

Chapter 4

A Test of Rival Strategies: Two Ships Passing in the Night

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The purpose of this essay is to analyze several prominent military aspects of the war in Lebanon and derive the main lessons from them. The essay does not deal in historical explanations of what caused any particular instance of military thinking or any specific achievement. Rather, the analysis points to four main conclusions: the importance of clear expression at the command level to reduce the battle fog; the phenomenon of military blindness with respect to the role played by short range rockets (Katyushas) in the overall military campaign; the alarming performance of the ground forces; and the critical importance of an exit strategy and identification of the war's optimal end point from the very outset of the war.

The War and its Goals

The 2006 Lebanon war began on July 12 and continued for thirty-three days. The event began as a military operation designed to last one day or a few days. As matters dragged on and became more complicated, more vigorous terms were used to describe the fighting. Several months after the campaign, the government officially recognized it as a "war."

This was a war in which the political leadership tried to define political goals before the war and in the opening days of the fighting, something that did not occur in most of Israel's wars. This attempt was unsuccessful, however. What appeared to be the political goals changed in the course

of the fighting, at least judging by speeches made by the senior political leadership during the conflict.

The Israel Defense Forces was the entity that proposed the list of political goals to the government. The following objectives were presented to the prime minister and the cabinet on the night of July 12:

1. To distance Hizbollah from the border with Israel.
2. To strike a significant blow against Hizbollah's military capability and status, and thereby put an end to terrorism originating from Lebanon.
3. To strengthen the deterrence vis-à-vis Hizbollah and the entire region.
4. To correct the prevailing system in Lebanon, based on an effective enforcement mechanism that is supported by international involvement (this was later changed to "have the Lebanese government use the Lebanese army to impose its sovereignty over its entire territory").
5. To foster auspicious conditions for freeing the kidnapped IDF soldiers.
6. To accomplish these ends while keeping Syria out of the war.

These goals were dictated by the definition of the "strategic purpose" as presented by the IDF. The concept of "strategic purpose" was added to the IDF lexicon in recent years and is designed to be a platform proposed by the military to the political leadership (because the political leadership has long refrained from defining goals to the army), from which the campaign's goals are to be derived. These goals should guide all government agencies, not just the military. Notably absent from the strategic purpose was any reference to Israel's home front.

Definition of the goals changed during the fighting, in an effort to adapt them to the emerging situation. More importantly, however, statements by political figures, and sometimes also by senior military officers, employed careless and populist language. These statements created expectations among the public that did not match the discourse between the military and the civilian leadership. In addition, the goals ignored one of the fundamentals of Israel's security doctrine: any war initiated by Israel should have a defined and short timetable.

The political goals were translated into a list of missions for the operational headquarters. These amounted to extensive strikes by the air force against Hizbollah deep within Lebanon while isolating Lebanon from Syria, together with a series of ground operations in the Northern Command's theater that would not drag the IDF into implementing its entire ground operations plan for southern Lebanon. A long time passed before the prevention of short range Katyusha rocket fire appeared on the list of operational goals. This task was added to the list of goals at a later stage of the fighting, after the military command fully realized its significance.

What all these formulations had in common, from those made by the tactical command level to those by the political leadership, was the lack of simplicity and transparency necessary to make intentions clear. The former culture of structured communications – verification that both parties, those giving commands and those receiving them, understand things the same way, and the definition of achievable and measured missions – was abandoned.

Enemy Facts and Figures

Hizbollah began to establish itself as a military power in Lebanon in 1985. The hope that Israel's retreat from Lebanon in May 2000 would divert Hizbollah from the military course to the political sphere was not realized. Hizbollah indeed entered the political arena, but it also continued to strengthen itself militarily. The withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon in early 2005 was a turning point for Hizbollah. It appears that the full significance of the change in the internal balance of power in Lebanon was not appreciated in Israel. Neither the significance of the absence of Syrian power as a lever for Israeli pressure on Lebanon – and when necessary on Hizbollah – nor Hizbollah's concept of its role in the new balance of power was fully comprehended.

