

# The Cognitive Campaign: The Second Lebanon War as a Case Study

Pnina Shuker

The aim of this article is to examine the way that leaders try to shape their society's cognitive perceptions during war, with the assumption that society will not agree to unconditionally support a protracted war involving high casualties. Recognizing the necessity of large-scale public support of war, decision makers manipulate local public opinion so that it will justify the war and recognize the importance of the war's objectives and the ostensible achievements that war could provide. This article demonstrates how this was manifested during the Second Lebanon War—to the point of endangering the ground troops of the Israel Defense Forces for objectives that were purely psychological—and points out the negative repercussions of waging a war at the strategic level and on its outcomes.

**Keywords:** Cognitive battles, public opinion, domestic legitimization, national resilience, decision making

## Introduction

In recent years, military strategy researchers have reached a consensus that civil populations increasingly influence the objectives of war, the choice of fighting modes, and sometimes even the management of the fighting itself.<sup>1</sup> A central component of this trend is the relationship of the public to war—

---

Pnina Shuker is a PhD candidate in the political science department at Bar-Ilan University and a research associate at the Institute of National Security Studies.

- 1 Stuart A. Cohen, "Changing Civil-Military Relations in Israel: Operational Repercussions," in *In the Name of Security*, ed. Majid Al-Haj and Uri Ben Eliezer (Haifa: Haifa University and Pardes Publishing, 2003), p. 103 [Hebrew].

which also has undergone drastic changes in contemporary times—and how cognitive tools and influence are used to shape public opinion.

Since the 1990s, protecting human life has become an extremely important operational consideration,<sup>2</sup> and during the 2000s, society had developed an expectation of war without casualties.<sup>3</sup> The assumption underlying this article is that this expectation—as perceived by decision makers—considerably influenced the combat doctrine of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) during the Second Lebanon War, leading at the same time to an incessant cognitive campaign vis-à-vis target audiences in Israel in order to retain public support for the war. This article engages, therefore, in the importance attributed to inculcating a sense of victory among the Israeli public during that war.

The article begins with a theoretical review of the phenomenon of the sensitivity of democratic society to casualties and, as an outcome, the importance of the military campaign to gain the home society's cognitive support. The article then looks at the entrenching of the cognitive aspect in the IDF, while examining the question of how this was manifested during the Second Lebanon War. Finally, the article will elaborate on the possible negative repercussions as a result of attributing excessive importance to the cognitive dimension.

## The Importance of the Cognitive Campaign

Researchers have not agreed upon any uniform definition of the essence of the war over cognitive perceptions. Col. (res.) Miri Eisin, the former international media spokesperson of the Israeli government, proposed the following definition: “The battle over cognitive perceptions during a war is the overall attempt of a country or a non-state entity to influence various target audiences in order to achieve a victory in a national struggle.”<sup>4</sup> According to Saar Raveh, the term “cognitive arena” is relatively new in the field of the military and warfare and relates to a number of central processes that emerged

2 Yagil Levy, “The Social Dimension of Civilian Control over the Military: Policy of Preventing Casualties,” in *Military-Civilian Relations in Israel: Implications on War and Peace Decision-making*, ed. Ephraim Lavi (Tel Aviv: Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, Tel-Aviv University, 2013), p. 71 [Hebrew].

3 Meir Finkel, “Society's Impact on IDF Doctrine and Culture,” *Ma'arachot* 412 (May 2007): 61 [Hebrew].

4 Reuven Erlich, “The Contribution of Intelligence in the War over Perceptions,” *Meir Amit Intelligence and Terror Information Center*, July 11, 2006.

since the end of World War II and continue to this day. These processes include the changing nature of the confrontations in which militaries in general and the IDF in particular are involved; the intensifying involvement of the world powers in ethnic or national disputes beyond their borders; and, concurrently, the rise in the importance of global public opinion; and transformations in the realm of information, which has led to the creation, ownership, and dissemination of information that is not under the control of any authority. These processes have transformed the military's physical operations into campaigns integrated with operations in the cognitive realm, which seek to explain, interpret, and define to target groups the objectives of the military operation, its targets, and even its outcomes, in a way that reflects the policy and the interests of the initiator of the operation.<sup>5</sup>

According to Lior Reshef and Shay Shabtai, another dimension of the military campaign is cognitive, which relates to subjective aspects such as thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, world views, interpretations, and symbols. The cognitive dimension involves an incessant process of imparting meanings to events that take place in reality, and consequently, is vulnerable to manipulation and influence. It is saturated with variables and players, and in order to create an effective influence, congruence is needed between the various efforts that shape the reality—particularly, the force deployment—and the “story” that the IDF wants to convey to the target audiences.<sup>6</sup>

In the years preceding the Second Lebanon War, the IDF began to understand that dealing a serious blow to the enemy's ability to fight relates to the cognitive aspect of the military operation no less than the physical aspect.<sup>7</sup> Under Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon, the IDF understood the importance and necessity of shaping the cognitive perceptions of Israeli society as well as that of the enemy. Within this framework, the Center for Cognitive Operations was established in January 2005, with the mission of examining the cognitive aspects of the military operations and initiating operations geared toward influencing the enemy's perception, mainly through propaganda, psychological warfare, and sometimes deceptive tactics. The Center for Cognitive Operations was directly subordinate to the head of the

5 Saar Raveh, “Cognition and Experience: The Two Components of the Operational Whole,” *Ma'arachot*, 409–410 (December 2006): 66–68 [Hebrew].

