The Israel-Lebanon War and Its Implications for Regional Security

*Nazir Hussain**

Abstract

[Israel's 34-day invasion of Lebanon from July 12 to Aug 14, 2006 was not its first attempt to ward off perceived threats to its national security. In the recent past, Israeli forces have overrun the country twice, first in 1978 and then in 1982. What was different from these earlier aggressions, however, was that the present encounter has shattered the myth of Israeli invincibility and impregnability. This war has many important implications for individual actors and regional environment that can impact the future security milieu. This paper is an endeavour to look into the war and its strategic implications. However, to achieve this end, the paper would trace the historical circumstances leading to this war, the force level and posture of the belligerents, and their objectives, including that of the United States. *Editors*]

Israel's 34-day invasion of Lebanon from July 12 to August 14, 2006, proved costly for its military reputation and national politics. This was not the first time Israel attacked Lebanon to ward off perceived threats to its national security. In the recent past, Israeli forces have overrun the country twice, first in 1978 and then in 1982. What was different about these earlier encounters, however, was that Israel did not have to face a credible and determined resistance force such as Hezbollah. Israel's most recent attack had been aimed at eliminating the Hezbollah threat to its own security., Instead, the resistance and resilience of this non-state actor until the end shattered the myth of Israeli invincibility and impregnability.

The month-long war was devastating for the people of southern Lebanon because Israel's "disproportionate use of force" destroyed their civic infrastructure, homes and hospitals. The region suffered over 1,000 casualties, around one million displacements, and incurred economic losses estimated at $1.5 billion. But the damage to Israel was also severe, accruing mainly in the form of military failures, and loss of a deterrence strategy as well as political unity. Israel suffered around 160 casualties — a very high figure in Israeli calculations, undermined its command and control, and aroused questions about its political leadership. It was compelled to initiate an inquiry into the war failures in Lebanon. The country also came under severe international criticism over its military tactics, especially the use of cluster bombs against the civilian population and infrastructure; some even went to the extent of calling Israeli actions as war crimes.

Although the war is over and a ceasefire sponsored by the United Nations (UN) is being monitored by a 5,000-strong international,

* Dr. Nazir Hussain is Assistant Professor at the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

[17]

multilateral force along the Israeli-Lebanon borders, the belligerency and antagonism between Hezbollah and Israel have soared to the extent that 'another round' of war cannot be ruled out.

The war has had many important implications for individual actors, the regional environment, and the future security milieu. This paper traces the historical circumstances leading to the war, examines the force level and postures adopted by the belligerents during the war, discusses the objectives of the involved parties, including the United States, and finally examines the strategic implications of the war for security in the region.

The War's Historical Background

Lebanon has seldom seen a sustained period of calm and stability due to its fragmented socio-political setup and geographic and religious divides. The second civil war of 1975 gave birth to strong factionalism and proliferation of militant groups along religious and sectarian lines. The Shi'a population was concentrated along the borders of Israel. Hezbollah emerged in 1980 to safeguard its local interests and fend off Israeli attacks. Its presence was first felt in local politics during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982. Hezbollah's suicide attack against US and French marines in 1983, which killed over 300 marines, proved decisive in establishing its influence in the region. Since then, with Syrian backing, it has been the most well-disciplined and organized group in Lebanon, managing effective social welfare projects and military and political wings.

The present conflict could be traced back to the Kuwait Crisis (1990–91), when Syria, out of ideological and political compulsions, sided with the US against Iraq. The US, in return, gave Syria $6 billion and a free hand in Lebanon. Effective Syrian control and influence helped to restore normalcy and political order in Lebanon. Under Syrian guarantees, through a mutual agreement, all fighting groups, except Hezbollah, decided to disband and disarm; this heralded the political, social and military integration of Lebanon. Meanwhile, owing to its proximity with the Israeli borders, Hezbollah continued to fight against the Israeli-backed South Lebanese Army (SLA). Eventually, due to its geopolitical compulsions and continuous Hezbollah attacks, Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon in April 2000. This was seen as a political and military victory of Hezbollah that made it an unchallenged actor in southern Lebanon.

The 9/11 incident and the "War on Terror" changed the entire regional scenario and Israel launched its "own war on terror" in the occupied Palestinian territories. Israeli forces occupied several Palestinian areas and started massacring the local population at will. Israel tried to isolate the Palestinian leadership but this proved counterproductive as suicide attacks were launched against the Israeli military, its infrastructure and civil population, leading to a large number of Israeli deaths and destruction.[1] Arafat's death and the change of guards in the Palestinian leadership made no difference to the Israeli attitude. In 2005, through an election process, a new Palestinian government of the more hard-line

---

[1] Hussain, 2002.

