

Chapter 15

The Impact of the War on Arab Security Concepts

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The Arab street has for the most part heralded the results of the fighting in Lebanon as a Hizbollah victory. The prevalent Arab narrative is that for several weeks a small military organization with a few thousand fighters, without an air force or tanks, displayed determination and the ability to realize its potential, and thus withstood the might of the army that is considered to be the strongest in the Middle East. It may be assumed that the Arab defense establishments and other regional elements examined the progress and results of the fighting, and scrutinized the strengths and weaknesses shown by Israel and Hizbollah. It is not yet clear what conclusions they have drawn, and whether the confrontation in Lebanon will impact on Arab security concepts and if so, how. Certainly, the process of internalizing the significance of the war in Lebanon by the Arab security systems and translating this into specific practical results – if this occurs at all – will take time.

This essay aims to consider how the results of the fighting in Lebanon may ultimately influence Arab security concepts. In the absence of actual data on any learning process on the Arab side, the analysis, based on the known components of Arab security thinking, attempts to assess how the Arab approach may change in the wake of the fighting. What follows, therefore, is a review of the overall impact of the war on Arab security thinking, followed by a look at the security approach of states and organizations that have hostile relations with Israel and are directly affected by Israel's military strength and behavior: Syria, Iran, and the Palestinian organizations. Naturally, the more information is gleaned on the

conclusions drawn by the Arabs and the Iranians from the war in Lebanon, the more it will be possible to reexamine this analysis.

The Principles of the Arab Security Concepts

With regard to Israel, the current Arab security concepts have crystallized primarily since the seventies based on the main developments in the Arab-Israeli arena: the Six Day War, the Yom Kippur War, the 1982 Lebanon War, the collapse of the Arab coalition against Israel, the signing of the peace accords between Egypt and Israel and Jordan and Israel, and the two violent clashes between the Palestinians and Israel. At the same time, regional and global developments contributed to their formulation, particularly the transition of the locus of instability in the Middle East from the Arab-Israeli conflict to the Gulf area, reflected by the Iraq-Iran War, the Gulf War, and the 2003 Iraq War; the economic crisis in the Arab world that began in the mid-eighties; the collapse of the Soviet Union; and the emergence of the United States as the lone superpower.

From these developments, most Arab states drew a number of principal conclusions vis-à-vis Israel. First, Israel has overall strategic superiority over the Arab states and as such, the Arab armies are unable, in the foreseeable future, to defeat it on the battlefield and destroy it as a political entity. This conclusion derives from the assumption that Israel is militarily stronger than each individual Arab state and apparently than an entire Arab military coalition as well (which in any event the Arabs have been incapable of mobilizing effectively). The central factors in Israel's superiority are its aerial strength, its quality intelligence, its ability to operate large ground formations, its advantage in the field of precision arms, its command and control systems, and its extended reach. The Arabs appear to believe that despite the advances in quality made in some Arab armies in the last two decades, particularly in the Egyptian army, the discrepancy between the IDF and the Arab armies has increased further in Israel's favor.

Second, Israel's strategic superiority results from the confluence of several factors: on the one hand, Israel's ability to develop and utilize its human resources and harness them for its defense needs; its ability to obtain advanced military technologies and weapon systems – some from American and Western sources, and some self-developed; and its ability

to formulate and adopt advanced fighting methods and adapt them to the conditions of the Arab-Israeli arena. For their part, the Arabs have failed in most of these areas, and have not managed to harness their resources and unite to overcome their inferiority vis-à-vis Israel.

The special relationship between the United States and Israel; the commitment of American administrations to Israel's survival and security; and the US commitment to maintain Israel's qualitative edge over the Arab states are among the pillars of Israeli security. These relations provide Israel not only with a source of technological superiority but also superpower backing in times of military distress during a war. The Arabs, however, have no such support in their confrontation with Israel.

