The Israeli-Lebanese war of 2006 and its repercussions: an overview

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This opening article is an overview of the various issues addressed in a symposium held in early September 2006 in the aftermath of the war that took place between Israel and Lebanon in the summer of that year. It analyses the reasons behind the war and its repercussions for both Hezbollah and Israel, probes the reasons advanced by Israel and the real intentions behind the war, and reviews the prosecution of the war by both parties and the reasons behind the success of Hezbollah’s resistance to the Israeli onslaught. The article also addresses the responsibility of Hezbollah for triggering the war and the disproportionality of the Israeli response to Hezbollah’s kidnapping of its soldiers. The losses incurred by both parties are analysed, as are the repercussions on Israel, Lebanon, the region, and the international community especially the United States.

Keywords: Lebanon; Israel; repercussions of 2006 war; Hezbollah; popular resistance

Today, after the cessation of ‘hostilities’, it is necessary to consider the possible repercussions of the Israeli aggression on the various parties involved, in one way or the other, on both sides of the conflict: Hezbollah, as a resistance movement, and Lebanon on one side, and Israel on the other, as well as its long term effect on the Arab world.

For reasons of practicality and space, this article will deal with Hezbollah and its resistance movement, and their repercussions on Israel, and on the Arab world. The effects on Lebanon’s internal political and economic situations and its relations with the Arab world and the international community have already been exhaustively discussed elsewhere.²

Hezbollah

Hezbollah deserves to be considered in detail on account of its present and likely future impact on areas beyond Lebanon, including Israel, the Arab neighbours of 1948 Palestine (Israel), and the regional and international situation, which may be summarized as follows:

1. The national resistance in Lebanon has effectively scored a ‘strategic and historic victory’ as Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah himself said in the speech he delivered immediately after the ‘cessation of hostilities’ was declared, and as many in Israel and the West have since recognized. On the other hand, Israel has demonstrably failed to achieve any of its declared objectives in this war.

   The objective of the Lebanese national resistance was to liberate the Chebaa Farms, effect an exchange of prisoners, obtain maps from Israel indicating the location of the landmines it had laid in Lebanon, and prove its ability to ‘deter’

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any Israeli attack on Lebanon. With regard to the debate as to whether Resolution 1701 has effectively addressed the issue of the Chebaa Farms, in this author’s opinion a significant step forward has been taken. The Chebaa Farms were not covered by United Nations Resolution 425 regarding Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon after the ‘Litani Operation’ of 1978, but by Resolution 242 regarding territories occupied by Israel in 1967. Now, however, Chebaa is once again on the Security Council’s agenda and the latter has in fact asked the Secretary General, through Resolution 1701, to submit within one month a report about his talks with relevant parties regarding this issue. During recent debates on the text of Resolution 1701, the United States prevented the inclusion of a clearer text on Chebaa so as not to give the impression that the resistance and Hezbollah had scored a victory. This, however, did not prevent the issue from being placed once again on the Security Council’s agenda, and the outcome will no doubt favour returning the Farms to Lebanon, especially now that Syria has recognized that they are indeed part of Lebanon. When asked in an interview with the Lebanese Al-Akhbar newspaper whether Syria would sign a document recognizing the Lebanese identity of the Farms if requested to do so by Lebanon, Walid al-Muallim, Syria’s Foreign Minister, replied: ‘We sent an official letter to the United Nations confirming that fact and it is already in their files. They, however, want us to sign on maps and we cannot do that while the occupation persists. The issue is very clear...’ (Al-Akhbar, 15 August 2006 [in Arabic]).

As for the issue of prisoner exchange (releasing the two Israeli prisoners in return for Lebanese prisoners) referred to in the preamble to Resolution 1701, it is now a forgone conclusion. Resolution 1701 was adopted under Chapter Six, not Seven, of the United Nations Charter and therefore there is nothing that the United Nations can do to force Lebanon, through the resistance, to release the two Israeli prisoners without the reciprocal release of Lebanese and/or other prisoners. This exchange is expected to take place soon, given Israel’s urgent need to ensure the release of the Israeli prisoners. Israel has also declared five of its soldiers ‘missing in action’ and it could very well be that they are, dead or alive, in the hands of the resistance; which will further accelerate Israel’s sense of urgency in dealing with the issue.

As for the issues of the map of Israeli mines in Lebanon and the effectiveness of the resistance, the map has already been submitted to the United Nations following the end of hostilities, and the effectiveness of the resistance is therefore already apparent. The Lebanese resistance has thus achieved, or is about to achieve, all its aims. If this is not a victory, then what is?

In contrast, Israel has failed to achieve any of its stated objectives in the war, as will be explained later.

2. Hezbollah’s resistance, from the point of view of planning and execution, was highly effective, making it a ‘very good example’ for the Arabs to follow. It demonstrated that the Lebanese resistance had been diligently planning and preparing for some time to do battle with Israel (Fisk 2006) in order to liberate the Chebaa Farms, force an exchange of prisoners, obtain the maps of Israeli landmines in Lebanon, and prove its ability to stop Israeli violations of Lebanon’s territorial integrity, air space, and territorial waters.
The performance of the Lebanese resistance during the war stunned the Israelis not only by the extent of its planning and readiness, but also by the high technical and moral standards (Cody and Moore 2006, p. A01) of its fighting force. The resistance itself explains this as the result of a ‘marriage between brains and faith’ that provide the Lebanese resistance fighter with the capacity to undergo a high level of training, and the faith to keep on fighting until martyrdom. This has resulted in an overall ability superior to that of the Israeli fighter, a fact bitterly recognized by the enemy.