18

Hamas came into power. However, it was made virtually ineffective by denial of revenues and targeted killing and kidnapping of its leadership by Israel. Since June 2006, Israel has let loose a reign of the worst state terror in Palestine, during which it has kidnapped 34 Palestinian parliamentarians, including the parliament speaker.[2]

In Lebanon, blame was directed at Syria for sponsoring terrorism and helping Hamas and Hezbollah. There were several hot pursuit incidents during which Israeli forces overran Syrian territories. In the new scheme of things, Israel was to be elevated to the status of regional policeman, because Syria's the presence in Lebanon did not fit. Therefore, in September 2004, under US pressures, the UN Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 1559, demanding the withdrawal of Syrian troops and the disbanding/disarming of all Lebanese militias (mainly Hezbollah). To put further pressure on Syria, the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq-al-Hariri was assassinated in February 2005, and the blame for this was also put on Syria. Under intense international pressures, Syria began to withdraw its troops from Lebanon, leaving the country after almost 30 years.

On March 8, 2006, a massive rally was led by Hezbollah and Amal in Beirut to "thank" the departing Syrian forces for their role in stabilizing Lebanon. In response, on March 12, 2006, another huge rally was conducted by "Washington's Lebanese Clients," demanding an end to Syrian hegemony and Hezbollah's control. This group was composed of 1) the Future Movement; Hariri's Political Forces, 2) Druze, 3) Maronite Christian Right, 4) Liberal Christians and 5) the Democratic Left Party. The group came to be known as the "March 14 Forces." Several meetings were conducted between the March 14 Forces, Hezbollah and Lebanese officials from March to June 2006, but the gaps in the two conflicting views could not be bridged. Hezbollah was not prepared to disband or disarm. The March 14 Forces asked why Lebanon should undergo a military confrontation with Israel, alone, on account of Hezbollah's resolve to keep itself armed as a deterrent to possible Israeli aggression in Lebanon.[3] In an interview to the news channel *AlJazeera* on July 20, 2006, Hassan Nasurrullah, the Hezbollah Secretary General, revealed that he had informed the meeting that the "ongoing imprisonment of three Lebanese by Israel is an outstanding Lebanese grievance whose resolution can stand no postponement. We are serious about prisoners issue and this can be solved only through the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers."[4]

This was the reason for the July 12 kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah, which initiated the 2006 Lebanese war. Importantly, Israel had been exchanging prisoners with Hezbollah in the past, and it was believed that the same would happen after this incident. Moreover, before it attacked Lebanon, Israel did not demand the release of its prisoners, nor

---

[2] *Agence France Press (AFP) News*, August 6, 2006, "Israel captures Hamas speaker."
[3] Quilty, 2006.
[4] *Ibid.*

19

did it employ diplomatic channels or inform the United Nations. These are indications that the kidnapping episode was perceived as a blessing in disguise for Israel to finish off Hezbollah once and for all. Israel went into the war to achieve larger political influence in the region and deter any possible threat to its security. As one Israeli critic points out that the Israeli Defense Forces have always been influential in policymaking, but their influence today is without parallel.[5] When Hezbollah mounted an attack across the border and captured two Israeli soldiers, Ehud Olmert presented only a military plan of action to his security cabinet; Israel held 15 Lebanese prisoners but the option of negotiating a prisoners' exchange was not even considered. In fact, Olmert was trying to prove that he could be tough and decisive when Israel's security was at stake.[6]

However, there are other stories, which appeared in the US and Israeli press after the war, that point towards the US instigation and enlargement of the war. The respected US journalist Seymour Hersh writes that the US leadership was convinced that a successful Israeli bombing against Hezbollah would ease Israeli security concerns and could serve as a prelude to a potential US preemptive attack against Iran. Therefore, the war was planned much before the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers on July 12, 2006.[7] Stephen Zunes believes that Israel instigated war on the behest of the US to cripple Hezbollah and pressurize Syria and Iran. In fact, during the war, the US administration pushed Israel to expand the war into Syrian territory, but this suggestion was rejected by Israel.[8]

Force Level and Posture
Western states have described Israeli military actions as "disproportionate use of force" in the war. It is pertinent to see just how "disproportionate" the two opposing forces were. Israel had over 20,000 armored troops in the battlefield,[9] whereas Hezbollah had a few hundred irregular militia. The Israeli standing army was over 140,000-strong and equipped with state-of-the-art weaponry, while Hezbollah had a combined force of around 7,000 troops with small arms and an estimated 12,000 rockets.[10] The Israeli strong point was its massive fire and air power, which it used indiscriminately. Israel also had strong military, diplomatic and economic support from the United States, and was provided with much-needed missiles and other weapons by the US planes using British bases. On the other hand, Hezbollah relied on its 12,000 rockets and small arms with guerrilla tactics. Despite many claims, it was not proved that Hezbollah was receiving any financial or military aid from anywhere.

