

July 2006

### **The Hezbollah War**

This month is dominated by war. First was Gilad Shalit's kidnapping, and the IDF operations in Gaza against the infrastructure of the Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. Later, war erupted in Lebanon against the Hezbollah. In Gaza, the aims were twofold: to pressure the Hamas government to release the kidnapped soldier, and to stop the launch of Qassam missiles on Israel. In the process, dozens of Palestinians were killed. Many of them were terrorists. Some were unfortunate bystanders. In Lebanon, first to restore Israel's deterrence following a Hezbollah successful guerrilla operation inside Israel that resulted in the death of eight soldiers, and the abduction of two others. However, in less than 48 hours the escalation seemed to grow disproportionately, and we found ourselves in a state of war.

Israel is back in Gaza and in Lebanon. Disquiet in Israel means disquiet in Gaza, Lebanon and elsewhere. The Palestinians have to deal with the most dovish government in Israel since the Rabin-Peres government of the mid-1990s. Instead of harvesting gains in the negotiation table, they prefer bloodshed. What a shame for both sides. In Lebanon, the Hezbollah is fighting to survive. I hope it faces destruction and that this sorry chapter in the history of Lebanon will be closed. It is in the interest of Lebanon even more than it is in Israel's interest.

**Gilad Shalit, Amir Peretz, Bloody Wednesday July 12, War, Thank you, Guest Article, Convergence Plan, Syria, Iran**

### **Gilad Shalit**

On June 25, 2006 a group of Palestinians attacked an IDF outpost just outside the Gaza Strip. They came from Gaza through a tunnel and attacked the soldiers from behind. The Israeli platoon was taken by surprise. Two soldiers were killed and one, Gilad Shalit, was kidnapped.

Kidnapping was the favourite terrorist "sport" in Lebanon during the 1980s. The method was adopted in Iraq against the alliance. It is an excellent method to garner media attention, to increase the drama, and to exert pressure on governments. Experts call it "clever terrorism" because the gains for terrorists are high, even when they are killed in the process.

Israel always took pains to release hostages. We live in the line of fire. Soldiers and citizens are required to give so much, including their lives, that the least

the state can do for them is to guarantee that it will make all efforts to save their lives in such dramatic events. The message by all Israeli governments to its citizens is loud and clear: we will never desert you. You can count on us. Every person counts, and we will do all that is necessary to bring you home.

This message was repeated after Gilad's kidnapping. After some days of contemplation, on Thursday morning I woke up and then went to my computer to read the *Haaretz* online, as I do every morning, and could not believe my eyes: Israel has expanded its military operation against the Hamas-led government in the Palestinian Authority by embarking on mass arrests of senior Hamas officials before dawn June 29, 2006. Sixty four of the ruling militant group's ministers and parliamentarians in the West Bank and 23 military operatives. The arrests took place in Ramallah, Qalqilyah, Hebron, Jenin and East Jerusalem. Soldiers carried arrest warrants signed by judges that were issued following joint preparatory work by the state prosecution and police. Included among those arrested were Finance Minister Omar Abdel Razek, Minister Samir Abu Aysha, Khaled Abu Arfeh and Jerusalem Affairs Ministers Naef Rajoub, brother of Jibril Rajoub.

The arrests were part of several moves designed to increase pressure on the militant group to free Corporal Gilad Shalit. Israel blames Hamas for the abduction of Shalit. I thought: Olmert has balls. And then immediately wondered: what would the international community say about this? Going into the homes of elected government ministers of a rival regime, arresting them and bring them to Israeli prisons. Minister Ben-Eliezer, Fuad, of Labour, immediately said that "the Hamas is not a government but a murderous organization", so as to justify the action. The world, at large, is keeping quiet. Despite the efforts, the whereabouts of Gilad Shalit remain unknown.

### **Amir Peretz**

On July 10 I wrote the following:

1. It is not only that Amir Peretz's nomination was wrong; it is also that his Ministry projects weakness.
2. It is not only that this nomination endangers Israel; it also endangers the Middle East.
3. It is not only that Peretz lacks the capability to carry his job; he also lacks the will.

Let me explain each of these claims.

