

Israel and Hizballah at War:

A Status Report

by [Moshe Yaalon \(/experts/moshe-yaalon\)](/experts/moshe-yaalon), [David Schenker \(/experts/david-schenker\)](/experts/david-schenker), [Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](/experts/dennis-ross)

Jul 20, 2006

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Moshe Yaalon \(/experts/moshe-yaalon\)](/experts/moshe-yaalon)

Moshe "Bogie" Yaalon, Israel's former defense minister and military chief of staff, was the Rosenblatt Distinguished Visiting Fellow at The Washington Institute in 2016.



[David Schenker \(/experts/david-schenker\)](/experts/david-schenker)

David Schenker is the Taube Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Program on Arab Politics. He is the former Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs.



[Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](/experts/dennis-ross)

Dennis Ross, a former special assistant to President Barack Obama, is the counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute.



Brief Analysis

On July 19, 2006, Brig. Gen. (ret.) Moshe Yaalon, David Schenker, and Dennis Ross addressed The Washington Institute's Special Policy Forum. General Yaalon, a distinguished military fellow at the Institute, is the former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) chief of staff. Mr. Schenker, a senior fellow in Arab politics at the Institute, served until 2005 as Levant country director of the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Ambassador Ross, the Institute's counselor and Ziegler distinguished fellow, is a former U.S. Middle East peace envoy and author of *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace*. The following is a rapporteur's summary of their remarks.

MOSHE YAALON

Since the Israeli operation in Lebanon began, Israel has attacked more than one thousand targets, destroying an estimated 180 katyusha and longer range rockets, and at least one Iranian-made Zilzal rocket, capable of reaching Tel Aviv. Ammunition trucks coming from Syria and Hizballah headquarters in the southern suburbs have also been attacked. Meanwhile, at least eight hundred rockets—most of them Iranian-made—have been fired at Israeli villages and towns from Haifa to the Galilee. Some of these were 220-milimeter Syrian-made rockets that had been modified

with shrapnel in order to inflict more civilian casualties. There have been relatively few Israeli casualties because the rockets have generally been inaccurate and people have largely obeyed orders to move away from dangerous areas.

Israel's objectives in this operation are threefold: (1) the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1559's call for disarming Hizballah; (2) the deployment of Lebanese forces along the border, also as called for in Resolution 1559; and (3) the release of kidnapped Israeli soldiers. Anything short of this will be the starting point for the next wave of hostilities. This operation is an opportunity to move from the strategy of withdrawal back to the offensive strategy against radical Islam. The world is facing a war of proxies, with Iran as the mastermind and Syria as the facilitator. Israel would prefer that the international community apply political and economic sanctions to these two countries.

There is no way to destroy all the rockets through air strikes. Hizballah has twelve thousand katyushas; it has launched only a few hundred of those. These are rockets that can be stored in cars and launched anywhere, so the idea of a ground operation would be to suppress the rocket launching, not to destroy the rockets. In the end, the way to end the rocket barrages is to exact a price for the use of such weapons.

The targets Israel attacked in the north of Lebanon were Lebanese army radar stations and active air defense positions. The soldiers were warned to leave their positions. In some cases they did not do so, resulting in Lebanese Armed Forces casualties. But after those strikes, the ground-to-air strikes against Israeli planes ceased.

DAVID SCHENKER

Initially, with the notable exception of the Lebanese Shiites, the vast majority of Lebanese were shocked at the kidnapping of the Israeli soldiers, angry at Hizballah, and quietly pleased that Israel was responding in a serious fashion. The anger with Hizballah has not diminished, but there is a growing frustration with continued Israeli air operations—particularly those seemingly focused on Lebanese infrastructure.

The initial position of the Lebanese government and several leading politicians largely reflected this sentiment. Prime Minister Fouad Siniora announced that the government “did not condone” Hizballah's kidnapping raid. Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Armed Forces, condemned Hizballah's actions, albeit mainly on procedural grounds: Geagea said Hizballah did not have the authority to take such provocative actions without government approval. For his part, Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt has remained, true to form, candid in his observations, alternately describing the crisis as Iranian- and Syrian-generated.

Most Lebanese politicians, including President Emile Lahoud, have reacted according to their affiliations with Syria. The outliers in this regard are Gen. Michel Aoun and Saad Hariri. General Aoun, head of the Hizballah-allied Christian parliamentary bloc known as the Free Patriotic Movement, has made two statements focused only on prisoners and the occupation of Shebaa Farms. Aoun is in a precarious position; it seems likely he will need to distance himself from Hizballah to maintain credibility with his Christian constituency. As for Hariri, initially he did not condemn Hizballah. However, after Saudi Arabia released a statement criticizing Hizballah's provocation, Hariri too issued a statement criticizing the Hizballah “adventurism” that brought Lebanon to war.

