



## PERSPECTIVES

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# The 1982 Lebanon War and Its Repercussions for Israel's National Security

by Dr. Hanan Shai

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The conquest of southern Lebanon in Operation Peace for Galilee, and Israel's long sojourn in the area, had political and military justification. But defects in the IDF's deployment during the operation, and later in its protracted security activity, culminated in the May 2000 hurried withdrawal that continues to this day to negatively affect Israel's national security.

Israel's 1982 Operation Peace for Galilee had two political objectives. The first, which was realistic and achievable, was to restore normalcy to Israel's northern towns and villages after sustained rocket attacks had disrupted life there for many years. The second, which was unrealistic, was to expel the Syrian and Palestinian armed forces from Lebanon and secure a peace treaty with a second Arab country—a goal that required complete Christian control over Lebanon.

In line with these objectives, the IDF was ordered to conquer southern Lebanon up to the Beirut-Damascus Highway (about 40 kilometers from the border) to rid the area of terrorists and weaponry and cut Syria off from Lebanon.

With the aim of reaching the highway before it was captured by a nearby Syrian division, a brilliant, wily idea was proposed: that an Israeli tank division make use of Mount Jabal Barouk, which was considered impassable by armor and hence not well protected, to rapidly penetrate deep into Lebanon. Its mission was to reach the Beirut-Damascus Highway 48 hours from the beginning of the operation, cut Syria off from Lebanon, and surprise and defeat the terrorists in the south of the country by gaining access to the rear of their defensive deployment.

Despite the cleverness of the idea and the fact that the operation had been conceived and planned years in advance, the IDF's performance in conquering south Lebanon was rather poor. Its forces reached the highway three weeks late, and even that required slow advances that went on for more than two weeks after the ceasefire came into effect. An inquiry conducted later by the IDF (the Wald Report) found that the many failures in the IDF's performance repeated failures that had emerged nine years earlier in the Yom Kippur War, and which had not been remedied despite the army's promise to do so.

Moreover, as in a movie that is rewound, in preparing for its stay in southern Lebanon at the end of Operation Peace for Galilee, the IDF repeated the same mistakes it made in its deployment along the Suez Canal in the year preceding the Yom Kippur War.

Like post-June 1967 Sinai, southern Lebanon after Operation Peace for Galilee was an ideal territory for a frontal "protective holding effort"—that is, a secondary effort to create a defensive alignment that would identify an attacking force and warn of its movements as early as possible, thus enabling an advance deployment to stop the attackers when they reached the area. In south Lebanon this involved the early identification of terrorists making their way to the Israeli border and the conveying of a warning of their progress to the "protection effort" forces at the border so as to allow them to intercept the terrorists while they were still on the Lebanese side of the border security fence.

To fulfill its task of "identifying without being identified," a protection effort should be uncomplicated, mobile, and without a signature. In the Lebanese case, it should have been based (as it is within the Palestinian Authority) on units of *mista'arvim* (Israeli soldiers disguised as Arabs) that were tailored to the sector. However, as occurred along the Bar-Lev Line in Sinai, the Lebanon frontal holding effort comprised a broad and prominent military signature of strongholds and frontal logistical facilities, along with a regular routine of operational and administrative traffic between the positions within Lebanon and between Lebanon and Israel that was highly vulnerable to guerrilla attacks.

The IDF's visible signature grew ever more prominent the more the IDF, in response to the rise in casualties, thickened its protection rather than train its forces as *mista'arvim* in counterinsurgency warfare and reducing them to the minimum needed to gather intelligence on terrorists making their way to Israel.

In a decisive war aimed at achieving rapid victory, it is impossible to avoid sacrificing the lives of soldiers—as few as possible—to save many more lives, both soldiers and civilians. However, in a war of attrition that takes the form of an ongoing, erosive process that does not lead to victory, the winner is not necessarily the side that inflicts more casualties on its enemy but the one that

limits its own casualties as much as possible. The IDF ignored this rule in Lebanon just as it ignored it after the Six Day War in its flawed deployment in Sinai. That deployment led to the protracted, difficult, fruitless, and thus unnecessary War of Attrition (1969-70), as Defense Minister Moshe Dayan characterized it.

