

# Lebanon war — a turn

By Dan Lieberman

*The arguments between western nations and Islam cannot be resolved by force. In Lebanon, in addition to that of Iraq, Islam has displayed elements that are prepared to sacrifice everything, human and material, to prevent encroachments upon their lives*

**D**EBATES concerning the causes and consequences of the war between Israel and Hezbollah have obscured the exact nature and deep meaning of the conflict. The war might prove to be a turning point in world history.

**Who started the war?** Without seeking international support to free its abducted soldiers, and immediately after a military excursion into Lebanon failed to locate its captured soldiers, Israel had its navy blockade Lebanon and had its air force bomb several targets, including Beirut's airport and Hezbollah's headquarters in southern Beirut. More than twenty four hours after these attacks, Hezbollah fired long range rockets into Israel.

By killing several Israeli soldiers and abducting two of them, while firing mortars at the Israel town of Shlomi (that did little damage), Hezbollah started an unjustified skirmish; no doubt about that. However, Israel, after learning it could not use a ground campaign to retrieve its military personnel, escalated hostilities that could have and should have been contained, and started a pulverising war. Israel's initial strategy resembled NATO's war against Yugoslavia, in which NATO used aerial warfare to punish Yugoslavia, which lacked adequate defences against guided missiles launched from airplanes. No need to use troops and no need to occupy terrain. Hezbollah started a low-level conflict and Israel propelled the skirmish into a war.

**What were the strategies in the attacks?** Hezbollah initially pursued its usual strategy in an attempt to fulfill its usual purposes. The militant Lebanese Shi'ite organisation continued its harassment of Israel with anticipation of increasing its prestige by forcing Israel to negotiate. The "Party of God" expected to receive Israel's maps of mined territory in Lebanon, a prisoner exchange and international recognition of its claim to ownership of the Sheeba farms.

This strategy had one difference from previous operations. Hezbollah mentioned the Palestinian conflict in its arguments and referred to Palestinian prisoners in Israel's prisons. Although not proven, Hezbollah must have hoped to combine its strategy with those of the Palestinians and make it one Muslim effort

against Israel's encroachments into Arab territories and Jerusalem.

Israel had one simple short term strategy: free its soldiers without negotiations and concessions! Don't help Hezbollah to become more recognised. Get the soldiers out and drop the matter. Its strategy failed.

The short term objectives of both contestants faded fast and exposed their long term objectives.

The Shi'ite Islamist organisation proceeded with its ultimate strategy — the use of terror bombing to force a truce and also to motivate Jews to leave Israel. Rocket attacks, as another terror weapon, succeeded. Israel had only 42 civilian casualties, not much more than two suicide bombings, but the rockets appeared more ominous. Immigration to Israel has been slowing but now it might be halted. An average of 25,000 Israelis leave their nation yearly and the emigration from Israel might increase. Recent figures from the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies show that: "Some 313,000 Jews have left Jerusalem over the last 25 years, 105,000 more than those who moved to the capital during the same period."

Israel derived its long-term strategy from the

in Syria and Iran. Nevertheless, despite bombing mainly Shi'ite neighbourhoods and saturating Christian neighbourhoods with propaganda which blamed Hezbollah for the war and for the havoc committed upon the Lebanese people and which also urged the Christian population to engage the militant Islamic party, the sectarian warfare strategy failed.

**What were the successes and failures?** Hezbollah's power was greatly exaggerated. Except for the intense rocket barrage, Hezbollah was more smoke than fire, Hezbollah didn't have the power to create any offensive and deter Israel's air and sea power from daily destroying Lebanon's infrastructure. Anti-tank missiles stopped Israel's tanks and that effort, coupled with world opinion turning against Israel, prevented Hezbollah's defeat — Hezbollah's success was not victory; it was survival.

Israel took the offensive. Its military tried to destroy Hezbollah's ability to attack Israel again and attempted to reduce Lebanon to an impotent state. However, ground troops, as they worked their way into southern Lebanon, learned that ultimate victory, which was defined as destruction of Hezbollah, could not be achieved without

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failures of earlier experiences. Israel learned from previous occupations that it lacks sufficient resources to occupy hostile lands. Its new policy has endeavoured to control antagonists by other means. Examine Israel's previous occupations in Lebanon and Gaza, and it becomes obvious that Israel only removed its soldiers. It still controls Lebanon and Gaza air space and shipping lanes, engages in targeted assassinations in both areas and is able to enter Gaza with minimal interference.

Israel noted that accession to power by a radical Muslim group can initiate sectarian strife. Israel succeeded in stimulating several weeks of sectarian warfare between Hamas and Fatah. It modelled its new strategy from that experience and from observations of the US invasion of Iraq. By generating sectarian strife, Israel could have its antagonists destroy one another and reduce their ability of confrontation. If the strategy, which has partially succeeded in Palestine, could succeed in Lebanon, then it is probable that Israel would have applied the same strategy

massive destruction of the Lebanese population and Lebanon's infrastructure. By not exhibiting a winning offensive that accomplished objectives, observers proclaimed Israel to be a loser. Since there are those who like winners and despise losers, Israel lost some of its previous support.

Israel lost the public relations war. From the images on the TV screens, the world perceived a different Israel — a highly aggressive and non-compromising Israel that uses excessive power with diminished regard for civilian life. Particularly disturbing was a missile attack on a convoy containing Lebanese families fleeing the village of Marwahin, close to the Israeli border. Israel warned the villagers to evacuate and although the villagers proceeded on the only available road, Israeli warplanes bombed them and killed 16 persons.