1. Peretz's nomination stems from the wrong reasons. Olmert wanted the

key to Israel's finance to remain with Kadima, with one of his trusted loyalists. He owed Tzipi Livni a political debt and had to respect her wish to serve as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Hence the only senior ministry he could offer Labour was the Ministry of Defence. I can understand the reasoning. I cannot justify it. Switzerland can afford Peretz as Minister of Defence. Israel cannot. Our security problems are too weighty to entrust such a responsibility in the hands of a person who never held senior security positions. It is not only that he might make the wrong decisions. Israel's enemies were quick to realize that Israel's government is weak, and that they can seize the opportunity of having two civilians (Olmert and Peretz), with very little military experience, deciding on security matters.

2. In our volatile reality, things might get out of hand very quickly. King Abdullah of Jordan is afraid of spillover to Jordan, endangering his kingdom. The Hezbollah in Lebanon might exploit Israel's vulnerability. Israel might not only return to Gaza but also to Lebanon. More soldiers and civilians will be killed. All hard-won gains of the last six years will go down the drain.

3. Israel cannot afford Peretz's trial period at the ministry. By the time he'll be qualified, both sides will suffer far too many casualties. Furthermore, a Minister of Defence in our troubled region needs not only to assess situations, analyze opportunities and make decisions, some of which are most unpleasant, but unfortunately he is also required to have a killer instinct. Peretz does not know to assess, analyze and make such decisions, and he lacks the killer instinct. He is the person who needs to balance the Ministry of Defence, not to head it.

For all these reasons, Amir Peretz I implore you: Please resign now. The risks are too high. Things might escalate and reach a point of no return, by which war might be conceived as the solution. This is certainly not what you want.

Now it is too late. At this stage (July 24, 2006) Peretz should not retire. Israel pays a high price for our lack of deterrence.

Olmert and Peretz should reconsider the issue when the dust calms down.

### **Bloody Wednesday, July 12**

The escalation continued, and another front was opened. Those who read my writings over the years surely remember one of my repeated contentions: evil erupts from the North. Evil, you are not welcome back.

Eight Israel Defence Forces soldiers were killed and two others were abducted on July 12, 2006 in attacks by guerrillas from the militant Hezbollah organization.

Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah said: "No military operation will return them... The prisoners will not be returned except through one way: indirect negotiations and a trade." In particular, emphasis was put on the release of Lebanese militant Samir Kuntar, jailed in Israel since a 1979 attack in the northern town of Nahariyah, in which he entered an apartment and murdered three family members (the Haran family) and an Israeli police officer. At the time, this murderous operation shook the country because of its brutality and the tragedy involved. In one night, Smadar Haran lost her husband and their two small children.

The Hezbollah attacked two IDF armoured Hummer jeeps patrolling along the border with gunfire and explosives, in the midst of massive shelling attacks on Israel's north. Three soldiers were killed in the attack and two were taken hostage. Later in the day, four IDF soldiers were killed when their tank hit a mine some 6 kilometres inside Lebanese territory. The tank should not have entered into the mine land unprotected. It was a mistake to send it, but now the casualty toll was more pressing.

During consultations, senior IDF officers called for an end to the restraint against Hezbollah and said Lebanon should be made to pay a heavy price. Chief of Staff Halutz ordered the IDF to mobilize a reserve infantry division that was expected to be sent to the northern border. General Staff exercises held over the past several years tested a number of possible responses to kidnapping scenarios. IDF began heavy artillery and tank fire. Israel Air Force jets struck roads, bridges and Hezbollah guerrilla positions in southern Lebanon. The air raids were intended to block any escape route for the guerrillas who may be taking the captured IDF soldiers to areas further removed from the border in order to prevent an Israeli rescue mission. But this was too late. Information about the kidnapping arrived a considerable time after fact, when the abductors were well inside Lebanon. The destructive airstrike could not halt the abductors. It only fueled the escalation.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said in response to the violence in the north that enemies are putting Israel to a test. He said they would fail in their efforts and would pay a "heavy price" for their actions. "These are difficult days for Israel and its citizens," Olmert told reporters. "There are elements, to the north and the south, that are threatening our stability and trying to test our determination," he said. "They will fail and pay a heavy price for their actions." He meant what he said.

Olmert convened the government on Wednesday night, June 12, to decide Israel's reaction. The government agreed that the attack had created a completely new situation on the northern border, and that Israel must take steps that will "exact a price" and restore its deterrence.

Olmert rejected Hezbollah's demand that Israel purchase the kidnapped soldiers' freedom by releasing Lebanese and Palestinian terrorists jailed in Israel.

