

# The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006



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# Chapter Three

*The Israeli War against Hizbullah  
and Lebanon*

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# The Israeli War against Hizbullah and Lebanon

## *Introduction*

On 12/7/2006, Israel launched a total war on Hizbullah, and through it on Lebanon. This war was different from all previous Israeli wars in many respects: its objectives, the nature of the adversary that it confronted, and the results and repercussions that has far reaching local, regional and international consequences. While facing in the past regular Arab armies with different numbers and military capabilities, Israel found itself this time in a comprehensive war with a “party” that constitutes an important part of a sectarian-based political system in a small Arab country with a weak army, hence its only option is to follow guerilla tactics to defend the country and its peoples. In its previous wars, particularly the ones in which it took the initiative, Israel achieved decisive and resounding victories that achieved more than it wanted and in a record time. But this time, it found itself dragged into a long war that it failed to successfully conclude or even to achieve any of its declared objectives.

Additionally, this war was conducted in different local, regional and international circumstances. Locally, this Lebanese “summer war” was the first comprehensive war that the Israeli army launched under the command of a civil minister of war, and in the absence of the founding and historical leaders of the state, as Sharon, the last of those figureheads, was incapacitated, in early January 2006, by a massive brain clot in an intensive care unit of an Israeli hospital. Regionally, there was a state of sharp polarization in the Arab world, where some Arab countries had openly, and for the first time in the history of Arab-Israeli wars, held an Arab side, not Israel, responsible for starting the war. On the international level, this was the first Israeli war instigated by the USA, and which Israel launched on behalf of others.

Since it is difficult to properly know what had happened in this war without addressing its roots, the major part of this chapter will be allocated to a diagnosis of the war’s surrounding conditions that distinguishes between its direct or declared reasons and its underlying and ulterior motives. This will be followed by a chronology of the phases of the war, and the attitude of regional and international

quarters towards it up till the time of the Security Council Resolution 1701. Finally, the discourse deals with the war's consequences and repercussions at the local, regional and international levels.

### *First: The Roots, Reasons and Motives<sup>1</sup>*

Few hours before the beginning of the “summer war,” Hizbullah launched a unique military operation in which eight Israeli soldiers were killed, 18 wounded and two captured. Subsequently, the party declared that the objective of this operation was to arrest as many Israeli soldiers as possible to swap them in an indirect negotiations with some Lebanese detainees in Israeli prisons. The party rationalized this attack by arguing that it is in a continuous state of war with Israel because of its occupation of some Lebanese territories and detaining a group of Lebanese nationals since the year 2000. The party added that this was not its first military operation after the liberation of the South, and that it had previously conducted successful negotiations with Israel to exchange prisoners. Hizbullah seems to have calculated that the Israeli reaction will not be basically and qualitatively different from previous ones in similar circumstances. But subsequent developments showed that this was gross misjudgment as Israel launched a comprehensive war against Hizbullah and Lebanon only few hours after this operation.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, Israel was not in dire need for this massive response, and could have pursued other viable alternatives that ranged from a limited military operation to all known kinds of diplomatic, or even military, pressure that is compatible with the event. Since institutional states do not take such dangerous decisions for emotional and circumstantial reasons, and wars require long planning and preparations, the prompt decision of Israel to launch a total war on Lebanon had naturally raised eyebrows on the underlying motives that triggered it to act likewise. Hence, it is legitimate to seriously suspect the Israeli claims that Hizbullah operation was the real and only reason behind this war.

However, we have sufficient and reliable evidence from various western sources that the preparation for this war started many months before the operation. Moreover, many newspapers reports had ascertained this. Amongst them were two reports

published in *The New Yorker* by Seymour Hersh and Wayne Madsen, of which the Lebanese newspaper *Assafir* had published long excerpts that are seemingly based on information from informed sources. They record an Israeli-American coordination that started long before Hizbullah's operation to destroy the military infrastructure of this party as a prelude to a drastic change in the political rules of the game in the entire Middle East region, and not Lebanon alone. It is evident that the Iranian factor was the prime mover of this coordination, as both powers have common interest to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities if the diplomatic efforts failed to compel this country to stop its program of uranium enrichment. The success of such operation urgently required a pre-emptive strike against Hizbullah, who was expected to retaliate to the planned attack on Iran by bombarding Northern Israel. Besides, the air raids on the military bases of Hizbullah could be a model to be followed on the Iranian front. Hence, there were strong motives for this coordination between the USA and Israel, and the latter was bound to go to the "summer war" to liquidate Hizbullah whether it launched its military operation on 12 July or not.<sup>3</sup>

The above reports give concrete information of a meeting, held under the cover of a symposium organized by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), in Beaver Creek, Colorado on 17-18/6/2006, and attended by the American Vice President Dick Cheney, the Israeli Premier Ehud Olmert, three former Israeli prime ministers: Benjamin Netanyahu, Ehud Barak and Shimon Peres, and the Knesset member Natan Sharansky, which finalized the plans for the "summer war." It is most likely that in this meeting, which may have been preceded and succeeded by other undisclosed ones, the role of each party was fixed. Since Israel had been asked to bear the military effort, it was given the right to choose the opportune time for launching the war in accordance with its internal conditions, while the massive American military capabilities were, of course, wide open for Israel at all times. Meanwhile, the USA was allocated the role of leading the diplomatic battle that would give Israel all the time that it needed to complete the mission successfully. The Israeli leadership seemed to have planned to launch the war by the end of the tourist period, but Hizbullah military operation hastened the decision.<sup>4</sup>

On launching its strike, Israel declared that it aspired to achieve the following objectives:

1. To destroy Hizbullah's military infrastructure and to push its fighters behind the Litani River.
2. To assist the Lebanese government to impose its authority on all Lebanese territories in such a way that enables the Lebanese army to spread its authority in the South, as well as evicting all armed groups whoever they are.
3. To enable the Lebanese government to implement Resolution 1559 that calls for the disarmament of Hizbullah and other military groups that are not subjected to the Jurisdiction of the state, including the Palestinian military factions.