6 Lior Reshef and Shay Shabtai, “The Cognitive Effort in the IDF,” *Ma'arachot*, 457 (October 2014): 35 [Hebrew].

7 Raveh, “Cognition and Experience,” p. 71.

IDF Operations Directorate, which attests to its considerable importance.<sup>8</sup> Another unit with a similar mission had existed previously, but its operations were quite limited.<sup>9</sup>

Chief of Staff Dan Halutz adopted a similar approach, whereby every war is, first and foremost, a battle over cognitive perceptions.<sup>10</sup> He believed in the need to influence the enemy's cognition and formed a "Campaign Design Department" for this purpose in the Operations Directorate.<sup>11</sup> The IDF Spokesperson's Unit also adapted its aims to the systemic approach: no more engaging in spokespersonship and propaganda but rather in the "design of a perception of reality in the public discourse." It was determined that the IDF needed to deploy a "cognition system" in times of war, exactly like the conventional systems in command centers that are responsible for launching fire power or for coordinating logistical assistance. A "cognition system" was established even in the IDF's Galilee Division, which is responsible for the Lebanese front; in other words, at issue was a combat system for all intents and purposes.

## Democratic Society's Sensitivity to Casualties

The phenomenon of sensitivity to casualties is defined as a society's aversion to suffering losses during a military operation. There is wide consensus that this phenomenon has been a constant social and cultural characteristic of western democracies since the end of the Cold War, and that it is increasing to the point of absolute opposition to launching operations that could involve

8 Yoni Shedmi and Barak Ravid, "The Unit that will Drive Our Enemies Crazy," *Maariv NRG*, December 17, 2005 [Hebrew].

9 Ron Schleifer, "Psyoping Hezbollah: The Israeli Psychological Warfare Campaign during the 2006 Lebanon War," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 2 (2009): 223.

10 Matt M. Matthews, "Hard Lessons Learned: A Comparison of the 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War and Operation Cast Lead: A Historical Overview," in *Back to Basics: A Study of the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead*, ed. Scott C. Farquhar (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, US Army Combined Arms Center, 2009), p. 44.

11 Amir Rapaport, *Friendly Fire: How We Failed Ourselves during the Second Lebanon War* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Maariv, 2007), pp. 53–54 [Hebrew]; Schleifer, "Psyoping Hezbollah," p. 224.

casualties.<sup>12</sup> Some argue that the phenomenon restricts the militaries, in that it might motivate leaders to adopt a policy of casualty aversion; that is, a policy that strives to limit the risks to the combat forces, and it sometimes might escalate to the point of sacrificing operational efficiency and even refraining from missions in which casualties are expected.<sup>13</sup>

Some researchers believe that society's sensitivity to casualties will diminish as long as it believes that the prospects of victory during the war are high. In other words, even if the public perceives that launching the war is a mistake, it will accept the continuation of the fighting and will reconcile itself to additional casualties if it sees that its side is winning.<sup>14</sup> Thus, during wartime, leaders consider it highly important to give the public a sense that

- 12 Gerhard Kummel and Nina Leonhard, "Casualties and Civil-Military Relations: The German Polity Between Learning and Indifference," *Armed Forces & Society* 31, no. 4 (2005): 514–515; Joseph Soeters and Jan Van Der Meulen, "Considering Casualties: Risk and Loss during Peacemaking and Warmaking," *Armed Forces & Society* 31, no. 4 (2005): 483; Joseph P. Vasquez, "Shouldering the Soldiering: Democracy, Conscription and Military Casualties," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 6 (2005): 849; Yagil Levy, *Israel's Death Hierarchy: Casualty Aversion in a Militarized Democracy* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), p. 2.
- 13 Edward N. Luttwak, "Where Are the Great Powers? At Home with the Kids," *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 4 (1994): 24; Edward N. Luttwak, "A Post-Heroic Military Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 4 (1996): 42; Harvey Sapolsky and Jeremy Shapiro, "Casualties, Technology, and America's Future Wars," *Parameters* 26, no. 2 (1996): 122; James Burk, "Public Support for Peacekeeping in Lebanon and Somalia: Assessing the Casualties Hypothesis," *Political Science Quarterly* 114, no. 1 (1999): 54; Philip Everts, "When the Going Gets Rough: Does the Public Support the Use of Military Force?," *World Affairs* 162, no. 3 (2000): 93.
- 14 Jeffrey Record, *Hollow Victory: A Contrary View of the Gulf War* (Washington: Brassey's, 1993), p. 137; Steven Kull, "Review of Eric Larson's Casualties and Consensus," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (1997): 672; Marijke De Konink and Jan Van Der Meulen, "Risky Missions: Dutch Public Opinion on Peacekeeping in the Balkans," in *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force*, ed. Phillip Everts and Pierangelo Isernia (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 116; Peter D. Feaver, Christopher Gelpi, and Jason Reifler, "Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq," *International Security* 30, no. 3 (2005): 7–8; John E. Mueller, "The Iraq Syndrome," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 6 (2005): 49; Patricia L. Sullivan, "Sustaining the Fight: A Cross-Sectional Time-Series Analysis of Public Support for Ongoing Military Interventions," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25, no. 2 (2008): 112; Peter D. Feaver, Christopher Gelpi, and Jason Reifler, *Paying the Human Cost of War: American Public Opinion and Casualties in Military Conflicts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 1.

victory is imminent, inter alia, by presenting achievements on the battlefield, as well as by obfuscating facts that might cause demoralization, such as mistakes, defeats in battle, and heavy losses.<sup>15</sup>

According to Cornish, another way to prevent demoralization is to falsely report the number of fatalities. However, reporting a number of fatalities that is lower than the real number may raise the public's threshold for similar outcomes in future military operations. Thus, instead of reducing society's sensitivity to casualties, the opposite outcome is achieved.<sup>16</sup> The research literature describes additional ways to "soften" the information about the number of fatalities, such as eliminating particular types of casualties from the inclusive total; controlling the photos published of fallen soldiers in order to avoid exacerbating the public outrage; releasing details about fatalities simultaneously with news about achievements during the war in order to create a sense among the public that the sacrifice was worthwhile.<sup>17</sup> This article argues that tremendous efforts were exerted during the Second Lebanon War to internally legitimize the fighting and to create a sense of achievement compared to the number of casualties.

