation in Lebanon, all while working to create an Arab coalition to deal with the situation.

3.8. **Russia** talks with all power bases in Lebanon, either governmental or sectorial including Hezbollah, to verify which possibilities are open to it as a broker. Within this framework, Russia warns Iran not to militarily interfere in Lebanon out of concerns that such interference will bring about a Hezbollah victory that will weaken the Russian hold on Syria. Additionally, the Russians examine tactical coordination with Israel (much like the one in southern Syria) to avoid unwanted clash in case Russia will decide to militarily interfere in Lebanon.

3.9. **The UN Secretary General** initiates a P5 leaders’ summit and examines with the possibility of dispatching a peace keeping force and a designated field hospital. Simultaneously the secretary general issues a public statement that the elected government of Lebanon is the only legitimate counterpart of the international community. In this context, France acts to obtain a Security Council resolution that will designate Hezbollah as an illegitimate rebel element and impose economic and military sanctions on Hezbollah.

3.10. **Germany** – as the president of the EU, acts to stabilize the situation on the ground by composing medical and humanitarian aid package to Lebanon from the EU.

**Conclusions**

1. The sensitive and deteriorating state of affairs in Lebanon may affect not just the internal Lebanese balance but the **balance of interests and stability in the entire region**.
2. Any process that will take place in Lebanon within the above opening scenarios will have **direct and immediate ramifications for Israel** and require Israel to form an adjusted, considered and circumstance-appropriate policy.

3. In any of the above scenarios, **Hezbollah** finds itself in a sensitive position and within a complex internal Lebanese sets of relationships while having to contend with interference, pressure and multiple external influences.

4. **Russia** emerges as a major player that may affect the regional and Lebanese balance of power, especially within the military deterioration scenarios. The special relations the Russians have with most of the actors enables it to adopt a “carrot and stick” policy vis a vis many within or outside the arena.

5. **The US** uses the opportunity to strengthen its chokehold on the Iranian regime and on Hezbollah and acts to thwart any effort to assist Hezbollah.

6. **France’s** historic connection to Lebanon makes it a willing active participant ready to assist and stabilize Lebanon in any of the opening scenarios.

7. Vis a vis the Iranian-Shiite-Syrian axis it seems that many actors (**France, Germany, the US, KSA, and Israel**) have a joint interest in pushing Hezbollah from a position of power in Lebanon while strengthening the opposing forces to help the Lebanese people.

8. In light of the of the projected outcomes in each of the examined scenarios it seems that Israel, as well as any other actor in the arena, can benefit from using an this special simulation as conducted by ICT to weigh its options and consider an interference (or refrain from interference) on any level, military, diplomatic or other to preserve and promote its interests in the arena.

---

**List of Players**

- **Israel** - Prof. Boaz Ganor
- **Hezbollah** - Dr. Eitan Azani and Mr. Edan Landau
- **Druze** - Mr. Eliezer (Geizi) Tzafrir
- **Christians** - Ambassador Itzhak Levanon
- **Sunnis** - Col. (Res.) Dr. Anan Wahabi
- **Shi'ites** - Dr. Michael Barak
- **President of Lebanon** - Col. (Ret.) Dr. Jacques Neriah
- **Iran** - Lt. Col. (Ret.) Mickey Segall
- **Syria** - Brig. General (Ret.) Amnon Sofrin
- **United States** - Mr. Naftali Granot
- **United Nations** - Amb. (Ret.) Danny Carmon
- **Saudi Arabia** - Ms. Sarit Ben Shabat
- **Russia** - Dr. Yaacov Falkov and Dr. Ely Karmon
- **Germany** - Amb. Ron Prosor and Mr. Daniel Cohen
- **France** - Dr. Ely Karmon
Founded in 1996, the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) is one of the leading academic institutes for counter-terrorism in the world, facilitating international cooperation in the global struggle against terrorism.

ICT is an independent think tank providing expertise in terrorism, counter-terrorism, homeland security, threat vulnerability and risk assessment, intelligence analysis and national security and defense policy. ICT is a non-profit organization located at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya, Israel which relies exclusively on private donations and revenue from events, projects and programs.