The above extensive objectives make it difficult to accept the Israeli claim that this massive war was merely a response to Hizbullah limited military operation, and it is clear that the successful attainment of these objectives in the Lebanese front would prepare the way to change all the rules of the game in the entire Middle East, an objective that the USA had been looking for. If the Iranian nuclear program had played a major role in convincing the USA to extend to Israel the necessary political umbrella that would enable it to launch a military operation against Hizbullah, Israel had, on the other hand, its more pressing reasons to embark on such a military adventure.

To know the real roots for this war, we need to reflect on the year 2000, which had witnessed two important developments: First, the success of the Lebanese resistance, under the leadership of Hizbullah, to force Israel, for the first time in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, to unconditionally withdraw from an Arab territory, the Lebanese South in this case, on 24 May, and secondly, the failure of the summit between Barak and 'Arafat which Bill Clinton had arranged in Camp David during the period 12-25/7/2000 to seek a permanent settlement of the Palestinian issue. The two incidents, which were separated by a period of two months, may not initially appear to be interrelated, but they had, in fact, interacted on the ground to determine the orientation of future events. Had Camp David Summit succeeded to strike an agreement that would pave the way for an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty that satisfies the minimum Palestinian demands and establish their independent state, the events on the Lebanese front would have taken a different course, and the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon would have been viewed as a wise

decision that aimed at preparing the region for a comprehensive settlement of all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. But this was not the reality on the ground. For the deal offered by Barak in Camp David, and subsequently slightly improved by Clinton, was less than the minimum that any Palestinian leader can accept, however moderate he may be, though, at the time, it was propagated by some quarters as the best that an Israeli Labor leader could give, and far more than the maximum of the Israeli right. Thus, Camp David 2 revealed the dilemma of the route of the political settlement, while Hizbullah victory proved that there is a more effective alternative to restore the rights of the Arabs.

If Oslo impasse and the achievement of Hizbullah in Lebanon had jointly paved the way for the Israeli right to come to power under the leadership of Sharon, and ignited, even militarized, *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, the victory of George Bush in the American race for the presidency had the lion's share in complicating the already complex situation in the Middle East.

The assumption of power in America by the American right under the leadership of Bush the son in late 2000, and the victory of Sharon, the leader of the Israeli right, in early 2001 had paralyzed the whole route of peaceful settlement. The attempts to isolate and besiege Yasir 'Arafat politically was followed by the dramatic events of 11 September that shocked the USA, and gave the neo-conservatives the pretext to implement their project of "the new American century" that aimed at consolidating the sole American supremacy over the world. No doubt, these events enabled Sharon to have the American green light to crush the *Intifadah* and liquidate it militarily. The so-called "international war on terrorism" enabled Sharon to appear to be on the same boat with the USA, and to exhibit the Palestinian and the Lebanese resistance movements as nothing but "terrorist" movements of the same caliber as al-Qa'ida. Within the same context, the USA declared war on Afghanistan and removed Taliban regime by force. Subsequently, it declared war on Iraq under the guise of its possession of weapons of mass destruction, crushed the Iraqi regime and occupied the country. Meanwhile, Sharon was free to destroy the infrastructure of the Palestinian resistance, besiege 'Arafat and claim that he had no Palestinian partner to negotiate with.

The American invasion of Iraq was nothing but one of a series of operations to consolidate the imperial project of the neo-conservatives. Since George W. Bush had identified that his so-called "axis of evil" include Iraq, Iran and North Korea,



the issue was who will be next after Iraq. Logically, North Korea should be the next target because of its relatively advanced nuclear program that disturbed the American administration, but nobody seriously felt that the Korean crisis would develop into a military confrontation irrespective of the extent of the Korean provocation. In fact, the Middle East remained the primary concern of the imperial American project, particularly after the events of 11/9/2001. It was obvious that the neo-conservatives aspired to achieve a number of objectives in this region of which the most important are:

1. To maintain direct control of the sources of oil because it is one of the main means to dictate the balance of power in the international order.
2. To consolidate Israel to be the main regional power as it is the only trusted ally in the region.
3. To weaken anti-American regimes and forces in the region whenever possible, and, at the same time, to press friendly powers to undertake radical political and cultural measures to uproot the sources of the so-called “terrorism.”

By the American occupation of Iraq, the Iranian and Syrian regimes were at the hands of the American military might. In the American perception, Iran's threat comes from its inspiration of all anti-American fundamentalist Islamic groups in the region, and from its nuclear program that threatens Israel, the only trusted ally in the region. Though the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait had opened a window of opportunity for improved American-Syrian relations, the USA government had by now felt that Syria lost its strategic importance because of its adamant opposition to the war on Iraq, extreme position towards the Arab-Israeli conflict and its association with both Iran and the Palestinian armed resistance. Naturally, in this context, America has tangible interest to weaken the Iranian and Syrian regimes.

The sequence of events should have logically triggered the American administration to launch a military strike on Iran or Syria or both once the situation in Iraq is stabilized. But the stumbling of its project there forced the administration to revise its plans and change its means without given up its objectives towards these countries. Thus, the military option was temporarily shelved in favor of the nuclear and Lebanese issues as more appropriate means of pressure on the Iranian and Syrian regimes respectively. Meanwhile, since it was rather difficult for the American administration to indulge in these issues unilaterally, it decided to enlist

the support of the “rebellious” European countries, particularly France. Hence, was the American drive to close the chapter of its differences with these powers over the Iraqi war. France, on her part, felt that the region is heading towards a new Sykes-Picot Agreement from which it did not want to be excluded, and thus it strove towards a rapprochement with the USA that would enable her to get its share of the cake. There was no better area than the Lebanese theatre to test the possibility of such a rapprochement.