## Sensitivity to Casualties during the Second Lebanon War

Many researchers have argued that the political and military echelon hesitated in carrying out extensive ground operations during the Second Lebanon War, which could have reduced the number of rockets fired on Israel's citizens,

15 Tirza Hechter, "Political Myths—Continuity versus Change: The Development of Political Myths Surrounding the Yom Kippur War Among the Secular Jewish Public: from the Yom Kippur War until the Oslo Agreement," (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 1996), p. 55 [Hebrew].

16 Paul Cornish, "Myth and Reality: US and UK Approaches to Casualty Aversion and Force Protection," *Defense Studies* 3, no. 2 (2003): 124.

17 Douglas L. Kriner and Francis X. Shen, *The Casualty Gap: The Causes and Consequences of American Wartime Inequalities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 9.

because they were overly sensitive to the soldiers' lives.<sup>18</sup> According to Yagil Levy, in July 2006, the decision makers were given little legitimacy to send ground forces in to Lebanon as it would also require the call-up of reservists.<sup>19</sup> Dan Halutz, then the chief of staff, also asserted that Israel was facing a campaign based on deploying long trajectory fire, mainly by means of the air force and artillery.<sup>20</sup> He also expressly decided to avoid a ground

- 
- 18 Yitzhak Ben-Israel, *The First Missile War: Israel-Hezbollah* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy, 2007), p. 20 [Hebrew]; Yehuda Wegman, "A Distorted Self-Image: On the IDF and its Responsibility for Civilians," *Strategic Assessment* 10, no. 2 (2007): 24 [Hebrew]; Efraim Inbar, "Strategic Follies: Israel's Mistakes in the Second Lebanon War," in *The Second Lebanon War and Subsequently* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2007), pp. 4–5 [Hebrew]; Dov Tamari, "Can the IDF Change After the Second Lebanon War?," *Ma'arachot*, 415 (2007): 38 [Hebrew]; Ron Tira, *The Battle over the Nature of War: From Clausewitz to Scipio Africanus and from Anwar Sadat to the Political Enemy who became Accustomed to War against the RMA* (Tel-Aviv: Institute of National Security Studies, 2008), p. 97 [Hebrew]; Moshe Ya'alon, "The Link between the Political Echelon and the Military Echelon when Preparing Ground Maneuvers," lecture at the Second Latrun Military Defense Conference, Latrun, Armored Corps Memorial, September 16, 2008 [Hebrew]; Giora Segal, "The Criticality of Ground Maneuvers during an Asymmetric Confrontation," *Strategic Assessment* 10, no. 4 (2008): 24, 28–30 [Hebrew]; Amir Harpaz, "New Roles of Ground Maneuvers," *Ma'arachot* 431 (2010): 21 [Hebrew]; Uzi Rubin, *The Rocket Campaign against Israel during the 2006 Lebanon War* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2008), p. 16; Avi Kober, "The Israel Defense Forces in the Second Lebanon War: Why the Poor Performance?," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 1 (2008): 7; Uri Bar-Joseph, "The Hubris of Initial Victory—the IDF and the Second Lebanon War," in *Israel and Hizbollah: An Asymmetric Conflict in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, ed. Clive Jones and Sergio Catignani (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 153.
  - 19 Yagil Levy, "How Democratization Spawns Militancy—the Second Lebanon War," *Politica* 17 (2008): 122 [Hebrew].
  - 20 Giora Segal, "How to Beat Revolutionary Forces," *Ma'arachot* 415 (2007): 44 [Hebrew]; Uri Ben-Eliezer, *Israel's New Wars: A Sociological-Historic Explanation* (Tel-Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2012), pp. 393–394 [Hebrew]; Haim Rosenberg, "Technology will Not Replace Maneuvers," *Ma'arachot* 443 (2012): 74 [Hebrew]; Stuart Cohen, *Israel and its Army: From Cohesion to Confusion* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 46; Efraim Inbar, *Israel's National Security: Issues and Challenges since the Yom Kippur War* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 226.



operation and disregarded the “Mei Marom” contingency plan designed for the circumstances that Israel had encountered on the morning of July 12, 2006.<sup>21</sup>

After the war, Halutz claimed that when he made decisions during the war, it had been clear to him that he needed to consider the parents of 2006, as the tolerance for casualties had changed from what it had been in the past.<sup>22</sup> And indeed, upon the launch of the campaign, Halutz submitted a recommendation to the government to attack the national infrastructure in Lebanon; however, the prime minister opposed a large-scale assault due to the American opposition.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, the government did approve an attack on the airport runways in Beirut and on the Beirut-Damascus highway.<sup>24</sup>

The Winograd Committee, which investigated the Second Lebanon War, found that the military activity had continued until the end of the war under routine security procedures and prohibitions and had imposed restrictions on the forces’ actions, compatible with routine security considerations, such as avoiding the endangerment of soldiers.<sup>25</sup> Halutz also referenced this in his book, writing that “the failure to internalize the situation of the war found expression in the various internal directives issued by the Northern Command, by the Navy and by the Air Force, and they imposed constraints

21 Giora Segal, “The Second Lebanon War—the Missed Opportunity,” *Ma’arachot* 420–421 (2006): 17 [Hebrew]; Michael Harsgor and Ehud Fuchs, *Historical Decisions and Hysterical Decisions* (Or Yehuda: Dvir, 2010), p. 326 [Hebrew]; Matt M. Matthews, *We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Combined Arms Center, Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), p. 43; Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Air Operations in Israel’s War Against Hezbollah: Learning from Lebanon and Getting it Right in Gaza* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2010), p. xv.

