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All Glory Is Fleeting

Insights from the Second Lebanon War

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Prepared for the United States Joint Forces Command

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Summary

Preliminary Notes

As with many Arabic names, *Hizballah* appears with several spellings (e.g., *Hezbollah*). The former is used throughout for consistency with the exception of references in direct quotations.

A Hizballah raid along the Lebanon-Israel border on July 12, 2006, resulted in the capture of two IDF soldiers and others killed and wounded. The response from Jerusalem was both quick and violent, surprising Hizballah's leadership and triggering a monthlong conflict that, in retrospect, has been labeled the Second Lebanon War. (Lebanese tend to call the conflict the *July War*. The term *Second Lebanon War* is used throughout the following pages to avoid confusion.) The event left the IDF a chastened force and Israel an introspective nation. An independent commission charged with reviewing that military's performance soundly criticized the nation's prime minister, defense minister, and IDF chief of staff. The latter two lost their positions.¹ The prime minister's fate is undetermined at the time of this writing.

Israel was not alone in suffering the results of the conflict. The brief war damaged Hizballah's self-appointed status as Lebanon's protector. Casualties among its fighters were far higher than were those suffered by the IDF. Many of Lebanon's citizens lost homes; too many were killed. The nation's economy suffered yet another brutal blow. However, the difficulties that Israel and its military confronted are the primary focus of this book.

The IDF's efforts to learn from the war and correct recognized deficiencies began immediately. This book draws on information pro-

¹ "It Could All Soon Change" (2007).

vided by serving IDF personnel during a March 2007 conference held in Tel Aviv, interviews with active-duty and retired IDF officers, and written sources. The analysis first reviews identified shortfalls, then offers an external perspective to provide further thoughts on sources of difficulties and analyze what the conflict offers the U.S. military in the way of lessons that might assist it as it confronts operational challenges today and in the future.

Postwar Analysis

Israeli reviews of the Second Lebanon War revealed concerns that impact all three levels of war (tactical, operational, and strategic) and virtually every aspect of military operations. A strategy of relying on air power alone was universally condemned as wrong-headed. Campaign plans for operations in southern Lebanon were found to be outdated. IDF doctrine and the theoretical concepts on which it rested were thought to have been infiltrated by an “intellectual virus,” the consequences of which were guidance that was so obtuse as to be largely incomprehensible. The intifada operations that had dominated IDF concerns in the years before the war were allowed to take precedence over training for other types of missions, one effect of which was a loss of combined arms and joint proficiency, with crippling effects on the battlefields of southern Lebanon. The quality of officer training had atrophied as well. Commanders were consumed by a desire to avoid casualties in their ranks. Those leaders too often did not move forward to inspire and determine battlefield conditions, the result of which was, in part, conflicts among orders, which frustrated soldiers and exposed them to unnecessary risk. Lack of training and the failure to prepare for anything other than intifada tasks also led to some officers’ unrealistic expectations about the quality of intelligence they would receive

regarding the enemy and terrain. Further, Israel seems to have been unprepared to deal with the level of sophistication developed by its erstwhile enemy as a military force, perhaps assuming that little had changed in the six years since the IDF left Lebanon. This is in stark contrast to the care with which Hizballah trained and prepared its defenses in readiness for an attack by Israel.

The difficulties resulting from these various issues were compounded by a failure of political and military leaders at the highest echelons to properly employ the means available to them. Overreliance on air power is but one example. Combining bellicose pronouncements with attacks on Lebanese civilian targets, top Israeli government officials pursued a strategy of coercing the government in Beirut to force Hizballah to meet Israeli demands. It was a strategy based on a gross misunderstanding of the relationship between Lebanon's government and the leadership of the forces confronting the IDF. Attacks on Lebanese civilians had the negative effect of alienating groups that could have had some influence on Hizballah or that might have been able to wield desired influence in the years succeeding the conflict. Israelis, once masters of the operational art, seem to have miscomprehended the very nature of the conflict at hand. Military and political leaders did not correctly draw on their national assets in the service of strategic objectives, nor did those in top IDF positions confront their civilian overseers with the hard facts and difficult decisions that were essential to prevailing. Shortfalls were many; the failures were, at times, systemwide. That Israel has been its own harshest critic—and one willing to share its problems openly—offers hope for considerable improvement and opportunity for better understanding the modern conflict environment.

Implications for the Present and Future

The offerings that may be taken in the way of potential lessons learned are no less far ranging than the observations presented here. They seem, in some cases, obvious, but woe to the military or political leader who believes that his or her own country is somehow invulnerable to the difficulties harshly brought to light in 2006 southern Lebanon or for the Russians in Chechnya at the close of the 20th century. Other lessons are less apparent. A brief summary of these observations follows.

