

Anti-War

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In interviews he gave before Rosh Hashanah, which are in effect the first draft of his testimony to the government investigation commission he appointed, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said, “The results of the second war in Lebanon will look better with time.” Like most of the comments on the thirty-three days of war, this sentence can be interpreted in different ways. The dwindling number of Olmert supporters consider this a great truth that reflects how short-sighted the public is, and how it is influenced by the populist media. Opponents will argue that Olmert is trying to turn black into white and convince himself and the entire nation that what the eye sees and the heart feels is simply not true.

This debate will ultimately be decided on the streets and at the voting booth. However, the very fact that the debate exists attests to the nature of the battle. The second Lebanon War (a name that in itself is controversial – there are grounds to the claim that the term “war” is a bit grandiose for the hostilities) was a post-modern war. This is not only due to the fact that after it ended both sides could parade proudly and claim victory, but also because the very use of force and the traditional importance of arms to ideas about the value of war were cast in doubt.

In this regard, the fighting in Lebanon could be classed with the second intifada: two post-modern conflicts, beyond the “new wave” and the “revolution in military affairs” that were the subjects of so much discussion in the 1990s. To borrow a well-known term, albeit with a somewhat different meaning than the one given by Alvin and Heidi Toffler in a book they published over a decade before June 12, 2006, Lebanon War II was Israel’s first anti-war.¹

A Farewell to Arms

The first sentence any Israeli soldier learns in an officer’s course comes from Carl von Clausewitz: war is the continuation of policy by other means. The significance of this sentence, particularly to a country that feeds off its anxieties and instinctively inclines to

response, retaliation, and obsessions with deterrence, has been applicable for over fifty years and is seemingly clear: before you take up arms, know what policy you are looking to implement. Looked at from a different angle, the success of a war can be judged by the subsequent political results.

We now know that Anwar Sadat based Egypt’s military move of October 1973 on a clearly defined policy designed to ultimately regain the Sinai Peninsula through an agreement

– which is in fact what occurred before the end of the decade. Victory on the battlefield, about which there is still a debate whether it was achieved on a purely military level (if such a level actually exists), was secondary to achieving the political objective – even though the military achievement of the initial days, limited as it was, was essential to attaining the political objective. Israel, on the other hand, responded to the threat as it saw it rather than to the actual

1. Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War: Making Sense of Today’s Global Chaos* (New York: Warner Books, 1993).

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threat. It perceived an Arab attempt to destroy it, which was not at all part of Sadat's plans (typically, Israel had intelligence information to that effect, but the country's leadership ignored it) and in the absence of any defined policy, it did not eventually score a victory. What would have happened had Israel been prepared for the war and had the Egyptian and Syrian forces been dealt a decisive blow on October 6, 1973 is of course a moot point, but there are grounds for arguing that in that case Sadat would not have achieved his political objective.

However, in July 2006, the fighting took an amazing turn: the political results of the war were entirely unconnected to the events on the battlefield. The IDF's fumbling moves on land could have succeeded or failed; the aerial bombardments could have been accurate or have missed their targets; Israel could have reached the Awali River and even Beirut or have stayed south of the international border. The military moves that Olmert is trying to lean on, which may ultimately generate a better security situation than existed on July 11, could have unfolded in any manner. Moreover, there are grounds to the claim that the main moves were made before the shooting started, and even led Hassan Nasrallah to opt for the kidnapping that sparked off the hostilities.

What exerted pressure on Hizbollah was not Israel's military might. In fact, the situation was the opposite – this strength was almost the only asset Nasrallah had. That, and the in-

ability to use it to achieve a tangible achievement, were the basis for the declaration (and the pervading sense in the Arab world, as well as in Israel itself) that Hizbollah earned its victory by virtue of the fact that it was still on its feet after thirty-three days of fighting, and even launched over 200 Katyusha rockets at Israel on the last day of the war. Had Israel not been so strong and had the post-modern war not been fought in such a manner, whereby this strength did not come into play and did not influence the outcome of the battle or impact on what emerged from the hostilities, Nasrallah's losses would have been more prominent.

One could expand this line of thinking further: in the second Lebanon War, the party that had weaponry and used it lost, and the side that desisted from war gained. Hizbollah sustained a physical blow (albeit one from which it will quickly recover, as physical destruction does not impact on a guerilla organization in the same way it impacts on a country); its standing within Lebanon is uncertain; and relations with its Iranian patron have worsened as, in Iranian eyes, Israel's unexpected response damaged a strategic asset Iran had been building up for years.

Israel's situation did not improve either: the threat to the north of the country was not removed. It is clear to everyone that Hizbollah can drive out an international force at will – it did so back in 1983, when it carried out a series of terror attacks that led to the hurried exit of the US marines

and the French army from Lebanon. For its part, the Lebanese army will stay stationed along the border only as long as Hizbollah wants it to, as it does not have the strength or the will to confront the Shiite organization. Hizbollah's arsenal of rockets still poses a threat to northern Israel, and the fighting proved that it can continue shooting, paralyze the north of the country for a long period of time, and, in a sense, force Israel to blink first. Other elements in the region got a better idea of how to confront Israel's strength and gained insight into the cracks in the decision-making level, even in the IDF itself.