22 Gal Hirsch, *Love Story, War Story* (Tel Aviv: Hemed Books, 2009), p. 330 [Hebrew].

23 Anat Tal-Shir and Zadok Yehezkeili, “Government in Darkness,” *Yedioth Ahronoth* August 18, 2006, pp. 8–9 [Hebrew]; Rapaport, *Friendly Fire*, p. 22; Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, *Spiderweb: The Story of the Second Lebanon War* (Tel-Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, 2008), p. 165 [Hebrew]; Eyal Zisser, *Lebanon Blood in the Cedars* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2009), p. 206 [Hebrew]; Zaki Shalom, “Defining the Enemy in an Asymmetrical Confrontation: The Case of the Second Lebanon War,” *Strategic Assessment* 12, no. 3 (2009): 8–10 [Hebrew]; Amir Eshel, “En Route to a Standstill in Maneuvers,” *Ma’arachot* 434 (2010): 24 [Hebrew]; Bar-Joseph, “The Hubris of Initial Victory”; Kober, “The Israel Defense Forces in the Second Lebanon War,” p. 36.

24 Rapaport, *Friendly Fire*, p. 173.

25 Winograd Committee, *Second Lebanon War: Final Report* (Jerusalem, 2008), p. 314 [Hebrew].



and restrictions on the operational forces that were incompatible with the reality of the war they had entered. The fear of soldier casualties had become deep-seated.”<sup>26</sup>

## Perception of Victory during the Second Lebanon War

Many attempts were made during the Second Lebanon War to generate a “image of victory.”<sup>27</sup> Chief of Staff Halutz declared that “the strategy is to create the perception of the weakening of Hezbollah, inter alia, by capturing/ killing the organization’s terrorists and giving public resonance to the matter.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, throughout the fighting, IDF forces were ordered to document and photograph evidence in the field, including bodies of Hezbollah terrorists, in order to illustrate their victories.<sup>29</sup>

According to a senior IDF officer, “They constantly wanted us to bring photos of dead terrorists, of terrorists who are raising their hands, in order to shape public perception.”<sup>30</sup> To this end, a procedure was issued called “operational documentation,” and some of the combatants were equipped by the IDF spokesperson with about two hundred various still and video cameras, some of which were attached to their helmets.<sup>31</sup> One of the assignments of a brigadier-general at the IDF Headquarters in Tel-Aviv was to receive the operational documentation.<sup>32</sup> Just how important this documentation was can

26 Dan Halutz, *At Eye Level*, (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, Hemed Books, 2010), p. 386 [Hebrew].

27 Harel and Issacharoff, *Spiderweb*, p. 398.

28 Harel and Issacharoff, *Spiderweb*, p. 236.

29 Felix Frisch, “IDF Soldier Protest and Photos of Terrorists’ Bodies,” *Maariv*, July 6, 2007, p. 11 [Hebrew].

30 Eitan Glickman and Nava Tzuriel, “The Vale of Tears,” *Yedioth Ahronoth*, August 16, 2006, p. 9 [Hebrew].

31 Amir Rapaport, “The IDF Broadcast Photographs of Hezbollah Fatalities on Al-Manar,” *Maariv*, August 9, 2006, p. 19 [Hebrew]; Yael Sloma and Lilach Shuval, “In the Propaganda Arena: Combatants are Equipped with Cameras to Document the Activity,” *BaMahane*, July 27, 2006, p. 7 [Hebrew]; Nurit Kenti, “Our Functioning was Excellent,” *HaAyin HaShevi’it* 64 (2006), p. 13 [Hebrew]; The State Comptroller Office, “Aspects in the Organization and Functioning of the Propaganda Personnel during the Second Lebanon War,” in *Annual Audit Report 58.A for 2007* (Jerusalem: State Comptroller’s Office, 2007), p. 483 [Hebrew]; Shulamit Shavit, “Photographs of the Victory,” *Ma’arachot* 440 (December 2011): 59 [Hebrew].

32 Yoav Limor and Ofer Shelah, *Captives in Lebanon: the Truth about the Second Lebanon War* (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, 2007), p. 270 [Hebrew].

be understood from the chief of staff's summary of August 8, 2006, which stated that "This is a supportive, helpful, and meaningful component to the success of the operations. We must be diligent about this documentation at all levels, and about the rapid dissemination of its products."<sup>33</sup> In fact, the operational documentation effort produced little output, and in the final analysis, most of the visual material presented during the war came from photographs by the air force.<sup>34</sup>

The Command and Chief of Staff Halutz both pressured the forces to capture Hezbollah combatants.<sup>35</sup> "Bring me bodies and captives," Halutz repeatedly said to Northern Command personnel, saying "I want ten captives in every mission."<sup>36</sup> One of the commanders at the front also attested, "They told us: bring as many bodies of Hezbollah combatants and captives in their underwear as you can."<sup>37</sup> Maj. Gen. Eyal Ben-Reuven, who served as an advisor to Head of Northern Command Maj. Gen. Udi Adam during the fighting, expressed harsh criticism after the war, stating that "It also disturbed me that the Northern Command was required, time after time, to bring corpses of terrorists and photographs of terrorists. This demand from commanders and soldiers is unreasonable . . . you gain a cognitive achievement by defeating the enemy and not by lugging corpses of terrorists on stretchers."<sup>38</sup>

During the war, several controversial military operations were carried out that were harshly criticized for jeopardizing soldiers for the sake of obtaining the desired "victory picture." I chose to focus on three key examples: the battles in Bint Jbeil, Operation "Sharp and Smooth," and the launch of the ground operation toward the end of the war.

33 State Comptroller's Office, "Aspects in the Organization and Functioning," p. 468.

34 State Comptroller's Office, "Aspects in the Organization and Functioning," p. 483, Knesset Subcommittee on Foreign Relations and Public Relations, "Report on Israel's Public Relations System during the Second Lebanon War," December 2007, p. 17 [Hebrew].