Hizbollah's military organization differs from the other Arab military forces in the area. It has the structure, organization, and capability of a regular army, the logic of a terrorist organization, and the *modus operandi* of a guerilla group. Hizbollah's power rested primarily on the following large and diverse three-pronged rocket array:

1. A unit of long range rockets with a range of 200 kilometers, deployed between Beirut and the Awali River. These rockets came from Iran.
2. A unit of medium range rockets with a range of 100 kilometers deployed south of the Awali. These rockets came from Syria.
3. A unit of short range Katyusha rockets with a range of 7-20 kilometers, and some rockets with a range of 40 kilometers. Thirteen thousand rockets of this type were deployed in southern Lebanon near the border with Israel.

In addition, Hizbollah was able to launch armed unmanned GPS-guided aerial vehicles (UAVs) – the Ababil.

Hizbollah had several thousand fighters trained in guerilla warfare, and was equipped with advanced anti-tank missiles. It prepared a broad system of bunkers and pits for the protection of its fighters. An effective and high redundancy communications system was also built, varying from landline communications to individual beepers. Although the system was repeatedly attacked, part of it survived to the end of the war, enabling Hizbollah to maintain control of its rocket system.

IDF Facts and Figures

The IDF entered the war from what was overall a routine situation. The immediate operational units at its disposal were the air force and the Northern Command.

During the fighting, the air force operated at almost full capacity. It succeeded in accomplishing most of the goals assigned to it. The air force put its “Mishkal Sguli” (“Specific Weight”) plan into operation on the night of July 13. Within thirty-five minutes, the vast majority of Hizbollah’s array of long range rockets and a large portion of the medium range rocket launchers were destroyed. In the course of the fighting, the air force destroyed all the medium range launchers from which rockets were actually launched (table 1).

In addition, the air force carried out the following missions:

1. Limited attacks on Lebanese ground targets and attacks on Hizbollah targets – these attacks were intended to affect Hizbollah’s ability to continue and renew the fighting. The effectiveness of these attacks is unclear.

Table 1. Success in Missions to Destroy the Various Rockets

Type	Range (km)	Payload (kg)	Quantity	Result
122-mm Katyusha	7-40	7	13,000	Most of the rockets and launchers were not destroyed.
220-mm, 302-mm, Fadjr 5, 3	45-70	50-175	about 1,000	Most of the launchers were destroyed: half in the first attack wave, and half in search and destroy missions. Launchers from which rockets were launched were destroyed.
Zelzal 2	200	400-600	dozens	The vast majority was destroyed in the early days of the fighting. Not a single missile was launched.

2. It demolished the Dahiya neighborhood in Beirut, a closed quarter used by Hizbollah as both a residence and an operational control area.
 3. It intercepted and shot down the Ababil UAVs that Hizbollah launched towards Israel.
 4. During the fighting, together with other IDF units operating various radar devices, the air force created a system for detecting rocket launchings in order to provide advance warning to the home front.
 5. During the war, it executed approximately 120 rescue missions, nearly half of them in enemy territory. Three hundred sixty wounded soldiers were rescued in these missions. It also parachuted supplies to IDF fighting units.
 6. In the later stages of the fighting, the air force began operations against Katyusha deployment. The effectiveness of these attacks was limited, and this activity did not alter the rate of Katyusha fire against Israel.
- To attain these achievements, the air force consumed a large quantity of resources:
1. The total number of sorties during the fighting was only slightly fewer than in the Yom Kippur War.

2. The total number of attack missions flown during the fighting was greater than in the Yom Kippur War.
3. The total number of combat helicopter missions flown was double the number flown in the first Lebanon war, Operation Accountability, and Operation Grapes of Wrath combined.
4. The air force depleted its supply of certain types of armaments, resulting in a need for immediate stocks from overseas.

The marginal effectiveness of the air force combat missions declined steeply as the fighting progressed, mostly because of the unlikely ratio of the number of targets with any value whatsoever (which dropped sharply) to the forces available to and operated by designers of the aerial combat.

The Northern Command began the fighting with the Galil Division. Permission to call up one division was granted on July 13. Sixty thousand reservists were called up during the fighting, a force equivalent to four divisions.

