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MACHOSTAN. The battery of generals that appears every evening on all TV channels in order to give a “briefing” (a.k.a. propaganda) to the nation, are all male. They bring with them a token woman, a real beauty who bears the title of “army spokesperson” and serves mostly for diversification. The commentators on TV are, of course, tough guys, and so are almost all the other speakers.

The rule of males is underlined by the fact that the Foreign Ministry is headed by a woman. Since the foundation of Israel, the Ministry of Defense has been the realm of he-men, who look with disdain upon the Foreign Office, which is always considered feeble and effete. Now, too, the Foreign Office is a sickly limb of the “defense establishment”. Tsipi Livni, who once aroused hopes, is a parrot of the army – as Condoleezza Rice is the parrot of Bush.

War is, of course, a matter for men. That’s how it was from the beginning of the human race, and perhaps even before. A tribe of baboons, for example, when faced with danger, automatically adopts a defensive formation: old males, women and children in the center, young males in a circle around them. There is only one difference between them and us: their leader is always the wisest and most experienced of the tribe.

The love of the human male for war – a phenomenon we have had the opportunity to observe from close up these last few days – is connected not only with this biological heritage. War assures the total dominance of the males over society. It also assures the total dominance of the generals over the state.

If we believed that that would change with a government headed by civilians, we were obviously wrong. The opposite is true: the civilians who pose as war-leaders are no better than the generals. A veteran general might even have learned something from his experience.

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I am going now to say something I did not think I would ever utter: It is quite possible that we would not have slid into this foolish war if Ariel Sharon were in charge. Fact: he did not attack Hizbullah after the withdrawal in 2000. One attempt was enough for him. Which proves again that there is nothing so bad that something worse cannot be found.

The lust for war also explains the talking choir of the hundreds of ex-generals, who think and talk in unison in favor of the war. A cynic would say: what's the big deal, after all it's the army that gave them their standing in society. They are important only as long as the conflict between Israel and the Arab world continues. The conflict guarantees their status. They have no interest whatsoever in its resolution.

But the phenomenon is more profound. The army is the crucible for senior officers. It shapes their world outlook, their attitude and style. Apart from the settlers, the senior officers' corps – in and out of uniform – is today the only ideological party in Israel and therefore has a huge influence. It can easily gobble up a thousand little functionaries like Amir Peretz before breakfast.

This is why there is no real self-criticism. At the beginning of the fifth week, the slogans are again: Forwards! To the Litani! Further! Stronger! Deeper!

AUGUST 12, 2006

# What the Hell has happened to the Army?

SO WHAT has happened to the Israeli army? This question is now being raised not only around the world, but also in Israel itself. Clearly, there is a huge gap between the army's boastful arrogance, on which generations of Israelis have grown up, and the picture presented by this war.

Before the choir of generals utters their expected cries of being stabbed in the back – “The government has shackled our hands! The politicians did not allow the army to win! The political leadership is to blame for everything!” – it is worthwhile to examine this war from a professional military point of view.

(It is, perhaps, appropriate to interject at this point a personal remark. Who am I to speak about strategic matters? What am I, a general? Well – I was 16 years old when World War II broke out. I decided then to study military theory in order to be able to follow events. I read a few hundred books – from Sun Tzu to Clausewitz to Liddel-Hart and on. Later, in the 1948 war, I saw the other side of the medal, as a soldier and squad-leader. I have written two books on the war. That does not make me a great strategist, but it does allow me to voice an informed opinion.)

The facts speak for themselves:

- On the 32nd day of the war, Hizbullah is still standing and fighting. That by itself is a stunning feat: a small guerilla organization, with a few thousand fighters, is standing up to one of the strongest armies in the world and has not been broken after a month of “pulverizing”. Since 1948, the armies of Egypt, Syria and

Jordan have repeatedly been beaten in wars that were much shorter. As I have already said: if a light-weight boxer is fighting a heavy-weight champion and is still standing in the 12th round, the victory is his – whatever the count of points says.