35 Ilan Kfir, *The Ground Trembled* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Maariv, 2006), p. 185 [Hebrew].

36 Limor and Shelah, *Captives in Lebanon*, p. 160; Rapaport, *Friendly Fire*, p. 174; Harel and Issacharoff, *Spiderweb*, pp. 244, 398; Amir Rapaport, "The Night When the Knives were Drawn," *Maariv*, June 29, 2007, p. 12 [Hebrew].

37 Ronen Bergman, "Collapse of Concept 2," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, August 18, 2006, p. 36 [Hebrew].

38 Amira Lam, "The Contingency Plan Failure," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, March 9, 2007, p. 34 [Hebrew].

## The Battles in Bint Jbeil

The majority of the Israeli campaign during the Second Lebanon War was conducted from the air; nevertheless, at a particular stage, the IDF ground forces were ordered to take over the town of Bint Jbeil, which had not been a target of any considerable strategic importance,<sup>39</sup> except that it was considered “the capital of the Hezbollah,” where Hassan Nasrallah, the organization’s secretary-general, delivered his infamous speech after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, during which he referred to Israel as weaker than a spiderweb.<sup>40</sup> According to Harel and Issacharoff, the intention had been to bring the prime minister and the minister of defense to the place where Nasrallah had made his speech so that they could deliver their own victory speech; however, by the end of the war, this was no longer possible.<sup>41</sup> Maj. Gen. Benny Gantz, commander of the ground forces, had conceived the idea for the operation in Bint Jbeil believing that it would be a significant achievement in one place: “Nasrallah’s victory speech was in Bint Jbeil . . . I would consider a limited ground mission in this region, which can be contained . . . I would bring in a film team to show the course of action and its results. In other words, it tells the complete story.”<sup>42</sup>

Chief of Staff Halutz supported Maj. Gen. Gantz’s idea,<sup>43</sup> and said that “modern wars are wars over symbols. Bint Jbeil is a symbol. Nasrallah gave his spider web speech in Bint Jbeil. There are symbols here that they defended, and our role now is to show them that we are striking them in this place.”<sup>44</sup> Maj. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot, who had served as the head of the

39 Bar-Joseph, “The Hubris of Initial Victory,” p. 154.

40 Moshe Ya’alon, *Long Short Road*, (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, Hemed Books, 2008), p. 208 [Hebrew]; Ze’ev Schiff, “The Head of the Military Intelligence Directorate had Warned the Prime Minister in Advance: Expanding the Operation is a Mistake,” *Haaretz*, September 7, 2006 [Hebrew]; Oded Lowenheim, “Legitimizing Victims during War,” (lecture Open University, November 13, 2011); Amir Rapaport, “The IDF and the Lebanon Syndrome—Toward the Third Lebanon War?,” (paper presented at conference the Lebanese Arena—Marking Thirty Years since the Lebanese War, Bar-Ilan University, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, May 30, 2012).

41 Harel and Issacharoff, *Spiderweb*, p. 260.

42 Amir Rapaport, “Go In, Kill some Terrorists, Get Out,” *Maariv*, July 6, 2007, pp. 18–19 [Hebrew].

43 Gadi Heimann and Oded Lowenheim, “‘Proper Retribution’: Revenge and the Israeli Campaign during the Second Lebanon War,” *Politica* 17 (2008): 103 [Hebrew].

44 Rapaport, *Friendly Fire*, pp. 160–161.

Operations Directorate at that time, also argued during the war that “what is important is the symbol, the ability to do this, and to shatter the myth.”<sup>45</sup> The name that was given to the operation in Bint Jbeil—“Web of Steel” in response to Nasrallah’s spiderweb theory—attests to the considerable cognitive importance that was attributed to it.<sup>46</sup>

The operation, which was launched on July 24, was indeed perceived as a success by the Northern Command; the General Staff, however, had expected achievements with far greater symbolic value, such as taking captives. Thus, even though on the evening of July 24, the forces had been ordered to retreat toward Israel, at the last moment, the Golani Brigade was ordered to remain in the field for the purpose of seizing the town.<sup>47</sup> Maj. Gen. Adam, who doubted the wisdom of the order, decided on his own to not seize the town—out of concern for the high price of casualties— and instead, deepened the hold over it. Nonetheless, two days later, on July 26, a bloody battle took place in Bint Jbeil, in which eight combatants were killed.<sup>48</sup>

Given the outcome of the Battle of Bint Jbeil, the desire for a cognitive achievement increased. Minister of Defense Amir Peretz remarked after learning about the number of fatalities that “we need to take a deep breath, and change the picture. If it had been possible to consider ending the war with partial achievements, it is now more distant . . . we cannot leave now with our tails between our legs, without dignity.”<sup>49</sup> After the battle, Maj. Gen. Eyal Ben-Reuven expressed harsh criticism to Chief of Staff Dan Halutz about the futility of the mission, stating that “Occupying Bint Jbeil is contrary to the combat mission of reaching areas where Katyusha rockets are being launched . . . out of the five brigades that we have, we destroyed three over nothing, even before the ground war against the Katyusha rockets began.”<sup>50</sup>

On July 27, Deputy Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Moshe Kaplinsky claimed that “there is no tactical military significance to seizing Bint Jbeil. It has

