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The missiles are coming

A rational country would have done the arithmetic long ago and understood that by continuing to hold on to the Golan Heights, the chances of a confrontation would simply grow.

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Here's a bit of arithmetic. Take the number of Hezbollah's Scud missiles and Katyusha rockets and add the number of Iranian-made Zelzal rockets and Shihab-3 missiles, and divide by 7.5 million. How many missiles are there for every Israeli?

And now for geometry. Draw three circles around Tel Aviv; the first will mark the Shihab's range, the second the Scud's and the third the Katyusha's. Assuming that an attack on Israel would be coordinated between Iran, Hezbollah and Syria, would you advise Hezbollah to fire only Scuds and conserve its Katyushas? Or maybe you would advise Iran to fire Shahabs and let Hezbollah conserve its Katyushas? Justify your answers based on your place of residence and the missile range.

The fear rained down on us by Military Intelligence research chief Yossi Baidatz, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates ("Hezbollah has more missiles than most governments"), Jordan's King Abdullah ("A war could break out this summer") and many military analysts leaves Israel with the all-too-familiar feeling that it has no choice but to launch a preemptive attack. Suddenly it turns out that it's not the Iranian nuclear program that poses an existential threat, but rather the various kinds of missiles. And the terrified country is already preparing public opinion and the army for the next confrontation.

Indeed, there is a balance of terror between Israel and its neighbors, whose purpose is deterrence. That's what every rational country does when it feels threatened and can't find a nonmilitary alternative. No doubt, Israel is threatened, but so are Syria, Lebanon, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. It's enough to listen to Israel's threats to "take Syria back to the Stone Age," "destroy Lebanon's civilian infrastructure" or smash Hamas to understand that the style of the Israeli threat approaches that of Iran. If anyone should be waking up in the morning in a cold sweat, it's the Lebanese, Syrians and Gazans, not the Israelis.

Nevertheless, even though Syria has suffered military blows from Israel, it continues to act "impudently," and Lebanon, which was pounded in war, has stepped up its threats. Operation Cast Lead in Gaza did not stop Hamas from arming itself. And in the West Bank, the occupation forces have not completely neutralized the threat.

But unlike Israel, which sees the threat but forgets the catalyst, each of its neighbors has territory under Israeli occupation, each has a legitimate national claim to get its occupied land back. Anyone looking for a nonviolent alternative can find it well-packaged and waiting to be used, but it's merely getting wet in the rain.

"[Syrian President Bashar] Assad wants peace but doesn't believe [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu," Baidatz told the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. But his words were lost in the alarming description of the number of missiles in Hezbollah's hands. Because even though we understand weapons, and we consider Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah a household name, and we assemble and dismantle centrifuges every day, we lose our way when it comes to the peace process.

Baidatz didn't explain how it's possible to gain Assad's confidence, and he wasn't asked, just as he wasn't asked whether returning the Golan Heights to Syria under agreed conditions could neutralize the Syrian-Lebanese-Hezbollah threat. These questions are too dangerous to ask to someone from the army - he just might propose a diplomatic solution.

But it's possible to answer for him. Peace with Syria might neutralize the military threat from that country, stop Hezbollah from arming and put Iran in a confusing situation, even if it doesn't break off its relations with Syria. Peace with Syria and the Palestinians would also change Turkey's position and neutralize the hostility between Israel and the other Arab countries.

In short, the military threat would lose a great deal of its punch. A rational country, even one not seeking peace - and Israel, after all, is not one - would have done the arithmetic long ago and understood that by continuing to hold on to the Golan Heights, the chances of a confrontation would simply grow. It would have understood that the threat does not lie in the circles that mark the missile range but in those territories it continues to occupy.