Israel has a strategic security net based on its nuclear capability. At the same time, the Arabs do not believe Israel will use nuclear weapons against them unless it finds itself in extreme distress and has no other option, which they do not think will happen in the foreseeable future. As such, the Arabs are of the opinion that Israel's nuclear capability should not limit or deter them from acting against it, either in a conventional war or through terror and violence. In addition, Israel has weak points that stem from its smaller geographical size and population, sensitivity to losses, political constraints, dependence of the IDF on reserve forces, and its difficulties in contending with terror and guerilla organizations.

These factors oblige the Arabs to adopt strategic conclusions with regard to their approach towards Israel. Here, the Arabs are divided over what conclusions to draw. Today all the Arab regimes believe that embarking on another war with Israel in the coming years is not in their favor because they would inevitably be defeated. As such, their strategic interest is to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict by political means, while adhering to the objective of attaining the Arab demands. Egypt and Jordan translated this approach into peace agreements with Israel. Syria has looked for a political settlement, but has not achieved it due to the gap between Syrian and Israeli positions. Other Arab countries are divided between willingness to maintain informal relations with Israel and a refusal to have any ties with Israel at all. The Palestinians are divided in their approach: some are willing to accept a political compromise settlement with Israel that satisfies their basic conditions, while the radical organizations support maintaining the armed struggle until attrition achieves the victory over Israel. The only

regime in the region that supports an armed struggle against Israel until it is annihilated is the Iranian regime.

For over a generation the Arabs have noted Israel's inability to achieve all its military objectives. Israel is still considered by them as a threat due to its military ability and intentions to occupy Arab territory. However, in all wars since the Six Day War – the peak of Israel's realization of its military abilities against the Arabs – the Arabs have uncovered weak points in Israel's strength: in the War of Attrition, the Yom Kippur War, the Lebanon War and the clash with Hizbollah, and the struggle against Palestinian terror. In the Arabs' eyes, the last war in Lebanon is, therefore, part of this general pattern.

The War in Lebanon: General Arab Lessons

Before examining the possible Arab conclusions from the war in Lebanon, a preliminary observation should be made. Not only is there not yet sufficient evidence as to the conclusions the Arabs will draw from the war; it should be assumed that for a number of reasons they will need to exercise caution with regard to the conclusions they do draw: (a) There is clearly a fundamental difference between fighting a small military organization and waging war against regular armies backed by states and governments. Thus, the main conceptual problem will be to examine which lessons from the war in Lebanon can be applied to countries and regular armies, and which are irrelevant. (b) It should be clear to the Arabs that Israel will also draw its own conclusions from the war and will aim to correct the lapses and defects that surfaced. Consequently, they will make a mistake if they rely only on the lessons learned from the last war in examining Israel's future defense activities. (c) Despite the prolonged nature of the war, only part of Israel's military components were tested, while the Arab states were not involved at all. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the Arabs will continue to maintain their fundamental approach towards Israel with regard to their perception of its abilities and limitations, but they will probably update some components based on the conclusions drawn from the war in Lebanon.

The basis of Arab analysis of the war's results will likely be that for the foreseeable future Israel will continue to maintain its overall strategic-

military supremacy and its technological advantage over the Arab states. Some of the fundamental components in Israel's supremacy, which were reflected in the last war, once again demonstrated to the Arabs that they lack an adequate response. First and foremost, the Arab states do not have an answer to Israel's aerial ability, firepower, and precision capabilities that were demonstrated in the war, despite the fact that in Lebanon these were not tested against an enemy air force and significant aerial defense. Second, Israel's intelligence capability, lapses notwithstanding, still provides its fighting forces with sufficiently accurate intelligence that lends them an advantage in the field and enables them to hit quality targets. And third, the United States' full support of Israel during the war in Lebanon was entirely clear, more so than in any previous war. Not only did these basic components not decline; their quality was felt even more keenly than in the past.