The attempts to engender an American-French rapprochement had, in fact, started after a secret visit by Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, an envoy of the French President Jacques Chirac, to Damascus in November 2003. According to a report by David Ignatius, published in *The Washington Post* newspaper on 5/2/2005, the French envoy told the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad that the regional and international conditions had changed after the de facto American occupation of Iraq, and that Syrian policy and attitude should also change. The envoy told the president that Chirac, with the full support of Bush, the Russian President Vladimir Putin and the German leader Gerhard Schroder, wanted him to demonstrate his good intention by such an act like a spectacular visit to Jerusalem or a daring measure that opens a new horizon for a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. No doubt, the French envoy knew very well that such a step tantamounts a political suicide for President Bashar, but the Syrian refusal was required to be a pretext for the forthcoming change in French policy towards Syria and Lebanon.

By August 2004, there was a secret diplomatic channel between France and the USA through Chirac’s envoy and Stephen Hadley, the advisor of the American president for National Security, which culminated in a joint American French resolution on Lebanon. President Bashar’s serious concern about this rapprochement may have been behind his insistence to extend the presidency of Imil Lahhud. Whether right or wrong, this extension had, given France a further pretext to justify its rapprochement with the USA and the major role that it played in the issuance of the Security Council Resolution 1559, which contributed to the expulsion of the whole Lebanese scenario. This Resolution aimed at a total Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, the dismantling of the military infrastructure of the resistance under the leadership of Hizbullah, the surrender of the Palestinian weapons outside the camps and the closure of the headquarters of the Palestinian organizations that refuse a settlement based on the Israeli conditions. From the Syrian perspective,

this Resolution had a sole outcome, namely, to hand over Lebanon to the joint American-French-Israeli supremacy, and to expose the security of the Syrian state, regime and society to direct dangers.

Naturally, Syria resisted this Resolution, particularly as it was not issued under Chapter VII and entailed no mechanism for its implementation. But the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri closed down all avenues for Syrian manipulation. Irrespective of who was behind this brutal crime, it provoked a series of reactions that led to the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. These reactions were designed to accelerate until they lead to the disarmament of Hizbullah and the surrender of the Palestinian weapon outside the camps. But the quick joint political maneuver of Hizbullah and the Lebanese anti-western national forces led to a new political reality in Lebanon that made the realization of the rest objectives of Resolution 1559, particularly the disarmament of the “militias,” impossible without a Lebanese consensus. Meanwhile, the outcome of the general elections that were conducted after the assassination of al-Hariri enabled Hizbullah to participate in the new government. Hence, there was no way but to start a national dialogue over all the pending issues.

These internal developments within the Lebanese political scene deepened the feeling that the American-French project over Lebanon had started to stumble. Meanwhile, both America and Israel seemed to have realized that the disarmament of Hizbullah can never be achieved through a political lobby from within Lebanon. But the increasing probability of a military confrontation with Iran over its nuclear program, particularly after its success in enriching the uranium, was the direct factor that triggered a serious quest for other alternatives to implement Resolution 1559 by force. Hence, plans for an extensive military strike against Hizbullah started. By its military operation in which two Israeli soldiers were kidnapped, the party had unknowingly given the pretext for launching the war.

## ***Second: The Conduct of the War and the Positions of the Regional and International Power***

According to the prior above mentioned coordination between the two parties, the USA undertook to launch an active diplomatic campaign that was necessary to counter the repercussions of the war and guarantee the realization of its objectives.

From the beginning, it was clear that the objectives of Israel were limited compared with the ulterior motives of the USA that saw in the air raids against the bases of Hizbullah an example that may be subsequently repeated against Iran, and a prelude to far-reaching changes in the region. Thus, the USA had not only been keen to give Israel all the time that it needed to crush Hizbullah once and for all, but it also instigated and encouraged Israel to continue its operations and supplied her with modern armaments when necessary. The USA expected that the destruction of Hizbullah will weaken Syria's influence in Lebanon to the extent that it will end its alliance with Iran, reduce its support to the Palestinian resistance and accept flexible conditions for a settlement with Israel. If the USA could concurrently succeed in destroying Iran's nuclear program, then the whole Middle East will be ripe for a fresh beginning. But the ability of the USA to administer the repercussions of the crisis in a way to achieve its objectives depended entirely on the ability of Israel to achieve a decisive victory in the theatre of war, in which it had, however, utterly failed as we will explain below.

### 1. The Military Conduct of the War

On the Israeli front, the military conduct of the war passed through three distinct stages:<sup>5</sup>

**First: Continuous and extensive air raids**, whose primary targets were to destroy Hizbullah's platforms of missiles, stores of weapons and military hideouts as well as Lebanese ports, airports, bridges and centers of telecommunication. These targets were well spelled out in a plan prepared by Olmert and approved by the cabinet on the very same day of Hizbullah's operation. The principal targets behind this plan was to inflict as much damage as possible on Hizbullah's human and military resources (soldiers, armament, supplies and means of communication) as well as the Lebanese infrastructure in the hope that the Lebanese people will rise against Hizbullah because it triggered the war, and held it responsible for the destruction of Lebanon.

**Second: Destruction of Beirut's Southern Suburb**, which houses Hizbullah's headquarter and most important political, media and economic institutions. This phase started after the fourth day of the war and aimed at the assassination of the party's leaders, particularly its Secretary-General Hasan Nasrullah, obstruction of its modes of communication and the destruction of

its machinery and organs, in particular its political and media institutions. This will ascertain the comprehensive nature of the war and its continuation until it achieve all its objectives, and increase the extent of damage in the hope that the required psychological impact will be achieved, and the Lebanese people will rise against Hizbullah.

**Third: Land operations**, which were conducted by the elite units, these operations started on a limited and interrupted scale to infiltrate and control some of the strategic positions. But the failure of the elite units to achieve their objectives gradually widened their scale until, by the end of the war, they became more of a land invasion. Meanwhile, the Israeli army repeatedly tried to control the Lebanese South as this was the only means to clean the region from Hizbullah and destroy the rest of its weapons and machinery, particularly the platforms of the missiles that operated effectively until the ceasefire. Meanwhile, some land and air operations tried to kidnap the party's political and military leaders.