The government also decided to demand that the international community enforce UN Security Council resolutions calling for the Lebanese army to disarm Hezbollah and assume control of the border with Israel. Since 2000, Hezbollah effectively controls southern Lebanon, and the lame Lebanese army stays away.

That night, Israel responded by bombarding bridges in central Lebanon and attacking Hezbollah positions along the border. The Hezbollah did not blink and retaliated on July 13 with Katyusha rockets across northern Israel. One person was killed and dozens were wounded.

In Nahariya, a woman died when a rocket struck her home. Another 29 people were hurt, including a number of children. Most of the casualties were lightly wounded; one person sustained serious wounds. At least 11 people were wounded when a fresh barrage of Katyusha rockets fired from Lebanon struck the northern town of Safed. The Hezbollah War commenced.

## War

We understood that this crisis is serious when a Katyusha rocket fell in the Stella Maris area, Haifa. This was the first time in our modern history that Haifa has been bombarded. It is a watershed. The news said that Nasrallah said this was "a mistake". Soon enough, he ordered to repeat this "mistake", so there could be no mistake of his ability, and intentions. Nasrallah called the Israeli leadership - Olmert, Peretz and Halutz "rookies", expressing his under-appreciation for them.

I presume he did not foresee that their reaction would be so harsh. Within 48 hours, the area went up in flames. I call this "the holier than the Pope Phenomenon". Olmert and Peretz, who joined together not only for partisan political interests but also to open a new chapter in our history, bringing the occupation to a close -- understood that they projected weakness, and wanted to show that no one will take them for a ride. They gave Halutz a long rope, and a green line to unleash hell on Lebanon, so as to teach them a lesson for allowing Hezbollah to create a country within a country. I hasten to think that the reaction could have been more measured and restrained. But Olmert and Peretz need to show more than would elected generals, in order to restore Israel's deterrence power.

I left Haifa on July 13, after the Stella Maris Katyusha. The following morning

I was on my way to Britain, and tried to follow the events from afar. It was not easy. British television is very different from the television I remember from the 1980s. Then, I think, it was the best TV in the world, with many quality shows, dramas and docudramas. Now it is filled with quizzes, games, reality shows ("Big Brother") and useless talk shows. To my Israeli taste, there was little information about the Middle East crisis. Most of it concerned British subjects who were caught in Lebanon, and their evacuation to Cyprus. Estimates were that between 3000 and 5000 Brits were in Lebanon in July 2006. There was less coverage on the air strikes of Israeli military power in Lebanon, and their harsh results. And there was far less coverage of the missile attack on the north of Israel. The picture was of disproportionate destruction inflicted by Israel. Also, the politics of numbers, given without interpretation and reminder of context, was anti-Israeli. The figures were 300 casualties in Lebanon, mostly bystanders, versus 24 Israelis. Lebanon is the underdog. Israel is the aggressor. Is this reality?

I saw some Israeli ministers speaking on TV. The Israeli leadership better designate a few qualified spokespersons to represent it. It cannot be that everyone who sees a microphone will seize the opportunity and give an interview. One needs to prepare homework. A qualified spokesperson should be articulate, with good knowledge of the language in which she speaks, and good understanding of the audience she addresses. Things that are good for Israeli ears are not necessarily pleasant for British ears. Israeli spokespersons better restrain their natural arrogance and self-confidence. It is not prudent to assume that you hold the entire truth. It is even less prudent to show that you think this way. As listeners, we can expect some sensitivity. Here I refer, first and foremost, to Minister of Internal Security Avi Dichter. He should restrain himself and not give in to interview temptations, especially when the temptations are offered by foreign networks. I am sure he has lot of work to do anyway.

Bibi Netanyahu was excellent as ever. I would nominate him as the official Israeli spokesperson for life. Unfortunately, he has other aspirations that suit him less. As a spokesperson, however, he is the best representative Israel has, and we should use his qualities as often as he is willing to make himself available. He is excellent, simply superb.

Hanan Ashrawi spoke of Israel's violent attacks on poor Palestinians and Lebanese. The interviewer was bold enough to remind her that Israel this time was not the aggressor, that it was provoked to action by guerilla attacks and the kidnapping of its soldiers. Ashrawai resorted to the good old routine of: Don't forget that the source of all this is the occupation. Well, I presume she is able to delude some people, but hopefully not most people. To say this after August 2005, Israel's evacuation of Gaza, the Qassam rockets that never ceased raining on Israeli cities from Gaza, and in light of Olmert's declared intention to reduce the occupation by carrying out his convergence plan, is

Palestinian chutzpah. And she is considered to be a moderate.