The defense establishment rejected criticism of the IDF's conduct in Lebanon with the claim that risking soldiers' lives was necessary to protect the Galilee's civilian population. That claim was in turn rejected by the Four Mothers—ordinary women who, through the massive public pressure they generated, brought about the IDF's May 2000 ignominious withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the opening of a new, lackluster chapter in the history of Israel's national security.

After the withdrawal, the attrition of IDF soldiers in Lebanon—which, as noted, could have been reduced with a proper professional deployment—was the main factor that influenced the crafting of the combat doctrines of both Hezbollah (and later Hamas) and the IDF.

Hezbollah exploited Lebanon's mountainous territory to block the movement of mobile ground forces along the few existing traffic arteries with a stationary terror army operating within a dense network of fortified, well-obstructed, and tunnel-based defenses equipped with antitank weapons and rockets/missiles for standoff fire at Israel. These defenses were built in areas densely populated by civilians whom Hezbollah made use of as human shields.

Hezbollah's (and later Hamas's) stationary army would pose a triple military-political threat to Israel: attrition of the home front under rocket fire and attacks issuing from offensive underground tunnels; the infliction of heavy casualties on the IDF's maneuvering ground forces, which would be compelled to operate in costly frontal battles aimed at breaching the fortified routes and defenses from which the fire on the home front was executed; and damage to Israel's international status and the legitimacy of its struggle if it struck the human shields. Hezbollah thereby confronted Israel with three cruel options: high attrition of its soldiers in order to stop the attrition of its civilians; civilian attrition to avoid the attrition of its soldiers; or the prevention of the attrition of both soldiers and civilians by destroying rockets and tunnels from afar at the price of widespread collateral damage and the attendant damage to its international status.

Israeli society's high sensitivity to casualties led the IDF to replace its traditional doctrine of rapid victory, which entailed defeating the enemy by destroying its combat capabilities, with a new doctrine that seeks to force the enemy to surrender quickly via the infliction of psychological shock and awe

induced by technological feats that are spectacular in their accuracy and lethality.

This doctrine seems to have been based on a well-known idea of Michel Foucault's: that power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined. Thus the IDF's superiority was translated into massive data collection and the building of a rich "bank" of "quality targets." By gradually destroying those targets in their order of importance, processes were meant to be generated that would lead to the enemy's surrender.

While it is doubtful that the political echelon formally approved this doctrine, it was applied during the 2006 Second Lebanon War. Yet despite the emptying of the Lebanese "target bank" of its "Foucault treasures," Israel's northern towns and villages remained under rocket fire for 34 days. Eight years later, in Operation Protective Edge, the doctrine of emptying the "target bank" was applied against Hamas—a much smaller and weaker terror army than Hezbollah. Yet Hamas was able to subject the south of Israel and the outskirts of the central region to rocket fire for 51 days.

Under the IDF's traditional doctrine of victory, each round of fighting ended with the enemy's defeat and the creation of improved initial operative conditions (which were not always exploited) for the next round of fighting. Because a war of attrition does not afford decisive military achievements, it is impossible to end it with significant political and military arrangements, including better initial conditions for the next round. Hence each round of attrition warfare turns out to be (as might be expected) more difficult and protracted than its predecessor. This may be why, in recent years, Israel has been forced to accept the ongoing suffering of its civilians along the Gaza border and the buying of quiet with Qatari money.

Although Israel is no longer threatened with destruction through conquest by maneuvering state armies, the new strategic threat it faces is not to be dismissed: the infliction of extremely heavy damage by powerful and massive rocket/missile fire, some of it extremely accurate and lethal, carried out by small, stationary terror armies.

Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi seems to be the first to try to extract Israel from the security trap into which it has fallen by exploiting its technological advantage to readopt a combat doctrine based on victory. This doctrine is aimed, according to Kochavi's own description, at concluding a war with a rapid, clear, and unequivocal victory that will destroy the enemy's combat capabilities with minimum harm to both IDF soldiers and human shields.

While the technologies needed to implement this doctrine are available or can be acquired relatively quickly, they will necessitate huge budgets. Amid the COVID-19 crisis, it is doubtful whether such budgets will be allocated anytime soon.

*Dr. Hanan Shai is lecturer in strategic, political, and military thought in the Political Science Department at Bar-Ilan University.*