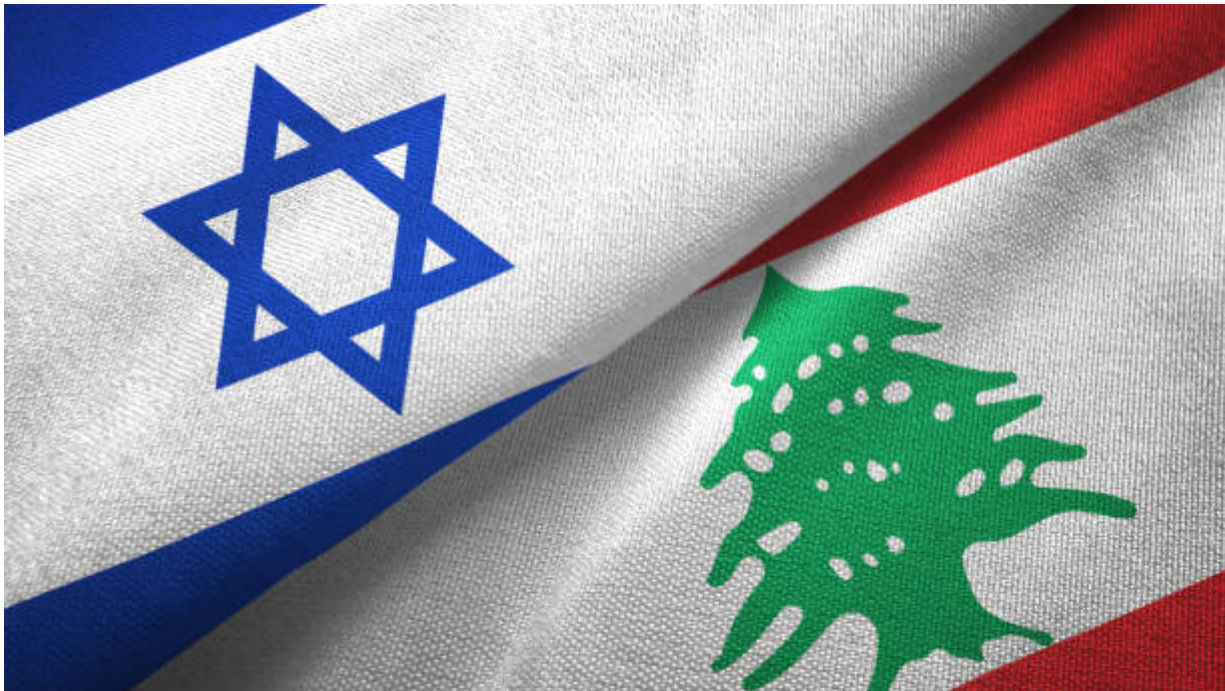


# Truce with Hezbollah? No, Israel must insist on formal peace treaty with Lebanon



by Lev Tsitrin

**I do not get it.** Why did we settle into the mindset that attacking Israel is somehow normal? Why, in the context of Israel's war on Hezbollah, do we talk of ceasefires and truces with Hezbollah, rather than ending the war with Lebanon's full recognition of Israel that is sealed by a formal peace treaty? Why the unspoken assumption that the war can only be paused but not ended?

I think the benefits of that switch in mentality would be plentiful – first and foremost, for Lebanon itself. Peace with Israel would rid Lebanon from the curse of Hezbollah whose official *raison d'être* (and the source of whatever appeal it has to the Lebanese who still support it) is “resistance” to Israel. Peace treaty with Israel concluded, what would there be to “resist”? There being no tension, no prospect of war

with Israel, no hostility, what need is there for Hezbollah's arsenal of rockets, and for Hezbollah's fighters? Lebanon would return to the tranquility that preceded its 1975 civil war, to being, yet again, the "Switzerland of the Middle East."

What's in the way? Hezbollah – which has an obsessively ideological, seemingly religious but in fact idolatrous objection to the very existence of Israel, masked by imaginary territorial dispute as an excuse for staying armed after Lebanon's civil war ended in 1990. The territory in question, a seven-by-two mile strip of land called Shebaa Farms by Lebanon and Mount Dov by Israel is mired in a legal controversy that is not resolvable to Lebanon's satisfaction, Israel claiming that it is part of the Syrian Golan it conquered in the Six-Day war while Lebanon claims it as its own – even though old Lebanese maps put that strip on the Syrian side of its border, supporting the Israeli position. The US also sees it as formerly belonging to Syrian Golan, and the UN indirectly confirmed it by certifying that Israel removed its troops from the Lebanese territory by withdrawing to the line which keeps this strip of land on the Israeli side. By claiming it to be Lebanese, Hezbollah – and whoever else in Lebanon who make this claim – do so only to pick a quarrel with Israel; Syria agrees with Lebanon simply to keep Israel's feet to the fire.

But this quarrel comes with a very heavy price for Lebanon – as proven by the 2006, and the present war. Is it worth it? We know that Lebanon is in the grip of Hezbollah and its patron Iran – but as this grip gets looser with every Hezbollah arms storage facility destroyed, and every Hezbollah leader (and rank-and-file member) killed, the question for Lebanese to ask is – why not stop this nightmare for good? What is gained by not recognizing Israel's legitimacy but seeking to fight it instead, when Israel is determined not to go anywhere – and moreover, to respond to attacks on it in spades? Lebanon

cannot even claim that Israel sits on its land. So why is it so difficult for Lebanese to say to its southern neighbor, “we want peace, we are willing to let you live so we can live – and we expect the same from you. Why won’t we mutually recognize each other, and sign a pledge of peaceful coexistence – in a formal peace treaty that will remove justification for anyone within our border to attack you – and would remove your reasons to bomb us?”

Insisting on this mental switch makes perfect sense; Israel should stop accepting from its northern neighbor a normalized status of a neighborhood’s quarrelsome dog to be rid of at the first opportunity, a status of a temporary nuisance.

Hence, it must insist that the outcome of the present round of fighting be not a “truce” – a temporary stop in attacks that are to resume at the next opportunity – but a permanent peace treaty that acknowledges it as a legitimate neighbor, a permanent part of the neighborhood.

Yet this is not what I see in the news reports. “Calls for a ceasefire have grown significantly from the United States and the international community” is a subtitle of an item titled [“Israel sketches terms for Lebanon truce but not yet ready.”](#) A recent [CNN news feed](#) also reports proposals for a ceasefire.

Why this nonsense? Why push for just another stop in an unending war – rather than for a permanent end to the war itself?

It makes no sense. We are stuck in a mental rut that perpetuates the conflict. The weakening of Hezbollah is the key moment to move the bar much higher, and to tell the Lebanese: do you want quiet? Do you want stability for your lives? Do you want decent living standards? Do you want peace? Then stop treating your neighbor like a dog, to be kicked at every opportunity in the hope that it will leave. Israel is in its rightful place and won’t move out. If you want Israel to

let you live, agree to live beside Israel. The choice is simple: end the quarrel, accept Israel's legitimacy, and sign the peace treaty. Nothing else will be an acceptable proof that you want peace – and without you wanting peace, there will be no peace. Choose now. No half-measures, no ceasefires, no truces would do. Choose peace – and sign a peace treaty. Period.

This, it seems to me, should be the proper stand for Israel to take. Enough nonsense. Enough feeding the hopes for Israel's destruction. Enough of Hezbollah's bullying of Lebanon, and attacks on Israel. Enough. Its time for a formal recognition of Israel, and formal peace treaty with Lebanon – yes, over Hezbollah's dead body. This, and only this, should now be Israel's diplomatic stance.