

Hizbollah's Force Buildup of 2006-2009: Foundations and Future Trends

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On August 12, 2006, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1701, paving the way for the end of 34 days of warfare between Israel and Hizbollah, a campaign later named the Second Lebanon War. Apart from the immediate need to establish a ceasefire, the Security Council hoped to change the security reality in southern Lebanon while neutralizing the elements that were responsible for the escalation, and prevent the repetition of another round of fighting between the sides. Accordingly, certain security arrangements were put in place, among them the deployment of the Lebanese army in southern Lebanon as well as an increase in the UNIFIL force from about 2,500 soldiers to a maximum of 15,000 to serve as a buffer between Israel and Hizbollah in the space between the international border and the Litani River. Likewise, the resolution forbade anyone other than the Lebanese army or UNIFIL forces to carry weapons or lay the foundations for a military infrastructure in the region, and the government in Beirut was called on to secure the borders and act effectively in order to foil arms smuggling in the area.¹

Resolution 1701 ostensibly gave an adequate response to Israel's security needs on the Lebanese front and significantly limited Hizbollah's ability to rearm in southern Lebanon. For the first time in three decades the Lebanese army would deploy all the way to the international border with Israel, and together with UNIFIL would prevent Hizbollah's attempts to reconstruct the line of fortifications along the border and build positions for intelligence gathering and planning terrorist attacks. Similarly, UNIFIL and the Lebanese army started to conduct hundreds

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of reconnaissance missions daily, on foot and by vehicle, to check Hizbollah's "nature reserves."² This type of a massive, ongoing presence was supposed to prevent the organization from maintaining existing fortifications and building new hiding places, and make it difficult for Hizbollah to smuggle weapons south of the Litani and deploy a dense array of thousands of rockets, as before the war. If there were effective enforcement by the Lebanese army along the eastern and northern border with Syria with regard to unauthorized imports into the country, then Hizbollah's ability to threaten Israel at the same scope as before and during the war would be neutralized, and the reconstruction of its force would be a slow, lengthy process. However, in this case the vision was one thing while reality was quite another. At the end of the fighting, Hizbollah did not miss a beat while adapting to the new reality and made the required adjustments in order to sow the seeds of a new confrontation.

The purpose of this essay is to examine Hizbollah's renewed force buildup since the end of the war in August 2006 despite the constraints of Resolution 1701, to understand the foundations underlying the rearmament of the last three years, and on the basis of this analysis to infer future trends in the organization's operational doctrine and the operative logic behind the trends. The essay analyzes a number of aspects of Hizbollah's force buildup, such as manpower, armaments, training, and deployment in the arena, in context of the lessons the organization learned from its various successes and failures in the war. The essay also examines the extent to which these conclusions match the organization's plan for confrontation against the IDF in the next round.

Divine Victory, Limited Edition

The Second Lebanon War was presented by Hizbollah as a miraculous intervention by Allah and dubbed "the divine victory" by the organization's leadership. At a rally on September 22, 2006 on the ruins of the Dahiya neighborhood in Beirut, Hizbollah's secretary general Hassan Nasrallah lauded the organization's firm stand with only a few thousand fighters of the resistance movement over 34 days against the strongest army in the Middle East, despite the IDF's superior quality of weapons and number of forces.³

However, alongside Hizbollah's success in paralyzing northern Israel for over a month by launching some 4,000 rockets of various types, foiling the IDF's attempts at maneuvering, and inflicting injuries on IDF forces,

the view of the organization's ostensible military victory was far from rosy. On the basis of IDF estimations, at least 600 organization operatives were killed, many of whom were veteran soldiers, commanders on the ground, and members of Hizbollah's special forces. Likewise, hundreds of operatives were injured with various degrees of seriousness, taking them out of the circle of fighting.⁴ In addition, a year and a half after the war the organization lost the commander of its military branch and its strategic brain, Imad Mughniyeh. The assassination of Mughniyeh in Damascus on February 12, 2008 in a tightly sewn attack was another crack in the compartmentalized wall that was one of the organization's hallmarks.⁵ This protective wall was prominently punctured already on the first night of the war with Operation Specific Gravity (*Mishkal Seguli*) taking out the Fadjr-3 and Fadjr-5 mid-range rockets. Israeli intelligence's penetration into Hizbollah's inner sanctum with its destruction from the air of some 40 launchers hidden in the homes of organization operatives in the framework of a covert, classified Hizbollah project shocked the organization's leadership.⁶