- In the test of results – the only one that counts in war – the strategic and tactical command of Hizbullah is decidedly better than that of our own army. All along, our army’s strategy has been primitive, brutal and unsophisticated.

- Clearly, Hizbullah has prepared well for this war – while the Israeli command has prepared for a quite different war.

- On the level of individual fighters, the Hizbullah are not inferior to our soldiers, neither in bravery nor in initiative.

THE MAIN guilt for the failure belongs with General Dan Halutz. I say “guilt” and not merely “responsibility”, which comes with the job. He is living proof of the fact that an inflated ego and a brutal attitude are not enough to create a competent Chief-of-Staff. The opposite may be true.

Halutz gained fame (or notoriety) when he was asked what he feels when he drops a one-ton bomb on a residential quarter and answered: “a slight bang on the wing.” He added that afterwards he sleeps well at night. (In the same interview he also called me and my friends “traitors” who should be prosecuted.)

Now it is already clear – again, in the test of results – that Dan Halutz is the worst Chief-of-Staff in the annals of the Israeli army, a completely incompetent officer for his job.

Recently he has changed his blue Air-Force uniform for the green one of the land army. Too late.

Halutz started this war with the bluster of an Air-Force officer. He believed that it was possible to crush Hizbullah by aerial bombardment, supplemented by artillery shelling from land and sea. He

believed that if he destroyed the towns, neighborhoods, roads and ports of Lebanon, the Lebanese people would rise and compel their government to remove Hizbullah. For a week he killed and devastated, until it became clear to everybody that this method achieves the opposite – strengthens Hizbullah, weakens its opponents within Lebanon and throughout the Arab world and destroys the worldwide sympathy Israel enjoyed at the beginning of the war.

When he reached this point, Halutz did not know what to do next. For three weeks he sent his soldiers into Lebanon on senseless and hopeless missions, gaining nothing. Even in the battles that were fought in villages right on the border, no significant victories were achieved. After the fourth week, when he was requested to submit a plan to the government, it was unbelievably primitive.

If the “enemy” had been a regular army, it would have been a bad plan. Just pushing the enemy back is hardly a strategy at all. But when the other side is a guerilla force, this is simply foolish. It may cause the death of many soldiers, for no practical result.

Now he is trying to achieve a token victory, occupying empty space as far from the border as possible, after the UN has already called for an end to the hostilities. (As in almost all previous Israeli wars, this call is being ignored, in the hope of snatching some gains at the last moment.) Behind this line, Hizbullah remains intact in their bunkers.

HOWEVER, THE Chief-of-Staff does not act in a vacuum. As Commander-in-Chief he has indeed a huge influence, but he is also merely the top of the military pyramid.

This war casts a dark shadow on the whole upper echelon of our army. I assume that there are some talented officers, but the general picture is of a senior officers corps that is mediocre or worse, grey and unoriginal. Almost all the many officers that have appeared on TV are unimpressive, uninspiring professionals, experts on covering

their behinds, repeating empty clichés like parrots.

The ex-generals, who have been crowding out everybody else in the TV and radio studios, have also mostly surprised us with their mediocrity, limited intelligence and general ignorance. One gets the impression that they have not read books on military history, and fill the void with empty phrases.

More than once it has been said in this column that an army that has been acting for many years as a colonial police force against the Palestinian population – “terrorists”, women and children – and spending its time running after stone-throwing boys, cannot remain an efficient army. The test of results confirms this.

AS AFTER every failure of our military, the intelligence community is quick to cover its ass. Their chiefs declare that they knew everything, that they provided the troops with full and accurate information, that they are not to blame if the army did not act on it.

That does not sound reasonable. Judging from the reactions of the commanders in the field, they clearly were completely unaware of the defense system built by Hizbullah in South Lebanon. The complex infrastructure of hidden bunkers, stocked with modern equipment and stockpiles of food and weapons was a complete surprise for the army. It was not ready for these bunkers, including those built two or three kilometers from the border. They are reminiscent of the tunnels in Vietnam.

