

# **Conflict in Lebanon: On the Perpetual Threshold**

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## **Executive Summary**

The conflict between Israel and the Hezbollah in the summer of 2006 showcased some of the most turbulent trends in Middle Eastern politics today. Lebanon is in many respects a microcosm of the Middle East with its tendency to instability, deterioration of secular-governing institutions, external interference, proliferation of weapons, lack of democracy, ethnic conflict and sectarian violence. The border between Israel and Lebanon was altered by Israeli unilateral disengagement in 2000. Israel withdrew in the absence of any diplomatic concessions or negotiated settlement while the Hezbollah took over its command posts and extended its influence in southern Lebanon. Since 2000, Hezbollah has trained, recruited and armed towards the effort of fighting Israel over its northern border. The situation grew to crisis proportions with the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers followed by exchanges of rocket fire and artillery strikes between Hezbollah and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in the summer of 2006.

Despite the gravity of this conflict and the massive casualty toll, the international community demonstrated a lack of willingness to invest the resources necessary to disarm militant groups, extend the sovereignty of the Lebanese state over all its internationally recognized territory and prevent the resumption of conflict. Despite a negotiated cease-fire and modest changes to the mandate of UNIFIL, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, no mechanisms were set in place that would preclude descent into conflict in the future thereby increasing the prospects for a second round. As well, no meaningful dialogue transpired in the post-conflict period that would counter the widespread belief that Hezbollah won the war.

This paper represents an exploration of the lessons that can be learnt from this episode towards the goal of long-term conflict management and resolution in the region. Drawing from the framework of fourth generation warfare, the analysis explores the role of the different parties to the conflict. The role of Hezbollah is examined as a radical Islamist network backed by Iran and Syria that has served as alternative service provider to the state and source of inspiration for those interested in pursuing the path of armed struggle against Israel. The role of Israel is also considered as a democratic state with a strong military whose forces are embroiled in armed conflict through occupation of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and fighting across its northern border. The paper seeks to provoke policy-oriented debate about the prospects for long-term conflict resolution between parties to the conflict considering the divergent and at times contradictory interests of the many players involved.

## Résumé

Au cours de l'été 2006, le conflit entre Israël et le Hezbollah a exhibé certaines des tendances les plus turbulentes des politiques actuelles au Moyen-Orient. À bien des égards, le Liban est un microcosme du Moyen-Orient, avec sa tendance à l'instabilité, la détérioration des institutions gouvernementales laïques, l'interférence de l'extérieur, la prolifération des armes, le manque de démocratie, le conflit ethnique et la violence sectaire. La frontière entre Israël et le Liban a été transformée par le repli unilatéral israélien en 2000. Israël s'est retiré en l'absence de toute concession diplomatique ni règlement négocié, tandis que le Hezbollah a repris ses postes de commandement et étendu son influence dans le Sud du Liban. Depuis 2000, le Hezbollah a recruté, entraîné et armé ses troupes pour lutter contre Israël le long de sa frontière nord. La situation a tourné en crise lors de l'enlèvement de deux soldats israéliens, suivi d'échanges de tirs de roquettes et de frappe d'artillerie entre le Hezbollah et les forces de défense israéliennes pendant l'été 2006.

Malgré la gravité du conflit et le lourd bilan des pertes, la communauté internationale a montré un manque d'empressement à investir les ressources nécessaires pour désarmer les groupes militants, étendre la souveraineté de l'État libanais sur l'intégralité de son territoire reconnu à l'échelle internationale et empêcher la reprise du conflit. Malgré un cessez-le-feu négocié et les changements modestes qui ont été apportés au mandat de la FINUL, la Force intérimaire des Nations Unies au Liban, aucun mécanisme n'a été adopté qui empêcherait la situation de sombrer à nouveau dans un conflit à l'avenir, augmentant du même coup l'éventualité d'une nouvelle série d'affrontements. De plus, aucun dialogue important ne s'est produit pendant la période postérieure au conflit qui pourrait nier la conviction générale que le Hezbollah a gagné la guerre.

Le présent document se penche sur les leçons que l'on peut tirer de cette situation qui permettraient de réaliser l'objectif d'une gestion et d'une résolution à long terme du conflit dans cette région. S'inspirant du cadre de la guerre de quatrième génération, l'analyse explore le rôle des différentes parties au sein du conflit. On examine le rôle du Hezbollah, en tant que réseau islamiste extrémiste appuyé par l'Iran et la Syrie, qui a servi de fournisseur de services de rechange à l'État et de source d'inspiration à ceux qui s'intéressent à la voie de la lutte armée contre Israël. On examine également le rôle d'Israël en tant qu'État démocratique fortement militarisé, dont les forces armées sont mêlées à un conflit armé, tant par l'occupation des Palestiniens en Cisjordanie et à Gaza, que par la lutte le long de sa frontière au Nord. Dans le présent document, l'auteure cherche à susciter un débat axé sur la politique à l'égard des perspectives d'une résolution à long terme du conflit entre les différentes parties, compte tenu des intérêts divergents et parfois contradictoires des nombreux intervenants concernés.