The following principal stages occurred in the ground fighting:

1. A limited ground operation along the border aimed at destroying Hizbollah's infrastructure there began on July 18. To use the IDF's terminology, these were "fence-hugging" operations designed to deal with Hizbollah's low trajectory firepower.
2. Action by individual brigades in Maroun a-Ras and Bint Jbail began on July 22.
3. Ground operations were expanded on July 29 in order to create a security zone.
4. Operation Change of Direction 8, carried out from August 1 to August 10, saw brigade teams seize strategically commanding territory and attack terrorists.
5. Two helicopter landings near the Litani River took place on August 12 and 13 in order to give the IDF control of this region.
6. Regular and reserve infantry and armored forces entered the Katyusha zone during the fighting. They fought several battles, whose effect on the overall operational goals was marginal.

During the ground fighting, Israel's artillery fired over 180,000 shells and hundreds of MLRS rockets at the Katyusha zone. There is no indication that this ongoing artillery fire achieved any substantial achievements; it clearly did not affect the rate of Katyusha launchings.

In general, the system that should have laid out the general staff's operational plans for the forces' operating commands had difficulty doing so, which created a large and growing gap between the general staff and the Northern Command. The general staff was perceived as hesitant, while the Northern Command was perceived as lacking in performance capability. The result was an overall negative result in the ground fighting.

Despite partial successes, whose long term effect is unclear, both the civilian and the military leaderships appeared incapable of leading a clear and decisive military conflict. In addition to inadequate professional capability, one of the reasons for this was the leadership's overreaction to every incident in which the ground forces suffered losses, even when these were separate from the operational campaign itself (in the Kfar Giladi incident, for example, where twelve reservists not yet engaged in combat were killed by rocket fire).

In previous wars, the IDF chief of staff devoted most of his time to handling problematic points on the battlefronts, in order to both overcome difficulties and spot strategic possibilities (as did Moshe Dayan in the Sinai Campaign and David Elazar in the Yom Kippur War). The same is true in foreign armies. This was the greatness of Napoleon, MacArthur, Rommel, and others. In his absence, the commander's staff remained behind and was entrusted with managing the war. In the campaign in Lebanon, it appeared that the chief of staff did not apply enough personal influence to solve the problem of weakness in the Northern Command's ground operations, including drastic replacements of commanding officers, even though he visited the Northern Command almost every day.

A Test of the Enemies' Strategies

The strategies employed by the IDF and Hizbollah evolved over the thirty-three days of the conflict. The core of these strategies was the respective concepts that had developed over the previous six years, but these were adapted on a constant basis in response to the particular way that matters unfolded.

The IDF's strategy divided Lebanon into the theaters of responsibility of the Northern Command and the air force.

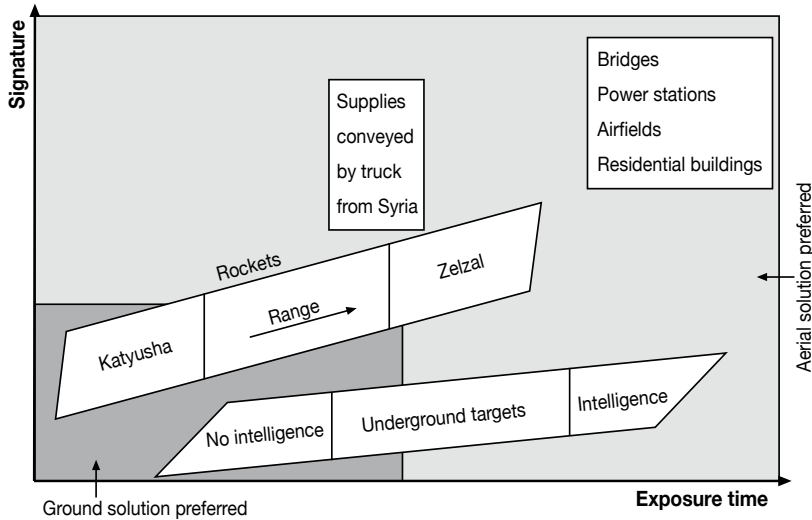


Figure 1. Targets and Means of Attack

1. Southern Lebanon – the region between the Litani River and the Israeli-Lebanese border – was already in the operative jurisdiction of the Northern Command before the war. As the fighting went on, the Northern Command was responsible for a smaller area.
2. The air force bore operational responsibility for all other Lebanese territory.