However, the Fadjr infrastructure was not the only asset Hizbollah lost in the war. Hizbollah's headquarters in Dahiya, the organization's nerve center, was destroyed; its front line of fortifications along the border was totally shattered; hundreds of targets identified with the organization's logistical and civilian systems were wrecked; and the homes of thousands of Shiite supporters were decimated. True, Hizbollah's senior leadership was not harmed and instead presented an image of a command totally in charge of events, while skillfully using the al-Manar television network, which demonstrated impressive survival skills.⁷ Nonetheless, at the end of the war, the heads of the organization were left in the dark, Nasrallah's Iranian patrons stripped him of much of his authority, and aspersions were cast on his decisions within Lebanon.⁸

In the war zone, Hizbollah managed to sustain launch capabilities against Israel; surprise Israel tactically both in terms of the successful attack on the Israeli naval vessel *Hanit* with a C-802 surface-to-sea missile and in terms of the network of underground tunnels and bunkers; and kill 119 IDF soldiers and damage 45 tanks using advanced anti-tank rockets.⁹ However more than Hizbollah succeeded, it was the IDF that failed itself. Generally, in every face-to-face confrontation between Hizbollah fighters and IDF soldiers, the latter had the upper hand, and Hizbollah's command and control systems throughout southern Lebanon were destroyed. In

light of this, Nasrallah admitted not long after the war that had he known how Israel would react, he would not have ordered his men to kidnap the soldiers.¹⁰ This revealing admission indicates that the final result of the war was not as unequivocal as Hizbollah would have it appear. On the contrary, it contained more than just a hint that the organization was badly battered by the war and would need a long time for its wounds to heal while it adjusted to the new reality in southern Lebanon.

Hizbollah's Learning Process

In September 2006 Hizbollah's leaders were boasting that the damage the organization sustained in the war was minor. Nasrallah declared that Hizbollah's military capabilities had been fully restored within a few days and that therefore the organization, with an arsenal of 20,000 rockets at its disposal, was stronger than it had been at the outset of the campaign.¹¹ His deputy, Naim Qasim, went even further and claimed that Hizbollah did not need any military reconstruction since it had launched merely one tenth of its rockets.¹²

However, the reality behind the scenes was totally different. A short time after the ceasefire went into effect, Hizbollah embarked on an in-depth examination process regarding its conduct in the war, studied the manner in which its systems operated against the IDF, and took stock of the damage. The organization launched a series of internal investigations and established an internal commission of inquiry to examine a long list of actions.¹³

First of all, one may assume that the heads of the organization were especially disturbed by the question of how intelligence had been breached so as to allow the elimination of the Fadjrs on the first night of the war. It is certainly possible that consequently there were investigations of organization operatives, and their level of reliability and relationships with suspect elements were scrutinized.

Second, Hizbollah likely studied the performance of its weapon systems and examined their effectiveness during the fighting, including: rockets of various ranges, their level of survivability, and the scope of damages caused to Israel's home front; the anti-tank system as a means of disrupting IDF moves, both against the armored corps in the open areas and against the infantry taking cover in buildings; the engineering branch, including booby traps and landmine pits, intended to delay IDF

ground forces but found to be fairly ineffective during the war; and the aerial defense system that made it hard for Israeli helicopters to operate and even managed to down one of them, but which failed utterly against Israel's warplanes, which flew through Lebanon's skies as their own.