The intelligence community has also been corrupted by the long occupation of the Palestinian territories. They have got used to relying on the thousands of collaborators that have been recruited in the course of 39 years by torture, bribery and extortion (junkies needing drugs, someone begging to be allowed to visit his dying mother, someone desiring a chunk from the cake of corruption, etc.) Clearly, no collaborators were found among the Hizbullah, and without them intelligence is blind.

It is also clear that Intelligence, and the army in general, was not ready for the deadly efficiency of Hizbullah's anti-tank weapons. Hard to believe, but according to official figures, more than 20 tanks were hit.

The Merkava ("carriage") tank is the pride of the army. Its father, General Israel Tal, a victorious tank general, did not want only to build the world's most advanced tank, but also a tank that provided its crew with the best possible protection. Now it appears that an anti-tank weapon from the late 1980s that is available in large quantities, can disable the tank, killing or grievously wounding the soldiers inside.

THE COMMON denominator of all the failures is the disdain for Arabs, a contempt that has dire consequences. It has caused total misunderstanding, a kind of blindness of Hizbullah's motives, attitudes, standing in Lebanese society etc.

I am convinced that today's soldiers are in no way inferior to their predecessors. Their motivation is high, they have shown great bravery in the evacuation of the wounded under fire. (I very much appreciate that in particular, since my own life was saved by soldiers who risked theirs to get me out under fire when I was wounded.) But the best soldiers cannot succeed when the command is incompetent.

History teaches that defeat can be a great blessing for an army. A victorious army rests on its laurels, it has no motive for self-criticism, it degenerates, its commanders become careless and lose the next war. (see: the Six-day war leading to the Yom Kippur war). A defeated army, on the other side, knows that it must rehabilitate itself. On one condition: that it admits defeat.

After this war, the Chief-of-Staff must be dismissed and the senior officer corps overhauled. For that, a Minister of Defense is needed who is not a marionette of the Chief-of-Staff. (But that concerns

the political leadership, about whose failures and sins we shall speak another time.)

We, as people of peace, have a great interest in changing the military leadership. First, because it has a huge impact on the forming of policy and, as we just saw, irresponsible commanders can easily drag the government into dangerous adventures. And second, because even after achieving peace we shall need an efficient army – at least until the wolf lies down with the lamb, as the prophet Isaiah promised. (And not in the Israeli version: “No problem. One only has to bring a new lamb every day.”)

THE MAIN lesson of the war, beyond all military analysis, lies in the five words we inscribed on our banner from the very first day: “There is no military solution!”

Even a strong army cannot defeat a guerilla organization, because the guerilla is a political phenomenon. Perhaps the opposite is true: the stronger the army, the better equipped with advanced technology, the smaller are its chances of winning such a confrontation. Our conflict – in the North, the Center and the South – is a political conflict, and can only be resolved by political means. The army is the instrument worst suited for that.

The war has proved that Hizbullah is a strong opponent, and any political solution in the North must include it. Since Syria is its strong ally, it must also be included. The settlement must be worthwhile for them too, otherwise it will not last.

The price is the return of the Golan Heights.

What is true in the North is also true in the South. The army will not defeat the Palestinians, because such a victory is altogether impossible. For the good of the army, it must be extricated from the quagmire.

If that now enters the consciousness of the Israeli public, something good may yet have come out of this war.

AUGUST 17, 2006

# From mania to depression

THIRTY THREE days of war. The longest of our wars since 1949. On the Israeli side: 154 dead – 117 of them soldiers. 3,970 rockets launched against us, 37 civilians dead, more than 422 civilians wounded.

On the Lebanese side: about a thousand dead civilians, thousands wounded. An unknown number of Hizbullah fighters dead and wounded.

More than a million refugees on both sides.

So what has been achieved for this terrible price?