While attentions of the international media converge on the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, political tensions are intensifying to an unprecedented degree in Lebanon. The precarious nature of politics in this country and its geo-strategic positioning within the Middle East make it a crucial area of concern for regional and international security. Since the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah from 12 July to 14 August 2006, developments within Lebanon have exacerbated an already volatile political situation, both domestically and with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict. As a result, events in Lebanon have wide-ranging ramifications and must be taken seriously by the international community. The 23 November 2006 assassination of Pierre Gemayal, Industry Minister in the Sinora Cabinet and vocal opponent of Syrian influence in Lebanon, demonstrated that violence continues to be the preferred method of resolving political disputes there. Gemayal's murder was the latest in a series of political killings that began with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005.<sup>1</sup> These murders serve as warnings to all in Lebanon who dare oppose the influence of Hezbollah and its regional sponsors, Iran and Syria, in Lebanese internal politics.

Since the conflict in Lebanon, Hezbollah has continued to recruit and train members, accumulate weapons, and promote itself as a power to be reckoned with in the Middle East. Its popularity has skyrocketed owing to the widespread belief in the Arab world that Hezbollah and its leader Hassan Nasrallah won the war with Israel. No meaningful dialogue or action within the international community after the war served to alter that interpretation. In fact, the international community has avoided investing resources in attempting to stabilize the Lebanese arena.

The question that begs an answer is not whether another conflict will erupt in Lebanon, for that is an inevitable certainty; the question is the degree to which the parties to the conflict will be equipped for the next round and whether the international community will muster the courage to intervene in a more significant fashion in the future, not only to curb the violence, but to promote long-term peace and stability in the region. During the 2006 conflict, extra-regional actors, including the United Nations, deliberated

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<sup>1</sup> Paula Wolfson, "Bush Condemns Gemayel Assassination," 21 November 2006, VOA, *Voice of America News*, accessed 13 December 2006, <http://www.voanews.com/english/2006-11-21-voa69.cfm>

regarding the conflict in Lebanon and mitigated its escalation by way of a cease-fire agreement and a UN resolution altering the mandate of the UN peacekeeping force stationed there.

However, the international community failed to set any mechanisms in place to prop up the Lebanese government and preclude a future descent into war. One major impediment to conflict resolution was the aversion of the great powers to take Lebanon to task and see it for what it really is; a failed state overrun by Jihadist militias intent on promoting their agenda of an Islamist state through violence and intimidation. If the international community is serious about its war on terror, both internationally and in the Middle East region, then it must hold failed states accountable by intervening and disarming all elements within them that threaten the sovereignty of the state and its monopoly over the means of force within the territory under its jurisdiction, rather than appeasing groups such as Hezbollah by giving them quasi-legitimacy.

This article examines what lessons the international community can learn from the 2006 Lebanese conflict. At a time when the country is undergoing severe political turbulence, how can extra-regional actors respond in a positive manner to help mitigate the unrest while promoting the peace, security, and sovereignty of the Lebanese government over all of its internationally recognized territory? This discussion seeks to provoke policy-oriented debate regarding Lebanon by considering the complex dynamics of the key players of Israel and Hezbollah, as well as the ramifications of this war for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is a central component of any Arab-Israeli conflict. What prospects exist for long-term conflict resolution between the different sides, considering the divergent and at times contradictory interests of the many players involved?

### **The 2006 War in Lebanon:**

The war between Israel and Hezbollah began on 12 July 2006 when a Hezbollah unit crossed the border into Israel, attacked two Israeli patrols on the Israeli side of the Israeli-Lebanese border, and kidnapped two Israeli soldiers.<sup>2</sup> The faces of the two kidnapped soldiers, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, were immediately broadcast all over the world. For Israelis, their fate was of the utmost concern. The

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<sup>2</sup> *Hezbollah* also killed three Israeli soldiers during that attack.

kidnapping of young soldiers struck deeply at the heart of Israelis' sense of personal security, and public cries for their safe return resounded throughout the country. At the time of the kidnappings, Hezbollah units fired Katyusha rockets into northern Israel, to which Israel responded with artillery strikes on Lebanese civilian infrastructure followed by the imposition of an air and naval blockade.