Third, it is entirely plausible that Hizbollah examined the effectiveness of its military doctrine in light of the pressure exerted by the IDF on its strongholds in southern Lebanon. While the use of the underground network proved effective in preventing unnecessary losses and also helped maintain the continuity of the fighting, the organization's fighters did not overpower the Israeli soldiers in face-to-face combat. Moreover, the ability to insert reinforcements and move them from village to village according to operational needs was negligible, and the attempts to move troops from north of the Litani into the war zone in the south failed because the Israeli air force was in control of all the approaches.

The findings of Hizbollah's internal commission of inquiry remain classified, but from statements made by the organization's leadership as well as various UN reports and data leaked to the media over the last three years it is possible to glean that these findings have not been allowed to remain on paper alone. Furthermore, Hizbollah did not suffice itself with investigations. It also drew personal conclusions about which commanders failed to live up to the organization's fighting standards. The most prominent ouster was that of Hussein Jamil Yunis, the commander of the Baalbeck sector, who was one of the people responsible for Hizbollah's logistical support in the Beqaa Valley, as part of the Haider Brigade.¹⁴ Apparently the IDF raid on the Shiite town of Baalbeck as part of Operation Sharp and Smooth (*Had ve-Halak*) and the return of the force without any injuries was seen by the organization as a resounding security lapse. The IDF's capability of inserting some 200 fighters deep into the region under the organization's control without resistance or even anyone noticing their arrival, killing some twenty operatives and returning home safely, proved to Hizbollah that its early warning system in the rear had failed.¹⁵ Replacing Yunis was likely a message to other sector commanders not to let their guard down because of their physical distance from the Israeli border. They were charged with maintaining a high level of alert, reinforcing their measures of detection and surveillance, and preparing for the possibility of an Israeli operation,

despite the fact that such an operation was previously considered impossible.¹⁶

Apart from analyzing the organization's strengths and weaknesses while attempting to fix the problems, Hizbollah's leadership was also highly attentive to developments on the Israeli side. From the large amount of information leaked to the media about the IDF's operational plans and the atmosphere in the defense establishment after the war, namely the feeling of a missed opportunity and the need to have performed differently, Hizbollah learned about Israel's future methods of operation.

On the eve of the war, the IDF had an off-the-shelf plan for a ground maneuver in Lebanon, dubbed Marom Waters (*Mei Marom*). It had been developed by commander of the northern front in the Second Lebanon War, General Eyal Ben-Reuven, and called for a preparatory stage that would include a concentrated aerial strike and a limited ground move along the border. Afterwards, the army was supposed to have landed large forces north of the Litani, moved south, taken control of the region, and tackled the loci of terrorist concentrations and rocket launchers.¹⁷ The plan was not put into practice, but Hizbollah could have learned from it that it had to reinforce its deployment north of the Litani in order to prevent its operational core in southern Lebanon being outflanked and to deepen the entire aerial defense in order to disrupt a possible helicopter operation in the region.

In addition, Hizbollah can assume that in the future the IDF will not go on raids limited in force and time, but will rather undertake a ground maneuver using a number of divisions in order to aim for a quick decision. The brigade-level sorties in the Second Lebanon War did not reflect the power of the IDF, preserved the operational capabilities of Hizbollah, and resulted in the pointless continuation of the battle. The public disclosure on Marom Waters as well as statements made by senior IDF personnel in this vein from the end of the war onwards simply supported Hizbollah's working assumption.¹⁸ The design of Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip provided further backing to this premise. Israel started its campaign against Hamas with a concerted aerial attack on a series of targets and artillery barrages. Afterwards the IDF started its ground move, did not hesitate to fight in urban areas, and proved itself superior to the enemy at every given moment. True, the cases of Gaza and Lebanon with their respective fronts are highly different, but the

operation in Gaza demonstrated that the IDF was prepared to take more risks on condition that they demonstrate its advantages and lead to as quick a decision as possible.