On the other hand, one of the people who gained most from the war (in the meantime, as the long term results of the war are not entirely clear) was the person who suffered the most losses without firing a single shot: Fouad Siniora, the Lebanese prime minister. The empathy aroused by the severe Israeli attack, which caused many civilian casualties – in Israel the sense was that the IDF fired selectively and with great restraint, yet the overwhelming majority of fatalities were innocent Lebanese civilians – together with international fears over the future of Lebanon as an independent entity, helped Siniora adopt the status of a victim and a representative of the great hope. He used his image to portray Lebanon as looking to escape the clutches of Hizbollah and stop serving as the battlefield where regional forces conduct their wars. Siniora came out of the war in a stronger political position.

Third party countries that did not take up arms also gained, or may gain from the war. In an attack meant to obstruct the smuggling of arms to Hizbollah, the air force killed several dozen Syrian farmers. It is easy to imagine what Israel would have done in a similar situation: it would have launched a heavy bombardment against the aggressor. Syria, which knows Israel well and understands the true balance of deterrence

proxies, came out of the war with an opportunity to improve their positions. The statements made by President Bush indicate the shortcomings of taking a military option against Iran, and the Iranians themselves, now that the general enthusiasm for confrontation has lessened, are likely to achieve better results from the complicated game of poker they are playing with the West over the matter of their nuclear capability. Thus,

the raised hammer was far more significant than the actual pain of the blow when the hammer was lowered.

In contrast to the common assumptions and the populist observations in the media, Israel did not ignore Hizbollah's stockpile of arms. There were initial reports of the growing, substantial arsenal before the withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 and, over the years, the intelligence corps made sure the rising figures were leaked to the media. Every Israeli knew that Nasrallah had more than 10,000 warheads aimed at Israel; everyone knew that Haifa Bay and areas beyond it were within the target range. Over the years (in fact, long before the withdrawal, as even when the IDF was in southern Lebanon there were clear instructions to the Northern Command "to do everything to prevent Katyusha attacks") the raised hammer hampered Israel's freedom of movement, heightened the sense of threat and the anxiety of residents in the north of Israel, and played on the already strained nerves of the IDF leadership. Amazingly, Nasrallah's big mistake was to implement his threat.

This does not in any way imply a cavalier dismissal of the suffering of the residents of the north during the fighting, the economic damages, or the human casualties, and certainly not the deaths of dozens of civilians in the Katyusha rocket attacks. However, on the macro-national level, 4,000 Katyusha rockets were fired on Israel and their damage was shown to

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between them, opted for restraint. However, Bashar Asad, who was driven out of Lebanon a few months earlier, found a loophole in the war that he may be able to use to remove his state from the list of the West's most detested countries. He may even be able to initiate a process that could ultimately help him realize his father's dream and regain the Golan Heights through negotiations with Israel. It is not clear if Asad either understands the opportunity he has or is able to seize it. However, it is clear that had he mobilized his army, even for a limited response, he would have come out of the war as a big loser, and may even have been ousted as president.

Likewise, Iran and the US, two rivals who both viewed the war as a kind of confrontation between their

while it is too early to predict how the Iranian affair will play itself out, and notwithstanding the nascent post-war stage, it is not too early to determine the first anti-war rule: force is no longer the continuation of policy by other means. The Clausewitz connection between the two has been severed, the ability to achieve political gain through a military operation has almost completely dissipated, and, in fact, the situation has been reversed: the side that uses force has a greater chance of losing.

At the systems-tactics level, the fighting in Lebanon displayed another anti-war paradox: almost every weapon lost its significance and effectiveness as soon as it was used. All deterrents lost their power as soon as the threat was translated into reality. The expected pain from the blow of

be minimal – despite the lack of preparation by the government, and despite the terrible shortcomings in the protection, evacuation, and financial support measures. Israel's GDP will suffer minimally, if at all, residents of northern Israel (if the government acts wisely) can receive full compensation for their financial losses, and the Katyusha rocket has lost its status as a threat, as someone made the mistake of using it to such an extent that the significance of the rocket fire completely eroded. A rocket cannot bring a country to its knees, certainly not a country with economic and organizational strength – relative to its enemies – such as Israel. As such, the potential rocket is far more effective than the rocket that has actually been fired.

By the same token the IDF's enormous strength has also lost its significance, as it was used against an enemy it could not overcome. The air force bombardment was successful in destroying Hizbollah's mid and long range rocket arsenals. However, beyond the claim (which has also yet to be proven) that this prevented the organization from firing at areas much further south than Haifa – even the air force does not claim that it destroyed the last rocket, yet Hadera was hit by only one rocket throughout the war – this was the extent of the effectiveness of the IDF's most successful crops in the war.