On 13 July 2006, Israeli Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Dan Halutz, submitted a document entitled "strategic purpose" of the second Lebanon war to the Israeli government.<sup>3</sup> The document underwent many formulations regarding the scope and rationales of Israel's response to the kidnappings. In the initial draft, the main goal of a strike against Hezbollah was articulated as "the return of the abductees."<sup>4</sup> Critics of this draft, including the Chief of Staff himself, argued that representing Israel's war aims in this way would imply that Israel went to war over two soldiers. Anyone familiar with conventional military doctrine would know that it is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve the return of abducted soldiers by military means. On the other hand, if Israel negotiated, as it has in the past, to release political prisoners to the Hezbollah in exchange for the soldiers, it would further decrease its deterrent power. In any case, the next few days witnessed Hezbollah's intense rocket bombardment of Israel's urban metropolitan centers.

The strategic plan was thus re-articulated as intending to fight Hezbollah, an ambitious task since Hezbollah fighters and bases are spread all over Lebanon, not only in the southern part but also in the Beka Valley area. Moreover, within Lebanon, the political wing of Hezbollah is largely regarded as a legitimate political party represented in the Lebanese Parliament and backed by strong constituencies. Hezbollah's legitimate standing in Lebanon was the result of governing institutions' years of neglect of the Shi'a community in the south and the disproportionate influence of Christian minority politics. As a result of marginalization within the Lebanese political process, Shi'a constituencies in the south have looked to Hezbollah as an alternative representative of their interests. Also, the weakness of the Lebanese state and its inability to provide welfare, relief, and other services has prompted the Shi'a community to look to

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<sup>3</sup> Ze'ev Schiff, "Let's Get Real," *Haaretz*, 20 October 2006, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=777197>

<sup>4</sup> Aluf Benn and Akiva Eldar, "Looking for the Endgame," *Haaretz.com*, Friday, 6 October 2006, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/769432.html>

Hezbollah as a substitute service provider. Hezbollah's political gains have therefore grown in inverse relationship to the strength of the Lebanese State and its ability to provide for all its citizens.

Aware of the profusion of support for Hezbollah in the south and following the so-called "Lebanese quagmire" since 1982 that entrapped Israel by its own devices within the Lebanon area, the dominant Israeli sentiment in 2006 was to conduct a quick war with an equally rapid exit strategy. However, Israel seems to have underestimated Hezbollah's willingness to fight from within built-up civilian areas, thus preventing Israel from limiting the war to military and political targets. Israel elected to mount a combined air and ground campaign to inflict significant damage on Hezbollah, prevent the movement of weapons and supplies into southern Lebanon from Iran and Syria, and stabilize its northern border against rocket and missile attacks. Israel learned many difficult lessons as it failed to achieve its major military objectives in the 2006 Lebanon War. First, Israel's military campaign resulted in massive civilian casualties, particularly among the Lebanese. Until the de-escalation of the conflict by the UN-negotiated cease-fire that took effect 14 August 2006, the toll was estimated to be 1500 Lebanese civilians dead with over a million displaced, and 130 Israeli soldiers and 50 civilians dead with over 500,000 Israelis displaced.<sup>5</sup>

The escalation of the conflict caused undue damage throughout Lebanon, and Israel was accused of using disproportionate force. In addition, confidence in Israel's military and intelligence capabilities plummeted, driving home the lesson that power cannot be quantified by military force alone. Despite its overwhelmingly superior military strength, Israel was clearly unable to prevent Hezbollah's bombardment of its urban metropolitan centers, which caused major infrastructural damage and more importantly, psychological trauma, to vast segments of Israeli society. Israel could not defeat a guerrilla movement like Hezbollah using conventional methods that worked in past Arab-Israeli wars; that is, a single, powerful, military strike from the air. Israel could not even negotiate for the return of the captured soldiers, which was a major symbol of the war itself. This lesson confirms the precepts of fourth generation warfare that large conventional armies cannot defeat guerrilla warfare using military means alone. Third, the military

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<sup>5</sup> "Summary of IDF Operations Against Hezbollah in Lebanon," 13 August 2006 (Communicated by the IDF Spokesman), Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism-+Obstacle+to+Peace/Terrorism+from+Lebanon-+Hizbullah/Summary%20of%20IDF%20operations%20against%20Hizbullah%20in%20Lebanon%2013-Aug-2006>



build-up of Hezbollah's forces in southern Lebanon during the six years since the Israeli withdrawal was a major intelligence failure, as Israel seems to have underestimated the potential threat of Hezbollah's capabilities. As Avi Shachar, former head of the Research and Analysis Branch within the Lebanese Contingency of Israeli Intelligence, argues:

From an intelligence point of view, we have a very big problem. I don't believe they didn't know, or at least they had to know something. I don't know whether Israeli intelligence was aware exactly of the extent of what Hezbollah was doing. But why wasn't anything done about it?<sup>6</sup>

Intelligence is crucial in fighting guerrilla warfare, yet the best military intelligence is useless if it is focused on erroneous geographical areas and then ignored by the top political leadership. Finally, the most significant lesson Israel learned was that withdrawal from Arab lands must be accomplished in conjunction with a negotiated settlement. Otherwise, it merely sets the stage for the next round of fighting.

### **Lebanon – A Fractured Country:**

Lebanon has a long history of internal unrest due to changing demographic trends, sectarian violence, frequently shifting and erratic alliances, unstable political structures, and interference by external actors.<sup>7</sup> Since the start of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, the country has undergone close to fifteen years of instability and violence. This period was punctuated by four significant phenomena: (1) military presence of Syrian forces from 1976 to 2005, (2) relocation to southern Lebanon of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its functioning there as a base of operations against Israel in the 1970s and 1980s, (3) Israel's invasion of Lebanon from 1982 to 1985 and the subsequent establishment of a 328-square mile security zone from which Israel withdrew in May 2000, and (4) the deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) on the Lebanese side of the Israel-Lebanon border from 1978 to the present. How do the competing interests of the major players in this conflict influence its possible resolution and prospects for peace and stability in Lebanon?

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<sup>6</sup> Personal telephone interview with Avi Shachar, CEO of Spylogics International, Inc., and former head of the Research and Analysis Branch within the Lebanese Contingency of Israeli Intelligence from 1994 to 1998, on 15 September 2006

<sup>7</sup> For more information on Lebanon's civil war, see David Gilmour's *Lebanon: The Fractured Country* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983)

### **Israel's Interests in the Conflict:**

It is prudent to begin with Israel, as relations between Israel and the current anti-Syrian parliamentary majority in Lebanon would be conducive to a stable alliance were it not for rejectionist elements like Hezbollah within Lebanon. Zionist interests in Lebanon date back to the period of the British Mandate (1923–1948). It has long been considered, by Israelis and by many resident Lebanese, to be a Christian heartland<sup>8</sup> serving as a bulwark against the Muslim-dominated Middle East. However, incremental growth of the Shi'a Muslim population in southern Lebanon, strengthened in part by the presence of the PLO and Israel's invasion from 1982 to 1985, catalyzed the emergence of Hezbollah (the Party of God). Hezbollah replaced the PLO as a radical Shi'a Islamist militant and political organization based in southern Lebanon whose manifesto, publicized on 16 February 1985, proclaims three main objectives: to eradicate the Western presence in Lebanon, transform Lebanon into an Islamic state, and destroy the State of Israel.

Israel's geo-strategic vision for Lebanon was complicated by the replacement of PLO insurgents with Hezbollah fighters who are more radical and negative regarding peace negotiations and the recognition of the State of Israel. From 1985 to 2000, throughout the years that the security zone existed, Israel suffered from Hezbollah fighters' incessant attacks on Israel's soldiers and military infrastructure. The growing strength of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon has been menacing, not only for Israeli military targets and infrastructure there, but also for Israel's northern communities, extending as far as Haifa (Israel's third-largest city). The apparent lack of a military solution to violence in the security zone led to a public outcry in Israel and eventually prompted Israeli unilateral withdrawal in 2000 to the internationally recognized border.

Israel's main interest has been to see Lebanon develop as a strong, independent, and democratic state with which it can normalize diplomatic relations. However, anti-Israel influence from factions within and outside Lebanon prevented the Lebanese political arena from developing positive relations with Israel. Israel's inability to end its conflict with insurgents operating out of Lebanon has decreased its overall deterrent capacity. Never before had Islamist fighters been positioned so close to Israel's northern border.

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<sup>8</sup> Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881–2001* (New York: Vintage Books), 494

This caused a range of problems for Israel's northern population, but Israel's problem is much more significant. The stalemate over its northern border creates an ambiguous situation rendering highly problematic Israel's ability to prevent any of its enemies from using weapons of mass destruction or provoking an all-out military offensive in the future.