The Lebanese resistance has achieved a similar feat on the media campaign front, which demonstrates its keen awareness of the fact that ‘successful publicity is half the victory in the battle’. It managed its media campaign very effectively, a fact also recognized by the enemy (Akher 2006). Its credibility increased as the war progressed due to the integrity and credibility of its leadership, which had already been established. Not only did this serve to bolster its media campaign and help repel the enemy, who took its words and warnings seriously, but it further reinforced the movement’s ability to ‘deter’.

The Lebanese resistance has also prevented Israeli intelligence from infiltrating its ranks and the leadership of Hezbollah and the resistance, and its operations room was able to continue leading the battle against Israel until the very end of the war.

3. What further increased Lebanese and Arab support for the resistance is the fact that Hezbollah waged its war with Israel under the banner of ‘Arabism and Islamism’ and adopted an ‘Arab-Islamic’ discourse (Abd al-Jabbâr 2006, p. 13).

4. It is difficult to understand the feat achieved by the Lebanese resistance without first understanding the nature of the party that stands behind it; that is Hezbollah. In light of available published and unpublished information, we can say with some confidence that on the internal organizational, operational, and democratic levels, Hezbollah is the best organized and most democratic of all Arab political parties. It performs at a high level because it relies on modern technology and information systems, and their various uses, and is the best informed of all Arab groupings about what goes on inside Israel (Belqaziz 2000; Khalifeh 2006).

An Iraqi social scientist describes Hezbollah as follows:

Hezbollah is an ideology and a political party and, above all, a social movement (which makes it larger than a party). It is a social organization closely involved with the Shi’ite community; it manages a series of service-oriented institutions... and is part of a large regional front. This multi-layered identity puts it in a unique position that allows it to survive... Hezbollah can only be destroyed by means of a crazy solution, namely either the destruction of the entire Shi’ite community, or the annihilation of Syria and Iran or the elimination of their political will. (Abd al-Jabbâr 2006, p. 15)

5. It is difficult to address the subject of Hezbollah and its resistance movement without focusing attention on the role of its secretary general and head of its resistance movement, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

General Secretary Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah plays a distinguished role in both the party and the resistance, in spite of the collective nature of the party’s organization, for, in addition to his charismatic personality, which is not by itself
enough to confer on him his current role, he possesses the appropriate intellect, political acumen, and organizational ability, and holds the title of Sayyed, meaning that he is a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad. Very few people know how Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah thinks, but his life story, as he himself has recounted it (Nasrallah 2006b), sheds light on this aspect of the man. It is the few who have possessed both intellect and political acumen, such as Lenin, Nehru, Nasser and Mandela, who have made their mark on history.

Those who read his biography, and know his early background, the various stages of his education, and how he acquired his organizational abilities, from modest beginnings until his election as general secretary of the party, and those who followed his television appearances during the war, could not fail to have noticed his calm demeanour, his humility, and the very civilized nature of his discourse. He is the first Arab leader to tell his fighters that he ‘kisses their hands and feet’. His speeches were free of fillers and repetitions and each contained separate messages for both the home front and beyond, depending on which stage the war was at, which only added to the credibility he is renowned for among both his admirers and his detractors. Thus, we not only have here an ‘exemplary party’, we also have an ‘exemplary leader’.

6. Hezbollah’s ability to realistically and successfully ‘Arabize’ its resistance movement raises two questions: first, whether it can, if it really wants to, transform itself into a Lebanese national party that transcends its own religious community to embrace the Lebanese national community and, second, to what extent is it able, if it wishes, to transform its ideology along similar lines? This is, after all, what Lebanon really needs in order to extricate itself successfully from the prevalent ‘one community—one party’ system. This is a challenge that needs some time to mature, given the need for a dose of ‘party education’ for the movement and its members. If it were successfully accomplished, it would allow Hezbollah to enter history by the front door and have a considerable impact, extending beyond Lebanon’s borders to the Arab world at large.

7. The Hezbollah-led ‘exemplary resistance’ will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the Palestinian and Iraqi resistance movements. For, in spite of their different circumstances as compared with the capabilities, freedom of operation, and financial resources at the disposal of the Lebanese resistance over the past six years, the latter’s experience will be of much benefit to the resistance in Palestine and Iraq. Nevertheless, they all need to coordinate their efforts, exchange expertise, undergo training, and learn some humility.

If the resistance in Palestine and Iraq need to learn from the experience of the Lebanese national resistance in managing, planning, and executing resistance operations, in addition to the use of missiles against Israeli armour (various types of Merkava tanks, which are one of the sources of Israel’s military pride) (Schiff 2006a), the Lebanese resistance, on its part, needs to learn from the experience of the Iraqi resistance in the development of road-side bombs, also known as improvised explosive devices (IEDs). These are currently the object of a technological race between the Pentagon and the Iraqi resistance, given that half of the American deaths in Iraq, and 70% of all injuries, are the result of IEDs (Galloway 2006; Gordon et al. 2006; Merle 2006; Schmitt 2006; Charter 2001).
8. There remain important issues related to Hezbollah, its resistance, and its responsibility for the war, chief among which is the extent to which Hezbollah can be held responsible for triggering the war, i.e. Israel’s attack on Lebanon.

**Question one:** Does the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers from inside Israel, and the killing of eight others, constitute an attack on Israel and therefore give Israel the right to self defence? Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, relevant to the right of self defence, states:

> Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defense shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security. 

