

Chapter 7

***Israeli Public Opinion
and the Second Lebanon War***

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No war in Israel's war-filled history was accompanied by such extensive public opinion polling as was the Second Lebanon War. Indeed, more than by objective criteria, the course that the war took was determined to a large degree by the perceptions of the public on both sides. Perceptions do not necessarily reflect reality, but they have a power of their own. This essay, devoted to Israeli public opinion during and after the war, deals solely with perceptions. Closely intertwined with this phenomenon is the fact that Israeli media coverage of this war was all pervasive and unprecedented in extent. For the first time in Israel's history, the IDF published on a daily basis the number of soldiers killed in action on that day. The media gave extensive coverage to the casualties, coverage that included the name of each soldier killed in action, his picture, interviews with his family and friends, the time and place of his funeral, and in many instances, coverage of the funeral itself. Especially when the number of casualties was high, at least by Israeli standards, coverage of the casualties overshadowed that of the actual events on the battlefield. The particular media coverage in Israel had a major effect on the development of public opinion surrounding the Second Lebanon War.

The aim of this chapter is to describe the evolution in public opinion during and after the war, as well as to attempt to understand the factors underlying the changes in public opinion. It will attempt to assess the future ramifications of public opinion with regard to the war – both in Israel and in the region as a whole.

In order to appreciate and properly evaluate the evolution, causes, and consequences of Israeli public opinion during and after the fighting, one must understand the internal political context of this war. The war broke out a mere two months after the formation of a new government, pursuant to the general elections of March 28, 2006. The new government represented far more than a formal change in government – it marked the end of the Sharon era, inaugurated a new era in Israeli politics, and brought to the forefront a completely fresh and untried national leadership. The new prime minister, Ehud Olmert, had been acting prime minister since January 4, 2006 and had served as deputy prime minister since 2003. Although he had served in many governments and was a veteran politician, he had little if any experience in daily defense and security matters. The new defense minister, Amir Peretz, had no experience whatsoever in defense and foreign affairs. Not only had he never served as a minister in the government; he had never even been a member of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. The new foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, had also not been previously involved in foreign affairs in any significant way.

As is customary in Israel, the formation of the new government was associated with unsavory political negotiations, and thus in the weeks after its formation the government did not enjoy a high degree of popularity. The job approval ratings for the prime minister were around 40 percent, and those for the new and untried defense minister were especially low – in the mid-20s.¹ A majority of Israelis had grave doubts as to whether Mr. Peretz was indeed fit to be minister of defense. Towards the end of June 2006, only 32 percent rated his performance as defense minister as “good” vs. 62 percent who rated it as “not good.”² The unfavorable opinion of the government was aggravated by the events in Gaza and the increase in the Qassam rocket attacks against Israel, especially at the city of Ashkelon, and the abduction of an Israeli soldier on June 25, 2006 led to an even further decline in public support for the government. At the same time, support for the prime minister’s convergence plan also decreased, and by the beginning of July 2006, a majority of Israelis opposed it.³

Overall, the prevailing public mood was low and pessimistic. The sentiment in Israel was that the difficult disengagement from Gaza had not produced the desired results – by the end of June 2006, 50 percent of Israelis viewed the disengagement as a mistake vs. 46 percent who

said it was a correct move.⁴ The new government was considered weak, inexperienced, and indecisive, and Israel was perceived to have lost the initiative and to be losing its deterrence. The Hizbollah attack on July 12, 2006, which resulted in two kidnapped soldiers and eight others killed in action, came on the heels (two and a half weeks later) of the Hamas attack from Gaza where one Israeli soldier was kidnapped and two others were killed. As far as public opinion was concerned, a non-decisive response by the Israeli government to the Hizbollah attack would have had disastrous consequences.

It is difficult to ascertain the degree to which domestic factors influenced the government's response to the attack, although one can assume that they played an important role. In any event, within hours of the attack, the Israeli government decided on a dramatic response and unanimously approved the proposal of the prime minister and defense minister for a major military action against Hizbollah in Lebanon. The military action – ultimately called a “war” – commenced the night of July 12, 2006 and included air attacks on Beirut International Airport, which remained closed for the duration of the war; on all known Hizbollah long-range missile sites; and on other Hizbollah targets from the Israeli border in the south to the Syrian border in the Beqaa valley in the north.