### **Israeli Unilateral Withdrawal from Lebanon:**

The nature of Israel's withdrawal from its security zone in Lebanon in 2000 formulated the key elements of Israel's relationship with Hezbollah, which led to conflict in 2006. It is imperative to understand this withdrawal and its implications to better appreciate the potential for escalation between the two parties in the future. Even though Israel's redeployment of forces from the security zone in southern Lebanon complied with UN Security Council resolutions and placated Israeli public opinion, the unilateral nature of the withdrawal was fraught with complications, the most challenging of which was the creation of a power vacuum on Israel's northern border, a position Hezbollah filled. The nature of Israel's unilateral withdrawal has been largely criticized both within and outside Israeli national security circles. Israel's critics point out that the withdrawal of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) was both hasty and chaotic. It was undertaken amid exchanges of fire, which placed Israel in a weak light and promoted a view that, when faced with guerrilla warfare, Israel would turn and run with its tail between its legs. Instead of handing front line positions over to its ally, the South Lebanese Army (SLA), Israel found its territory prevailed upon by Hezbollah fighters and their civilian supporters who immediately claimed victory. Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon without gaining any reciprocal strategic or diplomatic concessions from either Hezbollah or the Lebanese and Syrian governments.<sup>9</sup>

That withdrawal was ominous, not only for Israel's deterrent capabilities, but also for its relationship with its Arab ally in southern Lebanon. Upon withdrawal, the SLA, which had functioned as a proxy army for the Government of Israel throughout the 1980s and 1990s in the fight against Hezbollah, found itself stranded in Lebanon without protection. The SLA collapsed immediately, and those fighters unable to flee across the Israeli border were taken prisoner by Hezbollah. Approximately 2700 former SLA members

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<sup>9</sup> Eyal Zisser, "Israeli Policy After the Withdrawal from South Lebanon: New Realities, Old Dilemmas," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 2, No. 10, November 2000, [http://www.meib.org/articles/0011\\_11.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0011_11.htm)

were tried in Lebanese military courts, although most received light sentences of up to a year's imprisonment. This abandonment does not bode well for any future collaboration between Israel and parties in Lebanon, or other moderate Arab groups with common interests.

An additional complication of Israel's withdrawal was the economic problem that accompanied the closure of its northern border<sup>10</sup> (dubbed "the good fence"). It was considered the most open border in the Middle East, and Lebanese workers traveled daily to and from Israel's northern communities to work. Israeli withdrawal put an immediate halt to this labour market as the crossing points were sealed, forcing Lebanese workers to pursue employment elsewhere. It is no surprise that ordinary Lebanese civilians would feel as abandoned as the South Lebanese Army, cut off as they were from their source of livelihood.

Withdrawal in the absence of a negotiated settlement encouraged Hezbollah to make the dubious claim that it stood up victoriously to the Israeli military and forced Israel out of Lebanon. The Arab world found this belief persuasive, if not entirely consistent with the geo-strategic truth. Clearly Hezbollah did not break the IDF militarily. No guerrilla movement can stand up militarily to the Israeli Armed Forces. However, it can prevent Israeli victory by prolonging protracted conditions of war. Hezbollah is notorious for fighting from within built-up civilian areas and using civilians – whether men, women, or children – as "human shields." Human Rights Watch has reported that Hezbollah did not deliberately use civilians as shields to protect their fighters from retaliatory attacks by the Israeli Defense Forces. Nonetheless, Hezbollah stored weapons in and around civilian homes, placed rocket launchers within populated areas or near United Nations observer posts, and operated from bunkers constructed underneath such civilian infrastructure as hospitals, schools, and mosques. These Hezbollah strategies are well-known tactics of guerrilla movements fighting asymmetrical conflicts against better-equipped regular armies. International public opinion seems to have excused Hezbollah for failing to comply with the international rules of the game given there has been no official investigation of their fighting tactics after the war by any internationally recognized legal body.

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<sup>10</sup> Israel/Lebanon, *GlobalSecurity.org*, 30 May 2000, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2000/05/000530-lebanon1.htm>

Hezbollah's most dramatic victory against Israel in 2006 was a diplomatic one. Israel struck hard at Lebanon's physical infrastructure during the conflict, hitting roads, bridges, buildings, and hydro facilities. The Israeli rationale was to prevent Hezbollah from receiving additional aid and arms from across the Syrian border and to hinder their freedom of movement within Lebanon. However, Israel's military campaign affected vast sections of Lebanese society. Israel's use of air strikes, artillery fire, and cluster munitions was perceived by Lebanese citizens and the international community as unduly harsh and as a form of collective punishment, particularly considering the high rate of civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. Therefore, not only were Israelis disappointed in the apparent failure of their own military to protect them, the entire international community was shocked by the amount of damage done in the name of that protection.

