Chapter Title: Introduction and Background

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Introduction and Background

> Hizballah was ready; the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces were] not, and that is disappointing. . . . They were not ready on three levels—the tactical, operational, and strategic— . . . stemming from many reasons: budget, lack of time, being busy in the occupied territories. Still, you have to look at the tactical, operational, and strategic problems. Come on—We were confronting the equivalent of one commando battalion in the Syrian military. We have to do better.
>
> —*IDF Major General (ret.) Uri Sagie*[1]

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.

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[1] Sagie (2007).

Historical Overview

The Hizballah fighters executed their July 12, 2006, attack with deadly efficiency. It was a limited tactical action with dramatic strategic impact. *Jane's Intelligence Review* concisely summarized the incendiary event and its immediate consequences:

> At 0905 local time, two IDF armoured [HMMWVs, or high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles] were hit by at least one roadside bomb and rocket-propelled grenades fired by a squad of IR [Islamic Resistance] fighters hidden in dense undergrowth on the Israeli side of the border fence, 1.5 km northwest of the Lebanese village of Aitta Shaab. Three IDF soldiers were killed in the assault and three wounded, with another two abducted by the IR team. The ambush site was well chosen, falling into a "dead zone" at the bottom of a wadi between the border towns of Zarit and Shetula out of sight of nearby IDF posts, allowing the IR team to cross the border fence undetected. [See Figure 1.1, left circle.] The IDF had belatedly planned to erect a camera at the site the following week. IR fire support teams staged a diversionary bombardment of nearby IDF outposts and Zarit and Shetula with mortars and Katyusha rockets. The IDF discovered that two of its soldiers were missing some 30 minutes after the attack. At least one Merkava tank and an IDF platoon in armoured personnel carriers crossed the border in pursuit of the IR abductors. At around 1100, a Merkava tank struck a massive improvised explosive device (IED) consisting of some 200–300 kg of explosive, one of many IEDs planted by the IR at potential infiltration routes along the Blue Line [the border between Israel and Lebanon]. The tank was destroyed in the blast, killing all four crew members. An eighth soldier was killed in heavy fighting with local IR combatants, constituting the highest Israeli fatality toll in a single incident against Hizbullah since September 1997. Ehud Olmert,

Figure 1.1
Map of Lebanon

SOURCE: (U) CIA (1986).

the Israeli prime minister, declared the abduction "an act of war" and blamed the Lebanese government. "Our response will be very restrained," he promised. "But very, very, very painful." A bewildered Lebanese government, which knew nothing of Hizbullah's plans beforehand, announced that it "was unaware of the operation, does not take responsibility for it and does not endorse it.[2]

The magnitude of Israel's response appears to have come as a shock to Hizballah's leadership. The organization's deputy secretary general later related, "We were expecting the Israelis would respond at

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[2] Blanford (2006a).

the most by bombing for a day or two or some limited attacks."[3] The character of the Israeli military's reaction also puzzled other observers but for different reasons. For example, reserve mobilization took place more than two weeks after the initial Hizballah raid. Significant ground action was delayed in the apparent expectation that air action alone could accomplish the country's strategic objectives. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert made those objectives clear in his address to the Knesset five days after the July 12 attack:

> The return of the hostages, Ehud (Udi) Goldwasser and Eldad Regev; A complete cease fire; Deployment of the Lebanese army in all of southern Lebanon; Expulsion of Hizbullah from the area; and Fulfillment of United Nations Resolution 1559.[4]

Whether due to a belief that Hizballah's military capabilities had changed little since the IDF's 2000 withdrawal, failures of intelligence, or both, Israel did not expect the levels of resistance met when it eventually launched its ground offensive. Southern Lebanon's terrain was in part responsible. It is rife with hills scored by steep-sided, deep valleys. These gorges are themselves cut by innumerable wadis that hamper dismounted and mounted ground maneuver alike or render it altogether impossible in some locations. Villages perch atop hills that dominate surrounding terrain, providing any occupying them with

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[3] "Scale of Israeli Attack 'Surprised' Hezbollah" (2006). In her review of this book, Karla Cunningham noted that Hizballah's professed surprise could have been an effort at mitigating the antipathy directed at the organization in the aftermath of the destruction that the Lebanese people suffered.