In the Shiite community today, Hizballah likely retains much of the widespread support it held prior to July 13. Yet although Hizballah had a strong base of support, there is also a significant element of Lebanese Shiites who do not support Hizballah. Moreover, the developments of the past week have pushed many in Lebanon to the realization that all militias must be disarmed—that the “resistance” can no longer be tolerated.

Indeed, in the year since it took power, the Lebanese government has made no progress on the disarmament issue, largely because of the longstanding tradition of consensus that has guided Lebanese politics. Fearing civil war, Lebanese factions tend not to gang up against one another. Given the current stalemate, however, it has become incumbent on the Lebanese government to start taking a tough position on this issue, and to work with the

international community to press for and enforce disarmament of militias. To achieve disarmament, a necessary step will be to first abandon the consensus politics that made disarmament impossible.

DENNIS ROSS

In the six years since the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon to the internationally recognized Blue Line, Hizballah has essentially respected the line and not taken credit for attacks outside the disputed Shebaa Farms area. The significant change in Hizballah's behavior cannot simply be explained as an effort to display solidarity with the Palestinians; indeed, the events in Lebanon have guaranteed that the international community is now largely ignoring the Palestinians. A much more likely source of Hizballah's behavior is Iran. Hizballah carried out its kidnapping operation the very day Iran was due to respond to the European incentives package offered in exchange for a halt to Iran's nuclear enrichment program. Iran is demonstrating through the use of its proxy, Hizballah, that it can respond to international pressure on the nuclear question by pressuring the international community in other areas. Rather than focusing on Iran as it was scheduled to do, the G-8 summit became riveted on the crisis in Lebanon while the Iranian question generally slipped from the agenda.

While some have attributed Israel's harsh response to Hizballah's attack as the effort of a new government to prove its security credentials, there is a more fundamental explanation for Israel's actions. A consensus has developed in Israel that its unilateral withdrawals from Lebanon and Gaza have been perceived in the Arab world as signs of Israeli weakness. Rather than securing Israel's borders, the pullbacks strengthened Hamas and Hizballah. The country is now largely united in its desire to reestablish its military deterrent, to demonstrate to Hizballah and Hamas the costs of attacking Israel, and to severely weaken their infrastructures and capabilities in the process.

The events in Lebanon have drawn an unprecedented response from much of the Arab world. Saudi Arabia's blunt public criticism of Hizballah represents a fear among Arab states that Iran is using Hizballah and Hamas to shape events and become a regional arbiter. This new thinking among the Arab states creates an opening for an Arab-backed plan to change the status quo. The United States should be working behind the scenes with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan to develop a plan for Lebanon to bolster the Lebanese government and its army and address humanitarian concerns. Similarly, the United States should pressure the Arab states to strengthen Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas and provide funding for an independent security force capable of enforcing a ceasefire with Israel. In both the Lebanese and Palestinian cases, Hizballah and Hamas can be weakened, but political and economic alternatives must be built to replace their influence. One thing is certain: Israel will not go back to the status quo ante. Hezbollah cannot be allowed to emerge from the ashes or it will turn defeat into a victory.

This rapporteur's summary was prepared by May Habib. ❖

Policy #1128

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology](#)

Feb 11, 2022



Farzin Nadimi

[\(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

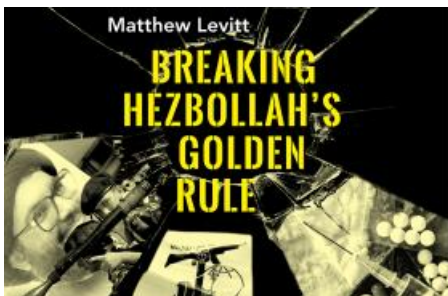
[Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism](#)

Feb 11, 2022



Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism\)](#)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule](#)

Feb 9, 2022



Matthew Levitt

[\(/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule\)](#)

TOPICS

[Arab-Israeli Relations \(/policy-analysis/arab-israeli-relations\)](#)

[Military & Security \(/policy-analysis/military-security\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Israel \(/policy-analysis/israel\)](#)

[Lebanon \(/policy-analysis/lebanon\)](#)