I thought representatives of the EU, the UN and the USA will rush to Israel. This was not the case. With the exception of EU Solana, who more or less was ousted by Olmert, the others took their time. Secretary of State Rice arrived in Lebanon only on July 24, 2006. The message was: We understand that we need to address this problem. Let Israel clean out the dirty laundry.

On July 23 I returned to Haifa together with the siren, announcing more falls of Katyusha rockets on the ailing city. Scary. Anything but serene. Welcome to the war zone. I took a taxi to home. I was happy to see my building standing tall unharmed. Hope it will continue to hold like this. Very few people on the streets. Some cars, but a far cry from the usual busy traffic. All the time one can hear bombs falling. Other than that, it is very quiet. I don't like this kind of quiet. I like the sound of bustling city life. Haifa is in a standstill. Waiting. You decide for what.

I returned to Haifa to work, but this was not easy. In one afternoon the siren went off six times. Each time I had to stop working, and to rush to the secure room inside the home. This room will not save me from a direct hit. It should withstand shock wave resulting from hits nearby. The situation is tense, and you hear about innocent civilians killed in different parts of Israel. Not ideal for contemplation and thinking. I heard at least twelve falls of missiles. The following day I joined my family in Herzliyya, away from the war zone, and assumed refugee status, together with thousands of other people who normally reside in the north of Israel, and could afford living outside missiles' reach.

Israel declares its wish to destroy the Hezbollah and to secure its borders from rocket attacks. The Lebanese leadership, which allowed Hezbollah to develop into a viable force in the region, and even allowed it to participate in elections and gain representation in parliament, made it clear that they don't intend to fight Hezbollah down. Israel cannot afford rockets and missiles on its cities. No country would allow such things to happen. What exactly is required to see this campaign successful from Israel's point of view is yet unclear. Does it mean we will have to gain control over half of Lebanon, including Beirut? Does it mean Israel will reoccupy southern Lebanon? What would be the world's reaction? Syria's? Iran's?

On June 24 one general explained the continued fall of rockets and missiles by saying that the majority of missiles that target Haifa stem from the city of Tzor (Tyre). The IDF until now mainly attacked southern Lebanon and southern Beirut. The residents of Tzor may expect the IDF soon.

On June 25 Nasrallah announced that the next stage of the war will involve broader range missiles, with capacity to reach Tel Aviv and its neighbouring

towns.

I don't see the end.

### **Thank you**

I wish to thank all of you who voiced concern and encouraging words, left messages, phoned and invited my family and myself to stay away from the war zone. You touched my heart. Deeply.

### **Guest Article: A Strategic Assessment of the Hezbollah War: Defeating the Iranian-Syrian Axis in Lebanon, by Maj.-Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror and Dan Diker**

The Institute for Contemporary Affairs published the following in its Jerusalem Issue Brief of Vol. 6, No.2 - 19 July 2006

· Israel's current military operations to uproot Hezbollah and to destroy it as a formidable military and terror organization is not merely an operation against another determined terror group like Hamas in Gaza. Hezbollah has a disciplined, well-trained army with sophisticated weaponry, backed directly by Syria and Iran.

· A high-level Iranian official recently emphasized to Western diplomats in London Hizballah's importance to Iran: "Hezbollah is one of the pillars of our security strategy, and forms Iran's first line of defense against Israel." Walid Jumblatt, the Lebanese Druze leader, shares this perspective: "The war is no longer Lebanon's...it is an Iranian war. Iran is telling the United States: You want to fight me in the Gulf and destroy my nuclear program? I will hit you at home, in Israel."

· Iran's Revolutionary Guards provide the majority of Hizballah's weaponry, financing, instruction, and strategic command and control. Hizballah's short- and medium-range missiles are manufactured in Iran and exported to Lebanon via the Damascus International Airport. Iranian officers from the Revolutionary Guards are on the ground in Lebanon, playing active roles in supervising terror actions and training Hezbollah operatives to launch rockets against Israel.

· The only way to defeat an insurgency is to first isolate it from external reinforcement. Israel is seeking to cut off Hezbollah from Syria and Iran and isolate it from the rest of Lebanon. Syria appears undeterred from continuing

its wartime supplies to the Hezbollah insurgency, as it has been undeterred in supplying the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.