Large segments of the Arab world attributed Israel's withdrawal to the courage and steadfastness of Hezbollah's fighting machine under the leadership of Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah. Nasrallah became an instant celebrity in the Arab Middle East with the ability to project power in the region through the adoration of the Arab masses. A song was written as an ode to him by the Palestinian El Haija Brothers, entitled "The Hawk of Lebanon," which became the most popular hit in the Arab world. The Hawk of Lebanon has played at weddings and graduation ceremonies and is one of the most popular cell-phone ring tones in the region.

### **Ramifications for the Palestinians:**

Hezbollah's "spirit of resistance" and its charismatic leader strengthened the resolve of other militant groups such as the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) to continue their armed struggle against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and forego the route of diplomatic negotiations. Certainly, there are complex rationales for Hamas' popularity in the Palestinian areas. The most important element of their success was the bankruptcy of secular and/or nationalist Arab states such as Jordan and Egypt, now perceived as having traded their ideals for American dollars. Also, the failure of pan-Arabism to take root in the region rendered Islamism a viable alternative form of governance and ideology. The particular experience in the Palestinian territories of corruption, brutality,

and perceived pandering to Israeli security interests on the part of the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority drove the nail in the coffin of secular Arab leadership. The strength of other Islamist movements under the patronage of Iran and Syria has been an additional contributing factor. In all, the Lebanese conflict, in particular, demonstrated that Islamist movements could fight successfully against Israel.

For the most part, however, the course of Lebanese politics had a destabilizing influence on Palestine's internal political process. The Palestinian political arena became increasingly bifurcated between the security forces loyal to Mahmoud Abbas (supported by moderate Arab states and the United States) versus the Hamas government (backed by Iran and Syria).<sup>11</sup> The virtual civil war between these two factions left Hamas unable to generate sufficient support in the territories within its jurisdiction even to govern effectively; its plans for reform, economic development, and eventual statehood, like the more pressing struggle against Israel, were all waylaid. At the end of the day, the 2006 conflict in Lebanon removed the Palestinian cause from the spotlight of international media and public opinion. The lack of media coverage during such crucial times in Palestinian politics caused the Palestinians to suffer more than they benefited from the conflict in Lebanon.

The most ironic aspect of Nasrallah and his emulation by other Islamist movements is that the popularity of the type that he gained seldom translates into anything substantive in either political or strategic terms. Nasrallah's own headquarters and home underwent sustained bombing during the 2006 conflict and drove him underground for what may well be the rest of his life.<sup>12</sup> Since much of his aura emanated from his actual physical presence in the streets of Beirut and south Lebanon, his newly gained "underground" status has hindered his ability to effectively mobilize and lead a complex political network.

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<sup>11</sup> Hillel Frisch, "The Palestinians and the Second Lebanese War," BESA Perspectives Paper, No. 24, 4 January 2007, <http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/perspectives24.html>

<sup>12</sup> Lee Smith, "The Rising Popularity and Current Status of Hizballah Leader Nasrallah After the Lebanon War: Does it Matter?", *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Vol. 6, No. 11, 19 September 2006, <http://www.jcpa.org/brief/brief006-11.htm>

Another irony of Nasrallah's popularity is that his and Hezbollah's program for Lebanon will eventually be exposed as nothing short of a desire to impose Iranian Shi'a theocracy. Despite calls during the 2006 conflict that "we are all Hezbollah now," longstanding sectarian divisions within Lebanon cannot hide the fact that Christians of different denominations, as well as the Sunni, Druze, and Alawite, will not easily, if ever, be converted to a program that negates their fundamental identities. The recent surge in tension between Hezbollah's supporters and opponents on the streets of Beirut is concrete evidence of these divisions. Lebanese citizens do not want increased Iranian influence over their domestic politics in much the same way that the anti-Syrian parliamentary majority in Lebanon opposes increased Syrian influence. Syria first entered the Lebanese arena in 1976, and although it later removed its troops from the country, Syria's opponents in Lebanon have accused Damascus of orchestrating the assassinations of anti-Syrian politicians like Hariri and Gemayal. This has increased resentment against Syria (and its Lebanese allies) in many segments of the Lebanese political spectrum. The increase in sectarian violence following the 2006 conflict demonstrates that Hezbollah is not the most prudent remedy to the tragic ills of the Lebanese state.