In light of Hizbollah's awareness that the Second Lebanon War revealed weaknesses in some of its systems and that in a future round of fighting with Israel the IDF would be used differently than in the summer of 2006, the organization has not been resting on its laurels. Despite the calm on the Israeli-Lebanese border, Hizbollah has been hard at work rebuilding its forces and enhancing its military strength, both in the spirit of the lessons it learned and on the basis of its understanding of IDF operational plans, and is now laying a new threat right at Israel's doorstep.

Force Buildup and Adjustment to a Changing Reality

The results of the Second Lebanon War thus brought Hizbollah face-to-face with a complex military challenge. The combination of Resolution 1701, which created a buffer between the organization and the IDF and curbed Hizbollah's moves in the open area, and the need to rehabilitate damaged capabilities quickly, especially in terms of manpower, demanded that Hizbollah adopt new patterns of action adjusted to the newly created reality. Moreover, under these circumstances the organization was required to develop a new operational doctrine that acted on its basic working assumption that in the next round of fighting its fighters would face an extensive ground maneuver by the IDF.

However, despite the difficulties it faced, Hizbollah revealed creative flexibility in terms of its ability to analyze a given situation, identify the cracks, and take advantage of them, and in terms of its ability to translate the lessons it learned into practice, showing impressive zeal in their full implementation. Accordingly, the three years that have passed since the war have been characterized by an intensive process of force buildup, with Hizbollah overcoming the limitations of the moment and working undercover. Below is a breakdown of the primary foundations of Hizbollah's new force buildup:

Manpower: In the Second Lebanon War, Hizbollah's fighting force sustained the most severe blow. The organization, which by various estimates had numbered 6,000-8,000 military operatives, lost 10-15 percent of its manpower strength, so that its most urgent need was

to refill its ranks.¹⁹ The organization, therefore, began with extensive recruitment operations, and it was reported that villages in southern Lebanon were emptied of men, who were sent to training camps in the Beqaa Valley, Syria, and Iran. However, while in the past Hizbollah was careful to enlist only Shiites, in the last three years the organization has also opened its doors to Sunnis, Druze, and Christians.²⁰ Aside from the immediate need to expand the fighting force, this move was intended to gain both a political and a military goal. Hizbollah, planted deep in the heart of Lebanese politics, viewed recruitment as a tool allowing penetration into segments of the population that were not among its traditional supporters and a potential means for expanding its political strength. Moreover, blurring its Shiite identity and creating a different population mix bolsters its image as a defender of Lebanon rather than a sectarian militia. In addition, turning to new populations and training them in its own warfare methods expands the organization's mass and heightens its chances of more effectively disrupting an IDF ground maneuver in the depth of Lebanon. In other words, the divisions that the Israeli army will insert in the front will face reserves of manpower that were previously not at Hizbollah's disposal. On the other hand, puncturing the organization's homogeneity with an eye to increased electoral strength and more military power invites intelligence breaches and information leaks that could serve both competitors within Lebanon and external players. Moreover, the level of loyalty of the fighters who are not Shiites and their dedication to the cause at the moment of truth remain to be proven.

Armaments: Hizbollah's array of armaments is varied, though in the last war the organization focused its use primarily on various Russian-, Syrian-, and Iranian-made rockets of ranges of 20 to 250 km and on a number of advanced anti-tank missile models, chiefly the Kornet and the Concourse.²¹ These proved their effectiveness in attacking Israel's rear and in stopping IDF advances on the battlefield. Because the organization does not manufacture its own armaments, Hizbollah is entirely dependent on supplies from the outside to increase its power. Resolution 1701 strove to stop the arms smuggling across the Syrian-Lebanese border and cut off Hizbollah's oxygen supply, but failed to impose an enforcement apparatus; the responsibility fell to the Lebanese army.²² Given the fact that armaments, with emphasis on quantity,

represented a central element in force buildup, it was important for Hizbollah to maintain open lines of supply.