45 Rapaport, “Go In, Kill some Terrorists, Get Out,” p. 20.

46 Heimann and Lowenheim, “Proper Retribution,” p. 103; Harel and Issacharoff, *Spiderweb*, p. 252.

47 Amir Rapaport, “We Engaged, There are Injuries,” *Maariv*, July 13, 2007, pp. 16–19 [Hebrew].

48 Nahum Barnea and Shimon Schiffer, “The Longest Day,” *Yedioth Ahronoth*, July 28, 2006, p. 4 [Hebrew].

49 Rapaport, “We Engaged, There are Injuries,” p. 18.

50 Ibid.

another significance . . . the symbolic significance.”<sup>51</sup> Chief of Staff Halutz accepted Kaplinsky’s position, and on July 28, the order was issued once again to capture the town, but was rescinded the next day after another attempt by the 101st Paratrooper Brigade to seize Bint Jbeil.<sup>52</sup> On August 1, the forces of the Ninety-First Division were ordered to launch an additional attack on Bint Jbeil,<sup>53</sup> and even when the IDF already began planning the major ground operation that was intended to push back the Katyusha rockets, the chief of staff did not waive capturing the town.<sup>54</sup> On August 7, the paratrooper’s brigade were ordered to enter Bint Jbeil once again, to reach the building that had been used as the headquarters of the Western Brigade in the buffer zone prior to the May 2000 withdrawal, to raise the Israeli flag there, and to photograph it. Ironically, this operation later was given the nickname “the flag attack.”<sup>55</sup> In addition, a victory march was planned: A convoy of tanks and armored personnel carriers was supposed to travel along Bint Jbeil’s main street, and an appropriate victory speech, which was intended to refute Nasrallah’s claims regarding the weakness of Israeli society, was written ahead of time for the commander of the occupying force, Brigade Commander Hagai Mordechai. Combatants equipped with video and still cameras were asked to document the historic speech and the Israeli flag on the building of the former brigade headquarters.

Brigade Commander Mordechai had reservations about the idea, and he had good reason for this: When he received the order, he and his forces were already a few kilometers north of Bint Jbeil, en route to seize control over the areas from where Hezbollah was launching Katyusha rockets aimed at Israel.<sup>56</sup> At this stage of the fighting, the commander of the Ninety-First Division, Brig. Gen. Gal Hirsch, also did not support seizing the town. “We are already located in the front,” he argued to Maj. Gen. Ben-Reuven. But

51 Limor and Shelah, *Captives in Lebanon*, p. 266.

52 Ibid., pp. 191–192.

53 Winograd Committee, *Second Lebanon War*, p. 368.

54 Rapaport, *Friendly Fire*, p. 259.

55 Amos Harel, “The Version of Brig. Gen. Hirsch: the Criticism of the Propaganda about the Ninety-First Division’s Achievements,” *Haaretz*, September 11, 2006 [Hebrew].

56 Rapaport, *Friendly Fire*, pp. 259–260.

the latter explained to the division commander that they had no choice: The chief of staff wanted a cognitive achievement.<sup>57</sup>

At the beginning of the battle, it seemed that the Hezbollah force in Bint Jbeil was about to collapse, but then, one of the soldiers in the paratrooper commando unit was mortally wounded. A battle began in order to rescue him, during which another soldier was killed.<sup>58</sup> The mission was not abandoned, however, and it was decided to call in the 890th Paratrooper Division. In the end, the Israeli flag was photographed flying over a building adjacent to the building where the hoisting of the flag was originally intended.<sup>59</sup> The photographs were forwarded to the IDF Spokesperson's Unit but were archived. The outcomes of this battle only deepened the call to launch an even more drastic action that would change the cognitive picture.<sup>60</sup>

## Operation Sharp and Smooth

During the war, special operations were carried out deep in enemy territory unlike the IDF had known before.<sup>61</sup> The decision makers believed that a surprise commando operation in the enemy's home front would enable them to achieve cognitive achievements that would strengthen the public's confidence in the war's leadership.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, besides the effort to strike the Hezbollah leadership, Prime Minister Olmert and Minister of Defense Peretz pressured Chief of Staff Halutz to carry out special operations similar in style to Operation Entebbe.<sup>63</sup> "I need something like the IDF of the olden days," said the prime minister.<sup>64</sup> Instead of directly contending with the threat of the Katyusha rockets, the desire was to carry out an operation that

57 Hirsch, *Love Story, War Story*, p. 352.

58 Kfir, *The Ground Trembled*, p. 207.

59 Harel and Issacharoff, *Spiderweb*, p. 349.

60 Limor and Shelah, *Captives in Lebanon*, p. 208.

61 Alex Fishman, "Mission Impossible," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, October 27, 2006, p. 10 [Hebrew]; Halutz, *At Eye Level*, p. 467; Ronen Cohen, "The Difference between a Strategic Incursion and a Tactical Incursion," *Israel Defense*, February 27, 2012 [Hebrew].

62 Kfir, *The Ground Trembled*, p. 191; Limor and Shelah, *Captives in Lebanon*, p. 260.

63 Moran Weinreich, "A New Generation of Warfare—Really? The Second Lebanon War," (MA diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2010), p. 90 [Hebrew].

64 Bergman, "Collapse of Concept 2," p. 34.

would shatter the symbol of the Hezbollah and provide an image of victory that would influence the public's cognitive perception.<sup>65</sup>

On the ninth day of the war, a special team was assembled in the Operations Directorate, headed by Brig. Gen. Tal Russo,<sup>66</sup> and the special units—the General Staff Reconnaissance Unit, the Kingfisher Unit, the Commando Unit, and others—began operational planning, as well as a search for a target that would provide the necessary cognitive effect.<sup>67</sup> Concurrently, special teams inside the divisions were deployed along the front line.<sup>68</sup> In total, twenty-four special operations were carried out during the war north of the Litani River, most of which were covert operations.

Operation “Sharp and Smooth” constitutes one of the only operations that achieved extensive publicity.<sup>69</sup> The plan of the operation, in which about two hundred combatants from the General Staff Reconnaissance Unit and the Kingfisher Unit were assigned to participate, was to raid a hospital in Baalbek where, according to the assessment, an Iranian physician had treated the captured Israeli soldiers, whose kidnapping had been one of the triggers for the war.<sup>70</sup>

The operation was launched on August 1, with Minister of Defense Peretz calling it “the operation that will change the face of history.”<sup>71</sup> After four hours in Hezbollah territory, the forces returned without any Israeli casualties. Although this was not the first time that the IDF's special forces had reached Baalbek, this operation was deliberately “noisy.”<sup>72</sup> Once it was discovered that the sought-after physician was not in the hospital, the remaining mission

65 Niccolò Petrelli, “The Missing Dimension: IDF Special Operations Forces and Strategy in the Second Lebanon War,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 23, no. 1 (2012): 67.

