

The Second Lebanon War: The Plus Column

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The public discourse on the campaign in Lebanon has focused almost exclusively on the war's negative aspects, while the professional post-mortems are dwelling on what must be inferred and learned from the war's failures and lapses. Yet a balanced review of the war requires delineating the positive outcomes along with the negative results. Indeed, as we expound on the minuses of the war, it is important to remember that the plus column of the balance sheet is neither blank nor, for that matter, even sparse. What follows, therefore, is a brief overview of the positive outcomes of the war in Lebanon.

The military blow to Hezbollah.

Hundreds of Hezbollah fighters were killed and injured. Their tactics were exposed; the organization's physical infrastructure in south Lebanon, Beirut, and Baalbek was substantially damaged; the line of military outposts running along the border was totally destroyed after it failed to inflict heavy IDF losses; large quantities of ammunition were depleted and destroyed; and above all, apparently only few of the organization's array of medium and long range rockets remain.

Hezbollah's status. Hezbollah's status weakened vis-à-vis Lebanon's non-Shiite elements, headed by the "March 14 camp." This has been made clear by the escalation of tensions between the organization and the Sini ora government. The organization failed not only to deter Israel, but

also to defend Lebanon against its southern neighbor; therefore its very *raison d'être* has been undermined. That being the case, the issue of disarmament – even if far from being resolved – has become more poignant, evidenced by Hezbollah's consent not to bear arms publicly. Also, there are potential challenges within the Shiite community itself, should reconstruction not progress with due speed and/or if the Shiite enclaves in the south and in the Dahiyah area suspect that Hezbollah's operations are liable to generate another round of hostilities at their expense.

At the very least it can be stated that Hezbollah's image as "guardian of Lebanon" is less founded after the war than it was before it. As for Hassan Nasrallah, one of Hezbollah's bastions of strength, he has been exposed as less familiar with the Israel mindset than he has consistently boasted. Today he is forced to live in hiding and command his organization from a bunker.

Security Council resolution 1701.

The Lebanese army has deployed in southern Lebanon for the first time in forty years. Accompanying it is a multinational force whose scope and composition enable more effective action than demonstrated by UNIFIL; this force is apparently backed by greater international resolve than in the past. Much attention is being devoted by Lebanon's security apparatus as well as by the international community to blocking routes (sea, air, and land) that could enable the flow of illegal arms from Iran and Syria to Hezbollah. All this strengthens Lebanon's sovereignty at the expense of Hezbollah and makes it difficult for the organization to rehabilitate itself militarily (with equipment, force buildup, and training).

International response. The international community – especially prominent European countries as well as Arab-Sunni axis countries (Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia) – has evinced

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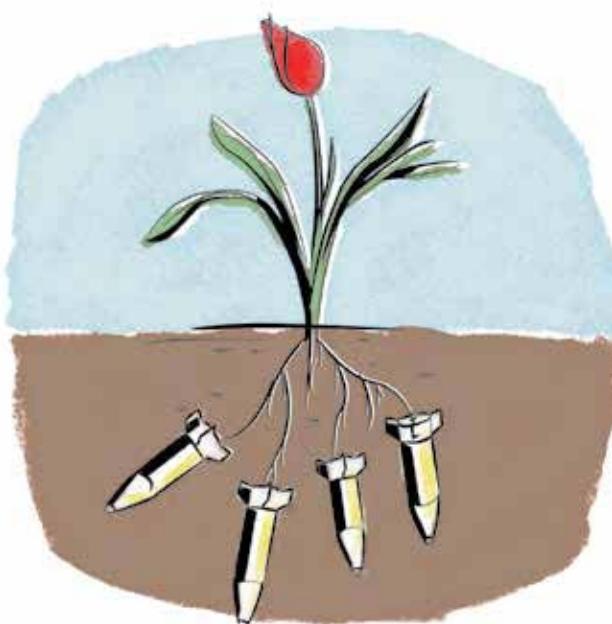


greater awareness of the danger embodied by Hezbollah as a destabilizing element connected with Iran. This awareness translated into relative patience towards Israel during the war and support for the implementation of resolution 1701; it is also likely to be evident in future issues that concern Iranian involvement in Lebanon. In addition, vigorous US support for Israel was forthcoming not only from President George Bush and his supporters, but also from the entire political spectrum.

Syria. For the first time in approximately thirty years, Syria has been unmasked as an almost irrelevant player in Lebanon. In previous rounds of conflict the key to any resolution was sought first in Damascus. This time, too, there were those in the European arena who thought Syria played an influential role, but in practice this was not the case. True, Syria did transfer weapons to Hezbollah, but its impact on what actually occurred was marginal. Moreover, the Syrian weaponry used by Hezbollah focused international attention on the negative role Syria plays and has played in Lebanon (following a long list of crimes that have originated in Damascus, including the murder of Hariri). The Syrians did not like resolution 1701, but were forced to accept it. After the war Syria was compelled to announce (or at least pay lip service to) its support for supervision of the Syria-Lebanon border to prevent the supply of illegal arms.

Israel's deterrence. Deterrence is a multidimensional phenomenon (i.e., regarding "what" and "against whom"). Israel's deterrence ability will be strengthened on three levels. First, in regard to long range rockets, Israeli intelligence and the air force demonstrated extremely impressive capabilities and achievements. Second, notwithstanding Nasrallah's spi-

of destroying the threat. Third, by Nasrallah's own admission, he was surprised by how Israel "went haywire." It is difficult to deter, or plan to deter, an opponent who is perceived as irrational or at least unpredictable. After Israel set such a disproportionately high price tag, it is most likely there will be a lengthy respite from Hezbollah provocations.



der web analogy, Israel demonstrated its readiness to enter into a broad confrontation in order to put an end to provocations. The country proved it is prepared to endure extended rocket fire on its home front as the price of achieving objectives or of continued resistance. The combination of these two levels constitutes a strategic problem for Syria and Iran vis-à-vis plans to attack Israel with long range missiles. Israel has proved, on the one hand, that this threat does not deter it, and on the other, that it is capable

Timing and the future. Israel unintentionally benefited from the timing of the war. First, if Iran had planned to involve Hezbollah in an anti-Israel or anti-America/West context, its "vanguard" absorbed a first blow that both exposed and weakened it. Second, it was preferable that Israel manage this conflict before Iran attains nuclear military capability. Third, even if Israel scraped by with a marginal victory only or else fought merely to a draw (i.e., failure), this was a poor dress rehearsal only, a failed mini-war, as it were, in a partial yet not critical test. Correcting the lapses in the military field (a buildup of ground forces not exclusively for curbing terror, upgrading the military reserve apparatus, and so on) and drawing the necessary conclusions in the area of strategic-political planning will improve Israel's future capabilities in confronting existential threats. It is almost as if Israel should thank Hezbollah for the wake-up call.