The Syrian-Lebanese border stretches some 360 km, with 100 km to the north and the rest to the east of the Beqaa Valley. Despite its length, there are only five official border crossings, of which two are in the east – the Ka'a crossing southeast of al-Hermel and the Masna'a crossing located northeast of Rashaiya. While a supervisory force of 800 soldiers under a Lebanese general and German guidance started operating on the northern border in early 2008, the eastern border is highly porous. Dozens of pirate crossings allow unhindered smuggling of arms to all parts of Lebanon. Furthermore, supervision at the two official crossings has been far from satisfactory. The Ka'a and Masna'a crossings are 12 and 8 km away from the border, respectively. This margin allows free entry of every sort of goods into Lebanon without fear of border inspections. Moreover, the Masna'a crossing on the Beirut-Damascus road is the primary truck crossing. Even though some 200 trucks pass through daily, only 30 are randomly spot-checked, easily allowing the smuggling of heavy armaments in commercial quantities, including long range rockets, directly into Hizbollah warehouses in Beirut.²³

The reality on the border has played into Hizbollah's hands. At the end of the war, the organization started an intensive arms race; Syria renewed the stockpiles that were depleted in the war and even increased the numbers significantly. In the summer of 2006, the number of rockets in Hizbollah hands was estimated at some 12,000. In August 2007 Defense Minister Ehud Barak announced that the number had climbed to more than 20,000,²⁴ and a year later intelligence sources put the number at 42,000.²⁵ The Lebanese army's interception of an ammunition truck in southern Beirut on February 8, 2007 carrying 300 rockets hidden among bales of hay,²⁶ and the interception of another truck on June 5, 2007 near Baalbeck carrying Grad missiles²⁷ uncovered only a small fraction of Hizbollah's smuggling and rearming efforts.

However, Hizbollah has not placed its faith in quantities alone. As a lesson of the war, it has worked to increase the range of its rockets in order to put the majority of Israel's civilian front under threat, and it apparently has attained weapons it did not have in the past.²⁸ Two years after the war, Defense Minister Barak admitted that most of Israel's citizens are within range of Hizbollah rockets,²⁹ and that it was possible that the

organization was equipped with an advanced Zelzal missile model and Fateh-110 rockets with ranges of 250-300 km and capable of carrying half-ton payloads.³⁰

Other than concentrating on rockets, the organization has also worked to enlarge its stockpiles of anti-tank missiles, with emphasis on the Kornet, capable of hitting its target from a 5.5 km distance; it seems that the latter was the most effective means of stopping the IDF's ground maneuver and disrupting its ground offensive. In light of Hizbollah's working assumption about Israel's plans for the future, the organization has equipped itself with large quantities of missiles received directly from Syria, which according to IDF intelligence has become Hizbollah's arms cache.³¹ For its part, the IDF has also learned from the war and has formulated an anti-tank response. Since the war the development of an active defensive system for Israel's armored corps was completed; it is capable of identifying anti-tank fire peripherally and intercepting it in the air before it hits the tank. Installing the system, known as the ASPRO-A (Trophy), on Israeli Merkava tanks is thus likely to neutralize an important Hizbollah tool and allow the IDF to maneuver deep in enemy territory and wrest a decision from it in battle.³²

Hizbollah has also invested special efforts in aerial defenses, which were revealed to be its chief weakness. The knowledge that the Israel is capable of gathering intelligence and creating targets unhindered, inserting special forces into the depth of Lebanon, and striking at the organization's centers of gravity, has worried Hizbollah. Therefore, the organization came to the realization that shoulder-mounted missiles, whose effectiveness in battle is negligible, are not enough, and that there is a need for more sophisticated systems capable of intercepting fighter planes and drones flying at high altitudes. The declaration made by the head of Israeli military intelligence that Syria has put almost all of its strategic capabilities at Hizbollah's disposal,³³ and the concern voiced by Defense Minister Barak in June 2009 to the secretary general of the UN about the disruption of the arms balance in Lebanon³⁴ hint that Hizbollah has acquired new capabilities in this field. It is not inconceivable that Syria and Iran have smuggled advanced anti-aircraft systems such as the SA-8 and SA-15 across the border. These systems are installed on armored personnel carriers equipped with powerful radar systems capable of keeping track of several targets simultaneously and intercepting aircraft

at high altitudes using guided missiles. These systems are ideal from Hizbollah's perspective because they are mobile, easily concealed, and require only a three-man team to operate them.³⁵

