



The Second Lebanon War

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Executive Summary: This preliminary assessment of the summer 2006 war in Lebanon discusses five central problems in Israel's management of that war: adherence to the rules of "post-heroic" warfare despite its limitations, playing into the enemy's hands, operation on the basis of false assumptions and beliefs, violation of basic military principles, and hesitancy on the part of Israel's leadership. The article then examines the outcomes of the war on the battlefield, on the grand-strategic level, in terms of victory, and in longer-term perspective.

Part One – Conduct of the War

Five main problems were revealed in the way Israel conducted the war: Israel adhered to post-heroic warfare despite its limitations, played into the enemy's hands, operated on the basis of false assumptions and beliefs and violated basic military principles, while the country's political leadership acted with hesitancy.

Adherence to "Post-Heroic" Warfare

Since the 1978 Litani Operation, Israel has conducted its low-intensity conflicts in post-heroic fashion. "Post-heroic" warfare is characteristic of non-existential wars fought by Western democracies. It has two main rules: (a) avoid casualties to your own troops, and (b) avoid killing enemy civilians. Such warfare has enabled Israel to combine operational effectiveness and moral standards in combat with enemies fighting in "heroic" fashion, ready to sacrifice their own fighters and determined to kill as many enemy civilians as possible. After a long period during which Israel has conducted post-heroic warfare, quite successfully against the Palestinians and with partial success against Hizballah, the recent war has revealed its limitations. Israel found itself caught in a dilemma. On one hand, in order to achieve the ambitious political and military war objectives, it was necessary to sacrifice both troops and civilians. On the other hand, deviation from the rules of post-heroic warfare might have limited Israel's freedom of action. This indeed occurred when the pursuit of Israeli goals caused many Israeli casualties and much collateral damage in Lebanon.

Playing into the Enemy's Hands

A non-state player such as Hizballah seeks to attack its militarily and technologically stronger opponent's weak points. On a tactical level it engages in guerilla-type warfare against small units of the enemy army, while on a grand-strategic level it uses various forms of terror against the enemy population and economy. In the recent war, Hizballah fighters used their defensive capabilities (advanced but easy to operate weapons, effective evasion tactics, a network of bunkers, and familiarity with the territory and population) to engage small Israeli combat teams in battle under advantageous conditions. By firing Katyusha rockets, they also managed to paralyze social and economic life in northern Israel, bring about mass desertion of populated areas, cause casualties and damage property. Israel's failure to send in large ground forces with massive firepower and maneuverability at an earlier stage, with the mission of occupying the areas from which the Katyushas were being fired, harmed its ability to achieve the war objectives (see below).

False Assumptions and Beliefs

Reliance on Airpower. Many years of airpower advocates preaching in favor of investing the bulk of available defense resources in airpower developed high expectations on the part of the Israeli leadership and public, which were only partially fulfilled. While the IAF successfully destroyed Hizballah's long-range rocket launchers from the air, it was unable to destroy short-range rocket launchers, which caused most of the damage in northern Israel.

Particularly flawed was the tacit assumption that airpower could decide the outcome of the war. Battlefield decision at the strategic level has never been achieved from the air (only at the tactical level). Kosovo was a grand-strategic decision, achieved by denying the Serbian *society* the ability to carry on the war (not that of the Serbian army, which remained almost unharmed). Lebanon differed from Kosovo: the Americans would not let Israel damage Lebanese infrastructure, and the Israeli civilian rear, unlike that of the countries attacking Kosovo, was under attack throughout the war.

Small High-quality Special Forces. Increased reliance on airpower was accompanied by cultivation of special units. Instead of conquering territory – the traditional role of ground forces – the special units were expected to operate as small, independent units, in cooperation with the IAF. By applying network-centric joint warfare they were supposed to shorten the sensor-to-shooter loop to near-real time, destroy Hizballah targets and control the south Lebanese battlefield via fire – tasks which were only partially fulfilled. Hizballah, on the other hand, operated grand-strategically and tactically in a manner compatible with the battlefield conditions. The organization's combination of determination and tactical skills and use of advanced but simple technology proved to be effective and sophisticated.