#### **Role of the International Community:**

The international community has yet to play a positive role in resolving conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. For the most part, the international community has invested in the UNIFIL as a means to diffuse tensions. However, UNIFIL has been vehemently criticized for its incompetence, lack of neutrality, and even irrelevance. Israel has been consistently skeptical of the capacity of United Nations peacekeeping forces to take its place in southern Lebanon and alleviate concerns about the security of its northern community. The UNIFIL was established by the UN Security Council in 1978 and deployed on the Lebanese side of the border to monitor the cessation of hostilities along the Israeli-Lebanese border. Israelis have long bemoaned the performance of UNIFIL soldiers who they accuse of failing to promote Israeli security or neutralize the threat from armed militant factions operating in the security zone. Israel opposes the ongoing dialogue between UN peacekeepers and Hezbollah and has even accused UNIFIL

forces of collaborating with Hezbollah.<sup>13</sup> For example, on 7 October 2000, Hezbollah sparked a serious international incident when it kidnapped three IDF soldiers near a UNIFIL position. The UN's refusal to cooperate in Israel's investigation of the kidnappings prompted a strong Israeli accusation that UNIFIL personnel not only witnessed the event, but may even have been directly involved. Particularly infuriating to Israel was the fact that UN peacekeepers were found to have possession of video tapes of the incident. Despite the sensitive nature of these tapes, the UN refused to part with them. After lengthy negotiations, the tapes were ultimately handed over to Israel. They were, however, heavily edited, thus intensifying suspicions about UN involvement.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, the UN has thus far been the only international forum available for conflict resolution in Lebanon. The 2006 war in Lebanon ended with UN Security Council Resolution 1701 of 11 August 2006.<sup>15</sup> It calls for full cessation of hostilities, withdrawal of Israeli forces simultaneously with the deployment of Lebanese and UNIFIL forces throughout the southern region, disarmament of Hezbollah, full sovereignty of the Lebanese government, and the unconditional release of the abducted soldiers which gave rise to the conflict. The resolution also calls for a more "robust" mandate for UNIFIL and an increase in its numbers from 2,000 to 15,000 personnel. As of 8 January 2007, UNIFIL consists of 11,512 military personnel, including 9,756 troops along with a 1,756-strong maritime task force, assisted by 53 military observers from the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and supported by some 97 international civilian and 308 local civilian staff.<sup>16</sup> Its new mandate authorizes the right to:

take all necessary action in areas of deployment of its forces, and as it deems with its capabilities, to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Aluf Ben, "Israel Accuses UN of Collaborating with Hezbollah," *Haaretz*, 11 September 2005, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=623427>

<sup>14</sup> "What was the UNIFIL Scandal Involving Hezbollah and the UN Force?," *Palestine Facts*, Israel 1991 to Present UNIFIL-Hezbollah, [http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf\\_1991to\\_now\\_unifil\\_hezbollah.php](http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf_1991to_now_unifil_hezbollah.php)

<sup>15</sup> "Security Council Calls for End to Hostilities Between Hizbollah, Israel, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1701 (2006)," Permanent Ceasefire to be Based on Creation of Buffer Zone Free of Armed Personnel other than UN, Lebanese Forces, *United Nations Security Council SC/8808*, 11 August 2006, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8808.doc.htm>

<sup>16</sup> "United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon," *Lebanon, UNIFIL: Facts and Figures*, United Nations, <http://www.un.org/depts/dpko/missions/unifil/facts.html>

<sup>17</sup> James Bone and Richard Beeston, "After 31 Days of Fighting, UN Votes for Plan to Bring Peace to Lebanon," *Timesonline*, 12 August 2006, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,251-2309181,00.html>



UNIFIL has, both currently and in the past, accomplished a number of important humanitarian tasks such as clearing landmines, assisting displaced persons, and providing charitable assistance. However, one of the most significant deficits of the new UNIFIL mandate is with respect to its military component, particularly its unwillingness or inability to disarm Hezbollah. Israeli Lieutenant General (retired) Moshe Yaalon and Major General (reserve) Yaakov Amidror make the important point that “the UN has a very bad name in terms of confronting strong forces in areas where it is stationed.”<sup>18</sup> Instead, they argue, the primary mission of UNIFIL should be to help Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) disarm Hezbollah. As of 2005, according to a brief by the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Lebanese Armed Forces consist of a total of 72,100 personnel.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps increased personnel and better training would alleviate concerns about the LAF. After the 2006 conflict in Lebanon, the LAF deployed south of the Litani River for the first time since 1968. However, Hezbollah responded to UN Resolution 1701 by rejecting the call to put down its weapons. In any case, the Lebanese government, the Lebanese Armed Forces, and the United Nations admitted they would not disarm Hezbollah by force. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the opportunities and constraints of this new international force in order to determine its potential viability for conflict management in the region.

The United Nations has demonstrated that it does not have the military wherewithal to fight in situations where military force is necessary. If Hezbollah does not disarm voluntarily, peacekeepers may need to use military force and engage in combat, something the United Nations Security Council seems not to have the backbone to do.