Some legal experts believe that such actions are not unusual between neighboring countries, which means that the incident does not constitute an armed attack on Israel; they also base their opinion on similar practices by Israel in the past. Israel has indeed at times kidnapped and assassinated a number of Hezbollah leaders without the Security Council considering these incidents as armed attacks on Lebanon or adopting resolutions condemning Israel or ascribing blame to it.

**Question two:** To what extent was Israel’s attack on Lebanon the result of the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers and not a pre-planned operation that would have taken place regardless of whether the kidnapping had occurred? There is a lot of information to indicate that an Israeli attack on Lebanon had already been planned for and agreed upon by Israel and the United States, and that the kidnapping had surprised Israel and forced it to attack earlier than planned. This means that the attack would have occurred regardless of the kidnapping (Hersh 2006; Kalman 2006).

**Question three:** Did Hezbollah know or expect that the kidnapping would lead to an all-out Israeli war on Lebanon? It is clear from Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah’s press conference on 12 July 2006, the day of the two soldiers’ kidnapping (Al-Safir, 13 July 2006), that his intention was to exchange them for Lebanese prisoners through indirect negotiations. Had he expected Israel’s ensuing reaction, he would not have held an open news conference that same night. It was also clear from Nasrallah’s appearance in a pre-recorded message on Al-Manar television on 26 July 2006, that Hezbollah was not aware of the Israeli–American plan to wage war on Lebanon until it actually happened, for he said in that speech:

> When the arrest took place, and without knowing it, the resistance foiled a more dangerous plan and a worse war scenario on Lebanon, on the Lebanese resistance, and on the people of Lebanon. The humiliation suffered by the Zionist enemy as a result of the kidnapping operation made it impossible for it to absorb this coup, and it therefore moved up the attack for which it was already preparing. (Al-Safir, 26 July 2006, p. 7)

Furthermore, the Party had undertaken similar kidnappings in the Chebaa area since 2000, and Israel had not responded with a military attack on Lebanon; this supports the claim that Hezbollah did not expect a war on Lebanon in response to the soldiers’ kidnapping. In 2004, Israeli soldiers detained by Hezbollah,
including an officer who was lured to Lebanon and then arrested, were
exchanged for a large number of Lebanese prisoners, including some whom
Israel, as previously indicated, had kidnapped from inside Lebanon.

As for apportioning blame for the losses incurred by Lebanon, such as
civilian deaths, destruction of infrastructure, etc. (Iskandar 2006, pp. 1, 12),
to the resistance, the following can be said: Lebanon’s material losses, estimated at
$7 billion (Iskandar 2006, pp. 1, 12), could be totally covered by the over $800
million pledged by various Arab governments to compensate for the open or
secret collusion by some of them, and the silence and fear of others, and by
pledges made by the international community. A Lebanon capable of taking care
of itself in the face of Israeli aggression is much more attractive to Arab and
foreign investments after, rather than before, its victory over Israel. The
displaced have in fact started returning to their homes; Hezbollah, from the first
day after the cessation of hostilities, has put in place an urgent and feasible
programme to deal with the problem of partially or totally destroyed homes, and
several prominent Lebanese individuals and private institutions have undertaken
to repair or rebuild most of the country’s destroyed bridges.

The human losses are but the price any country must pay to repel an enemy
attack and safeguard its sovereignty. Suffice it to say that the number of those
killed in Iraq during July 2006, i.e. in a single month, was 3,438, twice the number
of those killed in both Lebanon and Palestine during the same period (Khâzin
2006, p. 20; The Options Narrow 2006). Liberation from occupation has never
been without its concomitant human sacrifice, and Israel’s losses will be
addressed below.

9. There are other outstanding questions concerning, for example, the relationship
between the resistance and the Lebanese state, how long the resistance can be
expected to last (Khodr, 2006), and whether it is a resistance movement or a
militia.

In relation to the first issue, the Lebanese government’s statement, on which it
secured a vote of confidence in the National Assembly, states:

The Lebanese resistance is a true and natural expression of the national right of the
Lebanese people to liberate its territory, defend its integrity, face up to Israeli
aggression, threats, and designs on Lebanon, and liberate the remaining occupied
Lebanese territories.9

Is there anything clearer than mandating the Lebanese resistance to defend
Liberon’s integrity in the face of Israeli aggression and the liberation of its
territory? Was the Lebanese state able to stop Israel’s repeated violations of the
country’s air space, territorial waters, and often the ‘Blue Line’, by relying on the
means at its disposal or on the Security Council? And was there any way, other
than resistance, to liberate Chebaa, bring back the prisoners, obtain the maps of
the minefields, and confront Israeli aggression?

10. Regarding popular support for the resistance within Lebanon, we can say the
following: At the beginning of the war, and for a very brief period of time,
opposition voices were heard against Hezbollah’s unilateral move to arrest the
two Israeli soldiers and the unleashing of the ensuing war on Lebanon. These,
however, lasted only a few days and soon a near total national consensus in
support of the resistance prevailed. This in turn generated an unprecedented
degree of national unity which lasted until the end of the war. But, how long will this near total national consensus last now that hostilities have ceased? It is not an issue one can address in total confidence. However, the displacement of large numbers of residents from the south of the country, from Beirut’s southern suburbs, and from the Beqaa Valley, and their taking refuge in other areas of the country further reinforced national unity. This encounter, the first of its kind among Lebanon’s various communities, saw the refugees received with open arms by all sectors of the Lebanese population and provided with all basic necessities.