· Israel must carry out its current military operation against Hezbollah until it is fully neutralized, isolated, and disarmed. It would be nothing short of catastrophic for both Israel and the international community if diplomatic efforts result in Israel being forced to end its military operation prematurely.

### **Hezbollah Has No Red Lines**

The current war being waged against Israel by Hezbollah and its Syrian and Iranian patrons is in large part the result of Israel's long-time, hands-off policy with regard to the Lebanon-based fundamentalist terror group. Since Israel's overnight unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, Hezbollah built itself into a deterrent military force possessing 13,000 to 15,000 short- and medium-range missiles. The terror organization exploited Israel's political preference to maintain the relative quiet for the residents of its northern border communities instead of uprooting the Hezbollah terror infrastructure and risking war. As a result of Israel's skittishness to confront it, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah assessed that he could determine when to launch hostilities against Israel completely on Hizballah's terms.

Hezbollah - the "Party of God" - has no red lines. Any strategic strike that it can execute, it will execute, limited only by its ability and the conditions permitting it to carry out an attack at any particular moment. In that regard, Hassan Nasrallah lives in his own bubble in which he judges democratic Israel the same way he judges the Lebanese or those in Hezbollah. Nasrallah recently called Israeli resolve "weaker than a spider's web."

Nasrallah's decision to kidnap two Israeli soldiers on July 12 was made partly in reaction to Hamas' kidnapping at the Israel-Gaza border of Cpl. Gilad Shalit. Nasrallah said in a speech shortly after the terror attack and kidnapping of the two Israeli army reservists that he wished to negotiate an exchange for Samir Kuntar, a Lebanese terrorist, and other "prisoners and detainees held by Israel."<sup>1</sup> Israeli intelligence assessed that Nasrallah meant he would also negotiate for Palestinians as well, and thereby assume a leading role on the Palestinian issue, even ahead of Hamas.

### **Israel's Response**

According to Israeli intelligence assessments, Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran were taken by surprise by the sheer magnitude and intensity of Israel's response to the missile attacks and kidnapping. Nasrallah did not understand what causes a democratic country to act harshly when its red lines are crossed and

its citizens are threatened, as Israelis are today. Nasrallah never thought that as a result of kidnapping two soldiers, Israel would launch such a far-reaching counter-offensive. He failed to understand that Israel has gone to war because Hezbollah has launched a strategic attack against it, and that Israel views the kidnappings as part of a much greater threat.

Israel's current military operations to uproot Hezbollah and to destroy it as a formidable military and terror organization is not merely an operation against another determined terror group like Hamas in Gaza. Hezbollah has a disciplined, well-trained army with sophisticated weaponry, backed directly by Syria and Iran.

### **The Role of Iran and Syria**

According to a May 11, 2006, Asharq Al-Awsat report, a high-level Iranian official who held a closed meeting with a small group of Western diplomats in London emphasized Hizballah's importance to Iran: "Hezbollah is one of the pillars of our security strategy, and forms Iran's first line of defense against Israel. We reject [the claim] that it must be disarmed."<sup>2</sup> Walid Jumblatt, the Lebanese Druze leader, shares this perspective: "The war is no longer Lebanon's...it is an Iranian war. Iran is telling the United States: You want to fight me in the Gulf and destroy my nuclear program? I will hit you at home, in Israel."<sup>3</sup>

Hezbollah is not an independent actor. Iran's Revolutionary Guards provide the majority of Hizballah's weaponry, financing, instruction, and strategic command and control. Most of Hizballah's terrorist weaponry, particularly short- and medium-range missiles - including the Zalzal missile that can reach as far as Tel Aviv, 150 kilometers from Israel's northern border - are manufactured in Iran and exported to Lebanon via the Damascus International Airport.<sup>4</sup> Weaponry and materiel are then openly transported by truck convoys to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

According to Israeli intelligence, Iranian officers from the Revolutionary Guards are on the ground in Lebanon, playing active roles in supervising terror actions and training Hezbollah operatives to launch rockets against Israel.<sup>5</sup> On July 14, Hezbollah fired an Iranian copy of a Chinese C-802 Kowthar missile at an Israeli warship, killing four crew members. These rockets have been in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' arsenal for four or five years.

Some of Hizballah's weaponry is manufactured by Syria and is provided to the terror organization at the direct order of President Bashar Assad. The rockets in the first barrage that struck the northern city of Haifa on July 16, killing eight Israelis, were manufactured and supplied by Syria. Other medium-range Syrian and Iranian missiles are also in Hizballah's stockpile

but have yet to be used against Israel.