Cult of Technology and Belief in Near-perfect Real Time Intelligence. The IDF has been inspired for many years by the technology-oriented American "Revolution in Military Affairs" (RMA), which emphasizes information dominance, "dominant maneuver," precision strikes, "focused logistics," etc. The cult of technology has already had a weakening effect on traditional military capabilities such as close combat or combat intelligence. The assumption that thanks to the IDF's "Ground Forces Digitalization" program (ZAYAD, in Hebrew), ground forces would have

access to much more precise intelligence, proved problematic, whether due to gaps in intelligence (which will always exist), outdated intelligence, or failure to distribute intelligence to troops on the battlefield in general or in real time. Forces often operated blindly, were occasionally surprised by enemy munitions (advanced anti-tank or ground-to-sea missiles), and fell victim to Hizballah's tactics. To the credit of the ground forces it must be said that their transformation into a digital army has yet to be completed, but doubts regarding the expected effectiveness of this development are already present.

"Controlling" Instead of Conquering Territory. With the increased emphasis on firepower, as opposed to maneuver, new concepts began to permeate Israeli military thought, among them that of "control" – a concept reserved until recently for air and sea contexts in which conquering territory is irrelevant. Control, however, is insufficient for purposes of destroying infrastructure or achieving battlefield decision

Reorganization of the Logistic System. With the increased emphasis on firepower as opposed to maneuver, the IDF decided to reorganize logistically. The current system, based on modularly structured area logistic units, is meant to allow the allocation of logistic resources to the combat units in accordance with operational planning and developments on the battlefield in real time, while their modular structure is meant to provide availability, flexibility, and efficiency. However, the centralized nature of the new system, which comes at the expense of the combat units' autonomy, already seems to have created logistical constraints. It is unclear whether the new logistic system would have met operational requirements if the war had involved large-scale ground maneuvers.

Reserves Units. The emphasis on air power and on small high-quality forces, the assumption that the era of traditional ground war is over and that "control" can replace conquering territory, the reliance on the new logistical system to meet operational requirements, the IDF's emphasis on "current security" activities in the territories, and budgetary constraints, seem to have resulted in the creation of two armies: the regular army, which is more professional, better equipped, and better - although not always sufficiently - trained; and the reserve units, which are less professional, less well trained and inadequately equipped. The events of the recent war re-open the debate regarding the IDF's force structure.

Protection of the Home Front. Israel still lacks the ability to defend its home front from short and medium-range rockets and missiles. Development of a protection system has been delayed due to operational and budgetary problems as well as a sense that the threat would be tolerable. Those who opposed such projects could now claim that the rockets proved to be imprecise, and that since civilians remained in protected spaces, only 40 people were killed as a result of approximately 4,000 known rockets falling in Israeli territory. On the other hand, it could be argued that this low rate resulted to a large extent from the fact that hundreds of thousands of residents of northern Israel sought refuge elsewhere in the country, something that Israel would not be able to tolerate in the future.

Investing funds in the development and production of active defense systems is an issue for further investigation. Active defense would decrease the likelihood of

civilian casualties and significantly increase social resilience, but its contribution to Israeli deterrence is debatable.

Ill-prepared public shelters raised the question of who is responsible for preparing shelters and ensuring their readiness at all times. Is it reasonable to demand the government to take on this responsibility, which should naturally be that of local authorities or perhaps, of the civilians themselves? Similarly, the question of whether the home front command should remain in the hands of the army arose once again.

Violation of Basic Military Principles

The ground operations, if indeed they were necessary, should have opened with quick flanking and encircling operations and by taking over the northern parts of Southern Lebanon. Modern strategy prefers to avoid sisyphian accumulation of achievements at the tactical level and their translation into operational and strategic gains, and emphasizes instead the creation of optimal conditions for entry into combat by operation at higher levels. Harming Hizballah's political and ideological leadership would have helped to crush its war effort, but given Israel's failure in this area, and on the assumption that ground operations were inevitable in light of the objectives of the war, the air campaign should have been followed by a large scale ground operation. An indirect approach à la Sun Tzu or Liddell Hart would have caused confusion in the enemy ranks and brought about their psychological collapse much better than the Clausewitzian direct approach, which helped Hizballah recover and stand strong.