Nothing is more indicative of this national unity than the results of a survey to gauge the popular mood regarding various aspects of the war which was conducted by the Beirut Centre for Research and Information on 24–26 July, or two weeks after the onset of the Israeli aggression (Daily Star, 29 July 2006). With minor differences between the country’s various religious communities which did not significantly impact on the survey’s results, the responses revealed the following general trends:

(a) In response to the question: ‘Do you support the resistance’s operation to detain Israeli soldiers in order to exchange them for prisoners detained by Israel?’ a little over 70% of members of all communities, apart from the Druze, and with differing percentages, said ‘Yes’.

(b) In response to the question: ‘Do you support the resistance’s performance during the Israeli aggression on Lebanon?’ about 87%, from across the religious spectrum, gave a positive answer.

(c) In response to the question: ‘Do you believe that the resistance will be beaten by Israel?’ over 63% said ‘No’.

(d) In response to the question: ‘Do you think that Israel and the United States will succeed in imposing their conditions on a cease-fire agreement?’ around 67% of all respondents, apart from two religious communities, said ‘No’.

(e) To the question: ‘Do you believe that the United States is an honest broker in this war?’ 90% of respondents from all religious communities said ‘No’.

(f) In response to the question: ‘Do you think the United States took a positive stance towards Lebanon in this war?’ an overwhelming majority, around 86% from among all religious communities, said ‘No’.

(g) In response to the question: ‘Do you believe that the Lebanese government’s political and diplomatic efforts would have been enough to repel this aggression?’ 64% of the respondents from all religious communities said ‘No’.

(h) To the last question in the survey: ‘Do you think the Government did its duty to assist the displaced?’ a simple majority of 54%, with varying percentages among the religious communities, said ‘No’.

11. Regarding the future role of the resistance in Lebanon once the liberation of the Chebaa Farms and the exchange of prisoners have been achieved, and once the United Nations hands Lebanon the authentic map of the mines planted by Israel, as stipulated in Resolution 1701, the principal remaining issue will concern the defence of Lebanon against any future attacks by Israel. It will require the parties to reach an understanding on the development of an overall
‘national defence strategy’ for Lebanon based on national consensus. This national strategy would delineate the exact and realistic role of the resistance according to what will be agreed between the parties. Thus, once the liberation role of the resistance comes to an end, its defensive role will be delineated by the terms of a national defence strategy.

12. Regarding the fear of some that Hezbollah might at some point use its weapons internally, it is important to note that since its establishment in 1982, Hezbollah has never used its resistance force domestically, but only for the purpose of liberating and defending Lebanese territory.

13. As for the relationship between the Lebanese resistance and regional powers, mainly Syria and Iran, numerous reliable studies by American strategic studies centres, and others such institutions, confirm Hezbollah’s ‘non-dependence’ on these powers. This, however, does not prevent it from benefiting from these countries’ assistance in matters of armament and experience (Abû Zayd 2006). Neither does it prevent these powers from benefiting from the results of the Lebanese resistance’s actions, for although the resistance’s raison d’être is purely Lebanese, the impact of its actions extends beyond Lebanon to the region as whole (Nasrallah 2006a; Hersh 2006; Cordesman 2006b; Cordesman 2006a; Cordesman 2006c, pp. 15–16).

The effects of the war on Israel

Regarding the effects of the war on Israel, the following can be said:

1. According to comments by observers within the country, Israel has failed to achieve its stated objectives, objectives which gradually became more modest as the war with the Lebanese resistance turned gradually to its disadvantage. In an interview conducted by Anthony Cordesman in Israel with a senior official, the latter summarized the five main objectives for which Israel went to war as follows:

   (a) the destruction of the ‘Iranian Western Command’ (Cordesman 2006c, p. 3) before Iran could become a nuclear state;

   (b) reinstating Israel’s deterrent capability after its unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, and from Gaza in 2005, and countering the impression that Israel was forced to withdraw due to its weakness;

   (c) forcing Lebanon to become and act like a responsible state, and ending the status of Hezbollah as a state within a state in Lebanon;

   (d) damaging or destroying Hezbollah while keeping in mind that it could not be totally destroyed as a military power and would continue to exist as an important political force in Lebanon;

   (e) recovering alive the two Israeli soldiers detained by Hezbollah without having to exchange them for a large number of prisoners in Israel—or for the thousands requested by Nasrallah and Hezbollah. (Cordesman 2006c, p. 2)

Many Israeli observers and military officials were of the opinion that Israel failed to achieve all or most of these objectives (Fishman 2006; Schiff 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Eldar 2006b; Stratfor 2006; Chazan et al. 2006, p.1; Avnery 2006).
2. The war’s outcome had considerable impact on the Israeli defence strategy since, for the first time ever, Israel had to fight a war on its own territory; all Israel’s other wars had been fought outside its borders. Furthermore, all regions of Israel were now within reach of the Lebanese resistance’s rockets and, before that, of the Palestinian Qassam rockets and, before that in 1991, of Iraq’s scuds which rained on Haifa and Tel Aviv. Rockets launched by the Lebanese resistance were, however, the most effective and destructive. This in fact means that neither geography nor the Israeli separation wall are enough now to protect Israel.

3. One of the war’s effects on Israel and its strategy is the abandonment of the unilateral withdrawal policy. The Israeli Prime Minister told his ministers after the cessation of hostilities that ‘as a result of the war in Lebanon and the extreme harm that befell the citizens in the north of the country, plans for unilateral withdrawal are no longer at the top of my Government’s agenda…’. This is contrary to what he had previously stated, namely that the Israeli Army’s achievements in the war would help implement plans for unilateral withdrawal (Firter 2006).