The Israeli body politic is composed of Jews and Arabs. The breakdown between these two groups for the overall Israeli population is approximately 79 percent Jews and 21 percent Arabs. However, when speaking of the “adult Israeli population,” i.e., those eighteen years old and above, the breakdown for the two groups is 85 percent Jews and 15 percent Arabs. In normal circumstances, even considerable differences between the Jewish and Arab communities on any given issue will affect the overall result by only 3-5 percent. Thus, if 50 percent of the adult Jewish population and 80 percent of the adult Arab population support a given position (as may have been the case, at certain times, regarding disengagement) – the result of the overall Israeli sample would be 54.5 percent. In such situations, it is reasonable to relate to the Israeli sample as a whole. The story, however, is quite different in a situation where we find diametrically opposed attitudes and opinions between Jews and Arabs and near unanimity within each group. Thus, if 95 percent of Israeli Jews believe that the war against Hizbollah is justified but only 10 percent of Israeli Arabs are of that opinion, the result

for all Israelis would be 82.5 percent. In effect, however, this latter figure is meaningless and is no more than a statistical artifact. It represents a weighted average of two totally different communities as far as this issue is concerned and has little significance, if any. Under these circumstances, one must relate separately to the Jewish and Arab communities.

In fact, antithetical opinions were the case with regard to the Second Lebanon War. From the very first days of the war, the diametrically opposed positions among Israeli Jews and Arabs became clear to the pollsters. This clear split between Jews and Arabs is an important phenomenon in itself, and one negative result of the war was a deepening of the schism between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority in Israel. A detailed discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this study, and cited here is the public opinion data for the Jewish population of Israel. Regarding the Jewish public, studies did not find any significant differences between the northern residents, i.e., those who were under Katyusha rocket attacks for the duration of the war and their counterparts elsewhere in the country.

From the outset, the military campaign enjoyed the near total support of the Jewish population, and there was almost no dissent over the government's decision to go to war. The Jewish opposition in the Knesset declared its full support for the government and committed itself to support the government as long as the fighting continued. The ten Arab members of the Knesset were the only ones to vote against the statement of the prime minister on July 17, 2006 on the initiation of hostilities in Lebanon against Hizbollah. Many key personalities of the Israeli left even went on record publicly in support of the war. The basis of this Israeli consensus was the fact that both attacks (Hamas, June 25, 2006 and Hizbollah, July 12, 2006) were unprovoked, were carried out on sovereign and undisputed Israeli territory, and originated from areas from which Israel had previously withdrawn unilaterally. Hizbollah was seen as a dangerous terrorist organization and as the long arm of Iran, both of which were committed to the destruction of Israel.

In his address to the Knesset and the nation on July 17, 2006, Prime Minister Olmert said that there comes a time in the life of a nation when it says in one voice, "enough is enough." And indeed, nothing can better capture the mood of Israel on July 12, 2006 than the sentiment that "enough is enough." A Dahaf poll taken on July 17, 2006, less than a week after the

war began, found that 86 percent of the Israeli adult population justified “the IDF operation in Lebanon against Hizbollah,” while only 14 percent claimed it was a mistake. Fifty-eight percent were in favor of fighting “until Hizbollah would be wiped out” and 23 percent “until Hizbollah would be distanced from the border,” vs. only 17 percent who supported a ceasefire and negotiations. Eighty-seven percent of the sample were satisfied with “the performance of the IDF in the war.”⁵ A poll taken by the Rafi Smith Research Institute on the same day found 75 percent support for continuing military action against Hizbollah vs. only 10 percent who favored entering into negotiations with Hizbollah and Lebanon.⁶

Concurrent with the almost unanimous support of the war was a dramatic improvement in the approval ratings of both the prime minister and the defense minister. The results from both Dahaf and Teleseker polls are shown in table 1. Given the fact that the numbers in both polls were for the overall Israeli adult population, one can safely assume that the numbers for the Jewish population were higher by between 5 and 10 percentage points.