On the other hand, the war in Lebanon gave the Arabs food for thought as to possible ways of eroding Israel's supremacy and, principally, of exploiting its weak points. First there is the vulnerability of Israel's home front. The 2006 war was the first time since the War of Independence that an Arab force launched a large scale attack on Israel's home front, other than Iraq's Scud missiles during the Gulf War and terrorist attacks whose scope and the damage are far more limited. Ultimately, the Arabs will likely come to the conclusion that they cannot defeat Israel by striking at its home front, which demonstrated considerable resilience during the war. On the other hand, the damage was significant enough to justify development of an option to strike at the home front in the future, in the expectation that the Israeli home front will find it hard to withstand more prolonged and intensive attrition. Will the Arabs exploit such an option in future confrontations? That depends on the state. Arab states whose home front is as vulnerable as Israel's – Syria, for example – would have to weigh carefully whether they want to ignite the home front during a war. On the other hand, countries whose rear is less vulnerable to an Israeli response due to the distance, such as Iran, or elements that are less sensitive to strikes of this sort, such as Hizbollah and Palestinian organizations, are liable to use this option and try to enhance their ability to strike at Israel's home front.

Second, there are rockets and missiles. As far back as the Gulf War the Arabs viewed Iraq's Scud missile fire as a means to offset part of Israel's aerial advantage. The Arabs, including more distant states, see missiles as a long arm and an option for striking against Israel, a means of hitting Israel's home front and inflicting material and psychological damage, a deterrent, and a means of launching non-conventional weapons. In recent years missiles have become a less attractive option for the Arabs, probably due to the interception capability of the Arrow system. The missiles' efficiency was not tested during the war in Lebanon; the effectiveness of rockets, however, was tested and the Arabs may draw the conclusion that they proved themselves. Although the thousands of rockets launched by Hizbollah at Israel did not break the Israeli home front, they proved themselves a simple, available, and convenient weapon that is difficult to destroy and has a high level of survivability against aerial attacks. The use of rockets can also force Israel into a situation of prolonged warfare, high costs, partial paralysis of the national economy, intense frustration, and damage to national morale, all of which have always been viewed by the Arabs as being to Israel's disadvantage. The conclusion, both of Arab states and Iran and of military and terror organizations, is likely to be that they should expand and enhance their missile and rocket arrays against Israel.

Third, there are anti-tank missiles. The Arabs have long realized that in light of Israel's firepower and high level of mobility and its aerial supremacy, it is best not to engage it using large formations. Hizbollah's use of anti-tank missiles, some advanced, is apparently viewed as one of the organization's successes. Hizbollah proved capable of using low signature small forces in areas saturated with anti-tank weaponry, suited to operations in built-up areas and in a manner that optimizes force mobility. This success may motivate Arab armies to establish more anti-tank light forces and teams, perhaps at the expense of large armored units, to stop ground advances. These units would likely be equipped with more advanced anti-tank missiles and with more advanced missiles that may be mostly of Russian manufacture. This may also be the conclusion drawn by smaller military organizations.

One important question is how the deficiencies discovered in the IDF during the Second Lebanon War are likely to impact on the Arabs'

perception of the Israeli threat. In the last clash the IDF did not function well, partly due to defective planning and its use of ground forces and reserves, the quality of some of the officers, and logistical failures. Will the Arabs take this to mean that the IDF's strength has declined and the threat it poses to Arab states has lessened to the extent that they are able to launch new options against Israel? Not necessarily, and much depends on the processes that the IDF undergoes in the wake of the war. If the IDF manages to relay the message that it is correcting the mistakes and is restoring its capabilities, it is reasonable to assume that the Arabs will also conclude that its power base has not been damaged and that its deterrent level has been maintained. On the other hand, if the Arabs determine that the IDF's problems are substantial and long term, its deterrence may be eroded.

Will Israel's deterrence capability against its rivals be influenced by the confrontation in Lebanon? Presumably so, but the extent of the impact and the final result are still unclear. On the one hand, Israel surprised its enemies and launched a large scale military operation, during which it enjoyed political freedom of operation, almost without restraint. It also managed to dismantle Hizbollah's system of fortifications along the border and to destroy some of its rocket array, thereby decreasing the organization's deterrence. On the other hand, despite the abilities and resources Israel utilized freely, it paid a high price and did not achieve some of its objectives, what may persuade the Arabs that Israel will not hurry to repeat such an operation. At the end of the day it appears that Israel's ability to deter Syria from launching a military operation against it will not be affected. This deterrent ability will even increase, possibly because the Syrians will be more impressed with Israel's strategic components – particularly its aerial strength – than the tactical weakness it displayed against Hizbollah. Israel's deterrence vis-à-vis Hizbollah and the Palestinians will be significantly affected both by the IDF's measures and the steps taken by Hizbollah, as well as by the organizations' ability to rehabilitate and even improve their capabilities in the near future.