Training: The recruitment of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of new men into the organization, their integration into the ranks of fighters, and their training as guerillas created the need for a developed training network. Furthermore, the introduction of new weapon systems into Hizbollah's arsenal required a lengthy absorption process in order to reach a satisfactory level of operation. Therefore, Hizbollah has sent hundreds of its operatives to courses and specialized training in Iran to acquire specialized skills in anti-tank fire, launching mid and long range rockets, intelligence gathering, and sabotage. The inculcation of these skills is designed to fill the holes created in the organization's ranks by the war and prepare an extensive cadre of operatives with battle training in preparation for the next round.³⁶

However, Hizbollah has not satisfied itself with a few localized courses for its personnel. In the last three years, the organization has reportedly held at least two large scale maneuvers in southern Lebanon that are more reflective of a conventional army than a guerilla organization. In early November 2007, it was reported that Hizbollah carried out a three-day maneuver not far from the border with Israel, involving thousands of operatives and testing the organization's military capabilities on the basis of lessons learned from the war while strictly maintaining low visibility and without carrying arms, as required by Resolution 1701.³⁷ A year later, on November 22, 2008, Hizbollah held a similar maneuver on both sides of the Litani River, in part to test the speed of deployment of its forces with little advance warning.³⁸ Performing these two maneuvers shows that the organization is preparing to place the mass of its forces against an IDF multi-division maneuver in a large sector and test its capabilities of disrupting an IDF ground offensive as a coordinated fighting system.

The manner of deployment: The loss of the front line of fortifications along the border with Israel and the activity of the Lebanese army and UNIFIL in the open areas of southern Lebanon have forced Hizbollah to adopt different means of preparation than in the past, adjusted to the organization's current basic working assumption.

First, Hizbollah has turned the villages abutting the border into alternative surveillance and intelligence gathering centers. While its

operatives are not armed, they are equipped with cameras and long range binoculars, and from time to time are sent out disguised as shepherds and hunters to gather information close to the Blue Line. In addition, there have been reports of massive construction of structures near the fence, and it is not inconceivable that these are meant to serve the organization for carrying out terrorist attacks and as a first line of defense in fighting against Israel.³⁹

Second, Hizbollah has abandoned its nature reserve strongholds and settled in the villages in southern Lebanon. One reason is that UNIFIL forces have focused their activities on the open areas and have avoided searching the villages, since this could easily be perceived by the local population as a confrontational act that generates much friction and is rife with explosive religious and sexual sensitivities. By contrast, the sympathy of the local population lends the organization much freedom of action.⁴⁰ A second reason is that the secret of the nature reserves has been exposed. In light of the organization's assessment that in a future war it will not be able to stand up to the IDF in fighting in the open, the chances of maintaining continuous activity and launchings from urban areas and surprising the enemy with underground fighting are much better. Accordingly, each of the 160 villages south of the Litani has become a fortified military base and been given a role to play in the organization's regional defensive plans. Underground networks of tunnels for fighting and storing weapons have been built in the villages; command and intelligence centers have been erected there along with well-trained engineering and anti-tank cells. It is even possible that there is a secret communications network to increase coordination between sub-sectors, both at the level of rate of fire and launching times and as part of providing better assistance to points under attack. In addition, every village has turned into an independent launching zone, with a fairly large store of rockets smuggled into the south under the cover of civilian supplies or agricultural produce at the disposal of the dozens of operatives providing ongoing maintenance.⁴¹