The battle strategy of the opposing forces was also very asymmetrical. Israel employed massive air power, without risking its own human casualties, and destroyed civil infrastructure, including roads and

---

[5] Shlaim, 2006.
[6] Shlaim, *Op. cit*.
[7] *AFP News*, August 13, 2006, "US helped Israel plan Lebanon war."
[8] Zunes, 2006.
[9] *AFP News,* August 7, 2006.
[10] IISS, 2005.

bridges, trying to alienate southern Lebanon and Hezbollah from the rest of the country. Many believed that the Israeli reluctance to go deep inside southern Lebanon was due to the risk of heavy casualties, which Israel could not afford.[11] Hezbollah created deterrence by firing around 3,000 rockets inside Israel, which raised alarm bells. Hezbollah also adopted a strategy of increasing occupation cost by destroying Israeli troops. The situation in the battlefield was, as retired Gen. Elias Hanna of the Lebanese Army said, "Hezbollah wins if it does not lose and Israel loses if it does not win. What is more important to the non-state actor is survival than to achieve victory."[12]

Israel's military strategy and tactics were very offensive. So was the intensive propaganda it launched, claiming that Hezbollah was targeting civilians. In fact, as Jonathan Cook writes, the Israeli Prime Minister himself had embedded his soldiers in Israeli communities, schools, hospitals and welfare centers to ensure that every Israeli military target would also be a civil target.[13] Israel also planned an offensive 30 kilometers deep inside southern Lebanon to ward off missile threats. However, its advances in certain areas were soon aborted due to fear of retaliatory actions by Hezbollah, and the retreats were termed "tactical moves."[14] Israel dropped at least 350,000 cluster bombs on southern Lebanon and "the outrageous fact is that nearly all of these munitions were fired in the last three to four days of the war."[15]

Military and Political Objectives of Key Players
Before going into Israel's military objectives in the war, it is important to highlight certain facts about the country's diplomatic/security approaches and situation. Firstly, a permanent national strategy of Israel has been to court one world power for the fulfillment of its national objectives; it was Britain in 1918–1948 for the Balfour Declaration, occupation of Palestine, and declaration of statehood; France in 1948–1966 to build military industries and a nuclear program; and, since 1967, the USA, which provides $3 billion in military and economic aid annually, has used 30 vetoes at the UN to protect Israel, and supplies American weapons and equipment as a 'license to kill.' Secondly, Israel is the only state in the world that has no defined or demarcated borders. Thirdly, it is also the only state in the world that came into being during a war, continues to expand during wars, and survives as a result of wars. Indeed, it has followed a pattern of initiating a war, occupying and annexing the target territory, and later getting legitimacy through UNSC resolutions.

Based on these historical facts, Israeli aims in the war with Lebanon can be divided into immediate, short-term and long-term objectives. These objectives are inferred mainly from the speeches and statements of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Vice Premier Shimon Peres, Defense Minister Amir

---

[11] Ewig, 1984. See also, Bolia, 2004.
[12] Faramarzi, 2006.
[13] Cook, 2006.
[14] *AFP News,* August 7 2006.
[15] *Reuters News,* September 19, 2006.

Peretz, and Commander of Northern Region General Alon Friedman.

Israel's immediate objectives for the war were to:[16]
1. Decimate Hezbollah and force it back from the Israeli borders after the Israeli soldiers' return;

2. Effect the deployment of an international force in southern Lebanon to protect Israel from future attacks; and

3. Demonstrate Israel's readiness to retaliate and re-establish an effective deterrent.

The short-term objectives were to:[17]
1. Alienate/Eliminate Hezbollah from Lebanon by a) projecting it as the real troublemaker,[18] b) destroying the civil infrastructure, c) distributing pamphlets among the South Lebanese, and d) destroying Hezbollah's *Al-Minar* channel network;

2. Wipe out Syrian control and establish its own control in Lebanon;

3. Capture the Litani River because of the Israelis' historical belief that the Litani is part of Israel and because its water is an important source of irrigation;[19]

4. Establish 'legitimate' control over the Shehabba farms, an area at the junction of the Lebanese, Syrian and Israeli borders, which is presently occupied by Israel but considered by the UN to be Syrian and Lebanese territory.[20]

The long-term Israeli objectives were indicated by Shimon Peres when he said, "It would be catastrophic for the region if Iran succeeds in using Syria, Hamas and Hezbollah to expand its influence and establish 'Shiite hegemony.'"[21] Moreover, an Israeli victory would have served as a warning to both Syria and Iran and thus warded off any threat from these states. However, eventually, the long-term objectives come down to the Israeli dream of "Greater Israel": as depicted by the star of David and two blue lines on the Israeli flag, this dream is the revival of David's Empire, which stretched from the Nile to the Euphrates.