Table 1. PM and DM Performance, 1 week into the war

	Satisfied with the prime minister's performance in the war	Satisfied with the defense minister's performance in the war
Dahaf,⁷ July 17, 2006	78%	72%
Teleseker,⁸ July 18, 2006	78%	61%

Initial civilian casualties from Hizbollah rocket attacks as well as initial army casualties from the ground fighting in southern Lebanon did not change the overall picture of massive support for the war, the IDF, the government, and the prime minister and defense minister. Two weeks into the war, the numbers remained steady. Results from two Teleseker polls of Israelis and from a Dahaf poll for the Jewish population are shown in table 2. An extensive survey undertaken by the Tami Steinmetz Research Center on July 31 and August 1, 2006 revealed similar results and also pointed

out the huge differences between the Israeli Jewish and Arab communities. Ninety-three percent of the Jews justified the war in Lebanon, as compared with only 17 percent among the Arabs; 91 percent of the Jews justified the air attacks on Lebanon and supported continued attacks by the air force vs. only 6 percent of the Arabs (where 79 percent claimed that the attacks were unjustified). Eighty-seven percent of the Jewish sample evaluated the combat ability of the IDF favorably and 78 percent rated the information given by the IDF as “reliable” or “highly reliable” vs. only 32 percent of the Arabs. Seventy-nine percent of the Jews supported the continuation of the fighting until Israel’s objectives were achieved vs. only 7 percent of the Arabs who supported this position.⁹ Results are summarized in table 3.

Table 2. War Objectives and Performance Levels, after 2-3 weeks

	Justified Israel's and the IDF's response in Lebanon	Continue the fighting until Hizbollah is distanced from border	Satisfied with prime minister's performance	Satisfied with defense minister's performance	Satisfied with IDF's performance	Satisfied with political echelon's performance
Teleseker, July 26, 2006¹⁰	95%	82%	77%	60%		
Dahaf, July 27 2006¹¹	92%	34% and “until Hizbollah is destroyed”: 55%	82%	71%	90%	
Teleseker, July 30-31, 2006¹²					85%	74%

Table 3. War Objectives, by Ethnic Breakdown

	Justified the war in Lebanon	Justified the air attack on Lebanon	Approved of the combat ability of the IDF	Information given by the IDF is reliable / highly reliable	Support the continuation of fighting until Israel's objectives are achieved
Jews	93%	91%	87%	78%	79%
Arabs	17%	6%		32%	7%

Source: Tami Steinmetz Survey, July 31 and August 1, 2006

This highly favorable picture began to change during the last week of the war, and by the end of the war polls reflected a dramatic turnaround. Rarely does one see such far-reaching and dramatic changes in public opinion in so short a time (ten days to two weeks). By the end of the first week in August, there were clear signs of a disenchantment of the Israeli public with the results of the war, accompanied by a decrease in support for the IDF and especially for the political leadership (although some of the data was confusing and contradictory).

A Dialogue poll taken on August 9-10, 2006 found that only 20 percent of the overall Israeli sample felt that "Israel had won the war"; 30 percent felt that "Israel had not won the war"; and 43 percent said that "there is no winner and no loser." The approval ratings for the prime minister and defense minister returned to what they had been before the war – 48 percent were satisfied with the performance of the prime minister vs. 40 percent who were dissatisfied, while only 37 percent were satisfied with the defense minister's performance vs. 51 percent who were dissatisfied. Fifty-three percent said that if there had been leaders with military and security experience at the helm, the war would have been run better. Although a clear majority – 59 percent – were satisfied with the performance of the IDF, this was much lower than the numbers recorded in the first stages of the war. Interestingly, only 47 percent of the sample was satisfied with the performance of the IDF Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz.¹³ A Dahaf poll taken at the same time showed somewhat different results, although it also represented a decrease in many parameters. The poll found that 40 percent of the Jewish population believed that "Israel will win," 13 percent that "Israel will lose," and 42 percent that "there will be a draw." Eighty-seven percent continued to justify the war (75 percent of the overall Israeli sample) and 94 percent believed in the ability of the IDF to defend Israel. On the other hand, only 52 percent rated the IDF's combat performance in Lebanon as "good," vs. 41 percent who rated it as "not good," and 17 percent said that their faith in the IDF had been shaken as a result of the war in Lebanon. In this poll, approval ratings for the political and military leadership remained high – 73 percent for Olmert, 64 percent for Peretz, and 74 percent for Chief of Staff Halutz.¹⁴ The results are summarized in table 4.