Along with the geographical division was an incomplete division of tasks. Here too, a lack of clarity in conducting the war was the result. In the air force's sphere of responsibility, i.e., the entire area of Lebanon except for the south, a clear attack strategy was used. The Northern Command exerted its influence in the phase directed towards pushing Hizbollah away from the area near the Israeli border. Beyond this, there were no significant plans at that stage for dealing with the Katyushas or for any other objective.

Hizbollah's assets ("targets" from an Israeli perspective) can be plotted on two-dimensional axes that rank them according to "signature"¹ and "exposure time"² (figure 1). The lower the signature and the shorter the exposure time, the less possible it is to deal with a target from the air. While the vast majority of targets can be dealt with from the air, short range Katyushas must be dealt with primarily through ground operations.

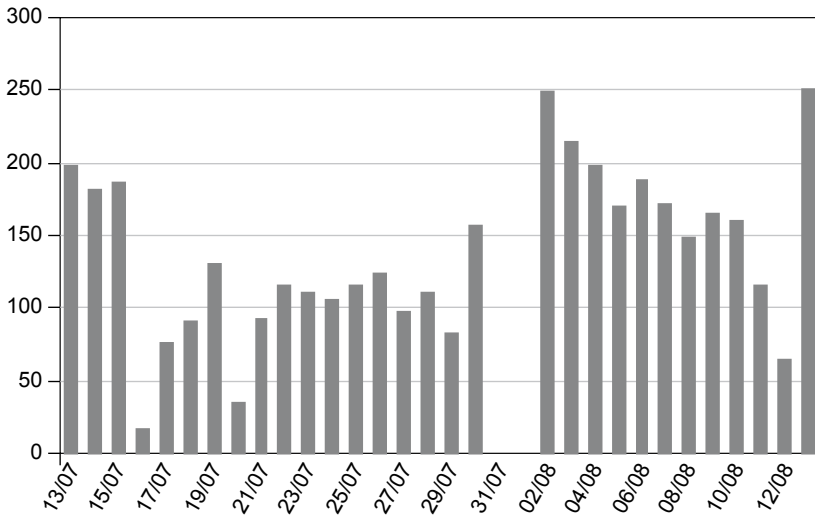


Figure 2. Number of Katyusha Rockets Fired during the War

The IDF's reluctance to conduct ground operations in southern Lebanon goes back many years. It reflects a belief that the threat (Katyusha fire against civilians) does not justify the price (the lives of combat soldiers), which means that the solution for this operational problem is to be found elsewhere. This belief greatly affected the readiness to enter a ground conflict and the way that IDF forces operated. It was assumed that heavy pressure and substantial achievement in the air force's theater of responsibility would also neutralize the threat of short range missiles from southern Lebanon. The IDF's assumption that the achievements in northern Lebanon would prevent the launching of Katyushas from southern Lebanon was proven highly mistaken: Hizbollah launched 100-200 Katyushas per day against Israeli communities (figure 2).

Only late in the conflict did the IDF comprehend the significance of its failure to stop the flow of Katyushas. The military leadership apparently felt that it was under no time pressure; the political leadership was responsible for this feeling, although time is a factor only partially subject to Israel's influence, if at all. Furthermore, the feeling of having all the time in the world may have been convenient for the political leadership, but it worked against the operational command. The military leadership can best achieve its objectives when it has a definite, fairly rigid time framework.

The IDF also failed to comprehend the Israeli public. The IDF may have evaluated the Katyusha phenomenon according to the number of civilian casualties. Indeed, in comparison with casualties from terrorist actions, such as suicide bombings, civilian losses in the war were few. It therefore seemed to the decision makers that it was possible to live with the Katyusha fire for an extended period. At a certain point in the war, however, and at least in part as a function of the ongoing rocket fire, the public's sense of accomplishment changed to a feeling of uncertainty regarding the campaign. This affected the degree of public support for the government with respect to the continuation of the fighting. Towards the end of the war, the fact that the Katyusha fire would be the criterion for determining who won the campaign was fully understood. The expanded ground operations were designed to deal with this bombardment, but were of no avail.