The immediate objectives of the United States were to protect Israel by providing military and diplomatic support.[22] The US provided weapons

---

[16] Faramarzi, *Op. cit.*
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] It is important to note that this was the view of Hezbollah taken by most of the Arab/Muslim governments initially. However, they changed their stance as the war progressed and the Arab/Muslim populous began to support Hezbollah through public demonstrations and rallies. (Ambah, 2006.)
[19] Margolis, 2006.
[20] Asseburg, 2006.
[21] Peres, 2006a.
[22] Jacoby, 2006.

22

and equipment during the war using British stopovers[23] and, on the diplomatic front, refused to stop the war until a possible Israeli victory. The short-term objectives of the US were to manage the conflict through military means, as an extension of its regional strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq — although both were failures and to pressurize Syria and Iran.

The United States' long-term objectives in the war reflected its strategy for the region. They were to:[24]

1. **Protect Israel** — No other country in the world has another state's protection or survival as its own national security objective. This objective transcends the political divide in the US.[25] Nevertheless, the US is not following the policy of safeguarding Israel blindly. The theory that whatever the US is doing in the Middle East, it is doing for Israel, seems superficial on the basis of the following facts:

   a. The theory puts all the blame for US actions in the region on the "conniving Jews" and absorbs all the moral responsibility of the actions of the US.

   b. The US has its own strategic interests, which are independent of Israel's.

   c. There is no qualitative difference in the actions of the US in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world. One can find a similarity between the US actions in the Middle East and its conduct in the Philippines, Panama, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile, etc., where there is no Israel to 'determine' US strategies and actions.

   d. This theory ignores the fundamental distinction that the US establishment makes between "vital interests" and "non-vital interests," which may also be termed 'frontyard interests' and 'backyard interests,' respectively. The US will only go along with Israel as far as its vital interests are not affected.

   e. The US also takes into consideration the vital interests of the Arab rulers in the region to further its own hegemony and to give durability to its rulings in the region. The position of Israel and the Arabs in American policy for the Middle East was quite obvious when the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said, "We are going to be a defender and ally of Israel. Israel is a democracy. Israel is our friend, and we share values. And we also have very good relations with others in the region, with Egypt, with

---

[23] *EDP24* (www.new.edp24.co.uk), July 30, 2006, "Hazardous cargo flights diverted to Mildenhall."
[24] Hunter, 2006 and Berrigan and Hartung, 2006.
[25] Stauffer, 2003.

23

Saudi Arabia, with Jordan. And we all have, I think, a common vision of how the Middle East should look."[26]

2. **Stop Syrian interference** — i.e. persuade Syria to stop arming Hezbollah, break its ties with Iran, and halt its interference in Lebanese politics.[27]

3. **Clip Iranian power in the region** — In the post-9/11 scenario, the Taliban and Saddam, both powerful enemies of Iran, were destroyed by the US, which enhanced the regional credentials of Iran. Therefore, the US wanted to clip Iranian influence.[28]

4. **Implement the US National Security Strategy announced on March 16, 2006** — The strategy was announced by President Bush and means that the US will, *inter alia*, strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism, work to prevent attacks against the US and its friends, and "prevent our enemies from threatening us, our allies and our friends with the WMDs."[29]

5. **Implement the Neo-Conservatives' Agenda** — This Agenda envisages a new Middle East in which American supremacy would be established by military means and the control of oil.[30] It suggests further division of Arab states into smaller states based on ethnic and sectarian foundations[31] so that the binding force of the Muslim Ummah may be broken and divergent elements provoked.

Hezbollah's objectives in the war were to:[32]
1. Effect the release of Palestinian and Lebanese prisoners from Israeli jails through prisoner exchange;

2. Show its military strength to the regional/global actors in general and Israel in particular;

3. Prove its legitimacy in the Arab world, presenting itself as the only resistance capable of standing against Israel and thus rejecting the Arab leaders' perception that Israel is undefeatable;

4. Demonstrate its strength to the Lebanese central government; and

5. Sustain Syrian and Iranian influence in Lebanon — an important factor for the achievement of the above objectives.

---

[26] US Department of State, 2006.
[27] Pan, 2006.
[28] Ali, 2006.
[29] The White House, 2006.
[30] Hussain and Yasmeen, 2004.
[31] Peters, 2006.
[32] *Ibid.*

The July 12 Israeli attacks on Lebanon continued for about 34 days and several attempts to halt the war were blocked, mainly by the US, to provide an upper hand to Israel. However, as the war progressed and Israel proved unable to sustain the war and achieve a worthwhile victory, the US initiated a serious effort to stop the war. The UNSC passed the resolution 1701 on August 11 and the war came to an end on August 14 with the dispatch of multilateral forces to monitor the ceasefire. Hezbollah and Lebanon were the first parties to accept the ceasefire call, depicting their readiness for peace and stability in the country. However, Hezbollah vowed to retaliate if Israel launched any provocations. Israel took several weeks to withdraw from southern Lebanon and also continued the air and sea blockade of Lebanon, increasing the miseries of its government and people.