Clarity and Simplicity Are Essential to Military Thinking and the Guidance That Comes from That Thinking

The intellectual virus that many in the IDF fear has infiltrated their military's thinking has both domestic and international roots. Israel's own theorists seem to have overlooked the need to ensure that these ideas were accessible to those whom the armed forces must train. Imported concepts, such as effect-based operations, came under attack as having failed to meet the test of combat conditions. There is a need to recognize the inherent value of simplicity and clear prose when writing doctrine and developing ideas that ultimately will influence the men and women actually confronting real-world challenges.

There Is a Need to Broaden Understanding of What Constitutes an Insurgency

Israeli leaders seem not to realize that the situations in the occupied territories and southern Lebanon demonstrate many characteristics found in insurgencies. Representatives of the U.S. government have been accused of similarly not recognizing the rise of an insurgency in Iraq in late 2003 and early 2004. Granted, present definitions hinder identifying post-Cold War insurgencies, but the cost

of limited perception or ignoring telltale signs today is having to face a stronger, bolder, and better-established resistance tomorrow.

Militaries Must Be Capable of Operating Across the Spectrum of Conflict

Time is a resource always in short supply for a military leader. There are never sufficient hours to train for all the contingencies that might confront a unit nor even to fully prepare an organization for any one contingency. Recognizing commonalities among various mission types helps to address the challenge. Training for flexibility is another concern. No military can afford to rely on units so specialized that they deploy only to contingencies for which they are specifically tailored. Armed forces must instead be general practitioners familiar with the skills of the specialist.

Joint Operations Remain Essential

In the months prior to the July–August 2006 war, the Israeli Air Force unilaterally declared that it would no longer support Israel's ground forces in a fixed-wing aircraft close air support (CAS) role. Other strategic missions were thought to take precedence. That decision was found to be unsupportable when war broke out in July 2006. Today's operational environments are unavoidably joint ones. Rather than reducing emphasis on joint operations, there is a need to improve what are, in some respects, relationships still in their adolescent stage. Multinational and interagency workings likewise demand constant improvement.

Leaders Need Training, Too

Israel recognized that far too many of its difficulties during the Second Lebanon War were failures of leadership. The actions and judgments of the prime minister, defense minister, and many commanders

at echelons from IDF chief of staff to those below brigade demonstrated, in one way or another, that more attention to educating leaders and their staffs is necessary. There were tactical failures: It was reported that tactical-level commanders in too many cases never left their command posts to cross into southern Lebanon and gauge conditions at the front. There were operational-level shortfalls: Fears of soldier casualties first stopped attacks and later slowed them to the pace of bulldozers constructing new roads. There were strategic misjudgments: Expectations regarding what could realistically be expected of air power were naïve. A military has an obligation to train its leaders just as commanders at the highest echelons must mentor their political masters regarding the capabilities and limitations of the nation's armed forces. And those civilian leaders must be willing to listen.

It Is Important Not to Overreact to Failure

The IDF has dramatically increased its commitment to training for conventional warfare in the aftermath of July and August 2006. It has directed the purchase and fielding of an antimissile system to protect its vehicles, reevaluated its doctrine, and changed its command structure. These adaptations to the lessons taken from the Second Lebanon War are likely to provide benefits, but there is a need to exercise caution. Lessons from the past are of value only if molded to the needs of the future. A military that does not balance looking backward with constant glances at the future risks preparing only for the war last fought.

A Few Other Observations

Three other lessons merit note:

- National boundaries should not constrain intelligence responsibilities. Hizballah exemplifies the complexity of the contemporary intelligence arena: Itself a nonstate actor, it influences and is

influenced by Iran and Syria. National intelligence organizations must ensure that analysts are not limited by internal allocation of responsibilities that preclude their sharing vital information with each other.

- Concerns regarding casualties are but one factor influencing operations: Oversensitivity to friendly-force casualties is frequently a characteristic of units joining today's coalitions. That sensitivity can make such an addition more of a tactical burden than benefit. As political rather than military factors often dictate the composition of coalitions, political and military leaders alike need to compensate for the challenges that this oversensitivity imposes on U.S. leaders in the field.
- Today's armed forces must be ready to meet domestic as well as international defense responsibilities: Hizballah's rocket attacks on northern Israel caused civilian casualties and precipitated mass evacuations of threatened areas. Although the threats are of a different character, the lesson to be learned is a shared one: The U.S. military may be called on to assist domestic authorities during future disasters, natural or otherwise. Development of plans, the conduct of rehearsals and exercises, and other preparations should receive attention before rather than as a reaction to such eventualities.