Hizbollah's strategy developed in response to Israel's measures. It strove to exploit its remaining military assets in an operational situation. The results of the Israel Air Force's attacks against Hizbollah targets in the early days of the war were a great shock to the organization's leadership. Hizbollah had no active tools (as opposed to passive tools) for dealing with the air force's operation in most of Lebanon's territory.

Hizbollah realized that the great hour of its Katyusha rockets had come, which was translated into the bombardment of Israeli communities in northern Israel and Haifa (due to the latter's greater strategic value in Israel's perception). In contrast to the initial concept of Hizbollah's Katyusha system as random (on both time and geographic axes) manually operated launchings, the system was organized and well prepared for firing in a regular military format. Many of the launching sites were planned and calculated in advance. Some of the sites were camouflaged and concealed to varying degrees, making it possible to use the launching equipment repeatedly. Hizbollah ground forces defended the launching area, helped by reinforced positions and bunkers prepared in advance. Anti-tank missiles and pits were used extensively. Hizbollah also developed a rapid response capability to IDF activity, based on eavesdropping on IDF communications. This gave them the upper hand in many of the clashes between IDF and Hizbollah ground units.

The way that the war was conducted reflected two strategies with practically no intersecting points. The IDF's strategy was based primarily on air superiority, while Hizbollah's strategy utilized the high degree of impregnability of its short range rocket system. During most of the fighting, both sides refrained from any attempt to challenge the other's strategy. Having no alternative Hizbollah refrained from defending its assets in the north, except for the defense of its senior command system and system of operational control. The IDF, on the other hand, deliberately refrained from stopping the Katyusha fire with ground forces, due to both the error in evaluating the operational significance of the bombardment and concern about a land entanglement. The IDF thus found itself executing a series of ground operations designed for other operational purposes. Utilizing a sophisticated theory of warfare to attack the Katyusha system was attempted, but it was too little and too late. Ground warfare, when it took place, occurred to a great extent according to rules dictated by Hizbollah. This greatly reduced the IDF's relative advantage as an army capable of operating very large and powerful structures. The IDF demonstrated a low level of military capability in the ground battles – both in planning the objective and in leadership to achieve the defined objective.

As a result, the war was waged most of the time like a football game between two teams playing against each other as if they were on separate playing fields, or like two ships passing each other in the night.

Conclusion

The principal lessons of the war are as follows:

- The political goals of the war, and even more so the operative military goals, should be formulated in clear language not subject to different interpretations. This allows evaluating the degree to which the goals can be accomplished. This was not the case with the war in Lebanon. The fact that wars in the Middle East are ultimately also used to advance the political goals of the international forces operating in the region should be taken into account in formulating political goals.
- A serious error occurred in understanding the significance of Hizbollah's Katyusha system, and in evaluating the way it was operated and its results. In consequence, the IDF delayed its response to the problem,

enabling Hizbollah to assume the appearance of a force whose operational capabilities were preserved up until the ceasefire.

- The ground campaign revealed serious problems in the level of planning and execution by IDF ground forces. It appears that the problem was not confined to technical aspects; it concerned fundamental aspects on which an effective military force should be based. Although the war was a limited one, it exposed the fact that there are two armed forces in the IDF: the air force and the ground forces. An attempt to explain the gap between the two forces solely in budgetary terms will not help restore the ground forces to their required performance level.
- The political and strategic consequences of the continuation of fighting beyond the first week were not completely understood. Likewise, the decisive importance of an exit strategy designed to identify the point of optimal achievement was not grasped. The political leadership surrendered to a feeling that “the world is on our side,” and was blind to the IDF’s clumsy operational performance.

Following the war, an atmosphere of feverish haste prevailed in drawing conclusions related to basic concepts in Israel’s security doctrine. These lessons concern matters such as the expected change in the character of the threat to Israel, the attempt to quantify Israel’s deterrent power, the change in building the IDF’s power, and so on. Nonetheless, crystallized opinions and the concrete measures to be based on them should not be derived prematurely.

Notes

1. Signature – information in the form of various wavelengths emitted by every object that makes it possible to track it.
2. Operational exposure time – the span of time during which it is possible to hit a target.