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Analysis: Trauma keeps its grip on northern Israel

Once-vibrant border communities lie in disarray, with no Israeli civilians foolish enough to risk returning to such perilous ground

By **Karen Woods**, [Special to National Post](#)

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Kibbutz member Eli Mualem inspects a house that was hit by a direct missile during the war, as he returns to the kibbutz near the Lebanese border in Manara, Israel. PHOTO BY AMIR LEVY/GETTY IMAGES

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Ma'alot-Tarshiha, Israel – The fleeting

ceasefire with Hezbollah has all but

farming areas, weapons smuggling operations thriving, and Jewish and Israeli Arab homes reduced to rubble.

The once-vibrant communities along the border now lie in disarray, with no Israeli civilians foolish enough to risk returning to such perilous ground.

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For Israel, the stealthy movement of
weapons into Lebanese hands from Iran

River, creating a buffer zone intended to stabilize the area. However, many Israelis are doubtful about the ability of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to enforce its mandate.



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Israeli Lieutenant Colonel Zehavi said the UN peacekeeping force has previously fallen short, failing to adequately monitor and report Hezbollah's movements and activities.

Adding to this uncertainty is Lebanon's precarious political state, teetering on the brink of civil unrest. The spectre of Hezbollah integrating into the Lebanese army, which Zehavi thinks is a possibility, raises alarm bells in Israeli security circles. Such a scenario would not only deepen Hezbollah's

entrenchment in Lebanese state structures
but could fundamentally alter the military

itself facing a more complex and challenging
adversary.

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reflected, signifying a recognition that contemporary conflicts are won not just by tactical victories but through sustained diplomatic and strategic patience — an acute challenge with Iran in the shadows behind Hezbollah. Iran, as Hezbollah’s principal backer, leverages the organization to exert pressure on Israel, turning Lebanon into another front line of Iran’s proxy war, like Hamas in the concurrent Gaza war to the south.

“We’re already in a regional war. We cannot say Iran is not interested in a regional war.”

I recently joined the Exigent Foundation – a Canadian initiative that aims to amplify Israeli voices — on a media mission to visit the area, where landscapes of remarkable beauty are marred by the scars of war.

We went to the ALMA Research and Education Center, a focal point of understanding the geopolitical and security dynamics that define Northern Israel.

ALMA founder Lieutenant Colonel (Res) Sarit Zehavi explains Hezbollah has built a

formidable presence just across the
mountains from her home, not just through

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Since Oct. 8, 2023, northern Israel has been bombarded with missiles and rockets, with Hezbollah increasingly shifting from military targets to civilian infrastructure and exacerbating the human toll of this conflict. Anti-tank missiles, known for their low altitude and almost unerring accuracy, have wreaked havoc.

“We’re dealing with attacks aimed squarely at civilians,” she noted.

*The indiscriminate
nature of Hezbollah’s*

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with over 1,500 incidents reported, mostly affecting private residences, towns like Kiryat Shmona have been particularly hard hit, with approximately 90% of its population evacuated. That has created deep social upheaval, displacing communities, disrupting families, and fracturing networks of support.

Zehavi's own daughter has not been able to attend school for four months. On the day of our visit to the ALMA Centre, two of her Arab Israeli neighbours were killed by Hezbollah rockets.

Hezbollah's strategy is rooted in the covert militarization of civilian areas, particularly within Shia Muslim communities, where houses double as weapon depots, military structures, and even tunnel entry points. Conventional responses risk exacerbating civilian casualties and international condemnation.

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Our journey brought us to Tarshiha, an Arab border town echoing with stories of strength amid devastation. Here, we met Hamid Naim, the town’s former mayor, visibly weary but resolute. That day, Tarshiha had been struck by Hezbollah drones, killing his 20-year-old cousin. Despite the palpable grief shadowing our conversation, Naim’s resolve to advocate for peace over escalation resonated powerfully.

“The indiscriminate nature of Hezbollah’s rockets does not distinguish between Jews and Muslims. In targeting innocent civilians, Hezbollah is an enemy for all people,” says Naim.

The Israeli government’s response to such tragedies is noteworthy. In Tarshiha, psychological support for affected residents is attuned to cultural sensitivities, with support teams of both Jewish and Arab psychologists. These efforts are designed to

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not only address the immediate trauma but
to sustain the communal bonds essential for

Israel's challenges extend beyond its immediate border with Lebanon. The ceasefire does little to alleviate persistent security concerns, especially with Hezbollah's continued weapon-smuggling functioning as a proxy for Iran.

The path forward demands a holistic strategy and a political solution that integrates immediate military preparedness with long-term regional diplomacy, aiming for a stable and secure future amidst the intricate geopolitics of the Middle East.

"Israel will never accept another attack like that of October 7," says Zehavi. "A comprehensive political solution is essential, one that not only addresses immediate

security needs but also lays the groundwork
for enduring peace. Our goal is to create a

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