Notwithstanding the significant losses to Israel and the moral victory for Hezbollah, the ultimate loser in the war has been Lebanon and its people, who suffered enormous human casualties and destruction of the entire civic infrastructure in the south.

Strategic Implications

The war has exposed many Israeli myths and it has impacted upon regional and global actors as well as the overall environment. It will take time for the true implications to unfold and reveal their full effect but some of the foreseeable implications can be analyzed.

Many of the objectives of the belligerents have remained unfulfilled while Hezbollah has emerged as the most popular, effective and powerful resistance force, which is being appreciated throughout the world. Around 89 percent of Sunnis and 80 percent of Christians in Lebanon[33] and the majority of the Palestinians support Hezbollah.[34] There have been demonstrations throughout the Arab world in support of Hezbollah, notably in strong pro-US states, such as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.[35] At the peoples' level, in many countries, local recruitments were made to help Hezbollah, especially in Indonesia, and at the state level, the Malaysian minister asked the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) to provide arms to Hezbollah. Therefore, the Israeli objective of alienating and eliminating Hezbollah has backfired; support for it has grown across the region and the Muslim world. Despite several bombing attempts by Israel on the home and headquarters of Hassan Nasarullah, the Hezbollah Secretary General claimed a "historic and strategic" victory against Israel.[36] Moreover, as soon as the war ended on August 14, 2006 and people began to return to their devastated homes, Hezbollah distributed $12,000 to each family whose home had been destroyed by the Israeli air strikes. There are an estimated 15,000 destroyed homes, which would cost around $1.5 million to rebuild at this rate. The Lebanese government has yet to launch a

---

[33] Gerges, 2006. See also *The Guardian,* August 4, 2006, "War crimes and Lebanon."

[34] *Reuters News*, August 7, 2006, "Palestinians back Hamas, Hezbollah stance against Israel."

[35] *Associated Press News*, August 7, 2006, "Arab protestors vent anger on their rulers."

[36] Razzouk, 2006.

25

similar scheme.[37] This has further enhanced the good reputation of Hezbollah in its stronghold.

Despite its acceptance of the UNSC resolution, Hezbollah has vowed to keep fighting until the last Israeli soldier leaves Lebanon. As the first non-state actor that single-handedly took on Israel in a full-scale war of this kind, it has undermined Israeli 'deterrent power' in the region. It is not so much its performance that has changed the balance of power in the region, at Israel's expense, but the example it has set for others in the region.[38] Moreover, the Israeli demand that an international force disarm Hezbollah met with rejection from most quarters. It was turned down by the Lebanese government, while Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema said in an interview that our objective was not to destroy Hezbollah, which by now is an important part of Lebanese society.[39] Israeli Foreign Minster Tzipi Livni conceded in a cabinet meeting that no army in the world would have succeeded in disarming Hezbollah by military means alone.[40] The European Union (EU) members made it clear that they believed disarming Hezbollah should not be part of the mandate of any international force deployed in Lebanon.[41] Moreover, it was stated by Kathleen Christison, an expert on the Middle East who formerly worked with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), that the oppressed population in Israel's neighborhood is now fighting back. No matter how much Arab leaders in Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia may bow before the US and Israel, the Arab people now recognize the fundamental weakness of Israel's race-based culture that they can ultimately defeat it.[42]

The Lebanese Prime Minster thanked Hezbollah for saving his country from Israeli aggression. It was because of Hezbollah's steadfastness that a country like Lebanon refused to entertain the US Secretary of State and instead welcomed the Iranian Foreign Minister. It also gave confidence to the Lebanese government to reject the draft UNSC Resolution for a ceasefire as, initially, it was Israel that has been doing this for the last one month.

However, despite all these positive outcomes, there is a strong possibility that Lebanon may plunge into another civil war given the political and religious divide and Hezbollah's stronger role in Lebanon. In the longer run, this would be disastrous for the country — which has already witnessed several civil wars during the past century — and jeopardize regional peace and security.

By its standards, Israel suffered heavy human casualties. The pride of the Israeli army has been dented and its aura of invincibility as one of the most professional and powerful armies in the region has been broken.

---

[37] *Reuters News*, August 17, 2006. "Hezbollah hands out cash to war homeless."
[38] Hirst, 2006.
[39] *AFP News,* August 27, 2006, "Italy recognizes Hezbollah as part of Lebanese society."
[40] *Associated Press News*, August 13, 2006.
[41] *AFP News*, August 28, 2006.
[42] Christion, 2006.

