Possible Resolutions to the Conflict in the North

Shlomo Brom

In the war in Lebanon, Israel finds itself in a new kind of conflict, engaged against a sub-state organization that in some respects has the military might of a state and is able to threaten a large percentage of the civilian population. At the same time, the organization still has the characteristics of a terror and guerilla organization. It benefits from the cover of a civilian population and when it is attacked by a superior force, it scatters and melts into the populated areas to regroup and renew the fighting from among people who live under occupation-like conditions. The war in Lebanon cannot, therefore, end in a military victory in the normal sense, meaning that the enemy loses its will to fight and it becomes possible to dictate a new political reality. Even if Hizbollah loses all military confrontations and the whole of Lebanon is occupied, Hizbollah will continue to operate as an underground organization against the occupying army. It can be assumed that in such a situation, Israel will find itself in a predicament similar to that of the American army in Iraq, but against a better trained and more effective rival.

These parameters imply that the best possible military result that Israel can expect to achieve is a situation in which Hizbollah and Lebanon suffer serious damage. This means that the organization's ability to attack Israel is considerably reduced, and thus it will have paid a heavy price for violating the rules of the game that Israel is willing to tolerate. At the same time, Lebanon will have paid a price that will generate motivation, at

least among the non-Shiite majority, to work to change the situation and to impose its sovereignty over the entire country.

Accordingly, in order to translate the military situation into a settlement that will stabilize the situation on the Israel-Lebanon border, political action is required, with Israel's partners being Lebanon, Arab states, and the international community. The more ambitious the settlement Israel strives to achieve, the more difficult it will be to realize in terms of feasibility, the time required, and the extent of necessary military achievements. The Israeli government must

therefore define realistic goals for itself that can be achieved within a reasonable time scale and are based on realistic military gains.

The best possible situation for Israel is one in which Security Council resolution 1559 is implemented – Hizbollah is disarmed and becomes a political movement only – but it is

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doubtful if this is a realistic goal. In terms of Hizbollah, its principal asset is its military ability. It will not agree to disarm when it is clear that it is ending the war "on its own two feet" and retains the ability to attack Israel's home front. As far as it is concerned, consent to disarm means surrender, nor can it be disarmed by force. The Lebanese government is weak and splintered and lacks public legitimacy. Many of those serving in the Lebanese army are Shiites who support Hizbollah. Moreover, there is no international party that is ready to volunteer to send effective military forces to Lebanon that can help to

disarm Hizbollah. As such, Israel will have to make do with limited aims.

There will be a need for security arrangements that address two basic issues: Hizbollah's armed activity in southern Lebanon, and the positioning of long-range rockets in Lebanon.

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Israel has an interest to free its border of Hizbollah military presence, and its general demand is to return the area to state sovereignty, to Lebanon, and station the Lebanese army there. The problem here is that the Lebanese army is not a reliable party, due both to its weakness and the weakness of the government that it serves and also due to the strong Shiite element in the army. There is great symbolic importance to stationing the Lebanese army up to the border as an indication of Lebanese sovereignty and at least the partial implementation of Security Council resolution 1559. However, an additional body, a multinational force, will be needed to provide monitoring, backup, and assistance.

Currently, a United Nations force (UNIFIL) is deployed in southern Lebanon, but this force lacks capability and credibility, and it is doubtful whether it can fill the required role, even if it is reinforced. There are several reasons for this. First, the force does not have a clear mandate to pre-

vent entry by armed elements other than the Lebanese army to this area and to use force if necessary. Second, the forces controlled by the UN secretariat comprise elements from states that have different agendas, a situation that creates a complex lack of cohesiveness and weak leadership. Third, the military effectiveness of the units is limited. Based on experience with international forces over the last decades, a multinational force is effective only if it has a clear mandate from the Security Council that gives its action legitimacy, and if the force is itself an effective military force operated by an effective subcontractor. There are two examples of subcontractors that operated effective

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military forces with a clear mandate: NATO in the Balkans, and the Australian army in East Timor.

The presence of an international force will also exact a cost from Israel, as such a force will limit Israel's freedom of action in the area where

it is deployed. This may spark friction between Israel and the countries contributing to the force, and thus lower efficiency. Nonetheless, in the current reality, it is clear that without the presence of a multinational force and regardless of the nature of the arrangements that will end the fighting in Lebanon, Hizbollah soldiers will trickle back into south Lebanon, and within a short space of time Israel will find itself back to square one.

With regard to limiting the long-range rockets in Lebanon, it is hard to predict if this is a feasible demand that will be accepted. Even if it is accepted, an efficient supervisory mechanism will be required to ensure that the demand is implemented. This mechanism too will have to be international in nature and could be part of the force that would be stationed in south Lebanon.

Another issue that should be addressed is whether Israel has an interest in Arab participation in the particular international force. It is likely that this is in Israel's best interests – not because the Arab contribution would make the force more effective, but it would offer Arab legitimacy. It is also likely that there is what to be gained from reviving and upgrad-

ing the channels that can allow the communication of messages and the agreement on an accord. Such a mechanism was established as part of the Grapes of Wrath understandings and included occasional meetings of representatives of Israel, Lebanon, Syria, the US, and France, as well as understandings relating to the rules of the game between the sides.

The feasibility of these solutions depends on the ability to devise a combination of military and political moves that will be acceptable to all the parties. The military achievements that would be required for this to happen include:

■ A serious blow to Hizbollah's military capability, to the extent that it generates strong motivation for a ceasefire, even if this is only to re-group militarily.

■ Reducing Hizbollah's ability to strike at the home front to a degree that convinces the organization that Israel can continue with the military operations over time without paying a significant price. As long as Hizbollah believes Israel will be the first to balk, such arrangements do not appear feasible.

■ Significant "cleansing" of southern Lebanon of Hizbollah's military presence. It is easier for an international force to prevent entry of armed elements to a region than re-move them from there.

In any case, military gains alone will not achieve the objective. A wide international coalition is required that will include members of the Security Council, the G-8, and the leading Arab states. Such a coalition will apply intense pressure on Lebanon, Hizbollah, and its Iranian patrons. A related issue is the way in which settlements are perceived. If they are viewed as a clear victory for Israel and

ment of this sort, the Israeli government will also find it hard to accept due to the high level of expectation it set at the start of the hostilities: disarming of Hizbollah and creating a new order in Lebanon. It is important for the Israeli government to cerate a reasonable system of expectations with regard to the possible results of the conflict and the strategy for ending the conflict.

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defeat for Hizbollah, the chances of Hizbollah accepting them are small, even if it suffers very heavy military blows. Thus, the settlements must be proffered as designed principally to stabilize Lebanon and return life to its normal routine, with Hizbollah recognized as a legitimate partner to the accords. Resolving the two areas of conflict – the problem of Shab'a Farms (for example, by persuading Syria to declare that it is Lebanese territory) and the issue of the Lebanese prisoners in Israel – can encourage acceptance of the proposed settlements.

In addition to the difficulty in persuading Hizbollah to accept a settle-

In conclusion, any arrangement made after the end of the war will be fragile and unstable in the long term. A fundamental change in Israel's situation vis-à-vis Lebanon will take place only if Israel addresses basic problems of the northern arena: in other words, reopening a dialogue with Syria that will lead to renewal of talks between them. Even if Syria has lost much of its power, including in terms of Hizbollah, it is still a key factor in the Iran-Syria-Hizbollah axis. Removing the Syrian link from this axis will significantly contribute to the neutralization of the other components.