The ground forces incursion had absolutely no effect on the progress of the war, a result that the IDF knew from the outset. Even killing, the ba-

sic activity of the war, had no impact at all. Hizbollah made almost no effort on behalf of its soldiers trapped in the area controlled by Israel, and their death had no influence on the continued Katyusha rocket fire – which, ultimately, brought Israel to the end of the conflict in a state of exhaustion – and naturally did not influence the decisions of the Hizbollah leadership.

During the war the IDF fired 130,000 shells and carried out ten thousand air sorties. Some of its basic ammunition was used so extensively (and uncontrollably) that stocks were exhausted and immediate supplies were required from within and outside Israel. A confrontation with around 1,000 men (we will probably never know exactly how many Hizbollah personnel were actually armed during the war), in a limited arena of less than ten kilometers in depth, without an enemy tank or jet, and with an adversary that barely launched any attacks (throughout the fighting Hizbollah initiated a single attack only, on paratroopers at Bint Jbail, which ended in decisive success for the IDF) brought Israel to a state reminiscent of the need for the airlift during the Yom Kippur War. There is nothing more anti-war than that.

The Preoccupation with Deterrence

Another interesting outcome of the anti-war relates to deterrence, one of the known obsessions of the IDF and the Israeli public. The concept of the old war is still embraced: decisive

victory, preferably in every battle, generates an image of strength and deterrence. This mentality has not changed despite the historical facts showing otherwise for some time: the Six Day War, which ended in a crushing victory, did not deter the Egyptians from embarking on the War of Attrition just two years later, and the Yom Kippur War three years after that.

Israel turned a localized incident into a war in order to consolidate its deterrence. The political and military leadership did not recognize that with an organization like Hizbollah, there has never been, will not be, and cannot be any deterrence – as it is not a state that takes responsibility and it does not have a backbone that can be crushed. On the other hand, even failing on the land-based battlefield and in creating the image of victory did not essentially change the deterrence towards Syria: Bashar Asad may engage in highbrow talk, but out of a sense of weakness and recognition of Israeli supremacy, he decided not to respond to the damage inflicted on his citizens and sovereignty.

The conclusion that Asad will draw from the fighting in Lebanon relates to his perception of defense: it should be more similar to that of Hizbollah, be entrenched on the ground, and create dispersed low profile positions with as few as possible heavy control facilities that can be struck and incapacitated. On the other hand, he should know that an attack on Israel will end in failure. If Syrian tanks move from their bases towards the

border, it is highly unlikely that they will get there.

This is another anti-war turnaround, which was framed by theoreticians, particularly in the US, over twenty years ago: the old approach, according to which offensive initiative is an advantage, has been overturned. Israel would have difficulty attacking Syria on the ground, as the area between Kuneitra and Damascus has not been used for maneuvers for some time. Despite the fact that its absolute air supremacy would enable it to destroy control systems and targets in the field and inflict far greater damage on the Syrian leadership than the damage caused to the diffuse Hizbollah organization, moving into Syria is liable to entangle the forces in something similar to Lebanon. The IDF reached this conclusion fifteen years ago, but as mentality always overcomes insight, it did not even apply this in Lebanon.

“Out of twenty-three days of this war, twenty-one days were completely superfluous.” This remark, made in the middle of the fourth week of the war by one of the people who know Prime Minister Olmert best – and who, at the time, did not know that Israel was facing another ten days

of death and failure – touches on the main conclusion to be drawn from the second Lebanon War: in anti-war, the real wisdom is not to know how and when to use force, but how and when not to use it.

Government ministers, senior officers, and commentators – in fact, almost everyone not called Olmert, Peretz, or Halutz – are united after the event in the opinion that few held in real time: Israel achieved very little after July 14, at a cost that does not justify the gains. Almost all the results in which the prime minister glories were achieved in the first two days of the war, before all the damage was caused – particularly the deep inner rift in the IDF that will fester for some time.

Israel would have been in a better situation had it defined the event as a punitive operation rather than a war, without mounting a land operation, and without using its enormous reserve forces, whose strength was wasted like a heavyweight boxer punching air. Hizbollah would have gained had it launched far fewer Katyusha rockets – fifteen a day would have achieved the same result in wearing down the Israeli home front and in generating the sense that

the IDF did not achieve its objectives, and the deterrence of the enormous number of unfired rockets would have been maintained – and if it had implemented a unilateral ceasefire at various exit points. In anti-war the right question is not how much time there is to fight but when should fighting stop.

Had the Israeli leadership recognized this fact before the anti-war, it would have set objectives that could have been attained by an extensive aerial punitive operation – and, again, these objectives were by no means small and local. The continued fighting that no one had planned, and even those who ordered it did not believe would yield benefits, stemmed from a well-established mentality and from an adherence to the axioms of the old war according to which more time and more force produce more gains. This cost the lives of over 100 soldiers and civilians.

Those responsible are paying and will pay the price. However, the real conclusions are no less important. In other words, it is not clear how long the prime minister, minister of defense, and chief of staff will remain in office, but the anti-war will be with us for a long time.

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