At the same time, the move into the villages is not completely free of drawbacks and may in fact limit Hizbollah's sphere of activity to some extent. In the view of the IDF, the villages are no longer civilian entities but military bases and as such are fair game for attack. Hizbollah, in need of support from the local population and with its self-image as a social

movement, must therefore take into consideration the level of damage that its constituents are likely to sustain, and ramifications for its status in Lebanese society. In addition, using the villages for military needs harbors the seeds of potential for a confrontation between local residents and organization operatives because of the extent of the destruction one may expect. It is not inconceivable that the concern about another armed conflict in southern Lebanon may lead to a wave of protest against the organization, as occurred in the village of Marwahain in August 2009, resulting in Hizbollah losing a number of its positions. Hizbollah has started to prepare the zone north of the Litani as a battle zone parallel to the area south of the river. Based on various reports, the organization has gone on a shopping spree of land and homes from Druze and Christian villagers and has started turning them into military installations. In addition, a line of fortification has been built along the northern bank of the Litani, and it seems that mid and long range rockets have been deployed in the region between the heights of Nabatiyeh to the foothills of Jebel Baruch. The rationale behind this change in planning stems from the organization's intention of gaining immunity against an IDF ground maneuver or vertical outflanking, from its desire to maintain a strategy of multi-level launchings not deployed mainly south of the Litani as was the case in the war but that may be well enough protected against infantry sorties and aerial attacks, and from its desire to allow a large enough margin of activity for its anti-tank cells to block lines of armored vehicles moving through the difficult winding hills and lowlands.⁴³

The operations concept: From Hizbollah's basic assumption that in the future it will face an extensive ground attack, and from the trends that have characterized its force construction in the last three years, it is possible to derive the main points of the organization's fighting concept. Generally, it seems that Hizbollah realizes that it will find it difficult to defend southern Lebanon against an IDF maneuver and therefore has worked to change the configuration of the battlefield. Instead of fighting in the open, Hizbollah has moved its centers of gravity into the villages. In other words, should the IDF attempt to eliminate the launching sites and concentrations of fighters it will have to conduct simultaneous fighting in urban areas in dozens of different locations. Taking control of the urban sphere against an enemy amidst a civilian population perforce requires significant forces liable to be exposed to fighting in tunnels,

attempted kidnappings, booby traps, and anti-tank fire, while trying at the same time to avoid harming uninvolved bystanders. Thus Hizbollah generates targets in the form of Israeli soldiers, and from familiarity with the Israeli sensitivity to loss of life it can anticipate that exacting a high human toll would undermine Israel's political and military leadership and disrupt continuation of the ground maneuver. Even the expansion of the ranks of its fighters and arming them with advanced anti-tank missiles and deploying them north of the Litani serves this purpose. On the one hand, the IDF would have to expand the lines, move in enemy occupied territory, and be exposed to precision weapons fired from afar. On the other hand, Hizbollah fighters would be able to block the advance of armored vehicle lines with a heavy fire screen of missiles, ambush forces from the rear, and maintain their own survivability or alternately, pull the Israeli army deeper into Lebanon and conduct fighting far from the border. In addition, dense deployment north of the Litani is likely to prevent an outflanking of southern Lebanon and a pincer move by the IDF to take control of this sphere. In other words, the chances of survival for the fighters on Hizbollah's front lines increase while a similar outflanking against the rear line north of the Litani is seen as rife with danger for the IDF and can only play into the hand of the organization.