[4] "Address to the Knesset by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert" (2006). Among the seven primary elements of the resolution are "calls for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias" and support for "the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory" (UNSC, 2004).

excellent observation, superb fields of fire,[5] and considerable protection against small arms and indirect engagement. These factors combined with some leaders' uncharacteristic sheepishness to make the July 17 attacks against the communities of Marun ar Ra's and nearby Bint Jbail far more time consuming than expected. (See Figure 1.1, right circle.) Initial stretches of road from the Lebanon-Israel border northward were heavily mined and covered by antitank weapons by fighters well trained in how best to engage Israeli military vehicles. Three Merkava tanks suffered missile penetrations; six IDF soldiers died, and another 18 were wounded before the army declared Marun ar Ra's secure after seven days of combat.[6] Fighting for the nearby village of Bint Jbail was no less vicious.[7]

The July 28–31, 2006, period finally saw the mobilization of approximately 15,000 Israeli reservists as the army prepared for further combat in such villages as Aita el-Shaab, Taibe, Al Adisa, and Marjayoun. The IDF had reached the Litani River, commonly considered the northern border of southern Lebanon, by August 10 and surrounded many of the enemy. The bloodiest day of the war would prove to be its last, as the opposing sides struggled for control of ground that could be used as a bargaining chip during postconflict negotiations or to house defensive positions after the pending ceasefire.[8]

Combat in Wadi Salouqi provides insights regarding the extent of confusion that plagued Israeli operations during the war. On August 10, 2006, IDF leaders sent an armored column crawling down the steep banks of the ravine by that name to attack the town of Ghan-

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[5] Exum (2006, pp. 2–3).

[6] Exum (2006, p. 9).

[7] Pfeffer (2006); Moores (undated).

[8] Moores (undated).

dourieh on its opposite side. Orders to abort reached the soldiers just as their lead vehicles reached the chasm's bottom. Unit members made a careful withdrawal back to their starting point only to be told that they were to once again attack along the same route two days later. Wise to Israel's approach, the enemy lay in wait, small arms and antitank weapons at the ready. An IED destroyed the column commander's Merkava tank as it reached the wadi floor. The explosion signaled initiation of the ambush. Missiles slammed into 11 other Merkavas. Eight crew members perished, dying with four of their comrades on foot or mounted in other vehicles. Ghandourieh nevertheless fell the next day, August 13, 2006, only to be abandoned when its captors departed less than 48 hours later after Israel signed UN Security Council resolution 1701.[9]

Hizballah's tactical success surprised most in Israel and many elsewhere. It did not surprise members of the group itself who had spent years preparing southern Lebanon for defense and training to fight on the rugged terrain. Attacks on the Israeli homeland were equally well prepared for. Short- and medium-range rockets destined for sites south of the border had been dug in and camouflaged so effectively that IDF soldiers literally walked across the top of the fake stone used to conceal them without detection of what lay beneath.[10] Hizballah would ultimately fire roughly 4,000 rockets and missiles at military and civilian targets in Israel.[11] Fifty-three civilian dead would be among the casual-

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[9] UNSC (2006); Exum (2006, p. 11); Blanford (2006a).

[10] Cohen (2007); Exum (2006, p. 4).

[11] Exum (2006, p. 5).

ties. Wounded ran into the thousands, and approximately 2,000 Israeli dwellings either suffered severe damage or were ruined.[12]

Other Hizballah weapons included AK-47 rifles, machine guns, rocket-propelled–grenade launchers, and anti-armor capabilities that included Saggar, Kornet-E, and Metis-M antitank guided missiles.[13] It was these missiles that would prove the insurgents' most effective killers during ground combat. They would, in the end, destroy 14 Israeli tanks; mines would ravage another six.[14] Even the IDF's most advanced model, the Merkava 4, proved vulnerable.