4. The idea of possible negotiations with Syria began to be raised; Akiva Eldar wrote in *Haaretz*:

Foreign Minister Tspi Livni a week ago appointed Yaacov Dayan (Yaki), who until recently was head of the diplomatic desk in the Foreign Ministry, as ‘project manager’ to draw up a document dealing with the Israeli-Syrian relationship. Dayan has been asked to ‘present Livni and Foreign Ministry officials with a document detailing the chances for resuming the diplomatic dialogue with Syria in the light of Syrian and Israeli positions on substantive issues such as borders, security and normalization…Associates of Peretz say he has become convinced of the need to examine Assad’s intentions. They say he views the Syrian president as an important factor in preventing a renewal of fighting on the northern border and in enforcing the arms embargo on Lebanon.’

However, Akiva Eldar continues by saying that ‘Prime Minister Ehud Olmert opposes any deviation from his strict policy of boycotting Syria… (Eldar 2006a).

Regardless of the divergent views within Israel, this door, which, before the war on Lebanon, had been firmly closed for some time, has now been opened.

5. Voices were heard saying that Israel should conduct itself like a part of this region rather than as an agent of the United States (Jacques 2006).

6. For the second time ever, the first being when Iraqi rockets were launched against Tel Aviv in 1991, more than a million Israelis were forced to abandon their homes and move southwards in search for refuge, while in major cities many more hunkered down in underground shelters. Besides causing a great deal of commotion, this had quite a powerful psychological effect on many Israeli citizens and skewed their attitude towards the Arabs.

7. The losses Israel has admitted incurring in this war are shown in Table 1. According to figures provided by business owners, the total financial damage incurred by the country’s economic sector as a result of the war (the industrial, tourism, agricultural and commercial sectors in the north of the country) is
estimated at 11.5 billion Shekels, or 1.9% of the gross national product. Damage to the industrial sector in the north alone was estimated at 4.7 billion Shekels, and economic experts estimate the cost of rebuilding all business concerns and factories in the north at 11 billion Shekels (Morgenstern 2006).

8. Contrary to the Lebanese media campaign, the Israeli media campaign did not perform at all well. Jackie Hoji says:

We are able to say with certainty that from the point of view of the media campaign directed towards Lebanon and the Arab world, Israel has suffered a glaring defeat. It is glaring because the State cannot destroy a neighbouring country and not tell its citizens the reason why it did it... (Hoji 2006; cf. Cook 2006).

9. As for the impact of the war on Israeli public opinion, an opinion survey conducted in Israel recently (Ma’ariv, 16 August 2006) to gauge public views concerning the outcome of the war, reveals the following noteworthy indicators:

(a) In response to a question about public satisfaction with Olmert’s, Peretz’s, and Haluts’s performance during the war, support for Olmert dropped from 78% on 19 July 2006 to 40% on 15 August 2006; support for the then Minister of Defence Peretz went down from 61% to 28% over the same period, and support for Joint Chief of Staff Haluts dropped to 44%.

Conclusion: these low numbers indicate general public disappointment in Israel with its political and military leaders.

(b) In response to a question about who bore responsibility for the military failure; 40% blamed the then Joint Chief of Staff (Haluts), 41% blamed the

Table 1. Losses incurred by Israel during the war

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<tr>
<td>Killed</td>
<td>156</td>
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<tr>
<td>Losses in billions of Shekels [US$1=4.3515 Shekels]</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days of fighting</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockets launched at Israel</td>
<td>3,970</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soldiers killed</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilians killed</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of those injured</td>
<td>5,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of those hospitalized</td>
<td>311</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homes destroyed</td>
<td>12,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trees burned</td>
<td>750,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terrorists killed [resistance deaths]</td>
<td>500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of soldiers who took part in the fighting</td>
<td>30,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Air raids [launched by Israel against Lebanon]</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours ships sailed</td>
<td>800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Targets bombed [in Lebanon]</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocket launchers destroyed [in Lebanon]</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crashed helicopters and aircraft</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helicopters downed</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meals distributed to the [Israeli] fighters</td>
<td>700,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loaves of bread the [Israeli] soldiers ate</td>
<td>780,000</td>
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then Minister of Defence (Peretz), and 49% blamed the Prime Minister (Olmert).

Conclusion: Israeli public opinion blames first and foremost the political establishment.

(c) In response to a question about how Israelis would vote if elections to the Knesset were held today; Kadema got 29 seats (the same number as it currently holds), Labour got 15 seats (as compared with 19 seats it currently holds—a loss of 4), and the Likud coalition got 20 seats (as compared with 12 seats it currently holds—a gain of 8).

Conclusion: The survey’s result shows the punishment of the two parties in the ruling coalition (Kadema and Labour) in favour of the Likud right-wing opposition (which includes Migdal and Ha Torah).

(d) In response to a question concerning whether Israel should have agreed to a ceasefire without first securing the return of the two captive Israeli soldiers; 70% said that Israel should not have agreed (as opposed to 27% who said it should).

Conclusion: 70% of Israelis believe that Israel did not achieve its objectives in the war (the return of the two soldiers).

(e) In response to a question about who won the war; 30% said that Israel won, while 30% said Hezbollah had won.

Conclusion: (i) the Israelis no longer believe that their state is always the winner in war; and (ii) Israeli efforts to convince the public that its army had won have come to naught.