66 Nahum Barnea and Shimon Schiffer, “War on Three Fronts,” *Yedioth Ahronoth* August 4, 2006, p. 3 [Hebrew].

67 Kfir, *The Ground Trembled*, p. 181.

68 Alex Fishman, “Mission Impossible,” *Yedioth Ahronoth*, October 27, 2006, pp. 10–11 [Hebrew].

69 Amir Rapaport, “March of Stretchers on the Streets of Tyre,” *Maariv*, July 20, 2007, p. 12 [Hebrew]; Petrelli, “Missing Dimension,” p. 64.

70 Petrelli, “Missing Dimension,” p. 64.

71 Ofer Shelah, “A War as You Requested,” *Maariv NRG*, January 17, 2009 [Hebrew].

72 Amit Cohen, Doron Nahum, and Felix Frisch, “120 km in the Rear of the Hezbollah,” *Maariv*, August 3, 2006, p. 4 [Hebrew].



was to take as many captives as possible, to seize documents that might have intelligence importance, and to kill about twenty Hezbollah terrorists.<sup>73</sup>

The operation was labeled a success, but many argued that its achievements did not justify the risk involved.<sup>74</sup> Officers in the General Staff as well as retired senior officers believed that the risk had been too great for the purpose of such a mission, whose duration had been cast in doubt in advance.<sup>75</sup> According to their arguments, the operation's targets had not justified the deployment of such large forces, who were liable to become ensnared in an incident involving many casualties and even captives.<sup>76</sup> The former chief of staff Ya'alon also believed that "particular types of operations involve very high risk; therefore, you launch them only when the achievements they are supposed to accomplish are of strategic importance . . . I am not sure that the operation in Baalbek was not foolhardy."<sup>77</sup>

Notwithstanding the operation's modest achievements, the IDF launched a media campaign. The IDF spokesperson distributed photographs taken during the operation and they were published numerous times in the media,<sup>78</sup> while the operation's commander in the field, Col. Nitzan Alon, was sent to brief the journalists.<sup>79</sup> The political and military elite wanted to demonstrate achievements that would outwardly suggest an Israeli victory.

## Launching a Large-Scale Ground Campaign toward the End of the War

On August 11, the prime minister decided in favor of launching a large-scale ground operation reaching the Litani River, despite the knowledge at that time that the United Nations Security Council was supposed to pass a resolution about a ceasefire.<sup>80</sup> The decision to launch the ground operation was strange, especially considering the assessments made during the preparatory

73 Rapaport, "March of Stretchers on the Streets of Tyre," p. 13.

74 Rapaport, *Friendly Fire*, p. 217.

75 Limor and Shelah, *Captives in Lebanon*, pp. 254, 258.

76 Harel and Issacharoff, *Spiderweb*.

77 Limor and Shelah, *Captives in Lebanon*, p. 258.

78 Kfir, *The Ground Trembled*, p. 192; Limor and Shelah, *Captives in Lebanon*, p. 255; Rapaport, *Friendly Fire*, p. 222.

79 Kfir, *The Ground Trembled*.

80 Halutz, *At Eye Level*, p. 462; Yaakov Katz, "Wadi Saluki Battle—Microcosm of War's Mistakes," *Jerusalem Post*, August 29, 2006.

discussions, which raised the possibility of hundreds of fatalities.<sup>81</sup> The minister of defense clarified that the ground operation would not improve the terms of the ceasefire but would create the impression that Israel took the final action during the war. Israel was not asking the international community to declare a ceasefire as a lifeline from an unsuccessful war; rather it wanted to be recognized as the side that was being asked to stop the fighting.<sup>82</sup>

The discussions in the IDF and within the political echelon about launching the operation focused heavily on the question of “staging the victory”: How could the IDF instill the sense that it emerged victorious from the war, despite everything that had happened over the previous four weeks.<sup>83</sup> Harel Issacharoff described this well: “Just like Hezbollah, Israel is also searching now not only for an image of victory, but also a ‘victory story,’ an orderly description of the course of events, which will present the end of the campaign to the public as an Israeli triumph, which justifies the blood that was spilled and the houses that were destroyed.”<sup>84</sup> Indeed, Chief of Staff Halutz argued during the cabinet meeting of August 9 that “the ground operation is needed for two reasons: in order to accomplish the mission of reducing the rockets, and secondly—because of the imagery. The IDF needs to and can operate on the ground and win.”<sup>85</sup> The Winograd Committee report provides a basis for these statements, when it acknowledged that “Operation Change in Direction 11 was supposed to be a major, large-scale ground operation that would fundamentally change the reality in southern Lebanon and the imagery of the operation from a military perspective.”<sup>86</sup> During his testimony before the Winograd Committee, Prime Minister Olmert argued that “if Maroun al-Ras had looked differently, if Bint Jbeil had looked differently, it could be that we would not have had to reach the point that we reached in the end.”<sup>87</sup>

Others believed that launching the final attack had fundamentally been a mistake and should never have occurred in the first place, since—apart from the cognitive achievement—it could not have produced any strategic