The fighters using these weapons were better trained, better led, and showed more discipline than many in the regular armed forces of countries Israel had confronted in earlier wars. This is less surprising when one considers how Hizballah develops its military proficiency. It recruits much like a national military, develops its own doctrine, and exchanges personnel with regional nation-states. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) representatives conduct surprise inspections to gauge Hizballah readiness, visits likely first and foremost motivated by a desire to ensure that Iranian funds and weapons are not being wasted. They also serve as forums for the passage of military lessons, often, one suspects, with the Iranians learning more than they offer. Hizballah's command structure provides centralized guidance, plans, and policies to subordinate units. Yet its tactical commanders are trained to operate in the absence of continuous oversight, a situation that complicated information gathering for the IDF. These commanders are equipped with sophisticated means of communication

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[12] Rubin (2007). Casualty estimates differ. Mohamad Bazzi (2006) put the number of dead at 43.

[13] Blanford (2006a); "Hizbullah's Intelligence Apparatus" (2006).

[14] "Israel Introspective After Lebanon Offensive" (2006).

that allow them to monitor even Israeli frequency-hopping radios.[15] Leaders conduct postoperation debriefings and prepare after-action reports for improving training effectiveness similar to those in professional militaries.

Weapons and other systems provided by Iran and Syria included unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and rocket launchers in such quantity that Hizballah possessed greater numbers than Syria itself did.[16] Another capability, the shore-launched C-802 antiship missile, killed four sailors aboard the Israeli Navy's *Hanit* Sa'ar 5–class corvette off the Lebanese coast on July 14, 2007.[17] Israelis found Hizballah's internal security far better than what it was used to when dealing with Palestinian organizations.[18]

Hizballah tactical forces consisted of two general types:

> The first was the full-time military force of experienced, well-trained, highly disciplined and motivated guerrilla fighters, aged from their late twenties to late thirties. Numbering a few hundred, the full-timers were deployed in the network of bunkers and tunnels in south Lebanon as well as other locations. These fighters, equipped with military uniforms, were split into teams of 15 to 20 and chiefly were responsible for artillery rockets, advanced anti-tank missiles and sniping. The second wing was the "village guard" units, many of them veteran guerrilla combatants from the 1990s when the IDF occupied south Lebanon. Although they share the same high degree of motivation and discipline as their full-time comrades, the village guards were an

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[15] Bazzi (2006).

[16] Shapira (2007); Amir (2007).

[17] "Israel Probes Naval Missile Defense Failure" (2006); Eshel (2006).

[18] "Hizbullah's Intelligence Apparatus" (2006).

irregular force of part-time personnel. The guards remained in their villages after most civilians had fled north. In the event of an IDF ground invasion, the village guards would provide successive layers of defence consisting of fresh, well-armed fighters able to take advantage of their intimate knowledge of the local terrain to interdict and frustrate the IDF advance.[19]

Not all those fighting were members of Hizballah. Some had other political affiliations or were not associated with any particular political group.[20]

Israel's initial air strikes concentrated on Hizballah rocket and missile capabilities, particularly those medium- and long-range weapons with the potential to reach deep into Israel. Other attacks hit infrastructure targets throughout Lebanon: Thirty-eight percent of the attacks sought to deny Hizballah reinforcement and resupply via the destruction or damaging of bridges, roads, and other transportation infrastructure. It was an ineffective approach, given the foe's pre-stocking of supplies, arms, and ammunition.[21] Hizballah units were also trained to operate without external support. Their command-and-control system was likewise structured for semi-autonomous operations:

> Hizballah organized its fighters into small, self-sufficient teams capable of operating independently and without direction from higher authority for long periods of time. In general—but not exclusively—Hizballah's fighting units were squad-sizedelements of seven to ten men. These squad-sized elements were afforded a great deal of autonomy during the fighting but were able to remain in contact with their higher units through a complex system of

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[19] Blanford (2006a).

[20] Exum (2006, p. 5).

