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Israel

# The Limits of Might

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**This morning (13 Sept. - ed) the Israeli newspapers headlines announced that Israeli PM, Ehud Olmert, agreed to the formation of a fact-finding commission, headed by a senior judge, in order to evaluate all the aspects, political as well as military, of the Israeli war in Lebanon. This commission is replacing the various non-independent inquiry commissions previously established by the PM and the army.**

It is not yet what a majority of Israelis, and more and more senior politicians are demanding - a national independent inquiry commission, having juridical power, like after the 1973 war or the massacres of Sabra and Shatilla, in 1982. Last week, 60,000 civilians, led by reserve soldiers and officers who have fought in Lebanon, made this demand loud and clear, and one can expect that such a commission may still be established.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/clash.jpg>]

Peace demonstrators clash with police in Tel Aviv

If one had still doubts about the pathetic failure of the Israeli military offensive in Lebanon, the decision of the Prime Minister put the things straight: 33 days of colossal use of military force didn't bring any substantial result, except massive destruction and horrible massacres. Haaretz editorial is unambiguous on the failure of the Israeli offensive: **"There is no room for mistake: despite the attempts of the Prime Minister and the IDF generals to count the IDF achievements, towards its coming end, the war is perceived in the area and in the world, but also in the eyes of the Israeli public, as a painful defeat, with negative far reaching implications..."** [1]

Political as well as military initiatives are usually evaluated according to their initial objectives. A first problem we are confronted with, is the lack of clearly defined objectives, or, more precisely, the fact that the stated objectives of the war have changed many times. First, the declared aim was to release the Israeli prisoners of war captured by Hezbollah. Then, few days after the beginning of the Israeli offensive, PM Olmert announced that the objective was to eradicate Hizbollah, not less! The method suggested by the Israeli High command was characteristic of the narrow-mind of military senior personnel and their inability to learn anything from history, including their own one: massive terror operations against Lebanon, in order to "teach the Lebanese government and people" what is the price of letting Hezbollah act from Lebanese territory. The result of indiscriminating destructions and killings in Lebanon (including Beirut airport, more than hundred bridges, power stations etc) was to create a massive pro-Hizbollah sentiment among the Lebanese people, including large sectors of the Christian population.

Confronted with the growing sympathy towards Hizbollah and his sensational ability to hit the heart of Israel with hundreds of rockets, the declared objective was reduced to "destroy the ability of Hizbollah to send rockets on the Israeli territory." Two weeks after the colossal air strikes on Hizbollah, the number of rockets hitting Israel, and provoking serious damages to all the northern part of the country is even bigger than before! Another failure. Finally - for today - the objective has once again been enlarged: to restore the Israeli capacity of dissuasion and its image as a local military super-power.

This objective too has not been achieved, on the contrary. As Zwy Barel, Haaretz expert for the Arab world explains: **"Why would someone in Lebanon be dissuaded, when he is witnessing its houses destroyed, the children of its neighbors and their parents killed by hundreds, and having almost no chance to start school-year on time? He is now convinced that the war is not anymore against Hizbollah only, but against Lebanon, against himself, whether he is Christian, Druze or Shiite."** [2] In his article, Barel suggests to the Israeli leaders to try to learn something from the Palestinian experience: **"Whoever doesn't understand the formula can ask himself... why after more than 150 killed in the last three weeks, they are still trying one Qassam, one more rocket. Why the logic of the IDF, which calculates its strength by the quantity of steel at its disposal, why this logic**

doesn't work on them..."

The fact that the Israeli army has not been able to achieve even one objective, and that after a month Hizbollah is still able to strike hundreds of rockets on Israel is perceived in Israel as a national tragedy. **"Does someone think we have won?" asks Yoel Marcus, "who believe that the promises of Ehud Olmert at the beginning of the war to eradicate Hezbollah and to finish with the threat of rockets on Israel, was fulfilled?"** [3]

But the conclusion drawn by the military high command, most of the Israeli leadership and many Israeli commentators was still to increase the offensive, to mobilize more reserve units, to try to invade and occupy parts of Lebanon. The same Yoel Marcus, signor commentator in Haaretz, concluded his article on the total failure of the Israeli offensive with the following appeal: **"It is now clear that the fight is not on Lebanon. We are not confronted with a local organization, but the arm linked and acting on behalf Iran and Syria., Al Qaeda and the followers of the path which started with the Twin Towers. Israel is not only defending Kiryat Shmoneh, Hedera and may be Tel Aviv; it became, against its own will, a partner in the war against Islam fundamentalism, what Bush names "the axis of evil", in this part of the world... The conclusion must be to take a big breath and to initiate a fight with all the might we have at our disposal, in the air and in the ground, until we are able to neutralize Hezbollah, as a military militia on our borders. We must reach a cease-fire when we are the winning side, to show them that even the small Satan has teeth..."** [4]

Finally, after more destructions and killings - according to international organizations, more than 80% of the bombs were thrown in the last week of combat - and many more casualties in the Israeli army, Olmert has been obliged to accept the UN Security Council resolution calling not for a cease-fire, but for a "stop to hostilities". The Israeli army is still active in Lebanon, but it is definitely an army which has suffered a defeat.

Often, during demonstrations in the Palestinian occupied territories, and witnessing the massive use of force and the brutality of the Israeli soldiers against civilians, we use to tell them: "Big heroes! Your war is against unarmed women and children, and you dare calling it "confrontation or even "a battle"! The kind of wars you are strong at is wars against helpless civilians! But when you will be confronted with real fighters, you will not know how to fight, and you will either die or run away like rabbits!" And indeed Israeli soldiers are experiencing a war with well trained and well motivated fighters, and proving to be completely un-efficient. The number of casualties is huge, compared to the relatively small quantity of Hizbollah fighters, and one should ask what it may be if Israel dare to attack Syria, not only from the air, where definitely Israel has tremendous superiority.

The Israeli experience is obviously reminding the US experience in Iraq: a powerful army, but too powerful, too self-confident, too arrogant and too spoiled to be able to fight with the efficiency that the huge means at its disposal may have led to expect they will demonstrate.

The Israeli political as well as military establishment is, right now divided; between those who want an immediate revenge, in order to show to the world, and to the US neo-conservative leadership, that it has still its capacity of deterrence, and can play the role allocated to the IDF in the global non-ending preemptive war, and those who believe that Israel needs first to re-organize its armed forces, in order to be able to win. The demand for a reaches and a new opportunity to how what the guys are "really able to do" is very strong; the demands to put order in the Israeli mess, is strong too.

In the next few months, we will know which of these currents will win, depending among other, on the conclusions of the various fact-finding and inquiry commissions. But in both cases, there will be a second round, if only because it is part of the neo-conservative strategy of global non-ending preemptive war for the re-colonization of the world and the establishment of a "Great Middle East" under full US hegemony.

And we too shall prepared for this next round.

[1] Haaretz editorial, August 8

[2] Haaretz, August 6, 2006

[3] Haaretz editorial, August 8

[4] idem