### **Dimensions of the Conflict**

On a macro level, there are three dimensions to the current war against Hezbollah:

The first dimension is Hizballah's ability as a highly-disciplined terror force with approximately 13,000 rockets that have wreaked havoc on hundreds of thousands of Israelis in northern Israel. Additionally, its ground forces were previously deployed right up to the Israeli-Lebanese border, oftentimes within rifle range of public buildings in Israeli towns and villages. In this regard, it is abundantly clear that Israel cannot allow Hezbollah to return to its former positions in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese army must be deployed to ensure that southern Lebanon remains free of Hezbollah control.

Second, Hezbollah cannot be allowed to be the driving force that decides, whenever it so chooses, together with its Syrian and Iranian patrons, to inflame the Middle East. In this sense, Israel's current war in Lebanon is not punitive; it is strategic. The Israeli air force has struck the main arteries for the transfer of weapons to Hezbollah from Syria and Iran through Beirut International Airport, all Lebanese seaports, and across the Beirut-Damascus highway from the east, which has served as one of Hizballah's main lines of weapons transport. During the present hostilities, Syria has continued to attempt to resupply Hezbollah in the Bekaa Valley, as well. Syria appears undeterred from continuing its wartime supplies to the Hezbollah insurgency, as it has been undeterred in supplying the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.

In bombing Hizballah's Dahiya stronghold in the southern suburbs of Beirut, Israel is seeking to separate it from Hezbollah forces further south. Thus, Hezbollah is being cut off from Syria and Iran and isolated from the rest of Lebanon. Hezbollah has waged an insurgency against Israel from the mini-state it has created inside of Lebanon. The only way to defeat an insurgency is to first isolate it from external reinforcement. That is what Israel is seeking to do. In a second phase, the insurgency must be disarmed. In this regard, the international community must enforce UN Security Council Resolution 1559 that imposes the obligations of state sovereignty and responsibility on Lebanon to force the Hezbollah to disarm, as even French President Jacques Chirac has demanded.

The third and broader dimension of the escalating conflict is that Hezbollah is nothing less than an extension of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. Iran has taken a strategic decision to activate Hezbollah terror against Israel in order to preclude the United States and its Western allies from stopping Iran's nuclear development program. The uprooting of Hizballah's military capacity will

neutralize one of Iran's most dangerous and valuable deterrent threats against any country that attempts to act against Tehran's nuclear weapons program.

### **The Stakes for Israel and the West**

Israel must carry out its current military operation against Hezbollah until it is fully neutralized, isolated, disarmed, and unable to serve as Iran's long "arm" that can bring terror upon Israel and destabilize the Middle East region at will. The current Israeli victims of Hezbollah terror will not have sacrificed their lives in vain if Israel conducts its war to an uncompromising victory. However, if Hezbollah is allowed to remain a military force in Lebanon or even an armed presence in southern Lebanon, Israel will have indeed sacrificed its soldiers and citizens in vain, and will also suffer similar attacks in the future.

Furthermore, it is a primary interest of the international community that Hezbollah be fully neutralized as a military extension of Iran. Only a full victory against Hezbollah will allow the possibility for Lebanon to emerge as a free and democratic country. This is also in line with the Bush Administration's vision of helping the peoples of the Middle East to free themselves of tyrannical and fundamentalist elements and prevent the threat to the region of a nuclear Iran. This underscores the regional and international importance of Israel's current mission.

Any Syrian or Iranian forces or advisors in Lebanon are legitimate targets for Israel. Israel must send a clear message to Bashar Assad that it will not accept any Syrian interference in Lebanon. While Israel should not open up a front against Syria at this juncture, if Syrian forces show any type of movement, Israel must be ready to engage them.

The duration of the current war depends on Israel, Lebanon, and the international community. If the Lebanese realize that with every passing day the accumulating losses are taking too great a toll, if the international community continues to allow Israel to uproot Hezbollah without pressuring Israel for a cease-fire, and if the UN stays out of the fray, the war does not have to last very long. But if Israel is pressured to stop its operations, this acute conflict will indeed last a long time.

This is a war in which Israel is acting primarily through its air force, which is a new approach. However, if Israel's air force fails to stop Hezbollah rocket assaults, Israel may be forced to send in substantial ground forces to control the areas from which rockets are being launched. This real possibility would have far-reaching implications in terms of potential losses for the IDF and for the citizens of Lebanon.