[21] Amir (2007).

communications that included an elaborate system of radio call signs as well as a closed cellular phone system. At the lower levels, fighters made use of two-way radios for communication within the villages and between isolated fighting positions. . . . Hizballah's tactical leaders not only were given the freedom to make quick decisions on the battlefield, but did so with a degree of competence that rivaled their opposite numbers in the IDF.[22]

Air targeting also sought to punish Lebanese citizens for Hizballah's aggressions, perhaps in an attempt to bring its pressure to bear on Lebanon's elected officials. Israeli decisionmakers took for granted that applying pressure on the government in Beirut would force its officials into coercing Hizballah to meet Israel's strategic demands, this despite its also having not done so during conflict 10 years before:

> Statements by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert indicated that Israel was holding the entire nation of Lebanon responsible for the kidnapping and that the Israeli response would be felt by all segments of the Lebanese population. Accordingly, the IDF targeted not only positions in southern Lebanon but also the Beirut airport, all roads leading out of Lebanon, and even neighborhoods populated by Lebanese uniformly opposed to Hizballah.[23]

This belief that Beirut was responsible for—or at least could significantly influence—events in the south was confirmed in a formal release from Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "Israel views the sovereign Lebanese Government as responsible for the action that originated on its soil and for the return of the abducted soldiers to Israel."[24] The

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[22] Exum (2006, p. 5).

[23] Exum (2006, p. 9).

[24] "Special Cabinet Communique" (2006).

assumption was unsupportable. Hizballah operated with few restraints and much autonomy in southern Lebanon. A reasonable argument could be made that Iran and Syria more greatly influenced the organization than did a Lebanese government whose sovereign authority only notionally extended south of the Nahr el Litani river. Mark Heller of Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies concluded that Lebanon was not an enemy but rather "a theater in which the enemy operates."[25]

The resultant air strikes inspired considerable anti-Israeli sentiment both within Lebanon and internationally. Among the most contentious was a July 30 bombing of an apartment building in Qana in which least 28 people were killed. It was a brutal reminder of the 91 civilians who died on April 18, 1996, in a nearby refugee camp when Israeli artillery fired at Hizballah targets during Operation Grapes of Wrath.[26] Perhaps responding to the consequent international outrage, Israel's Prime Minister Olmert apologized to the Lebanese people on July 31, 2006, stating that it was Hizballah rather than the country's citizenry against whom Israel was fighting.[27]

The Second Lebanon War ended when all participants agreed to abide by UN Security Council resolution 1701 on August 14, 2006. To summarize, the 33-day conflict's legacy included the following:

- approximately 1 million displaced civilians
- more than 1,000 Lebanese dead, the majority of whom were civilians

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[25] Erlanger (2007b).

[26] Sharp et al. (2006, pp. 42, 44); Shadid (2006). Shadid states that 106 people were killed in 1996 and cites the Lebanese government as reporting at least 57 individuals killed in the 2006 attack.

[27] Sharp et al. (2006, p. 42).

- hundreds of Hizballah insurgents killed
- thousands of Israeli and Lebanese homes destroyed
- other structures damaged, including much of Lebanon's transportation infrastructure targeted by the Israeli Air Force (IAF)
- IDF losses of 119 military personnel.[28] Approximately "50% of Israeli casualties can be attributed to anti-tank missiles, 25% to small arms and mines, around 10% to friendly fire, 10% to rocket fire, and 5% to accidents."[29]
- Israel having been struck by roughly 4,000 Hizballah rockets and missiles, including 250 on the last day of the war.[30]

It was with notable understatement that a senior Israeli officer concluded, "I cannot say we have deepened our deterrent image."[31]

Book Structure

Chapter Two reviews shortfalls in Israel's preparation for and performance during the Second Lebanon War as identified by serving and retired officers and written sources. Chapter Three follows with a summary of several IDF responses to these identified difficulties. Chapter Four steps back to consider what other areas might merit concern in addition to those identified in Chapter Two and whether the Israeli responses noted in Chapter Three are appropriate in light of these additional observations. The book concludes with an analysis of the Second

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[28] Exum (2006, pp. 5, 7); Bazzi (2006); "Israel/Hizbollah/Lebanon" (2006). Some sources put the total at 120 killed; see, e.g., Ghattas (2006).

[29] Moores (undated).

[30] Exum (2006, p. 12).

[31] "Israel Introspective After Lebanon Offensive" (2006).

Lebanon War's implications for the United States and other militaries now and in the years to come.