The three phases of the war took 33 days during which all the army units: land, air and sea, actively participated. According to the estimates of *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper<sup>6</sup>, the air force launched 15,500 raids (of which 10 thousand were on fighting missions and the rest on communication, search and rescue missions), and the fleet was engaged for eight thousand hours, during which it undertook 2,500 bombardment operations on fixed targets, and tightened the siege on the Lebanese coast throughout the war, while the best land and air units occupied advanced positions along the borders, or conducted parachute operations in the interior. Almost seven thousand targets had been hit in the operations.

**On the Lebanese theatre**, the Lebanese army was not a party in this war, though some of its positions were subjected to bombardment during which tens of soldiers were killed or injured. Its role was restricted to the extension of support to civilians and to perform rescue operations. Thus, Hizbullah confronted Israel all alone in this war and shouldered all its military burden. Indeed, the party appeared to be on the defensive and fighting an imposed comprehensive war that was beyond its limited capabilities and abilities. But the party managed to compensate its lack of airplanes, tanks and warships by a huge supply of medium range Katyusha missiles in addition to a reasonable supply of the largely medium range "Zilzal" missiles, which enabled it to fight back and to transfer the war into the interior of Israel to reach "Haifa and beyond Haifa." The ability of Hizbullah to respond by

effective use of missiles was not the only surprise in this war, but it also managed to damage one of the most superior and sophisticated naval units, a cruiser that belongs to the category Eilat-Sa'ar 5.<sup>7</sup>

But the most important revelation of the war was the supremacy of Hizbullah fighters in all the face to face confrontations, and their mastery of the guerrilla tactics. However, irrespective of the claims of victory in this war to this or that part, Hizbullah demonstrated ability to, daily, launch hundreds of missiles deep in the interior of Israel, and to the last moment of the war, which glaringly prove that Israel failed to achieve its most important objective, the destruction of the party's military infrastructure.

## **2. The Political Management and the Development of Regional and International Positions**

### **a. International Developments**

As mentioned above, within the distribution of roles agreed upon with Israel, the USA took the responsibility of administering the crisis on the diplomatic level through the following:

1. The obstruction of any attempt to call the Security Council for a meeting, and to give Israel all the time it needs to achieve its military objectives prior to a discussion of a ceasefire.
2. To make sure that any decision taken by the Security Council, when the time is opportune for its meeting, observes all Israeli-American demands.

The first condition could be realized without much diplomatic predicaments, particularly after the developments in Germany that brought Angela Merkel to the chancellorship, and the American-French rapprochement on the Lebanese issue. Though the USA was rather disturbed by the downfall of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, this change was of limited impact and could not generate an anti-war front in Europe. With this de facto Euro-American understanding, it was not a big deal for America to obstruct a meeting of the Security Council. What remains for America is to provide an Arab cover for the war, a necessity that the administration was well aware of and had worked for its realization a long time ago, as explained below. Thus, the USA seemed to have been confident that its diplomatic apparatus will effectively deal with all the developments of the crisis to achieve the desired goals.

The Group of Eight (G8) Summit, held in Saint Petersburg on 16/7/2006, was the first international forum that deliberated the crisis. The American diplomacy succeeded to persuade the summit to put the blame of the war squarely on Hizbullah and its allies in Syria and Iran, who were considered to be the prime movers of instability in the Middle East.<sup>8</sup> The summit had, furthermore, rejected all the pleas addressed to it to pioneer a diplomatic effort to stop the war, and insisted that a ceasefire should be in place only when the time is opportune and permanent stability in the region is guaranteed.

However, the success of the American diplomacy to attain all its objectives depended on two factors: the success of Israel within a reasonable duration to destroy the military infrastructure of Hizbullah, and the rise of the Lebanese people against the party and to held it responsible for all the damage in Lebanon, thus paralyzing its political capabilities and impact. But Israel failed to provide the necessary tools for the realization of any of the conditions for two interrelated reasons: the heroic steadfastness of Hizbullah, and the rally of wide sectors of the Lebanese people behind the resistance.

The USA had initially estimated that Israel needs 10 days to achieve a major military success on the ground that would facilitate a seven-phase plan, whose focus is the formation of a striking and well equipped Atlantic (NATO) military force as follows:

1. Once the military might of Hizbullah be contained under the brutal Israeli air and land strikes, and is forced to withdraw between 5-10 km from the Israeli frontier, the first patch of the Atlantic force will be send to the Lebanese coasts and Beirut airport in preparation for their spread in this security belt. Hence, and on their arrival, a ceasefire will be declared.
2. Forces of the Lebanese army will start to spread side by side with the international forces, which will extend the security belt northwards till the Litani River.
3. To send within a week or 10 days reinforcements that increase the number of the international forces to 30 thousand.
4. To expel the exhausted fighters of Hizbullah to the middle of al-Beqaa, i.e., more than 100 km away, and to offer the international forces all the military facilities that enable them to do their job.

5. The Security Council will address an urgent demand to the Lebanese cabinet to implement Resolution 1559, and to call an urgent session to endorse a plan for the disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias under the supervision of the Lebanese army and the Atlantic-international forces, and to expel the leaders of the Palestinian organizations outside the borders.
6. Measures will be initiated to fully draw the Lebanese frontiers, including Shebaa Farms, under the supervision of the UN and the international forces, and with the participation of Lebanese-Syrian committees. If Syria refused, the drawing will be done by agreement between Lebanon and the UN.
7. To start the reconstruction of Lebanon, and to supply its army with modern armaments and equipments that enable it to replace 10 thousand out of the 30 thousand international forces.<sup>9</sup>

In the conference of Rome, which was presumably a platform to support the Lebanese government, the Lebanese Premier Fu'ad al-Sanyurah, submitted a seven-points plan, that was endorsed by the cabinet which represented various political trends, including Hizbullah, as a minimum for Lebanese consensus. Apparently shocked by this plan, the USA had no option but to pursue a policy of protracted delays to give Israel more time to achieve a decisive victory and dictate its conditions for a ceasefire. But Israel's inability to do so, and the dragging of the war longer than expected limited America's maneuvering ability to delay the deliberations of the Security Council. Hence, it resorted to coordination with France, and a joint draft resolution was submitted to the Council, which provided for the formation of an international force under Chapter VII of the covenant that would be empowered to enable the Lebanese army to impose its authority on the Lebanese South up to Litani River, and implement previous resolutions of the Council, including Resolution 1559. Hizbullah would then be automatically and forcefully disarmed, a condition that the party had, of course, rejected. Thus, the Israeli brutal war and the strong American diplomatic pressure continued for 33 days, after which the Security Council issued Resolution 1701 that did not refer to Chapter VII of the covenant.