Table 4. Perceptions of the War and Performance Levels, towards the end of the war

	Israel had won the war	Israel had not won the war	No winner, no loser	Satisfied with performance of PM	Not satisfied with performance of PM	Satisfied with performance of DM	Not satisfied with performance of DM	Satisfied with performance of IDF	Satisfied with performance of IDF's chief of staff
Dialogue, August 9-10, 2006	20%	30%	43%	48%	40%	37%	51%	59%	47%
Dahaf, August 11, 2006	40%	13%	42%	73%		64%		52%	74%

In the early morning hours of August 12, 2006 (Israel time), the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1701, which, inter alia, called for an immediate cessation of hostilities. On August 14, 2006, a ceasefire came into effect – a ceasefire that was scrupulously adhered to by all parties – and with it the Second Lebanon War came to an end. The disenchantment with the results of the war, which had surfaced in the final days of the war, now turned into an avalanche of frustration, dissatisfaction, and disappointment, and with a dramatic effect on public opinion. A poll taken on August 13, 2006 by the Rafi Smith Research Institute found that 58 percent of Israelis were of the opinion that Israel achieved only a small part, if any, of its objectives (compared to only 16 percent who held that opinion eleven days previously), whereas only 3 percent said that Israel achieved all or nearly all of its objectives (compared to 32 percent the previous week). Fifty-two percent said that the army did not succeed, vs. 44 percent who believed that the army had succeeded. A clue to one of the causes behind these numbers can be found in the fact that only 6 percent believed that resolution 1701 achieved most of Israel's objectives. Sixty-two percent did not approve of the way the prime minister conducted the war, and 65 percent were dissatisfied with the performance of the defense minister during the war. Forty-nine percent vs. 44 percent approved of the chief of staff's performance.¹⁵

Subsequent polls confirmed this picture of serious erosion in public confidence in the IDF and in the political leadership. Table 5 summarizes the results of a Dahaf poll and Teleseker poll of the Jewish population – both taken one day after the ceasefire went into effect. This negative picture did not change in the days and weeks following the end of the war. A series of polls taken towards the end of August all showed a dramatic decrease in public support for the two main coalition partners – Kadima (the prime minister's party) and Labor (the defense minister's party).¹⁶ A Dahaf poll taken towards the end of August found a total loss of public confidence in the government and in the political and military leadership. The numbers are astounding. Results from this poll for the Jewish sample are shown in table 6. A survey conducted by the Tami Steinmetz Research Center on September 4-5, 2006 confirmed the decrease in public confidence for almost all national institutions, including the IDF – although in absolute terms, the IDF still received the highest rating. Contrary to the findings in the past, only 31 percent believed that the unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000 “served Israel's security interests” while 51 percent believed that “it did not serve those interests.”¹⁷

It is hard to put one's finger on the exact turning point during the war with regard to public opinion. It is also quite difficult at this stage to determine what were the actual causes behind the dramatic shift in public opinion towards the end of the war and in its aftermath. A study conducted by the Cohen Institute for Public Opinion Research at Tel Aviv University found a decrease in the approval rating of the government's performance mainly as a function of the number of casualties. The first drop was recorded on July 27, 2006, the day after the battle at Bint Jbail, where the IDF lost eight soldiers and failed to take the village – from close to 80 percent to 60 percent, although within three days it rebounded to the 80 percent level. A second serious drop was recorded on August 9, 2006, one day after twelve reserve soldiers were killed by a Katyusha rocket at Kibbutz Kfar Giladi in northern Israel, close to the Lebanese border, and three civilians were killed that evening by a rocket attack in Haifa. From this point, the approval ratings continued to drop until the end of the war, with a significant drop recorded on August 11, 2006, the day after fifteen reserve soldiers were killed in the ground warfare in southern Lebanon.¹⁸

Table 5. Perceptions of the War and Performance Levels, at the end of the war

	Israel had won the war	Hizbollah had won the war	Neither side won	Support establishment of national inquiry commission	Israel should not have agreed to ceasefire without release of kidnapped soldiers	Olmert - performance	Peretz - performance	Halutz - performance
Dahaf, August 15, 2006 ¹⁹	30%	30%	36%	69%	70%	47% - good 51% - not good	36% - good 63% - not good	49% - good 47% - not good
Telesker, August 15, 2006 ²⁰	18%	15%	66%	67%	53% support continuing the fighting	40% approved	28% approved	44% - good 52% - not good