26

Israel also earned severe condemnation from the world after the Qana tragedy, which saw more than 100 civilians dead, the killing of UN Peacekeepers, and destruction of civilian infrastructure.[43] Israel was accused of committing war crimes by Amnesty International in its report "*Deliberate destruction or collateral damage? Israeli attacks against civilian infrastructure,*" which focused on how Israel deliberately hit civilian targets, including roads and bridges.[44] Israel was also snubbed by Human Rights Watch, which accused it of attacking civilians and thereby committing "war crimes," and refuted Israel's claim that the high Lebanese death toll should be blamed on Hezbollah fighters using civilians as shields.[45]

Israel was unable to achieve most of its military and political objectives. However, it has been able to get an international force deployed to protect its borders against Hezbollah attacks. Much before the end of the war, an Israeli military strategist, Ralph Peters, said that "Olmert has bungled the war effort and is causing Israel to lose the battle, both in the field and for international opinion."[46] Another Israeli critic said that a "war on terror" could not be won by a democratically elected government acting like a terrorist organization — war is too serious a business to be left to the generals alone.[47] On the state level, while a commission to probe the war was being formed, Israeli Army Chief General Dan Halutz, in a letter to the Israeli cabinet, conceded that his army had failed to knock out Hezbollah and acknowledged that this was not received positively by the Israeli public.[48] However, Benjamin BenEliezer, Israel's national infrastructure minister, held General Halutz responsible for the Lebanese war, saying "…I think that he completely failed in the Lebanese war."[49] Israel's lack of military planning and strategy was also exposed, with local commanders blaming the high command for lack of logistics and supplies and quick battle orders.[50] According to Marius Schattner, the Israeli army is in disarray as it struggles to cope with the failures of the Lebanon war: a general resigned, a colonel accused superiors of being ignorant about ground realities, and the command structure has been battered by the unrelenting storm of criticism.[51]

As long as Israel was meeting its military and political objectives against the Palestinians and the Arabs, the Israelis were satisfied with their leadership and no inward retrospection was deemed necessary. However, in the aftermath of the Lebanese war, several political, economic and moral scandals involving the top leadership, including the President and Prime Minister, came to the surface.[52] Amid the first days of the ceasefire, the

---

[43] Shlaim, 2006.
[44] *AFP News*, August 23, 2006.
[45] *AFP News*, August 3, 2006.
[46] Pan, *Op. cit.*
[47] Shlaim, *Op. cit.*
[48] *Reuters News,* August 20, 2006, "General concedes Israel failed to smash Hezbollah."
[49] *AFP News*, August 28, 2006.
[50] *AFP News*, August 29, 2006.
[51] Schattner, 2006.
[52] Avnery, 2006.

Israeli press was carrying reports about the Army Chief's secret stock sales before the war; the possibility that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert accepted a $500,000 bribe as part of a conspiracy with a building contractor; the resignation of Justice Minister Haim Ramon to fight charges of indecent assault on a female employee; and speculations that Israel's President Moshe Katsav may face charges of rape of a female employee.[53] The idea to 'sell victory' to Israelis has backfired: because he was unable to deliver a total victory against Hezbollah, there are now even more voices asking for Olmert to resign.[54] Yoram Peri, a professor at the Tel Aviv University, says that wars have shaped Israel's political agenda and unsuccessful military campaigns have sparked protest movements, brought down prime ministers and redrawn the political map. The Lebanon war is likely to be another such event for Israel.[55] These fears were echoed by French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy when he said that Israel was beset by confusion and introspection after the conflict and was heading towards political and military stalemate.[56]

The barrage of criticism over the handling of the war came with mounting calls for resignations. The first casualty was Major General Udi Adam, leader of Israel's northern command during the war, who resigned.[57] The public and the military were furious over Olmert's leadership during the war, and the Israeli press lambasted the decision-makers for putting the country in a security risk and causing the loss of its strategic deterrence in the region.[58] Consequently, the Israeli cabinet authorized an inquiry into the government's handling of the war in Lebanon that would be headed by a retired judge. However, many criticized the toothless commission and urged for a State Inquiry Commission that could investigate the top leadership.[59] In addition, the vice premier, Shimon Peres, asked for a complete revision of Israel's military approach in the aftermath of its experiences in the Lebanese war.[60] At the end of the war, there had been reports that Israel was ready to exchange 800 Palestinian prisoners for its soldiers and move to swap prisoners with Hezbollah.[61] This indicates that Israel learnt some very hard lessons about the ground realities.