No less significant is Israel's readiness to absorb damage to its home front. This requires a much higher degree of national resilience than that of the first Iraq war when Saddam Hussein fired 39 Scud missiles at Israeli cities. This time there is much more damage and loss of life on the home front, but Israel is showing great fortitude and national will.

### **Iran's Ongoing War Against the West**

Even if Israel is successful in destroying the Hezbollah infrastructure, Iran will not be deterred in its ongoing war against the West, for Hizballah's attacks on Israel represent Iran's strategic decision to launch what it sees as a counter-offensive against the West following America's post 9/11 attacks on the regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Echoing Iran's perspective, the conservative daily Jomhour-e Eslami, affiliated with the Islamic seminaries of Qom, reiterated in a July 17 editorial the charge that "the conspiracy of bringing down the Twin Towers in New York with one plane, which was totally dubious, was a pretext for occupying Afghanistan and Iraq, and for [providing] unqualified support to the Zionist regime in its crimes against Palestine."<sup>6</sup>

The Iranian editorial noted that "America's collaboration with the Zionists in murdering the Palestinian people, destroying Lebanon, and [hurling] baseless accusations against Iran [regarding] nuclear activity - which is now coming to a head - is a new phase in America's crusade against the Muslims. This is exactly the point at which the leadership of the Islamic nation must play a role."<sup>7</sup> This underscores the assessment that if Hezbollah is neutralized in the current conflict, Iran will have lost a major asset in its ongoing struggle against the West.

### **The Diplomatic Front**

In order to achieve its war objectives, Israel must succeed on the diplomatic front in addition to the battlefield. It would be nothing short of catastrophic for both Israel and the international community if diplomatic efforts result in Israel being forced to end its military operation prematurely. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon the international community, which last year demanded that the Syrian army withdraw from Lebanon, to provide the necessary assistance to Lebanon that will ensure that Hezbollah is disbanded as a military force, and this must be the highest international priority.

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Notes

1. <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3274616,00.html>
2. Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), <http://memri.org/bin/latestnews.cgi?ID=SD120406>
3. Anton La Guardia, "Israel Fights West's Cause Against Radical Islam," Telegraph (UK), July 17, 2006.
4. See Uzi Rubin, "The Global Range of Iran's Ballistic Missile Program <<http://jcpa.org/brief/brief005-26.htm>> ," Jerusalem Issue Brief 5-26, <http://jcpa.org/brief/brief005-26.htm>.
5. An Iranian military source close to the Revolutionary Guards leadership revealed to the London Arabic daily Asharq Al-Awsat details concerning Iran's role in training and arming Hezbollah. The source said that "in Lebanon, there are 70 trainers, experts, and technicians, as well as 60 Faylaq Quds intelligence agents, who assist the Hezbollah missile unit and its local leadership. In addition, there is a secret Revolutionary Guards unit, consisting of 20 officers, who use advanced means to track the movement of Israeli forces in the field, and select targets in Israel for the operation commanders. <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP120706>
6. MEMRI, July 17, 2006, <http://memri.org/bin/latestnews.cgi?ID=SD120806>
7. MEMRI, <http://memri.org/bin/latestnews.cgi?ID=SD120806>

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### **Convergence Plan**

Dead and buried. Israel's could not afford more space and opportunities to its enemies. Missiles on the north and on the south are bad enough. We don't need missiles also on Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. No leader of a sane mind will give away further territory to Hamas.

### **Syria**

The scope of tolerance toward Syria is now more limited. I see Bashar's end. I don't think he will change. Hence, his destiny is written on the wall. His days are numbered.

### **Iran**

The toughest cookie. Can the world afford leaving this fundamentalist bastion untouched? Iran is not only a problem for Israel. It challenges international order and sanity. It is an international problem demands international cooperation and solution. Israel should not fight on this front on its own.

In this Newsletter I intended also to speak about: The Fence, Sheikh Sa'ed, a-Ram Village, Mass Murder in China, European Parliament Scolds Companies for Aiding Internet Censorship, Mondial, Suggestions for Improving the Football Game, London Musical. All of these issues were written and will be published in the August Newsletter, in the hope that I will have the heart and the mind to speak of other matters. At this point, the war consumes our energies.

God, I hate wars.

Yearning for better, more tranquil, days,

Rafi

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Earlier posts at my home page: <http://hcc.haifa.ac.il/~rca/>  
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