	Government - performance	Senior IDF officers - performance	Soldiers and commanders - performance	Call for resignation of PM	Call for resignation of DM	IDF overall performance
Dahaf, August 15, 2006	14% - good 84% - not good	61% - good 32% - not good	94% - good 2% - not good	57%	42%	81% - satisfied 18% - dissatisfied
Telesker, August 15, 2006						

Table 6. Jewish Public Perceptions of Performance Levels, two weeks after the war

	Resignation of PM	Performance of PM	Resignation of DM	Performance of DM	Olmert fit to be PM	Peretz fit to be DM	Resignation of Chief of Staff	Performance of Chief of Staff during the war	Depended on the ability of the IDF to defend Israel
Dahaf, ²¹ August 25, 2006	63%	74% - not good 26% - good	74%	79% - not good 20% - good	11%	3%	54%	63% - not good 35% - good	82%

On the basis of the available data, the following list of causes may collectively explain the dramatic shift in public opinion and the deep frustration of the Israeli public with the results of the Second Lebanon War:

1. Exaggerated expectations caused by the political and military leadership. Buoyed by the initial success, both in the air campaign and in the diplomatic arena, Israel's leaders, especially the prime minister and defense minister, set goals that were unattainable (including the demise of Hizbollah, destruction of the entire Hizbollah infrastructure, freeing of the kidnapped soldiers, and a dramatic change in the face of the Middle East). It was vis-à-vis these objectives that the Israeli public evaluated the results of the war.
2. The inability of Israel to stop or even decrease the volume of Hizbollah rocket attacks against cities, towns, and communities throughout the north of Israel. Never since the 1948 War of Independence had Israel's home front faced such a sustained attack. The government underestimated the cumulative effect of 150 rockets a day throughout the north of Israel for thirty-three days. The home front showed a great deal of resilience and was willing to suffer the rocket attacks for a given period. But the Israeli public was not ready to accept the fact that after thirty-three days of air and ground warfare, the IDF was unable to make even a dent in Hizbollah's capacity to attack Israel's civilian centers.
3. The number of casualties and the extensive coverage given to the casualties by the Israeli media, and particularly the electronic media. This was the first war in which the IDF gave daily information on its casualties. When there were limited achievements on the ground and the air campaign had more or less run its course, the Israeli public became obsessed with the casualties and with the media coverage of the casualties, which became a major source of demoralization. It remains an open question whether a democratic country with a free and open society can for any lengthy period continue to wage a difficult war, without incurring formative negative approval ratings within the public. Interestingly, close to 50 percent of the Israeli public were of the opinion that the Israeli media harmed the morale of the troops at the front and the civilians at home.²²

4. The lack of preparedness of the home front. The government failed to prepare adequately for a situation where over one million Israelis would be forced to spend many hours each day for over a month in shelters and closed rooms. In many communities, the state of the shelters was shameful and the government never even discussed the possibility of selective evacuation of the most hard-hit towns, such as Kiryat Shmona. The government did not succeed in properly coordinating the efforts of the various civil defense agencies. The ones who suffered most from this gross neglect were the weaker segments of the population – the elderly, the sick, single-parent families, the poor, and the disadvantaged. Seventy-six percent of the Jewish population rated the government's treatment of the residents of the north as "not good."²³ The effect of this gross mismanagement was similar to the political repercussions endured by President Bush following Hurricane Katrina of August 2005.
5. The bitter complaints of the reserve soldiers returning from battle. This certainly was one of the most damaging factors in terms of public opinion. The IDF mobilized close to 50,000 soldiers, all of whom were released within days of the ceasefire. Unlike the standing army or conscripts, these soldier-civilians have no qualms or constraints whatsoever in venting their frustration about ineptitude in the army and the conduct of the campaign. The reserve soldiers, including high-ranking officers, told grim tales of glaring mismanagement, confusion, and grave mistakes in the conduct of the ground warfare. The reservists complained bitterly of lack of proper equipment, lack of proper and updated intelligence, insufficient training, serious failures in the logistical support, and contradictory orders. While many of these lapses are endemic to armies and occurred in all of Israel's previous wars, in the context of inadequate military achievements, they take on greater significance. Had Israel succeeded in killing Nasrallah and seriously limiting the Katyusha attacks, the Israel public may have been much more forgiving regarding these lapses. As it was, however, this factor, taken together with all the other causes listed above, had a disastrous and perhaps long-lasting effect on public opinion.