81 Rapaport, *Friendly Fire*, p. 295.

82 Limor and Shelah, *Captives in Lebanon*, p. 311.

83 Harel and Issacharoff, *Spiderweb*, p. 398.

84 Avi Issacharoff and Amos Harel, “An Earthquake Soon,” *Haaretz*, August 11, 2006 [Hebrew].

85 Limor and Shelah, *Captives in Lebanon*, p. 309.

86 Winograd Committee, *Second Lebanon War*, p. 387.

87 See Ehud Olmert’s testimony before the Winograd Committee <https://bit.ly/2BNAUkf>.

achievement, particularly given the timing of its launch.<sup>88</sup> Thus, for example, Minister of Transportation Mofaz argued in an interview after the war that “with six hours [the time allocated for the operation], it is impossible to have sufficient time to accomplish a mission that was planned to take several weeks . . . the massive deployment of ground forces into Lebanon had not been a military and political necessity, but rather, was the outcome of frustration about the lack of achievements. In the IDF, they understood that you can accomplish achievements only by using ground forces.”<sup>89</sup> According to Maj. Gen. (ret.) Danny Yatom, who had formerly headed the Mossad, the ground attack had no chance of producing a significant achievement, and, moreover, it was impossible to reach the Litani River in six hours.<sup>90</sup> The head of the research division at the Military Intelligence Directorate, Brig. Gen. Yossi Baidatz, also felt that the last-minute operation would not have any impact on Hezbollah. Baidatz also clarified his position in a letter that he sent to Olmert, Peretz, and Halutz.<sup>91</sup> Another senior officer who was opposed to the operation was the prime minister’s military secretary, Maj. Gen. Gadi Shamani, who expressed to the prime minister that launching that operation at that stage had been pointless.<sup>92</sup> Even Maj. Gen. Ben-Reuven, who devised the “Mei Marom” contingency plan and constantly pushed for its implementation, argued that “the approval for the [Mei Marom] plan was not issued in time; there was already no chance to reach a full

88 Yair Ettinger and Amos Harel, “The Battle Was a Success, They Say in the IDF, But it is Unclear What the Objective Had Been,” *Haaretz*, August 22, 2006 [Hebrew]; Yossi Ben-Ari, *The Second Lebanon War through the Perspective of the Press in Israel*, (Tel Aviv: Rothschild-Caesarea School of Communications, Tel-Aviv University, 2007), p. 24 [Hebrew]; Nahum Barnea, “The Final Days,” *Yedioth Ahronoth*, January 25, 2008, p. 4 [Hebrew].

89 Nahum Barnea and Shimon Schiffer, “This is Not How You Wage a War,” *Yedioth Ahronoth*, September 15, 2006, p. 4 [Hebrew].

90 Danny Yatom, *Confidant in a Secret* (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, Hemed Books, 2009), p. 431 [Hebrew].

91 Rapaport, *Friendly Fire*, pp. 321–322.

92 Schiff, “A Senior Officer in the Military Intelligence Directorate Warned the Prime Minister in Advance.”

achievement.”<sup>93</sup> The former chief of staff Ya’alon voiced extremely harsh criticism of the operation, calling it a “battle to save the leaders.”<sup>94</sup> He said, “This operation was to achieve a media spin . . . its purpose was to achieve the missing victory picture . . . thirty-three soldiers were killed for a spin . . . you don’t do such a thing. You do not send soldiers on a futile mission after the political outcomes have already been determined.”<sup>95</sup>

It appears that the public pressure to launch an extensive ground operation, which would produce the desired achievements, is what tipped the scale: The results of a survey conducted for the *Haaretz* newspaper showed that only 28 percent of the public had expressed support for an immediate ceasefire, considering the limited achievements in the political arena. Furthermore, Yossi Ben-Ari’s study found that the dominant trend in print journalism had been “to push the State into a battle” in order to achieve a victory, or at least, “an image of victory,” the aim being to restore the eroded Israeli deterrence.<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusion

During the Second Lebanon War, Israel invested considerable efforts in attempting to shape the public’s cognitive perception, to convince it of the war’s successes and achievements, and thus to increase the internal legitimization of the operation and of its casualties. As the war continued, there was an intensifying need to gain achievements that the public would perceive as significant. With this in mind, military operations were launched whose objectives were on a cognitive level; in many instances, however, these operations failed to create the desired cognitive perception of victory.

93 Lam, “The Contingency Plan Failure.” Formulated prior to the Second Lebanon War, Mei Marom was a contingency plan that included wide-scale ground maneuvers in Lebanon. Although it was still in advanced stages of formulation, the plan was theoretically implemented in an exercise of combined forces, with an opening scenario similar to what took place in July 2006: a kidnapping in the Gaza Strip and then one in the north, followed by Katyusha rockets and escalation for several weeks. The Mei Marom contingency plan did not manage to pass the authorization process, and, thus, on the eve of the war, there was no updated and approved attack plan.

94 Ya’alon, *Long Short Road*, p. 210.

95 Ari Shavit, “Ya’alon: Soldiers Died for a Spin: The Leaders Need to Go,” *Haaretz*, September 14, 2006 [Hebrew].

96 Ben-Ari, *Second Lebanon War through the Perspective of the Press in Israel*, p. 25.

The examples reviewed in this article were intended to illustrate the complexity of decision making and the tension between the need to gain achievements in war, including cognitive ones, and the risk of carrying out these operations. Internal legitimization played an important role in the decision makers' considerations, to the point that public pressure to gain significant achievements motivated the political echelon to launch a ground operation toward the end of the war, even though its strategic purpose had been doubted, especially given the imminent ceasefire.

The findings presented above indicate the conflicting pressures exerted by the public upon leaders of democratic countries during wartime: The public wants rapid and impressive achievements, while it also wants the number of casualties to be as low as possible. The decision makers strive to maintain a delicate balance between these two demands, but sometimes the deciding factor is the perception of the public's sentiment, which measures the war's objectives and achievements throughout the fighting vis-à-vis the number of casualties.

The Israeli leadership's concerns about casualties and its need for internal legitimization at times paradoxically led to the launch of operations involving risk to the soldiers. One can argue that considerations of internal legitimization, including considerations about the number of casualties—which are common mainly in democratic countries—are liable to negatively influence the decision makers' judgment during war.