Currently, UNIFIL personnel are derived from twenty-six countries including France, Germany, Turkey, and Indonesia.<sup>20</sup> This assortment of countries may be acceptable to the Arab world. However, the participation by some countries with poor relations with Israel has provoked diplomatic turbulence. For example, the situation was on the verge of crisis when French peacekeepers prepared to fire at two

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<sup>18</sup> Lieutenant General (ret.) Moshe Yaalon and Major General (res.) Yaakov Amidror, “An International Force in Lebanon: Advantages and Disadvantages,” *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Vol. 6, No. 4, 25 July 2006, <http://www.jcpa.org/brief/brief006-4.htm>

<sup>19</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Middle East Military Balance: Definition, Regional Developments and Trends*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Working Draft, Revised 23 March 2005, accessed 15 January 2007, [http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/050323\\_memilbaldefine%5B1%5D.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/050323_memilbaldefine%5B1%5D.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Current UNIFIL membership includes the 26 countries of Belgium, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey.

Israeli F-15 warplanes and two Israeli drones flying over southern Lebanon.<sup>21</sup> Israel's use of Lebanese airspace clearly violates United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701. However, at the same time, very little is being done to prevent Hezbollah from rearming. The UNIFIL must remain committed to neutrality and monitor violations of the resolution on both sides of the border, avoiding such incidents at all costs.

Third, in order to successfully prevent Hezbollah from rearming, it may be necessary for UNIFIL to deploy in areas beyond southern Lebanon. As suggested by Yaalon and Amidror, an international force should be stationed close to Beirut and at the border passages between Syria and deep in the Beka Valley.<sup>22</sup> Hezbollah's program to build an arsenal for future wars will probably not occur in southern Lebanon, territory that is more closely under the watchful eye of Israeli intelligence. In fact, it is easier for Hezbollah to import weapons across borders that are not monitored by external forces and then move them around to places far from the Israeli border for assembly, training, and storage. Israel can then concentrate its forces on securing its side of the border and its northern communities from future attacks.

Finally, the international community must continue to engage the parties, as well as their regional sponsors, in diplomatic negotiations. United Nations Resolution 1701 prohibits the presence of all foreign troops in Lebanon in order to increase the sovereignty of the Lebanese state. To ensure that undue influence by Syria and Iran in Lebanese politics is either decreased or fully eradicated, it is necessary for leading countries such as the United States, France, Egypt, and Jordan to coordinate their policies and offer incentives to parties in Lebanon to increase their allegiance to a Lebanese political entity, rather than to an external state.

To conclude, then, sustained conflict management on the basis of strong commitments by the international community is necessary to ensure that relations between Israel and Hezbollah do not

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<sup>21</sup> "UNIFIL Protests Israeli Flights Over Lebanon," *Reuters*, 17 November 2006, [http://today.reuters.com/news/articlenews.aspx?type=topNews&storyid=2006-11-17T164555Z\\_01\\_L17217297\\_RTRUKOC\\_0\\_US-LEBANON-UNIFIL.xml&src=rss](http://today.reuters.com/news/articlenews.aspx?type=topNews&storyid=2006-11-17T164555Z_01_L17217297_RTRUKOC_0_US-LEBANON-UNIFIL.xml&src=rss)

<sup>22</sup> Lieutenant General (ret.) Moshe Yaalon and Major General (res.) Yaakov Amidror, "An International Force in Lebanon: Advantages and Disadvantages," *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Vol. 6, No. 4, 25 July 2006, <http://www.jcpa.org/brief/brief006-4.htm>

deteriorate into violent conflict now or in the distant future. It is crucial to keep in mind that the conflict is one between an established, democratic state and an armed guerrilla movement. While Hezbollah may have considerable support in sections of southern Lebanon and among segments of the Shi'a Muslim population in the country, its very existence, particularly as an armed alternative, threatens the sovereignty of another established state (Lebanon) that seeks to promote its authority over all territory under its jurisdiction. Experience has shown that Israeli security is best protected by Israeli unilateral actions. If the international community wishes full Israeli support, it must alleviate Israeli concerns about vacating Arab territory in the absence of a diplomatic solution.

This article outlines the ongoing concerns of Israel, Lebanon, and the international community as well as some of the key lessons learned from the 2006 conflict in Lebanon. It also offers some practical suggestions for the international community to provide the most effective peacekeeping mechanism possible in the Lebanese theatre. Barring adoption of these types of changes and alternatives, it is likely that the next round of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah will erupt in the near future, possibly as early as the summer of 2007.

***(The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not CDFAI.)***