Finally, there are the long range effects of the war on Israeli public opinion, and specifically on what remains the central issue – the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict. It is of course still too early to assess fully the impact of the war on the basic attitudes of the Israeli public. More time and data are necessary to understand the lasting effects of the war on Israeli public opinion and the future course of events. For example, many observers believe that Israeli public opinion has taken a sharp turn to the right. Although there is considerable data to support this contention, it may very well be premature and should not be viewed as a foregone or permanent conclusion. There is reason to believe that the true picture is far more complex and that public opinion, as far as hard core issues are concerned, is in a state of flux and formation.

Most of the data regarding a shift to the right is in the realm of party politics. Almost all of the surveys show a continued drop in the approval ratings of the prime minister and defense minister as well as a sharp decrease in support for their respective parties, Kadima and Labor. A Dialogue poll taken on September 19, 2006 found that the approval ratings of the prime minister and the defense minister had plummeted to 22 percent and 14 percent, respectively, vs. 48 percent and 37 percent, respectively in the previous poll of August 11, 2006. If elections were to be held, the poll found a sharp and significant increase in the strength of the two main right wing parties (19 seats) at the expense of Kadima and Labor.²⁴ A Dahaf poll of the Jewish population taken a few days later recorded almost identical results.²⁵ It should be noted, however, that with time, the polls became less one-sided and less conclusive. A Rafi Smith Institute poll conducted towards the end of September 2006 found a major shift in support among Jewish voters away from Kadima and Labor – though not to the right wing parties, rather to the “undecided” and “not voting” categories. Close to half of those polled (48 percent) refused to say for which party they would vote.²⁶ Such a large floating vote is highly unusual in Israel and points to a confused electorate. A Teleseker poll, taken at almost the same time, found that under certain circumstances, Kadima would hold its own in an election, and the results would be very close between the right and the center-left blocs.²⁷

As far as the core issues are concerned, the situation is even more complex. The shift to the right is manifest mainly in the demise of unilateralism. Disillusionment with the disengagement from Gaza, which existed before the war,²⁸ became even stronger after the war. A Rafi Smith Institute poll

of Israelis taken on September 17-18, 2006 found that 55 percent “today oppose the Gaza pullout” vs. only 38 percent who “today support the Gaza pullout.”²⁹ In the Teleseker poll at the end of September, 2006, the same percentage – 55 percent of Israelis – said that the disengagement was “a mistake,” vs. 40 percent who saw the decision as “a correct one.”³⁰ The same holds true for the convergence plan. Support for convergence was down even prior to the war.³¹ By the end of the war, support for Olmert’s convergence plan had all but vanished, and the prime minister himself stated publicly that plan was at this time no longer on the public agenda. The Teleseker poll found that 60 percent viewed the prime minister’s decision not to implement the convergence plan as “a correct decision,” vs. only 20 percent who viewed this as “a mistake.”³²

Unilateralism, however, is not the only game in town. There are indications that more and more Israelis are coming around to view negotiations with the Palestinians as the only viable alternative to unilateralism. The Israeli public remains acutely aware of the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and of the need to find a solution, although the nature of such a solution remains unclear. Since Oslo in 1993 and throughout all the ups and downs of the ensuing years, including the most difficult periods of the second intifada, Israelis continued to support the principle of negotiations with the Palestinians. True, after the Hamas electoral victory of January 2006 there was a solid and strong majority against negotiations with Hamas, a position shared by the Israeli government and nearly the entire political establishment. At the same time, it seems that Israeli public opinion is continuing to search for possible avenues of negotiation.