### **b. Developments in the Arab Front**

A close follow up of events prior to the war reveals a campaign to pose Iran as the most important and imminent threat to the security of the Arab region. It



started with declarations by King ‘Abdullah of Jordan that cautioned from a “Shi‘i Crescent” under the leadership of Iran. Subsequently, was the criticism of the Saudi minister of foreign affairs of American mistakes that transferred Iran into a super regional power, and finally was the Egyptian president’s accusation of the Iraqi Shiites of being loyal to Iran. It was not a sheer coincidence that these very same three powers, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, were the first to condemn Hizbullah’s operation as reckless adventure that gave Israel a pretext to launch the war. The same position was adopted by other Arab countries like Kuwait, Iraq and the Palestinian presidency (represented by Abu Mazin).

But the position of these three powers did not represent the totality of the Arab attitude, which was trio in nature. Besides the first front which blamed Hizbullah, a counter-front, represented by Syria and Yemen, took a contrary position that considered the party’s operation part of the legitimate military resistance that is compatible with the covenant of the UN. The third front, that included Libya, the Sudan and Morocco, took a middle position, namely Hizbullah should have coordinated with the Lebanese government to guard against its embarrassment in front of the international community, though the party have committed no crime by its arrest of the two Israeli soldiers.

In its ordinary meeting of 15/7/2006 in Cairo, the Arab League Ministerial Council reached to what it viewed as a compromise between the three positions, but was actually nearer to the position of the Saudi-Egyptian-Jordanian trio. However, the rally of the Lebanese street behind its government seven-points project facilitated the projection of a minimum Arab solidarity, though the attempts to arrange for an emergency Arab summit failed. The steadfastness of the resistance on one side, and the pressure of the Arab street, which had unconditionally rallied behind it, helped to hold an emergency meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Beirut on 7 August, which was this time void of any criticism to the resistance. Besides, it formed a trio-committee that departed forthwith to New York to participate in the deliberations of the Security Council, and seemed to have played a role in improving the final phraseology of Resolution 1701.<sup>10</sup>

### *Third: Results and Repercussions*

Security Council Resolution 1701 was an outcome of direct or indirect interactions of the military and political interests of the various parties concerned with the Lebanese crisis. Since the war did not end with a decisive military victory on the ground to one party or another, none of the two warring parties managed to dictate its conditions on the other. Nonetheless, the total American support to Israel earned her many political concessions that were not proportionate to the military victory that it achieved on the ground. Thus, the Resolution was so ambiguous and open to different interpretations that each party read it the way it wanted.

Resolution 1701 may, in fact, be read in two ways, legal and political. A sheer legal reading shows that it is heavily biased towards Israel, which reflects the heavy American political pressure that tried to give Israel what it failed to achieve in the battleground. On the other hand, the political reading of the Resolution leads to the conclusion that the Resolution cannot be read literally and according to the Israeli and American interpretation because of the delicate balance of power on the ground. Hence, the implementation of the Resolution is quite difficult, and would depend on the political developments worldwide and in the region. In the circumstances, a round of fighting between Israel and Hizbullah may have ended, but war between them did not finish yet, even started, as Robert Fisk maintains, after the ceasefire.<sup>11</sup>

From a legal perspective, the bias of the Resolution 1701 towards Israel could be seen in the following examples:

1. The Resolution place the blame of igniting the war or its consequential disasters squarely on Hizbullah, but it is silent on the Israeli excesses that reached the extent of committing unprecedented and clear-cut war crimes.
2. Contrary to the usual pattern, the Resolution did not provide for a complete and unconditional ceasefire and the end of all actions of aggression. Besides, it distinguished between the obligations imposed upon Hizbullah and those on Israel.
3. The Resolution distinguished between the captured Israeli and Lebanese prisoners. While considering the former as “kidnapped soldiers” who should be unconditionally released, it described the latter as “prisoners” whose status should be quickly settled.

4. The Resolution referred to the issue of Shebaa Farms in an ambiguous manner, and within other issues that the secretary-general was directed to seek suggestions on from the concerned international parties. Amongst them was the drawing of the Lebanese borders, particularly in areas around which there is conflict, or whose status is not ascertained, including Shebaa Farms.
5. The Resolution did not ask for immediate Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon, but connected this with the deployment of the Lebanese army and United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) forces.
6. In one of its paragraphs, the Resolution indicated that the situation in Lebanon constitutes a threat to peace and security, and gave the UN vast powers without specifically referring to Chapter VII, which may be taken to include future disarmament of Hizbullah if politically feasible, particularly as the Resolution frequently referred to Resolution 1559.

In the context of this legal reading, Israel can claim that it got much of what it wanted. For Resolution 1701 had demanded the immediate release of the two kidnapped soldiers, a buffer zone void of the soldiers of Hizbullah up to the Litani River, and did not even exclude the disarmament of Hizbullah when politically opportune. But a pragmatic reading of the Resolution, which is based on the balance of power on the ground, should take in consideration a number of facts, particularly the following:

1. Hizbullah had not been defeated because Israel failed to achieve any of the objectives that led her to go to war.
2. Hizbullah continued to detain the two Israeli soldiers, and still maintain his full military power despite the deployment of the Lebanese army in the South.
3. The issues of Shebaa Farms and the Lebanese prisoners has officially become part of the agenda of the international community. If, as likely, Israel refrains in future from resuming its military operations and the status quo remains, then any settlement will most certainty fulfill Hizbullah's two most important objectives: the swapping of Israeli prisoners with their Lebanese counterpart, and the return of Shebaa Farms to Lebanese sovereignty. As for the disarmament of Hizbullah, it will certainly not be feasible except towards the end of a long period of Lebanese political consensus during which the

state would be restructured on new basis, the army reorganized and equipped to defend the country and the issue of the Palestinian refugees be settled without infringing Lebanese sovereignty, and within a comprehensive and just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Pending the achievement of all this, which is, however, unlikely in the near future, the war had concrete results that would have important impact locally, regionally and internationally.