The debatable performance of the IDF during the war also stresses the need for renewed thought regarding the infiltration of post-modern approaches into the officer corps training processes at the expense of classic military theory. Some believe that delving into non-military post-modern philosophical theories will equip senior officers with good tools for dealing with the complex and changing realities of war. Classic military thinkers have become no more than names, whose sayings are cited occasionally, but whose writings are no longer read or learned in depth.

Hesitancy on the Part of the Political Leadership

While there is a measure of justice in complaints about the lack of clear instructions and regarding missions and objectives in the recent war, partially directed at the political leadership, its hesitancy is also understandable. The political leadership was led to understand that the majority of the work could be done by the IAF, accompanied by small special forces, which also meant that the war could be fought with a minimum of casualties. When these assumptions were proven false, consideration of the cost/effectiveness of a large-scale operation began, with the ceasefire drawing closer. Pressure to display clear-cut military results during the UNSC discussions tipped the scales in favor of a large-scale ground operation in the hope of affecting the impending resolution in Israel's favor. If at the beginning of the war the politicians had known what difficulty the IDF would have on the ground and how limited the IAF would prove in responding to the threat posed by the Katyushas, they would probably have refrained entirely from a ground operation, or clearly stated, "We are at war and in order to put an end to the threat posed to the civilian rear by the Katyushas and end the war in unequivocal victory, signaling Israel's determination and military capability, a large-scale land operation that might entail quite a heavy cost is necessary."

Clausewitz noted the need for political leaders to base their instructions to the military on military assessments and the need for the military leadership to understand the wider political picture. The tension between the broad political considerations and the "narrower" military perspective is built into civil-military relations and its existence is no novelty.

Part Two - Outcomes and Achievements

The sense of missed opportunity after the war was sharpened by the fact that the war began and was mostly fought under almost optimal conditions: internal consensus, broad international support - including tacit support on the part of moderate Arab states, and a sense of having almost unlimited time to achieve the war objectives. While it is still too early to assess the war's long-term repercussions, the short-term achievements can be examined according to the following criteria: battlefield decision, grand-strategic decision, victory, and long term outcomes.

Battlefield Decision

There are those who claim that battlefield decision (more popularly known as military victory), which is about denying the enemy the ability to fight, is irrelevant when fighting a guerilla organization, except at the tactical level. The battlefield decision achieved by the IDF against the PLO in 1982 disproves this claim. In 2006 however, despite tactical achievements, the IDF did not achieve a battlefield decision against Hizballah.

Grand-Strategic Decision

A grand-strategic decision is achieved by denying the enemy the ability to carry on the war by attacking counter-value (population and economy) targets. Such an outcome could not be achieved due to limitations on attacking infrastructure targets in Lebanon, whose government is considered one of the great achievements of the US quest for democratization in the Middle East.

Victory

Victory is about the correlation between political or military objectives and their achievement. Unlike battlefield decision it is subjective and can be manipulated by changing the objectives. It is therefore possible to have more than one side presenting itself as victorious.

The unrealistic Israeli war objectives (e.g. destruction of Hizballah's infrastructure in South Lebanon, its disarmament and return of the hostages) raised the level of expectations, and, when they were not achieved, deepened the sense of failure. Also, the realization of some of Israel's objectives depended on foreign players – the Lebanese government (for deployment of the Lebanese army in South Lebanon) and the UN and other countries (for deployment of an effective international force).

Long-term Outcomes

We still lack the perspective required to estimate the long-term implications of the war. These will have to be examined in various contexts: Israel-Hizballah, Israel-Syria, Israel-Iran, the Muslim world, Israel-US relations, internal dynamics in Lebanon, Israel's response to the threat posed by rockets and missiles, preparedness of the civilian rear, Israeli military doctrine, etc.

It seems that one consequence with positive significance is deterrence-by-punishment. The IDF's debatable performance notwithstanding, Israel's strong response to Hizballah's provocation which triggered the war, and the extent of the damage in Beirut and South Lebanon have broken Israel's pattern of restrained response, raising the price of provocation in the foreseeable future.

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