

Opening Remarks

Gabriel Siboni

Although the writing was on the wall for several years prior, it appears that time will show that the first day of the Second Lebanon War marked a watershed. The war presented the public in Israel with a clear picture of a threat that has changed radically. Before the war, the IDF had focused on combating Palestinian terrorism and on attempting to construct an updated understanding of warfare against the classical military threat; the war, however, revealed the full force of the threat coming from high trajectory fire.

Immediately after the war, the public atmosphere in Israel resonated of anger, frustration, and embarrassment. The expectation of a crushing victory, in the style of the Six Day War, was unfulfilled, and the heavy toll the war took on the home front and the length of the war (34 days) amplified the bad feelings. In Israel's public consciousness, the war was seen as a failure. The government commission of inquiry appointed to investigate the war, headed by Judge Eliyahu Winograd, endorsed this view. As a result of the harsh public criticism of the IDF's performance, Chief of Staff Dan Haloutz resigned; Minister of Defense Amir Peretz subsequently followed suit. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert continued in his post for another three years, but the consequences of the summer of 2006 cast a shadow over the rest of his term in office. Nonetheless, the finger pointing and self-accusations rampant after the Second Lebanon War did not allow for a clear examination of the war, and to a large extent, made it difficult to draw important conclusions.

The Second Lebanon War was Israel's wake-up call, prompting it to realize that under its very nose, the Iranian octopus had sent its long tentacles deep into Lebanon and was also laying the groundwork to do

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the same in the Gaza Strip. The enemy had despaired of being able to conquer Israel or parts of it, and had therefore turned its energy toward constructing extensive high trajectory fire capabilities that put most of Israel's population within range.

World War II was conducted with great intensity on both the battlefield and the civilian front. Churchill's understanding of what the future held in store moved him to deliver the famous speech in which he sought to prepare the citizens of Great Britain for the difficult times ahead. The citizens of Israel, who for years had been used to wars limited to the military front alone, lacked this sort of preparation. Now, however, the cycle has run its course, and Israel has returned to the former type of war in which the civilian front is a legitimate – if not the main – target of the enemy. This is a strategic, tactical, and operational change among Israel's enemies with far reaching implications, from military doctrine to force buildup.

The enemy's new application of force is simple and clear cut, relying on its fixed strategic asset: depth and mass. Inherent here is the enemy's understanding that the IDF will not remain long in the areas in which it maneuvers. In addition, it recognizes that its own stamina is infinitely greater than that of the IDF.

The State of Israel embarked on the Second Lebanon War without sufficient understanding of the threat and its implications. The self-flagellation and disappointment covered widely by the media left no room for conducting an appropriate, professional discussion. Expressions such as "failure," "stinging defeat," "a clear miss," and "colossal blunder," were bandied about freely. The memory of that summer is still fresh, as are the glumness and frustration played up by journalists and former IDF commanders competing with one another to see who could criticize the military's conduct most harshly.

This trend peaked with the Winograd Commission. Without having undertaken an honest, professional investigation about the change in the threat to Israel and its significance, and without defining the terms "victory" and "decision" it used so freely in the report, the Commission stated that the IDF did not win the war, not even isolated rounds. It almost seems that the Commission made its determination as if the war was a sporting event.

The presentations compiled here examine what can be learned from the Second Lebanon War, with emphasis on military-strategic contexts

and dialogue between the military and the political echelon. The war revealed more than a few failures in terms of the IDF's preparedness to deal with a widespread confrontation against an undercurrent threat. These failures stemmed not only from the lack of appropriate resources to enable the construction of a proper force – though these were indeed lacking – but also, and perhaps primarily, from the lack of inherent understanding of and coming to terms with what it means to face a different threat. The IDF was not the only element surprised. The country's citizens discovered that the civilian front is an active, integral part of the battlefield.

Today the State of Israel faces a meaningful security challenge. The Second Lebanon War clearly revealed Iran's involvement as a central factor in leading the war against Israel. Iran's nuclear program is the strategic arm of the struggle, alongside Iran's drive to establish operational strongholds via Hizbollah in the north and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and possibly also in Judea and Samaria in the future. These present a conventional threat whose destructive force over time is no less potent than that of a nuclear threat.

Since the war more than a few lessons have been learned. The Israeli public now understands that the IDF cannot stop high trajectory fire only by damaging the enemy's numerous, decentralized, and scattered launch capabilities. The IDF can, however, damage many significant capabilities and thus remove many areas of Israel from the circle of threat, though the enemy will still have enough residual firepower to draw on until the last hours of fighting.

On the basis of this insight, a two-tiered model of response is developing, for the civilian front and military front.

1. On the civilian front, the construction of defensive and survival capabilities aimed at minimizing the damage from enemy fire as much as possible is underway. No less important is both the realization that the public must understand the philosophy guiding the army's response and the need to improve the public's level of preparedness to absorb fire until the end of the fighting.
2. On the military front, the IDF must attain two main achievements:
 - Shortening the time span and minimizing the damage of any future war. To this end, the army is training to operate the two primary tools at its disposal: the ground maneuver and firepower, used jointly.

- Rendering a destructive, painful fire blow that will leave the enemy occupied for years to come with costly and resource-greedy reconstruction, alongside the stinging memory of the price one pays for challenging Israel. One may assume that this will help postpone the next confrontation by some years. The Second Lebanon War supplied a small taste, both to us and to the enemy, of the IDF's capabilities to render such a blow.

Three years after the war, it seems that the public uproar about the war has subsided somewhat. The dust of the war has settled, and changes in personnel have been made in Israel's top ranks of the military as well as its political leadership. The IDF and the public as a whole have experienced a kind of corrective experience thanks to the achievements of the security services in Operation Cast Lead against Hamas in the Gaza Strip (December 2008-January 2009). Taken together, these elements allow a more sober examination of the Second Lebanon War – its consequences, ramifications, and – above all – lessons that may be learned from it.

Three years after, in a slow but steady process, the true picture of the war emerges. Despite the lack of preparedness, the opening conditions, and the shortcomings revealed in the army's performance, the IDF supplied the State of Israel with a strategic achievement of the highest order. The level of the army's functioning frustrated Israel's citizens, but was enough to attain a significant achievement. Alongside deterring Hizbollah, all the layers of the threat were revealed, and it was possible for the IDF to plan the future operational response against this threat.

The articles compiled here are based on presentations at a conference at INSS to mark three years since the Second Lebanon War. Major General (ret.) Giora Eiland presented his insights from the war, focusing on the strategic context relating to the decision making processes of that war compared to those we will have to use in future wars. The second presentation, by then-Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Moshe Kaplinsky, supplied a panoramic view of the processes experienced by the IDF before the war and the subsequent processes of learning the requisite lessons. Dr. Oded Eran then examined the diplomatic campaign, which culminated in Security Council Resolution 1701. Professor Eyal Zisser surveyed the path that Hizbollah took on its way to war, its conduct during the war, and the repercussions of the war for Hizbollah, including what has happened to the organization since the war. The final presentation

was by Lieutenant General Dan Haloutz, chief of staff during the Second Lebanon War.

Some of the authors participated in the war and in the decision making process that shaped the events, while others followed the war from the side as commentators and academics. Each of them presents a different aspect of the total picture, and together they construct a set of opinions, outlooks, and important lessons it behooves us to learn.