### **1. Locally**

#### **a. On the Israeli Front**

The huge material and moral damage inflicted on Israel during the war may eventually have dangerous repercussions on both the state and the society. However, currently we do not have complete and exact estimates of this damage, particularly on the human level where figures of the casualties differ from one source to another. While Arab sources record about 400 dead mostly soldiers, their Israeli counterpart claim that the figure never exceeds 83 soldiers and 39 civilians. The latter include nine Palestinians living in the 1948 territories, who, in the absence of sufficient hideouts, were targeted by the Katyusha rockets. The Israeli sources add that 1,187 persons were wounded and about 20 thousand suffered psychological disorders that required treatment. As for the material damage, these sources say that 3,204 Katyusha rockets fell on territories under Israeli control, which caused varying damage to 11 thousand houses, 50 factories, 550 shops and 1,200 cars, while other sources record the number of the damaged buildings as 16 thousand.<sup>12</sup> On its part, Hizbullah mentions that it destroyed 120 advanced Merkava tanks, 30 armored cars, two warship model Sa'ar 5 and one gunboat, in addition to three American made Apache helicopters and two advanced helicopters.<sup>13</sup>

To cover the cost of the war, the Israeli treasury paid about 23 billion shekel (about \$5.23 billion), of which seven billion shekel (around \$1.59 billion) went to the security organs, five billion shekel (about \$1.14 billion) to cover the cost of the direct and indirect damage of the bombardment of Northern Israel, and nine billion shekel (about \$2.05 billion) to face the decrease in the national income that resulted from the war.<sup>14</sup>

More importantly were the far-reaching security and strategic repercussions of this war. Israel, who was accustomed to surprise wars won in few days, found herself, for the first time, engaged in a long war that continued for 33 days during

which it was compelled to significantly moderate the level of its initial expectations. Moreover, Israel was unable this time to pursue its previous practice of fighting outside its own territory. Instead, the battle was transferred into its land where more than a million persons were forced to seek protection in the sanctuaries for many days. The Israeli people had, for the first time, seen their presumed legendary and undefeatable army in such a state of disarray and chaos that its elite units collapsed before Hizbullah's fighters. The resulting psychological and strategic impact may, in the long run, undermine Israel's arrogant view of its own self as well as of the others, and erode confidence in its strength and capabilities. In the short run, these repercussions would ignite internal political feuds that would most likely be in favor of the Israeli right, and consequently reduce the chances of a comprehensive peace settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Such complications may lead to a new war not only against Hizbullah and Lebanon, but also Syria and probably Iran.

However, we should neither exaggerate nor minimize the consequences of this war. Israel may eventually be able to compensate its economic losses through some guaranteed and readily delivered foreign aid. Being transparent and governed by institutions, the Israeli society is expected to profoundly reflect on the underlying roots of the war mistakes, and penalize those responsible for them. But, by the end of the day, it will draw lessons from this war and put it behind its back.

### **b. On the Lebanese Front**

Available sources estimate the human casualties of the Israeli aggression as 1,400 killed, of whom 1,084 were civilians, 40 from the army and security organs, 250 of Hizbullah's personnel, 17 of Amal Movement activists and one from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). Four UN supervisors and a subject of the temporary emergency international force were victims of air bombardment of their headquarters in Southern Lebanon. The number of the wounded totaled at least 3,700 persons.

The Israeli aggression has far reaching social and physiological repercussions. More than 973,334 persons were displaced, of whom 220 thousand were forced into the diaspora. This figure includes 100 thousand foreigners or Lebanese holders of other nationalities. Some sources estimated Lebanon's total material loss as \$6 billion, while the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) put it as \$3.61 billion, of which the loss of the infrastructure alone was \$958 million. Thirty

vital institutions were either totally or practically destroyed, including Beirut airport, ports, water storages, electricity refineries, 630 km roads, 32 petrol stations, 145 major or minor bridges, seven thousand houses and nine thousand factories, shops, farms and markets. Television, radio broadcasting, and telecommunication stations, worship places, military bases and machinery, and some of Hizbullah's headquarters and houses of its leaders were all damaged. Tens of Lebanese cities and villages were bombarded, including Tyre, Bint Jbeil, al-Khiyam, al-Nabatiyah, Qana and Sidon in the South, the Southern Suburb of Beirut, al-Masna', Beqaa' Valley, Baalbek and its surrounding and 'Akkar Valley in Northern Lebanon. The bombardment of al-Jiyah electricity station resulted in a stain of petrol that spread along 140 km of the Lebanese shores up to the Syrian shores.<sup>15</sup>

More importantly were the far-reaching political repercussions on the future of the Lebanese state and society. As we know, the war had erupted at a time of a serious political crisis in Lebanon that has polarized after the assassination of al-Hariri into two conflicting fronts: the so-called 14 March Forces and the so-called 8 March Forces, which respectively represent the parliamentary majority and the opposition. A national dialogue that diluted this confrontation had, however, come to a standstill just before the war. Nonetheless, the steadfastness and unity of the resistance had, no doubt, strengthened the internal front, and enabled the Lebanese civil society to face the widespread damage and its consequences, notably the displacements of hundreds of thousands citizens, particularly in the South. The insistence on unity among all sectors of the community had sidelined differences and conflicts among them.

