

Introduction

The Second Lebanon War embodied a type of military confrontation different from the many other clashes that Israel has engaged in since its establishment. This confrontation belongs to the category of asymmetrical wars involving rival entities endowed with inherently different and unbalanced attributes. In the 2006 Lebanon war, Israel, a sovereign state with a strong, organized military, faced Hizbollah, a sub-state organization that operated from within a failed state while controlling a relatively small guerilla force. Size notwithstanding, the force boasted considerable military abilities and was well deployed for this type of confrontation. Hizbollah presented Israel with a stiff challenge that, built on years of painstaking preparation and close Iranian support, displayed a strategic concept that maximized its abilities and compensated for its weaknesses in the face of a stronger rival. Although in this kind of confrontation it is difficult to identify victor or victory definitively, it is clear that in view of the expectations, the perception in Israel, the Arab world, and the global community is that Hizbollah scored prominent and tangible achievements, while Israel emerged from the confrontation bruised and disappointed.

Beyond the military aspect, the war between Israel and Hizbollah reflected a number of strategic processes essential to understanding the general regional picture: the strengthening of Islamic radicalism and its evolution into an active anti-status quo power; the weakening of the Arab states; the growth of non-state actors that exploit the weakness of the state system; and the difficulties faced by the international community, led by the United States, in coping with these processes.

Among the Israeli public, the Second Lebanon War was grasped as an event with crisis proportions, and the war and its results are still the subject of intense public debate. Fundamental questions revolve around the weaknesses of high level decision making exposed in the war, civil-military

relations, the role of the IDF in Israeli society, the transformation of the home front into a battlefield, and Israel's approach to regional processes. Israel's management of the war, both on a military and a political level, has yet to be judged definitively by the final report of the Winograd Commission, the government-appointed investigative committee mandated to study the 2006 conflict. The Commission is due to release its full report by the end of 2007, yet the findings that have been published thus far, particularly in the commission's partial report released in April, shed incriminating light on various aspects of Israel's conduct. This perspective is shared by a number of books on the war.

The Second Lebanon War: Strategic Perspectives explores various dimensions to the confrontation initiated by Israel on July 12, 2006 in response to Hizbollah provocation. The war received an unprecedented amount of media exposure in real time, largely because the media has come to assume a strategic role in modern day wars. The present collection of essays, however, adopts a different stance from other coverage and offers a strategic overview of the war. It provides an analytical and conceptual view of the war, on the basis of which relevant conclusions can be drawn on the national level. The essays compiled here delve into different aspects of the war: its background, its implications, and the lessons that can be inferred. The essays do not tell the actual story of the war. They are, rather, an academic attempt to explain the rationales and forces underlying this violent clash, with a clear focus on the strategic perspective. Significantly, some of the essays published here posit conclusions and perspectives that do not tally entirely with the party line assessments of various aspects of the war.

Part I of this collection examines internal Israeli perspectives and comprises three sets of essays. The opening set studies strategic dimensions that underlay the war. Shlomo Brom views the war as a model of a limited confrontation with a non-state actor operating from within a failed state, and notes the ensuing difficulty in defining – and achieving – political and military objectives in this type of confrontation. In the essay that follows, Giora Eiland looks at the decision making system in Israel and suggests how inadequate civil-military relations and lapses in the inter-echelon dynamics led to failures in the way the war was waged. Yair Evron then offers an in-depth analysis of the impact of the war on Israeli deterrence

and draws unorthodox conclusions that depart from the popular tendency to extract hasty, conventional assessments from a military campaign involving Israel.

The second set of essays dwells on military aspects of the war from the Israeli standpoint. Giora Romm examines some of the leading operational approaches in Israel that impacted on how the war started and their contribution to the achievements and failures of the war. His principal argument is that the war revealed adversaries with rival strategies that did not intersect during the war. In his essay, Gabriel Siboni focuses on an area that became a main target of criticism during the war – the IDF's ground forces and their performance against Hizbollah. Aharon Ze'evi Farkash then looks at the role of Israeli intelligence during the war on a strategic and tactical level, and claims significant achievements in the former area, which contrast with deficiencies in the latter.

In this war, the civilian front played a central role, and the third set of essays addresses this arena. Yehuda Ben Meir presents the development of public opinion during the war, its impact on the progress of the war, and its attitudes after the war. Meir Elran examines the civilian front, which was Hizbollah's principal target of the war, and draws system-wide conclusions, both with regard to the robustness of the Israeli public and the performance of the home front defense systems.

Part II of this collection examines regional and global aspects of the war. The first set of essays in this section includes four essays about main regional actors that took part directly or indirectly in the confrontation and were affected by it and its ramifications. Yoram Schweitzer analyzes Hizbollah's balance sheet and suggests that its post-war minus column is quite extensive. In his essay Eyal Zisser examines the war in the context of long term processes in Syria and Lebanon, and considers the ramifications of the war for Lebanon and Syria in their interaction with Israel. David Menshari analyzes the role played by Iran in the war as part of the process whereby Iran has become a dominant actor in the region. Finally, Anat Kurz contends that the developments in the Israeli-Palestinian were driven by their own independent dynamic, and were not a function of the war in Lebanon.

The second set of essays in this section addresses the wider regional implications of the war, which far exceeded the states that participated

directly in the confrontation. Asher Susser sketches a panoramic picture of the Middle East, and places the war in the wider context of the prevailing regional trends. Yossi Kuperwasser ties the war to the problematic question of the Arab state as a responsible political element. Ephraim Kam assesses the possible impact of the war on the Arab security doctrines and differentiates between the public perceptions of the war on the Arab street, and the impact of the war on the Arab defense establishments and the ensuing conduct of the Arab states. The final essay of Part II, by Mark Heller, analyzes the involvement of the international community in the war and the relative freedom of action it granted Israel during the weeks of the confrontation.

Three appendices complete the collection of essays. The first, written by Amos Gilboa, tells the fascinating story of Shab'a Farms, cast by Hizbollah as a main reason for the continued conflict with Israel. In the second appendix, Yiftah Shapir reviews the rocketry and other weapon systems used by Hizbollah in the war that proved the main component of its operational capability. The third appendix is Security Council resolution 1701, which was adopted at the end of the war.

Most of the essays presented here were written by members of the research staff of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS); others were written by leading academic experts. INSS engages in practical and theoretical research on strategic issues, aiming to contribute to Israel's public debate and offer recommendations for policymakers. Predictably, then, this publication bears a similar nature: it combines analyses of the war's strategic issues with insights that can serve as a basis for discussion and future thinking on the processes that are taking shape in Israel and the region – and Israel's role in these latter processes. This idea is based on the assumption that as in the Second Lebanon War, in the future too, Israel and its policies will play a crucial role in defining the contours, topography, and relief of the regional map.