Hezbollah deserved criticism for its rocket attacks on Israeli cities. However, the barrages of 100-200 pound rockets caused minimal damage and served to emphasise the excessive dam-



# Turning point in history

age caused by Israel's 1000-2000 pound guided missiles. To compensate for its aggressive actions, Israel tried to arouse hostility against Hezbollah by accusing the Lebanese organisation of operating rocket launchers in heavily populated areas and intentionally inviting reprisals that would inflict harm on civilians. The accusations damaged Israel's credibility. An example of a pro-Israel statement:

The IDF, as has been well publicised, warned the citizens of Lebanon of impending attacks and did everything in its power to avoid the loss of civilian life. Hezbollah, in contrast, operates from civilian areas and uses Lebanese civilians as shields while firing missiles at Israel's cities. It does this knowing that in order to protect its own citizens, Israel will be forced to endanger the lives of Lebanese civilians, and the result will inevitably be to increase civilian deaths, no matter how precise Israel's weaponry. And these deaths in turn will be used to ratchet up the violence and hate

(1) Warnings of some attacks didn't relieve accusations of criminal actions by Israel due to unwarranted attacks on bridges, roads, power plants and entire neighbourhoods in Beirut

(2) Israeli pilots didn't supply photographs of rocket launchers being housed in populated areas.

(3) Non-biased reports from those who surveyed areas after Israeli bombings didn't disclose rocket launchers.

(4) Long-distance multiple rocket launchers cannot operate in populated areas. They need to fire rockets from areas where there are no obstructions. They are usually stationed in fields and hidden by foliage.

(5) Israel showed little concern for its own population by not agreeing to a truce at an earlier time and by engaging in a last day and meaningless offensive action that resulted in the deaths of seventeen Israeli soldiers.

Perceptions after the truce: A different Hezbollah was perceived; a well-organised and social-minded institution that had support from the Lebanese people and quickly assisted in relief programmes without prejudice. Previous perceptions of Israel as a defenceless and embattled state were modified. Israel lost its moral ground.

Israel's citizens became exhausted with war. For Israel, war has become endless. The endless wars solve immediate problems and create new problems. Wherever Israel goes it meets enemies. Saddam Hussein is gone, and now Iran, a major antagonist, has an almost direct path thorough Iraq to Syria and to Israel. The new Israeli population does not have Zionist idealists but are persons, mainly Russians, who came to Israel for economic opportunities. Their principal interest is com-

fortable living. They don't want to sit in their living rooms, and while watching television or listening to music, suddenly experience a Katyusha rocket fall in their lap. They can easily leave, go back to the old country, which now has increased opportunities, or go to another country. They have bags and can travel.

The United States lost prestige. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reluctantly travelled with her fashion show and accomplished what she promised the US would not do - a ceasefire without guarantees of Hezbollah's destruction. By approving on day thirty-two what could have been achieved on day two and, if so, saved lives, the US must have alienated international bodies and lost trust from much of the world.

**A turning point in history:** A number of established concepts that had moved the world in the last decades were destroyed. Other concepts that will move the world in the future were established.

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decisive moment in history.

Lack of victory forces Israel to rework its military and reinvigorate an angry population before embarking on another aggressive action. Israel cannot afford another non-victory. Israel now has no strategy to overcome Syria. If it replaces Bashar Al-Assad's government, Israel will face Hezbollah in Syria and Lebanon. Israel can bomb Iran nuclear installations, but if Iran, with a population of 70 million and a vast area, is able to retaliate with missiles, the smaller Israel will not easily survive. Israel has a dilemma - the time to challenge the enemy is when a nation has a large military advantage - but it might be a fatal victory. The Palestinians have offered a truce, and back channels will be used to lessen tensions. Israel needs to rest and devise a new strategy. The Middle East, outside of Iraq and Palestine, will probably become less threatening.

The concept of preemptive war, pioneered by Israel and adopted by the US, has proven to

be a failure. It has been shown in Iraq and Lebanon that preemptive war can only succeed if the enemy is totally destroyed and if the conditions that created the antagonisms are totally suppressed and then replaced.

The arguments between western nations and Islam cannot be resolved by force. In Lebanon, in addition to that of Iraq, Islam has displayed elements that are prepared to sacrifice everything, human and material, to prevent encroachments upon their lives. Prevention of mutual destruction of East and West is a choice between genocide and compromise.

The notion that a major military power can be provoked into war by an infraction upon their psyche without a major infraction upon their territory has alarmed other nations. Only the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction can save the weak from the strong. The war will stimulate a new and more aggressive arms race.

Israel's proposition that the release of a few soldiers is worth more than the destruction of a nation and massive killings of people, and its targeting of Shi'ite populations, tarnished its image and branded it as a megalomaniac and racist state. Israel lost the trust of a part of the

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world that previously supported it. The European Union, in particular, has finally displayed incipient movements geared to prevent Israel and the United States from shaping the Middle East to their own designs. The EU will work more independently to secure an equitable Middle East peace.

Nations will be reluctant to depend on the US. The US demonstrated that it is not a positive force for world peace. Unfortunately, as a result, countries might once again form blocs, similar to those before WWI, and make defence pacts in which an attack on one means an attack on all.

More ominous is that Israel still has the nuclear option and could use it to prevent the end of the Zionist dream. COURTESY COUNTERCURRENTS.ORG

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