Nonetheless, a crisis had been on the air, which, as expected, came to the surface after the war. Even before the end of the war, some of the majority leaders held Hizbullah responsible for this damage. Samir Ja'ja' said, "It was inappropriate for a Lebanese sector to determine the destiny of all the Lebanese people." He added, "To overcome this dangerous development, it is necessary that decision making should be placed forthwith in the hands of the cabinet... Only then can Lebanon be responsible for all that happens."<sup>16</sup> Walid Junblat openly criticized the kidnapping of the two Israeli soldiers, and associated its timing with the Iranian nuclear issue and the establishment of the international investigation court in the assassination of al-Hariri. He emphasized his support to the Saudi-Egyptian-Jordanian position towards the war, and added, "We need a ceasefire, but not by any condition. We will be patient and steadfast, but on condition that the state will be squarely

responsible for the decision of peace and war and the defense of Lebanon, starting from the South.” Commenting on a speech delivered by Hasan Nasrullah, Junblat said, “Notwithstanding political differences, Nasrullah has no right to say whether the Lebanese people like or not. He cannot unilaterally decide on peace and war and say to us as a state and people: I am here, and you should be responsible for what I do.”<sup>17</sup> Though Sa’d al-Hariri maintained that “the Lebanese and Hizbullah are currently on the same boat, and that nobody can disband a party that represent a sizable sector of the Lebanese people or held it accountable for what happened,” he added “Israel was looking for a pretext to hit Lebanon, her first and last enemy, had it been logical to give it this pretext?”<sup>18</sup>

It is worth noting that an Italian newspaper had reported that the Lebanese Premier Fu’ad al-Sanyurah said that Hizbullah “became a state within the state and that it should be disarmed.” But al-Sanyurah’s office claimed, during the war, the inaccuracy of this report, and added that the prime minister had actually said:

The international community did not give the Lebanese government the opportunity to address the issue of Hizbullah’s arms, and that the continuation of the Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory in Shebaa Farms is responsible for the existence of this armament. The international community should help us to secure Israeli withdrawal from Shebaa Farms, only then we could resolve the issue of Hizbullah’s arms.<sup>19</sup>

This and other indications demonstrated that the internal situation in Lebanon was liable for explosion after the war, which actually happened. Each party tried to make use of the delicate situation to serve its own agenda and political priorities. The opposition, which rallied behind the resistance, tried to invest the latter’s success to consolidate its position and share of power and wealth. Conversely, the majority, which supported al-Sanyurah’s government, blamed Hizbullah for the damage inflicted on Lebanon, and accused it of serving foreign interest. However, this internal polarization could not have reached to a crisis point had it not been supported and encouraged by some regional and international developments.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Regionally

It is important that we distinguish between the impact of this war on the Arab and regional fronts. On the Arab level, the Israeli war on Lebanon had important consequences that may be enumerated under three groups:

**First: The gap between the rulers and the ruled**, which was widened by the war, and showed that the two parties were at loggerheads. As mentioned before, all Arab governments, with the exception of Syria and Yemen, blamed Hizbullah directly or indirectly, which had been viewed by the Arab masses as a green light to the enemy to continue its project of liquidating the resistance. Through a variety of ways and means, the Arab peoples exhibited their unconditional support and rally behind the Lebanese resistance. They saw in Hasan Nasrullah the charismatic and capable leadership that they lost since the departure of Jamal ‘Abd al-Nasir. Thus, the war had intensified the suspicious between the governing regimes and the people, and revealed the strong bond between the former (which anyhow lacks legitimacy) and foreign powers, particularly the USA.

**Second: The future of the Arab-Israeli conflict.** The war had emphasized the conviction of the Arab masses that Israel is the prime danger on the totality of the Arab system, and that no peaceful settlement could ever be concluded with this barbaric state. Hence, armed resistance is the sole means to attain Arab rights.

**Third: The sectarian dimension.** The war demonstrated the futility of the attempts of some foreign as well as internal forces to use the sectarian card to weaken the opposition. Their emphasis on the Shi‘i composition of Hizbullah was rejected by the Arab masses who saw in this party, irrespective of its ideological commitment, a vanguard of the resistance against Israel. Interestingly, the Muslim Brothers of Egypt rejected some *Fatawa* issued by Saudi scholars prohibiting support to the Shi‘i Hizbullah in its war against Israel. The Muslim Brothers warned from those who were trying to “revive an old ordeal that had undermined the power and intellect of the Nation (*Ummah*), and which had already been by passed, thanks to the effort of the wise elite.” They also rejected the accusation that Hizbullah works for the interest of Iran.<sup>21</sup>

Broadly, the war had, no doubt, strengthened the position of Iran in the region, and consolidated its alliance with the Arab states and forces that reject the American-Israeli project. It also gave Turkey an additional impetus to demonstrate its independence in the realm of foreign policy, notwithstanding its European and Atlantic connections.



### **3. Internationally**

The Israeli war had once more revealed, even emphasized, several facts related to the international order and the balance of power within it. Amongst them are the following:

1. The American-Israeli relations are much stronger than presumed by some quarters. They develop in two, not one, directions each of which is capable of employing the other for its own interest. In this war, Israel did not fight for its interest only but also on behalf of the USA, who played the role of the instigator, the political agent and the diplomat.
2. The USA is capable of obstructing the role and mechanism of the UN, especially so when the permanent members of the Security Council have no interest, either individually or collectively, to defy or hinder American plans. This had been the case in the case of the Lebanese war, where the UN by passed, either explicitly or implicitly, the basic principles of its own covenant.
3. The role of the international public opinion and non-government organizations in international politics is indeed limited and complementary at best, even in cases when human rights are glaringly violated. As had been demonstrated in the barbaric Israeli invasion of Lebanon, they could not be relied upon to deter aggression.