Lessons of the War: Syria and Iran

The lessons of the fighting in Lebanon may be of particular importance to Syria and Iran, both because they consider Israel an enemy they are liable to encounter in the future, and because they are both connected to Hizbollah, which is an important component of their security concepts. Syria considered Hizbollah part of its military deployment against Israel, which includes strategic weapons, regular conventional forces, and terror systems, where Hizbollah occupies center stage alongside Palestinian organizations. Syria attached particular importance to strengthening Hizbollah after the IDF's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, as the organization's ability to act against Israel declined after that. Thus, Hizbollah's large arsenal of rockets, most of which were supplied by Syria, was designed to deter Israel from attacking Lebanon, Hizbollah, and Syria, and to provide the organization with a response capability if subjected to massive attack.

Is Syria likely to change its strategic approach towards Israel following the clash in Lebanon? Since the end of the hostilities Syrian officials, principally Bashar Asad, have made militant statements against Israel whose primary message has been: if Israel does not make progress towards a peace settlement with Syria there will be no choice other than to return the Golan Heights to Syrian control by force. The declarations were general and it is difficult to determine whether has been a change in Syria's approach to a potential military option against Israel. As far as one can tell, Syria's basic understanding of Israel's strategic supremacy remains unchanged. In this respect, the confrontation in Lebanon conveyed the advantages of a flexible and determined military organization like Hizbollah in the area of asymmetric warfare. Nonetheless, the majority of these advantages would be eclipsed in a war against a regular army backed by a responsible state, such as in the case of Syria.

Is Syria likely to change its war objectives based on the lessons of the clash in Lebanon, and set as its objective mere survival against a superior enemy, rather than victory in a war? It is reasonable to assume that it will not do so, as in such a case, in contrast with Hizbollah, it would might lose strategic assets in a war, such as territories, elements of military strength, financial assets, and centers of government. The loss of such assets is liable

to damage the country's strategic power, lead to a loss of will to continue fighting, and even bring about the downfall of the regime. It is also unlikely that Syria would consider a limited military operation while exploiting its advantages in order to generate a political process, due to its weakness, its frail political standing, and its insufficiently strong basis for diplomatic leverage.

However, the Syrians may well conclude that strengthening Hizbollah has lessened some of Israel's advantages and as such has proven its worth. Therefore Syria is likely to draw a twofold conclusion from the confrontation in Lebanon. First, it is important to strengthen Hizbollah with the most advanced weaponry in the field of rockets and anti-tank missiles in order to bolster its deterrence against Israel and demand a heavier toll in a future confrontation. Second, it is important to adopt some of the lessons of the fighting in Lebanon in the Syrian army, mainly in the area of missiles and rockets and anti-tank weapons.

Iran may reach similar conclusions. It too contributed to strengthening Hizbollah in its fortifications along the border and its rocket array in order to create a threat to the Israeli home front, which included deterring Israel from attacking the nuclear facilities in Iran. However, Israel surprised it with the scale of its response and forced Hizbollah to resort to its rocket array ahead of time, and not for the purpose for which the rockets were designed. Moreover, in the situation that arose at the end of the war, Hizbollah lost part of its deterrent capability against Israel, including through the dismantling of its border fortifications. Thus, Iran's basic strategic interest in strengthening Hizbollah has not declined, rather has been augmented by ideological and political considerations. For this reason, one must assume that Iran will make every effort to rearm the organization and restore its military strength and, if possible, provide it with more advanced weapons and equipment.

The Lessons Learned by the Palestinians

The way Hizbollah conducted itself in the past had significant impact on the defense perceptions of Palestinian organizations. In particular, the IDF's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in mid-2000 was perceived by the Palestinians as a major success by Hizbollah that should be duplicated,

and this appears to have impacted on the conduct of the Palestinians and contributed to the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada. The influence of Hizbollah on Palestinian military activity rose during the intifada, with the significant increase in the military aid and training that Hizbollah provided to the Palestinian organizations.