Parallel to the ground fighting, a central part of Hizbollah's concept is its capability of posing a threat to Israel's civilian front. The significant increase in the number and variety of rockets and their manner of deployment are meant to serve a number of goals: first, to prevent the Israeli air force from carrying out an opening move similar to Operation Specific Gravity, which cost the organization one of its principal strategic cards. The dispersal of long range rockets throughout Lebanon and the hundreds of launching sites are designed to neutralize the air force's ability to attain a similar result in the future and thereby leave Israel's depth exposed to the threat. Second, it aims to preserve continuous fire capability, even if an IDF maneuver in southern Lebanon is successful, thereby strengthening the organization's victory in the public eye. In Hizbollah's view, the IDF is capable of conquering southern Lebanon as it has done on several occasions in the past and damaging the organization's array of short range missiles. However, the extended ranges of the rockets and their deployment in the depth of Lebanon are meant to cancel out the achievement of an Israeli ground maneuver and

defy IDF control of the area while undermining Israeli public confidence in the campaign. In other words, being able to continue launching heavy barrages at Israel's population centers from the depth of Lebanese territory would question the IDF's capability of removing the threat and enhance Hizbollah's image as a surviving organization and an invincible opponent. Third, it aims to sow death and destruction while making life in Israel unbearable, such that it would seem that the fighting had moved onto Israeli territory, i.e., the fate of Israel's citizens would be no different than that of Lebanon's. Beirut and Tel Aviv would share the same fortune; air force bombings would be answered with daily barrages of numerous rockets. Fourth, severe damage to Israel's civilian front is likely to lower the morale of the reservists and their fighting efforts on Lebanese soil. In other words, heavy fire on the coastal strip and greater Tel Aviv area is liable to place most reservists in a dilemma: whether to remain in their fighting units while thinking about their families under attack or to abandon the front in favor of the home. Fifth, placing the military rear on continuous defense is likely to disrupt the orderly activity of the IDF on the fighting front. Rockets hitting staff headquarters or centers of forces would cause delays, keeping the enemy busy with search and rescue operations while also having to take cover. This is liable to damage logistical efforts to stream reinforcements and supplies to the battlefield.

Hizbollah's operational concept also encompasses aspects of fighting in the air and at sea. Damaging the Israeli ship *Hanit* at the beginning of the war and especially the downing of a Yasur helicopter were valuable beyond their own particular successes. Apart from the shockwaves they generated, these events caused a change in IDF moves. The navy adopted much greater caution and moved its vessels away from the coastline, while the downing of the helicopter put an end to an operation that was meant to tilt the balance of the war; instead of continuing, the IDF froze the situation and concentrated on a rescue mission. Therefore, damaging naval vessels or aircraft is seen by Hizbollah as an optimal pivotal event to unsettle the enemy and disrupt its ability to think judiciously. Moreover, Hizbollah has sought to limit the activity of Israel's air force and navy in Lebanon. The understanding that these represent a platform for inserting special forces deep into the territory, as happened in Tyre and Baalbeck during the war, and threatening the organization's assets required a response. The acquisition of C-802 shore-to-sea missiles and advanced anti-aircraft systems is designed to make it difficult to carry out

similar operations in the future and signal to the IDF that the price tag for special operations may be especially steep.

Conclusion

In the three years since the Second Lebanon War Hizbollah has experienced a major transformation. The organization has gone through a comprehensive learning process and its leadership has devoted much thought to the scenario of a future war against Israel, given the new reality in the area and the mood in the IDF. The application of the lessons in light of the current challenge is reflected in Hizbollah's accelerated buildup and the preparation of an adjusted operational concept through the current matrix of force components. Adopting new patterns of activity and changing current trends have proven that Hizbollah is a learning organization gifted in understanding the environment in which it operates, in its adaptability to changing conditions, and in its ability to understand the enemy's point of view and analyze its guiding rationale. These characteristics underscore that Hizbollah is not afflicted with the well known syndrome of other armies that tend to prepare for the last war, but is in fact preparing appropriately for the next. Therefore, it may be assumed that the IDF will face a stronger and radically changed organization from the one it fought in the summer of 2006. Only the construction of an appropriate defense response by the IDF will make it possible to render a serious blow to Hizbollah in its current, updated format.

Notes

- 1 See the wording of UN Security Council Resolution 1701: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/465/03/PDF/N0646503.pdf?OpenElement>.
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