### ***Conclusion***

The Israeli war on Hizbullah and Lebanon led to a series of developments that culminated in Resolution 1701. But the realities on the ground do not facilitate the immediate application of this Resolution that do not affect the Lebanese internal situation only but also the entire balance of power in the region. Since, as explained in the introduction, the underlying motives behind the Lebanese war are closely interconnected with the other crises in the region, particularly the American occupation of Iraq, the Iranian nuclear issue, and the Arab-Israeli conflict, the future developments in Lebanon depends largely on the American position towards these issues. This is particularly so after the defeat of the Republican Party in the midterm elections of November 2006, and the consequential control of the

Democratic Party of both houses of the Congress, the House of Representatives and the Senate, and the release of James Baker-Lee Hamilton Report that made several important recommendations amongst which is the necessity to actively engage Syria and Iran in the quest for a final and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. To implement these recommendations willingly and effectively, the report suggested formidable changes in the American foreign policies that may lead to stability in the region, including Lebanon. But the ideological commitment of the American administration and the stubbornness of its leader (Bush) do not leave a room for optimism. Hence, the military option vis a vis Iran is the most likely course for this administration. If so, this would have negative repercussions in the Lebanese political theatre that would accelerate the current polarization, and might prepare the ground for a new war.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This part is based on a previous study presented by the author in a symposium organized by the Centre for Arab Unity Studies. See Hasan Naf'ah, "*al-Tada'iyat al-Duwaliyah*," (International Repercussions), Ahmad Yusuf Ahmad and et al., *al-Harb al-Isra'iliyah 'ala Lubnan: al-Tada'iyat al-Lubnaniyah wa al-Isra'iliyah wa Ta'thiratuha al-'Arabiyyah wa al-Iqlimiyah wa al-Duwaliyah* (The Israeli War on Lebanon: The Lebanese-Israeli Repercussions and their Arab, Regional and International Impact) (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2006), pp. 379-398.
- <sup>2</sup> See Hasan Nasrullah's declarations after the kidnapping of the two soldiers in *Assafir*, 13/7/2006.
- <sup>3</sup> See Seymour Hersh, "Watching Lebanon: Washington's Interest in Israel's War," *The New Yorker* magazine, USA, 21/8/2006; and Wayne Madsen, "Lebanon and Gaza Invasions Planned Last Month in USA Meetings with Top Israeli Officials," 26/7/2006.
- <sup>4</sup> See "*Namudhaj Kosovo fi Lubnan Tamhid Israeli li Harb Amrikiyyah 'ala Iran*", (Kosovo Model in Lebanon an Israeli Paving to an American War on Iran), *Assafir*, 15/8/2006, translated from *The New Yorker*.
- <sup>5</sup> See 'Azmi Bsharah, "*al-Tada'iyat 'ala Israel*," (The Repercussions on Israel), *al-Harb al-Isra'iliyah 'ala Lubnan* (The Israeli War on Lebanon), pp. 173-175.
- <sup>6</sup> *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper, 15/8/2006.
- <sup>7</sup> For details on the technological characteristics of this cruiser, see *al-Qabas*, 19/7/2006.
- <sup>8</sup> [http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile english&y=2006&m=July&x=20060716130615dm\\_sonahpets0.4333155](http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile%20english&y=2006&m=July&x=20060716130615dm_sonahpets0.4333155)
- <sup>9</sup> The particulars of this project were published in *al-Seyassah*, 29/7/2006.
- <sup>10</sup> See Ahmad Yusuf Ahmad, "*al-Tada'iyat al-'Arabiyyah*," (Arabic Repercussions), *al-Harb al-Isra'iliyah 'ala Lubnan* (The Israeli War on Lebanon), p. 245.
- <sup>11</sup> See Robert Fisk, "As the 6am Ceasefire Takes Effect... the Real War Begins," *The Independent* newspaper, London, 14/8/2006, <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/fisk/article1219037.ece>
- <sup>12</sup> See *Okaz*, 13/8/2006; *al-Khaleej*, 15/8/2006; and the report of the PIC, 14/8/2006; see also about the losses, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties\\_of\\_the\\_2006\\_Israel-Lebanon\\_conflict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties_of_the_2006_Israel-Lebanon_conflict)
- <sup>13</sup> *Al-Vefagh* newspaper, Iran, 15/8/2006, <http://www.al-vefagh.com/1387/870827/html/>
- <sup>14</sup> 'Azmi Bsharah, *op. cit.*, p. 180.  
Note: According to Bank of Israel during July-August 2006, the rate of exchange is: one dollar =4.4 shekel.
- <sup>15</sup> *Al-Khaleej*, 15/8/2006; see also Terez Mansur, "*al-Masakin wa al-Mu'assasat Nalat al-Nasib al-Akbar min al-Damar*," (Residents and Institutions Received the Greatest Portions of Destruction), *Army* magazine, Lebanon, no. 254, <http://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/PrintArticle.asp?id=12428>; and see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties\\_of\\_the\\_2006\\_Israel-Lebanon\\_conflict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties_of_the_2006_Israel-Lebanon_conflict)
- <sup>16</sup> *Annahar*, 13/7/2006.
- <sup>17</sup> *Al-Khaleej*, 19/7/2006.

<sup>18</sup> *Al-Khaleej*, 20/7/2006.

<sup>19</sup> *Asharq Alawsat*, 21/7/2006.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed analysis of the repercussions of the Israeli war on the situation in Lebanon, see the articles of Ma'in Bashshur and Ziad al-Hafiz in *al-Harb al-Israeliyah 'ala Lubnan* (The Israeli War on Lebanon), pp. 51-117.

<sup>21</sup> See Mahdi 'Akif and Muhammad Habib's declarations, *Albalad* newspaper, Beirut, 28/7/2006.

## This Report

Al-Zaytouna Centre is glad to present to its readers The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006, the second in an annual series. The Report aims at monitoring the Palestinian issue through an informative and analytical approach. The Report covers the Palestinian internal political situation, issues concerning the Land and the holy sites, the economy, the Palestinian demographic indicators, the Israeli scene and the Israeli-Palestinian relations. It focuses on the Arab, Islamic and international stances towards the Palestinian issue. In addition, it devotes a chapter to discussing the Israeli war on Hizbullah and Lebanon.

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## The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006



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