Another outcome of the war is the formal death of a 15-year peace process, as well as widening of the political and military divide between Israel and Palestinians/Hezbollah on the one hand, and increased popular resentment against Israel on the other. In this context, the UN, OIC and Arab League are also the casualties of war because they could not do anything to prevent the war in the first place, and when the war did start, they could not impose the global will against Israel. The UN could not agree on a ceasefire simply because of US the opposition, while the OIC met only

---

[53] Cockburn, 2006.
[54] Gilmore, 2006.
[55] Peri, 2006.
[56] *AFP News*, August 29, 2006.
[57] *AFP News*, September 13, 2006.
[58] Mitnick, 2006.
[59] *AFP News*, September 17, 2006.
[60] Peres, 2006b.
[61] *AFP News*, August 27 and September 3, 2006.

after the war had been raging for 22 days, and then only 17 out of 57 members, including only five heads of state, attended the moot, which in any case ended without any resolute action. Surprisingly, it was Venezuela, a non-Muslim country, that took the major step of recalling its ambassador from Israel against its invasion of Lebanon.

Increased resentment against the pro-US governments and revitalization of anti-Americanism in the region are also outcomes of the war.[62] Among the negative consequences for the US, the war has driven the Sunni and Shi'a Arabs together in an anti-US front; it has destroyed any remaining hope for the US to be perceived as an honest broker for regional peace; it has undermined the US agenda of democratic reforms in the Arab world; and, most important, the war has helped to create more militant enemies in the region.[63] In Israel itself, demonstrations against the war accused the US of dragging Israelis into war. The *Haaretz Daily* quoted demonstrators as chanting, "We will not die and kill in the service of United States."[64]

More alarming for the US and Israel has been the emergence of radical states/groups in a 'regional crescent' stretching from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon to Sudan. This has all the potential of producing more non-state actors opposing their own governments and capable of precipitating a popular revolt that could jeopardize the entire Middle East and the world at large. Regionally, Hezbollah's assertiveness has given new confidence to these states and if there is a new war they may jump into the conflict to help Hezbollah and weaken Israeli and US power in the region. As it is, at the height of the war, Syrian Foreign Minister Wlaid Mullaem had declared that Damascus was ready for regional war and would respond immediately to any Israeli attack.[65] On the other hand, Israel has also made face-saving threats that it will start the "next round" of the war after its army has examined the war failures.[66] French President Jacques Chirac too has expressed fears that violence might resume without a political solution to the problem.[67] One commentator stated that 50 years of muted Arab states' response to Israeli excesses produced radical actors such as Hamas in 1987, which started the Intifadah, and Hezbollah, which emerged to fight against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in 1982. Time will reveal what new hard-line forces are to rise from the ashes of the Lebanon war.[68]

Conclusion
The war has broken the myths on which Israel based its deterrent strategy in the region and garnered sympathies from the international community, particularly the European states. This was the first time that a strong Israeli army faced an effective military resistance. During the four Arab-Israeli

---

[62] Greenway, 2006.
[63] Gordon and Shapiro, 2006.
[64] Zunes, 2006.
[65] *AFP News*, August 6, 2006, "Syria ready for war if attacked."
[66] *AFP News*, August 20, 2006.
[67] *AFP News*, August 28, 2006.
[68] Gresh, 2006.

29

wars, in the absence of any credible resistance from the Arab armies, Israel had created an image of military invincibility, which has now been competently shattered. The weaknesses of Israel's offensive military strategy in the areas of mobility, logistics, supplies and effective decision-making have been exposed; in fact, a strategy failed to materialize in the wake of an actual test. Even before the war ended, Shimon Peres was tacitly conceding the defeat when he said, "Clearly, it won't be the sort of victory we're used to having with armies. You can't beat terrorism with military strength or maneuvers."[69] Its military invincibility and impregnability destroyed, Israel has plunged into deep political and social turmoil, which may topple the government and increase the mistrust with the leadership, and could be suicidal for Israel in the future.

On the other hand, Hezbollah has provided the cue to Arab-Muslim states that they should make history by exercising their sovereign political will or otherwise be ready to become history themselves. At the same time, global sympathy for Israel and the perception of it as an innocent state surrounded by hostile Arab states is gradually diminishing, especially after the world witnessed its latest misadventure and its unnecessary and brutal use of force. The world capitals are fast realizing the political and diplomatic solutions to the outstanding dispute.

The emergence from the war of an undeterred and unshaken Hezbollah has given new confidence to radical forces opposed to Israeli and US hegemony in the region. This, coupled with the military scars of Israeli failures in the war and Israel's desperate need to recover its military and national self-confidence point towards the potential for another war in the region, which would be to the detriment of all parties concerned. The sooner the issues are resolved by peaceful means, the better it would be for achieving lasting and durable regional peace and stability. However, such a resolution requires a change of heart and mind on part of the US and from its regional ally, Israel.

---

[69] Pan, 2006.

30

References

International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). 2005. *The Military Balance 2005/2006*. London: IISS-UK

The White House. 2006. *US National Security Strategy 2006* (www.white house. gov.nsc). Washington, DC.