Repercussions of the war on the Arab world

The repercussions of the war on the Arab world might be manifested as follows:

1. There might be considerable moral repercussions, at both the official and public levels, as far as the Arab–Israeli conflict is concerned. The focus would be on the fact that a resistance movement, led by a single Lebanese party, was able to repel Israel, supported by the might of the United States, and to prevent it from occupying Lebanon. This resistance movement inflicted heavy losses on Israel, both in the south of Lebanon and within Israel itself, and forced it to reconsider its defence strategy. The question on everyone’s mind would be: if the Lebanese resistance was able to achieve all this on its own, what would happen if the resistance in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq pooled their efforts? In the same vein, what would happen if Arab regimes developed a policy of confrontation and pressure vis-à-vis Israel, instead of their current policy of submission to the US and Israel? (Hirst 2006). The considerable achievement of the Lebanese resistance would require, on the part of both the Arab regimes and the people, the re-evaluation of the way they have so far dealt with Israel and the means of achieving the just demands of the Palestinian and Arab people. Arab regimes would be at pains to justify their present policies.

2. The considerable achievement of the Lebanese resistance has already had a major impact on the Arab people, both spiritually and morally, by pulling them out of their depression and desperation, and dispelling their feelings of helplessness. It revived their optimism and jolted them out of their long
hibernation; this was evidenced by the extensive demonstrations organized in
most Arab capitals in defiance of the ban on demonstrations imposed by some
Arab regimes.

3. The Lebanese resistance also required some Arab governments to re-evaluate
their positions regarding events unfolding in Lebanon. For, after having initially
accused the Lebanese resistance of ‘adventurism’ and blamed it ‘for the
destruction in Lebanon and posing a threat to peace in the region’ (Walfie 2006,
pp. 18–31, esp. p. 24; Hirsh 2006, p. 21), four days later, on 16 July 2006, Arab
foreign ministers, at the end of a meeting in Cairo, and in light of the civilian
casualties and destruction of infrastructure inflicted by Israel, issued a statement
in which terms such as ‘adventurism’ and ‘threats to peace in the region’ were
conspicuously absent. On the contrary, they confined themselves to supporting
the position of the Lebanese government and avoided any reference to the
resistance itself.13 The success and steadfastness of the Lebanese resistance
changed the thrust of Arab propaganda, and Arab foreign ministers holding
another emergency meeting, this time in Beirut on 8 August 2006, endorsed the
seven point plan advanced by Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora in Rome
and adopted by the Lebanese government. Once again, their statement failed to
support the Lebanese resistance by name and used general terms to express
support for the Lebanese people and their steadfastness. Among other things, it
stated ‘the total rejection of all plans to turn Lebanon into a theatre of open
confrontation to advance regional or international objectives at the detriment of
the national interests of the Lebanese people, its security and stability’. It
expressed its total support for the steadfastness of the government and people of
Lebanon in the face of Israeli aggression and the policy of destruction and ruin
pursued by Israel against the country’s infrastructure and people (see the full
closing statement in Al-Nahār, 8 August 2006, p. 5).

4. The war brought to light, especially during its first week, the true identity of
some Arab journalists and intellectuals who were either ‘sympathizers’ or
‘collaborators’ with the American publicity drive to market its view of the war,
as was revealed by their false assumption that Israel, with support from the
United States, would quickly overrun the south of Lebanon and destroy the
resistance and Hezbollah. Their subsequent retractions, after the strong
performance of the resistance, did not help them at all for their true colours
had already become a matter of public knowledge.

5. Israel’s failure to achieve its objectives in the war and the steadfastness of the
resistance helped decrease American pressure on Syria, although this was not
one of the aims of the confrontation between the resistance and Israel per se.

6. Israel’s defeat in Lebanon will undoubtedly give the resistance in Palestine a
needed boost. This is doubly interesting in light of the recent development,
mentioned above, that the Israeli government has abandoned its policy of
withdrawing unilaterally from Gaza and the West Bank to previously specified
borders. This means that it, or any other government, will have to search for a
new policy regarding the Palestinian issue. At the same time, various Palestinian
resistance groups would greatly benefit from looking at how Hezbollah
managed to prevent Israel from infiltrating its ranks and how they, on the
contrary, infiltrated Israel and obtained a lot of information about its weapons. Ominously, Israel has in fact managed to infiltrate all the Palestinian resistance groups and liquidate their leadership, especially high officials in Hamas.

7. There is also no doubt that the results achieved by the Lebanese resistance in the war will also have positive moral and tangible effects on the resistance in Iraq, for the following reasons:

(a) The Lebanese resistance has proven right those who say that ‘resistance is the only means of liberation’ and that no matter how strong the occupier is, the resistance will be capable of achieving miracles if it executes its plans well through ‘marriage of brains and faith’.

(b) The Iraqi resistance can benefit from the moral support and expertise of the Lebanese resistance. From the moral point of view, the speech by Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah at the opening session of the Fourth Arab Conference in Support of the Resistance, held in Beirut on 30 March 2006, marked an important development in the attitude of the Lebanese resistance towards its Iraqi counterpart. In his speech Nasrallah referred, among other things, to the Iraqi resistance saying:

Regarding the Iraq issue, we believe that armed resistance is the right and genuine option for bringing the American occupation to an end. We, as a resistance force that draws on its cultural and intellectual background, and based on our experience in the field, strongly believe in and openly endorse the Iraqi resistance and the need to support it and stand by its side. At the same time, we must help strengthen it because the biggest challenge it faces now is internal strife. The resistance in Lebanon has never got involved in internal civil strife, neither has the resistance in Palestine. I cannot conceive of an Iraqi hand that fights the American occupier turning against a fellow Iraqi. We have confirmed information that there are murderous gangs killing Sunnis and Shias that operate under direct orders from the Americans, the Zionists, and the British. However, this does not mean that there are no criminals and murderers also involved. We therefore have to bolster the resistance in Iraq, which should now turn its focus on the occupation. Only then can it achieve victory over the occupier and not allow itself to be dragged into domestic sectarian machinations. The Iraqi resistance should also be cleansed to avoid mixing the blood of innocents with that of the occupiers. Engaging in a peace process only becomes acceptable when two conditions are met:

• never giving up the option of resistance, and
• tying the hands of the occupier by drawing a timetable for its departure.

