



## Line in the Sand

by Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaacov Amidror

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The recent tensions on the Israel-Syria border, and the Sunni attacks in Sinai and Suez against the Egyptians may seem unrelated, but they actually have several factors in common. These attacks attest to the impending collapse of regimes and nations in the region, and prove that radical groups are ready to exploit this. Israel must therefore act quickly to recognize any major threat along its borders and thwart it. The strike against Hezbollah last week clarifies to Israel's enemies that there are red lines, and anyone crossing them must take into account Israel's response.

Recent security events against Israeli soldiers on the northern border and against the Egyptian military in Sinai are seemingly unrelated, but it would still be wise to link them together.

The tensions on the Israel-Syria border began when a delegation of senior Iranian Revolutionary Guard commanders visited the Golan Heights. The successful targeting of that delegation resulted in Hezbollah's attack on IDF troops in Shebaa farms, in which two soldiers were killed and seven others were wounded. The attacks in Sinai and Suez, in which 25 Egyptian military personnel were killed and 58 others were wounded including civilians, security and medical personnel, were carried out by the Islamic State group's Egyptian wing.

The incident on the northern border was carried out by Shiites, and the attacks in Egypt were the work of Sunnis. Israel is their enemy in the north, and Egypt is their enemy in the south.

Although these incidents were different, they have several things in common – they attest to the disintegration of regional regimes and states, and prove that radical groups operating in areas where the actual regime has become defunct are waiting in the wings, ready to exploit this disintegration.

Israel cannot create order out of the Middle East's characteristic chaos. It can (and should) recognize the most dire threats and neutralize them. This is what Egypt has been doing – focusing on the elements threatening to undermine the Cairo regime and on the terrorist groups running rampant in Sinai, not on the regional wars outside its borders.

Cutting the Gaza Strip off from Sinai by creating a substantial buffer zone and razing the smuggling tunnels running between Egypt and Gaza, are part of the extensive Egyptian effort to curtail terrorism. Israel benefits from these efforts, but Cairo is motivated solely by Egyptian interests.

Israel's alleged strike in Syria bears the same characteristics. Since Iran and Hezbollah are trying to exploit the governmental vacuum in the area, the strike was meant to clarify that there are red lines, and anyone crossing them must take into account that Israel will respond.

Israel cannot and should not create order out of the chaos in Syria, nor will it have any say in whoever eventually wins the civil war raging there, but it must recognize any major threat as it manifests and thwart it.

Those who fail to clearly mark their red lines today may find themselves powerless should these threats take full form tomorrow, and it is precisely in the midst of the volatile dynamics of the world we live in that Israel must clearly define what it will and will not abide. Egypt sobered up to the situation in Sinai at the 11th hour – Israel cannot afford to do the same in the Golan Heights.

A preemptive strike meant to generate deterrence has its risks and therefore may come with a price. This was the case on the northern border, when Hezbollah retaliated over a move attributed to Israel. It had to do so to save face after the public blow it was dealt the week before, but its method of choice – an attack in an area devoid any civilian communities, and against a military convoy – indicates caution. Hezbollah has no interest in an escalation and it has done everything in its power to prevent one, despite its inevitable response.

The fundamental elements at the heart of Hezbollah's prudence have remained unchanged. The war it is fighting in Syria has strategic, even existential,

importance for the Shiite organization, as without Syria at its back it would struggle to sustain itself in Lebanon. Syria is Hezbollah's link to Iran, and all the aid the Islamic republic lends it arrived in Lebanon via Syria. Damascus itself is responsible for a considerable part of Hezbollah's military capabilities, and Hezbollah knows that as far as Beirut is concerned, it has no right to drag the Lebanese people into a war that is the result of its exploits in Syria.

Hezbollah and its chiefs, in Lebanon and elsewhere, still have a vivid memory of the results of their 2006 cross-border attack, which propelled into the Second Lebanon War, and they have no desire to re-live the experience.

Regional realities have become less predictable and more violent than before, and their dynamics are changing much more rapidly. Israel must decide where to draw its red lines, and it must be willing to pay a price for these lines if need be.

*Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaacov Amidror is the Greg and Anne Rosshandler Senior Fellow at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, and former national security advisor to the Prime Minister.*

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