Ali, Wajahat. 2006, August 3. "US war in the Middle East." *The Daily Times*.
Ambah, Faiza Saleh. 2006, July 30. "Many Arabs Applaud Hezbollah—US Credibility Seen as Harmed By Aid to Israel." *The Washington Post.*

Asseburg, Muriel. 2006, August. "An International Force for Lebanon?" *SWP Comments 20*. Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs.

Avnery, Uri. "Political Corruption in Israel." *Counterpunch* (www.counterp unch .com). Viewed September 28, 2006.

Bolia, Robert S. 2004. "Israel and the War of Attrition." *Military Review* (March–April). Ohio: US Air Force Research Laboratory.

Christion, Kathleen. 2006. "The coming collapse of Zionism." *Counterpunch* (www.counterpunch.com). Viewed September 12, 2006.

Cockburn, Alexander. 2006. "Who's to blame for Israel's moral decline?" *Counterpunch* (www.counterpunch.com). Viewed August 29, 2006.

Cook, Jonathan. 2006. "War of media deception." *Counterpunch* (www.coun ter pu nch.com). Viewed August 3, 2006.

Ewig, Major Mark G. 1984. "Surprise From Zion—The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon." *Air University Review*. (September-October)

Faramarzi, Scheherezade. 2006, August 2. "Hezbollah's fight impresses supporters." *Associated Press*.

Gerges, Fawad A. 2006, August 8. "Hezbollah has risen to fill a social need." *The Daily Times.*

Gilmore, Inigo. 2006, August 13. "Israelis turn on Olmert as UN agrees ceasefire." *The Observer.*

Gordon, Philip H. and Jeremy Shapiro. 2006, August 21. "America has emerged as a loser in the Middle East." *Financial Times.*

Greenway, H. D. S. 2006, August 22. "Wars of great miscalculation." *The Boston Globe.*

Gresh, Alain. 2006, August 22. "Arab World's silence has left extremists to set agenda." *The Guardian.*

Guardian, The. 2006, August 4. "War crimes and Lebanon."

Hirst, David. 2006, August 17. "Hezbollah Achievements." *The Guardian.*

Hunter, Robert E. 2006, July 19. "Protecting US Interests in the Middle

East." *Washington Post*. and Berrigan, Frida and William Hartung. 2006, July 26. "Who's arming Israel?" *Foreign Policy in Focus*.

Hussain, Nazir and Tahira Yasmeen. 2004. "Neo-Conservatives and the US Foreign Policy." *National Development and Security*. Vol. XIII (No. 1, Autumn) The Foundation for Research on International Environment, National Development and Security, Rawalpindi.

Hussain, Nazir. 2002. "Israel's State Terrorism and Regional Peace: Post 9/11 Scenario." *Strategic Studies*. Vol. XXII (No. 3, Autumn).

Jacoby, Jeff. 2006, March 25. "Why the United States loves Israel." *The Boston Globe*.

Margolis, Eric. 2006, August 6. "The War has backfired for Israel." *Toronto Sun*.

Mitnick, Joshua. 2006, August 30. "Olmert faces flak from Israelis for Lebanon war." *The Washington Times.*

Pan, Esther. 2006, July 31. "Peres Says Mistakes Made In War; Iran Must Be Checked." Council on Foreign Relations. (www.cfr.org)

———. 2006, August 3. "Vying for Victory in the Middle East." *Council on Foreign Relations Daily Analysis.*

Peres, Shimon. 2006a, June 31. *The Current Conflict in the Middle East.* Address at the Council on Foreign Relations (www.cfr.org). New York.

———. 2006b, September 4. "Israel must revise its military approach." *The Guardian.*

Peri, Yoram. 2006, August 25. "Inside Israel." *Washington Post.*

Peters, Ralph. 2006, June. "Blood borders – How a better Middle East would look." *Armed Forces Journal*. (http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/ 2006 / 06/1833899) Springfield, VA: Army Times Publishing Company.

Quilty, Jim. 2006, July 25. "Israel's War Against Lebanon's Shi'a." *Middle East Report Online*.

Razzouk, Nayla. 2006, August 15. "Lebanon truce holds as refugees stream home." *AFP News*

Schattner, Marius. 2006, September 15. "Israel in disarray over Lebanon war." *AFP News.*

Shlaim, Avi. 2006, August 4. "Massacre in Qana: Israel's error, then and now." *The International Herald Tribune*.

Stauffer, Tom. 2003. "The Cost of Conflict in the Middle East 1956–2002: What the US Has Spent." *Middle East Policy.* Vol. X (No. 1, Spring).

US Department of State. 2006, August 29. "Secretary Condoleezza Rice – Interview on KSL-TV with Bruce Lindsay." Official website of the US Department of State (www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/71646.htm).

Zunes, Stephen. 2006, August 23. "The logic of War." *Asia Times Online.*