(For the complete text of Nasrallah’s speech, see Al-Anwar, 31 March 2006.)

This was the first time that Nasrallah had expressed in such clear terms his support for the Iraqi resistance.

(c) The display of national unity behind the Lebanese resistance and the absence of major sectarian disagreements in Lebanon during the war could help diminish the current sectarian and religious infighting in Iraq. It could also encourage some Iraqis, who have so far not joined the resistance, to do so.

(d) The fact that the United States, who supported Israel’s war on Lebanon, has failed to achieve its stated objectives in the war, namely the destruction and disarming of the Lebanese resistance, has forced it to gradually retreat from its original demands on Lebanon. Its entrenched
position during the G8 Summit in Russia which included, among other things, a demand for the ‘immediate release of the two Israeli prisoners by Hezbollah’, evolved through the Rome conference, and the first draft of the American–French resolution in the Security Council, to the final text of Resolution 1701. The fact that the Americans were forced to accept fundamental alterations to the text of the first resolution has led to the adoption of the much improved Resolution 1701, even if its terms are not entirely satisfactory. This evolution would not have taken place had it not been for the changing balance of power on the ground in Lebanon. The Lebanese resistance has thus proven that its achievements on the ground, and the launching of around 4,000 rockets on Israel, can force the United States to change its policy, a fact that further confirms the all-important ‘pragmatism’ at the heart of American policies. The Iraqi resistance can draw the right lessons from this, namely that what it achieves on the ground can impose fundamental changes on America’s policies in Iraq and even force it to withdraw from the country.

(e) This experience has also proven that other major powers in the world, such as the European Union, China, and Russia, who at first went along with the American position at the G8 Summit in Russia, which eventually culminated in the first American–French draft resolution, can change their positions given the right conditions. For although the five permanent members of the Security Council had approved the first draft resolution, they soon changed their attitude and approved all the amendments. This again would not have taken place had it not been for the changing balance of power between Israel and the resistance on the ground in Lebanon.

The Iraqi resistance can also draw from this the valuable lesson that it should not rely on the initial and principled positions of the big powers, and that only its achievements on the ground and the personal interests of these countries, can bring about a significant change in attitude.

Conclusion

In light of this war’s impact on the Lebanese resistance, Hezbollah, Israel and the Arab world, we can arrive at two major conclusions:

1. If there is a will, and if intelligence and faith in one’s cause coincide, victory can be achieved no matter what the obstacles are.

2. We are on the threshold of a major Arab upheaval that could usher in the many changes we have so far been unable to achieve. The road is wide open to those who believe in the justice of their cause and are ready to make the necessary sacrifices.

Notes

1. Opinions expressed in this article are the author’s and do not necessarily reflect those of the Centre for Arab Unity Studies, of which he is Director-General.
2. ‘The Repercussions on Lebanon’ was the subject of a seminar which the Centre for Arab Unity Studies held in Beirut, 31 August–1 September 2006. Over 50 intellectuals and
activists from inside and outside Lebanon were invited to attend in order to ensure that various points of view were represented, which is one of the Centre’s main concerns. The Proceedings of this seminar were published in Arabic in 2006 (Centre for Arab Unity Studies 2006). Some of the papers from the seminar chosen for publication in this issue have been revised.

3. No one imagined that the Lebanese resistance had built an interconnected network of tunnels, supplied with electricity and air-conditioning 24 hours a day, and dug so deep that Israeli heavy missiles, including those supplied by America during the war, could not reach them.

4. Zeev Schiff says in his article (2006a) that ‘the surprise of the second war in Lebanon was the anti tank weapons and the way Hezbollah used them. This indeed came as a surprise to the Israeli Army…. Most Israeli army casualties in the war this time were the result of anti tank weapons…’.

5. In light of these casualties, the Pentagon set up a special section to develop a defence against this weapon, after all other attempts had failed, and allocated a budget of over $3.3 billion for this purpose; there are no positive results so far. In Iraq, the Pentagon is avoiding using land routes and is instead transporting its troops, equipment, weapons, and supplies by air as much as possible, in spite of the added cost.

6. Israel assassinated Shaykh Ragheb Harb in 1984 and kidnapped Shaykh Abdel-Karim Obeid in 1989; in 1992 it assassinated Sayyed Abbas Mousawi, then Hezbollah’s General Secretary, and in 1994, kidnapped Mostapha al-Dirani (Abu Ali). All of the above were members of the Hezbollah leadership, and the kidnappings were carried out by Israel inside Lebanese territory. Israel used car bombs to kill Jihad Jibril (2002), Ali Saleh (2003), and Ghaleb Awaly (2004). Why is Israel able to kidnap, assassinate, and blow up leaders and members of Hezbollah without its actions being considered as armed aggression, while Hezbollah’s kidnapping of the two Israeli soldiers is considered as such, and as giving Israel the right to defend itself and perpetrate barbaric air attacks which killed over a thousand civilians and destroyed the infrastructure of Lebanon, including bridges, roads and more…?

