

## Lebanon: Why So?

Sep 4, 2006



Articles & Testimony

**F**rom the outset, there was no “victory” to be had in this war, no resounding knockout. Still, the final score, on points, should have turned out very different from this. The perception that we’ve ended in a draw is actually a great achievement for Hizballah, one that all terror organizations will be celebrating for many years to come.

Israel should have fought this war in a different way, at a much faster pace, and essentially, with true grit and determination. Instead, it conducted the campaign hesitantly, clumsily, in an improvised, hodgepodge fashion. Hizballah stuck to its defensive plan—rockets on the Israeli home front, anti-tank missiles on the ground—and did not change its tactics, even as it absorbed lethal blows. And indeed, it lost most of its stock of heavy rockets and the best of its fighters.

With the hysterical impatience that characterizes the internal political discourse in Israel, the search is already on for scapegoats—the more the better—and the ritual calls for a commission of inquiry are already being aired. But it is no secret where the points of weakness were, and it is clear who bears the responsibility. All this was ruthlessly exposed while the fighting was underway, and regrettably, nothing will change in the aftermath. So here is some of our dirty laundry:

Prime Minister Olmert and most of his cabinet, including Defense Minister Amir Peretz, did not want a broad ground offensive in southern Lebanon, for fear of a high casualty rate and of getting bogged down in the notorious “Lebanese quagmire.” Therefore it suited them to go along with Chief of Staff Dan Halutz, the first air force man to be appointed to the top job in the military, who had suggested that a sustained air campaign, with no ground invasion, could achieve decisive results. Thus, instead of the IDF’s original plan, drawn up during the term of the previous chief of staff, Moshe Yaalon, the government chose to let the General Staff conduct a “no risk battle” from the sky.

From the moment it became apparent that this method was neither breaking Hizballah nor causing it to take flight, the government approved a plan to “clean up” the strip of Hizballah positions within 6-10 kilometers of Israel’s northern border. However, instead of sending in enough ground forces to do the job, they preferred to try a superfluous experiment dubbed the “Swarm of Wasps,” which involved sending small groups of elite soldiers into Hizballah strongholds. This resulted in tough battles with heavy Israeli losses at Bint Jbail, Ayta a-Shaab and other places. Israel wasted two to three weeks in this vein without producing any curve of success on the battlefield.

Only at the very last moment, with the UN Security Council’s approval of ceasefire Resolution 1701, did Olmert finally give the go-ahead for a large ground operation. It was like trying to score a goal after the referee has blown the final whistle.

Contrary to the impression created in some quarters, Israeli troops on the whole performed admirably, in the air and on the ground. Less impressive were some of the generals in the Northern Command. It seems that the Peter Principle has been running riot in the IDF as well; too many major generals and brigadier generals have been given more authority than they are able to handle.

But the mediocrity and lack of sophistication in some of the army’s upper echelons was not the problem so much as

the decision-making process at the highest political levels. War is not just another operation, not a large incursion, and not a pressure tactic. War is war.

In the wake of the cease-fire agreement, another crucial question arises: Will Hizballah's Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah manage to extort the Lebanese government—through Syria and Iran—into diluting the intentions behind the Security Council ceasefire resolution? Nasrallah might pretend to bow to the deployment of the Lebanese Army and the new, upgraded UNIFIL force in southern Lebanon, while in fact not removing his own armed presence south of the Litani River. He could continue receiving weapons from southern Syria, and could place a permanent veto on any request from the Lebanese government for help from UNIFIL. Then, over time, Hizballah could reorganize itself, albeit differently than before, but not necessarily any the weaker for it.

Another entirely possible scenario is that Hizballah, which the Beirut government relies on for a majority in parliament, will reach an agreement with the other factions in the framework of what they call the “national dialogue,” making its resistance fighters a kind of auxiliary or reserve force of the Lebanese Army. Before the war, Nasrallah presented a 220-page proposal outlining a similar vision for the “defense strategy” of the state. If he succeeds in forcing his coalition partner-rivals to accept this logic, then Hizballah units will become “legitimate,” and part of the “state,” and not what they are in reality—a body that subverts the state's authority and undermines it. It would be naive to believe that Lebanese gentlemen such as Fouad Siniora and Saad al-Hariri will be able to stand up to him.

So the end of this war may bring quiet to Israel's northern border for a while, without removing the threat of violence breaking out anew and of rockets again raining down on large areas of the country. That will be the case unless the serious and positive elements in UN Resolution 1701 are implemented punctiliously. These include the removal of all Hizballah units from the area south of the Litani River; an embargo on weapons shipments from Syria; and fulfilling the longstanding international demand to disarm Hizballah.

Now is the time for the diplomats to get to work, and for the IDF to learn its lessons and prepare.

Ehud Yaari is an Israel-based associate of The Washington Institute and associate editor of Jerusalem Report. He is the author of [Toward Israeli-Palestinian Disengagement \(templateC04.php?CID=125\)](#) and [Peace by Piece: A Decade of Egyptian Policy \(templateC04.php?CID=93\)](#). ❖

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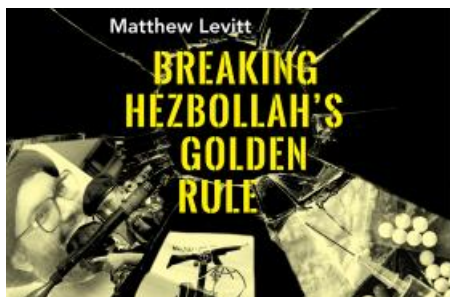
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