The Dialogue poll of September 19, 2006 found the Israeli sample evenly split on the question, “Should Israel conduct negotiations with a Hamas and Fatah unity government”: 45 percent in favor, 46 percent opposed, and 9 percent undecided.³³ The Dahaf poll at the end of August found similar results, with 41 percent of the Israeli population supporting negotiations with Abu Mazan and Hamas.³⁴ A poll conducted by the Harry S. Truman Institute at the Hebrew University on September 10-19, 2006 found that 67 percent of the overall Israeli sample supported negotiations with a Palestinian national unity government “if needed to reach a compromise agreement.” Fifty-six percent of Israelis supported and 43 percent opposed talks with a Hamas government “if needed in order to reach a compromise

agreement with the Palestinians” (in June 2006, only 48 percent supported negotiations with a Hamas government under similar circumstances).³⁵

Thus while the war apparently soured Israelis on unilateralism, it did not affect their desire to search for some form of resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It may even have increased their readiness for negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. In general, one can say that Israelis have become more threat-oriented and manifest a growing preoccupation with security threats (especially from Iran). At the same time, the overall mood remains positive and optimistic.

One final point should be made, regarding international forces. Since the time when UN Secretary-General U Thant summarily removed the UN forces from Sinai and Gaza on the eve of the Six Day War, Israelis have had very little faith in international peacekeeping forces. This sentiment was exacerbated by the negative experience with UNIFIL and by the failure of the European monitors at the Rafah crossing. Success of the international force in southern Lebanon in implementing resolution 1701 may have interesting consequences for Israeli public opinion and open new possibilities. The Israeli public will be carefully watching the conduct of this force and especially the behavior of the European contingent. If French and Italian soldiers demonstrate a readiness to engage Hizbollah and open fire if necessary, Israeli public opinion might be ready to entertain the idea of stationing such forces in Palestinian areas. Already in the Tami Steinmetz Research Center study at the beginning of September 2006, 51 percent of the Israelis supported the adoption of an international force solution for the conflict with the Palestinians and expressed readiness for an IDF withdrawal upon the stationing of such a force.³⁶

Notes

1. Teleseker Poll published in *Maariv*, July 5, 2005.
2. Dahaf Poll published in *Yediot Ahronot*, June 30, 2006, Supplement, pp. 12-13.
3. Ibid; and Tami Steinmetz Research Center Poll in *Haaretz*, July 10, 2006.
4. Ibid.
5. *Yediot Ahronot*, July 18, 2006, p. 5.
6. Ynet Service, July 18, 2006.
7. See footnote 5.
8. *Maariv*, July 19, 2006.
9. *Haaretz*, August 9, 2006, Section B, p 2.

10. *Maariv*, July 27, 2006, p. 9.
11. *Yediot Ahronot*, July 28, 2006, p. 3.
12. *Maariv*, August 1, 2006, p. 2.
13. *Haaretz*, August 11, 2006, p. 9.
14. *Yediot Ahronot*, August 11, 2006, Supplement, p. 9.
15. *Globes*, August 14, 2006; Ynet Service, August 14, 2006.
16. *Jerusalem Post*, August 25, 2006, pp. 3, 21.
17. *Haaretz*, September 12, 2006, Section B, p. 3.
18. Shavit et al., "Perception and Opinion of the Public Regarding the Fighting in the North," *Public Opinion* 12, August 2006, The B. I. and Lucille Cohen Institute for Public Opinion Research.
19. *Yediot Ahronot*, August 16, 2006, p. 3.
20. *Maariv*, August 16, 2006, p. 4.
21. *Yediot Ahronot*, August 25, 2006, Supplement, pp. 1, 6-9.
22. *Haaretz*, August 31, 2006, p. 2.
23. See footnote 14.
24. *Haaretz*, September 21, 2006, pp. 1, 7.
25. *Yediot Ahronot*, September 22, 2006, Supplement, pp. 10-11.
26. *Jerusalem Post*, September 29, 2006, pp. 1, 9.
27. *Maariv*, October 1, 2006, Supplement, pp. 16-17.
28. See footnote 4.
29. *Jerusalem Post*, September 22, 2006, p. 1.
30. See footnote 27.
31. See footnote 3.
32. See footnote 27.
33. See footnote 24.
34. See footnote 21.
35. *Haaretz*, September 27, 2006, p. 12.
36. See footnote 17.