Of all the Arab elements, the Palestinian organizations will undoubtedly be most influenced by the war in Lebanon due to the similarity between conditions in southern Lebanon and the conditions in which these organizations operate, particularly in the Gaza Strip. The lessons that the Palestinian organizations are likely to glean from the fighting in Lebanon, in order to reduce Israel's overall supremacy while enjoying the support of Hizbollah, can be summarized in a number of areas:

- Enhancing the use of civilian populations as a shield for the Palestinian fighters. The Palestinian organizations already use civilians as a shield. However, in order to complicate matters for the IDF, Hizbollah relaxed its constraints on activity in a civilian environment, and the Palestinians are liable for follow suit: to conceal fighters and make it difficult to trace them; to deter the IDF from attack due to the presence of civilians; to turn a civilian area into a fortified entity; to lead the IDF into fighting in a built up area; to exploit the impression of IDF attacks in populated areas; and to inflate the number of losses for the sake of propaganda.
- Expanding the use of rockets, while exploiting the void in the Rafah area to smuggle new weapons into the Gaza Strip and, as much as possible, also into the West Bank. It may be assumed that Palestinian organizations will try to build for themselves enhanced rocket arsenals, both in terms of range and warheads, in order to be able to launch long and ongoing attacks on Israeli populated areas in the future, including on the center of Israel. The main constraint on this is, naturally, Israel's preventive and obstructive measures.
- Establishing a control system in the field, as well as an alternative system, that offers centralized, hierarchical, and flexible control of the forces.
- Increasing the use of subterranean channels for smuggling arms and for operational uses.
- Enhancing the use of communications and psychological warfare, while exploiting Israel's sensitivities.

The Palestinian organizations already use such means, and it is clear that there are differences between the conditions in the Palestinian territories – even in the Gaza Strip – and the Lebanese arena. However, the lessons of the fighting in Lebanon are likely to provide them with leverage for trying to turn from a terror organization to a semi-military guerilla organization, as similar as possible to the Hizbollah model.

Conclusion

One of the important features of the war in Lebanon is that it remained an arena of two players: Israel on the one side, and Hizbollah and Lebanon on the other side. Despite Hizbollah's close links with Syria and Iran – during the fighting there was concern that the situation could deteriorate into a direct conflict between Israel and Syria – ultimately all the players stayed outside the circle of fighting. Nevertheless, the war in Lebanon is considered a confrontation with a wider context: the radical elements in the region view it as a reflection of the Israeli-American struggle against them. The moderate Arab elements viewed it as part of the clash between the radical Muslim camp and the moderate camp, and partly between Sunnis and Shiites. All see the war as potential for escalation in the future.

Because of the wider significance of the confrontation and its being a prolonged test between a regular, modern, and strong army and a small guerilla organization that was well armed and well deployed, the war has drawn the attention of Arab and other parties looking to draw the relevant conclusions. At this stage it does not seem that the Arab security concepts will change significantly as a result of the war. It was not comprehensive enough, and in any case, Arab states and armies did not participate in it sufficiently to leave a lasting impression on the Arabs' approach. A significant portion of the war's features is relevant to a confrontation with a small military organization that is not backed by a state, and not necessarily to a confrontation between regular armies. The lessons to be learned from the war should also not be detached from the conclusions drawn from previous and future developments that influenced the formulation of the security concepts, especially since security concepts generally evolve slowly and change gradually.

Nevertheless, the conclusions that the Arab elements and Iran may draw from the war are significant. The most important conclusions will be studied by the Palestinian organizations, which are liable to try to emulate the Hizbollah model, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Syria is apt to draw conclusions at the operative and tactical level in order to reduce Israel's overall superiority – mainly in areas relating to strengthening Hizbollah and the use of rockets and anti-tank missiles – and less on the strategic level. The scope and nature of these lessons will be influenced not only by the war but also by the measures taken in the near future, both by Israel and by Hizbollah.