Neither does this take into account the kidnappings carried out by the Israeli authorities in Gaza and the West Bank; it kidnapped members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and a number of the Palestinian National Authority ministers who came to power through democratic elections which were recognized as such by the United States and Israel itself. No condemnations by the United Nations have been heard, in spite of the fact that these acts violate the 1949 Geneva Convention and its articles concerning the responsibilities of occupying powers.

7. Marwān Iskandar (2006) estimates the material and financial losses caused by the war at around US$7 billion including the cost of profits lost as a result of restricted economic growth estimated at US$1.4–1.5 billion and costs resulting from damage to the infrastructure, which he estimates at around US$1.2 billion. He further estimates the cost of destroyed houses at US$2.25 billion, and losses to the state treasury from fees and taxes, emergency relief costs, port and airport closure, and the loss of income from value added taxes, at no less than US$600 million. Finally, he estimates the cost of the lost tourist season and the retreat of investments at US$1.5 billion.

8. About this subject, see for example, the position of President Salim al-Hoss on different occasions, and the article by Bishop Georges Khodr (2006).


10. Cf. the Egyptian researcher Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd (2006), who says that those who say that Hezbollah dragged Lebanon into a war to the advantage of third parties—specifically Iran and Syria—must reconsider their positions. There is a clear difference between accepting assistance and subservience; subservience does not achieve victory.
11. In his interview with the Turkish Labor Party ‘Evrensel’ on 13 December 2006, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah (2006a) denies that Hezbollah is led by Tehran. He says this is a lie, and that the Party is an independent Lebanese organization that receives orders from no one. On the other hand, Anthony Cordesman, in his reports about the Israeli war on Lebanon (2006a, 2006b, 2006c), bases his findings on information both in the media and supplied by Israeli and Arab information and research centres, and gathered on his visits to Israel and to the front during the war, when he spoke to senior Israeli officers and experts. He also says that no Israeli serviceman, intelligence officer or military officer felt that Hezbollah had acted (in this war) under orders from Iran or Syria. As for the issue of who was using whom, the unanimous answer was that all sides—Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria—were very happy to benefit from one another.

12. A Saudi official declared on 13 July 2006: ‘The Kingdom clearly believes that there should be a difference between legitimate resistance and uncalculated adventurism on the part of elements from within a state, or from behind its back, undertaken without coordination or the knowledge of the legal authorities and without any consultation or coordination with Arab countries.’

Later, a joint statement was issued at the end of a visit undertaken by King Abdullah I to Egypt on 14 July 2006, after his meeting with President Hosni Mubarak. The statement warned of the ‘danger of the Middle East region slipping into a war that would thwart efforts leading to peace and opening the door for a new round of violence and tension the extent of which no one can predict’. The statement also condemned ‘the wide-scale Israeli operations in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories…’, and insisted on the ‘need to resolve the current dangerous situation on the Lebanese and Palestinian fronts that would involve the release of prisoners as a way to ending the current deteriorating situation’. The statement underlined the ‘need for all parties in the region to exercise maximum restraint and responsibility and not undertake any irresponsible actions that would lead to an escalation and drag the region towards unpredictable confrontations the consequences of which would be borne by the states and people of the region’. They emphasized the ‘need to maintain stability in the Middle East and prevent a deterioration of the situation in a manner that makes it difficult to reverse’. The two leaders warned against ‘dragging the region into adventures that do not serve Arab interests and causes’ and expressed their total support for the Lebanese Government and the establishment of its authority on the entire country (see: The rulers of Egypt and Jordan join the Saudi position: the adventures of the resistance do not serve Arab interests, Al-Safir, 15 July 2006 [in Arabic], quoting news agencies). It is worth noting that the very first statements by some Arab leaders were made after telephone calls to them by President Bush.

In his article, Richard Walffe (2006, esp. the top column of p.24) reveals Bush’s telephone contacts with King Abdullah of Jordan, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Prime Minister Fouad Siniora of Lebanon, in the presence of Condoleezza Rice and Stephen Hadley (his National Security Advisor). Newsweek later reported concerning the involvement of Saudi Arabia that: ‘Even the few countries that she [Condoleezza Rice] and Bush had pointed to as supporters, like Saudi Arabia, were now bitterly criticizing Israel’s part in the war. And the Saudis were incensed that Washington publicized their initial statement blaming Hezbollah, using Riyadh to legitimize Israel’s air campaign’ (Hirsh, 2006).

13. The Arab foreign ministers met in Cairo on 15 August 2006 and issued the following statement saying that they:

(1) Condemn the Israeli aggression on Lebanon that contravenes all international resolutions, laws and regulations, and salutes the spirit of martyrs and the steadfastness of the Lebanese people and their unity and solidarity which is essential in the face of aggression.
(2) Express total solidarity with Lebanon and support its steadfastness in the face of this unjust aggression to which civilians are subjected, including the killing of innocent people and causing large-scale material and economic destruction.
(3) Totally endorse Lebanon’s complaint to the Security Council and in turn, request the Security Council to adopt an immediate cease-fire resolution and raise the embargo on Lebanon.
(4) Express their support for Lebanon’s declared intention to adhere to and respect international legitimacy and the Blue Line.
(5) Confirm their total support for the Lebanese Government in its determination to exercise its responsibility for protecting Lebanon and the Lebanese people and ensuring their safety, and reaffirm its right and duty to spread its authority over its entire territory and exercise its sovereignty inside and outside the country.
(6) Consider Israel’s ongoing destruction and killing of the Lebanese people makes the current situation even more difficult and complicated and leads to the undermining of stability, peace and security in the region.
(7) Believe that Israel should bear the responsibility for compensating Lebanon for all the losses and destruction resulting from its aggression on the Lebanese territory.

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