“GLOOMY, HUMBLE, despondent,” was how the journalist Yossef Werter described Ehud Olmert, a few hours after the cease-fire had come into effect.

Olmert? Humble? Is this the same Olmert we know? The same Olmert who thumped the table and shouted: “No more!” Who said: “After the war, the situation will be completely different than before!” Who promised a “New Middle East” as a result of the war?

THE RESULTS of the war are obvious:

- The prisoners, who served as *casus belli* (or pretext) for the war, have not been released. They will come back only as a result of an exchange of prisoners, exactly as Hassan Nasrallah proposed before the war.

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- Hezbollah has remained as it was. It has not been destroyed, nor disarmed, nor even removed from where it was. Its fighters have proved themselves in battle and have even garnered compliments from Israeli soldiers. Its command and communication structure has continued to function to the end. Its TV station is still broadcasting.

- Hassan Nasrallah is alive and kicking. Persistent attempts to kill him failed. His prestige is sky-high. Everywhere in the Arab world, from Morocco to Iraq, songs are being composed in his honor and his picture adorns the walls.

- The Lebanese army will be deployed along the border, side by side with a large international force. That is the only material change that has been achieved.

This will not replace Hezbollah. Hezbollah will remain in the area, in every village and town. The Israeli army has not succeeded in removing it from one single village. That was simply impossible without permanently removing the population to which it belongs.

The Lebanese army and the international force cannot and will not confront Hezbollah. Their very presence there depends on Hezbollah's consent. In practice, a kind of co-existence of the three forces will come into being, each one knowing that it has to come to terms with the other two.

Perhaps the international force will be able to prevent incursions by Hezbollah, such as the one that preceded this war. But it will also have to prevent Israeli actions, such as the reconnaissance flights of our Air Force over Lebanon. That's why the Israeli army objected, at the beginning, so strenuously to the introduction of this force.

IN ISRAEL, there is now a general atmosphere of disappointment and despondency. From mania to depression. It's not only that the politicians and the generals are firing accusations at each other, as we foresaw, but the general public is also voicing criticism from every possible angle. The soldiers criticize the conduct of the war,

the reserve soldiers gripe about the chaos and the failure of supplies.

In all parties, there are new opposition groupings and threats of splits. In Kadima. In Labor. It seems that in Meretz, too, there is a lot of ferment, because most of its leaders supported the war dragon almost until the last moment, when they caught its tail and pierced it with their little lance.

At the head of the critics are marching – surprise, surprise – the media. The entire horde of interviewers and commentators, correspondents and pressstitutes, who (with very few exceptions) enthused about the war, who deceived, misled, falsified, ignored, duped and lied for the fatherland, who stifled all criticism and branded as traitors all who opposed the war – they are now running ahead of the lynch mob. How predictable, how ugly. Suddenly they remember what we have been saying right from the beginning of the war.

This phase is symbolized by Dan Halutz, the Chief-of-Staff. Only yesterday he was the hero of the masses, it was forbidden to utter a word against him. Now he is being described as a war profiteer. A moment before sending his soldiers into battle, he found the time to sell his shares, in expectation of a decline of the stock market. (Let us hope that a moment before the end he found the time to buy them back again.) Victory, as is well known, has many fathers, and failure in war is an orphan.

FROM THE deluge of accusations and gripes, one slogan stands out, a slogan that must send a cold shiver down the spine of anyone with a good memory: “the politicians did not let the army win.”

Exactly as I wrote two weeks ago, we see before our very eyes the resurrection of the old cry “they stabbed the army in the back!”

This is how it goes: At long last, two days before the end, the land offensive started to roll. Thanks to our heroic soldiers, the men of

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the reserves, it was a dazzling success. And then, when we were on the verge of a great victory, the cease-fire came into effect.

There is not a single word of truth in this. This operation, which was planned and which the army spent years training for, was not carried out earlier, because it was clear that it would not bring any meaningful gains but would be costly in lives. The army would, indeed, have occupied wide areas, but without being able to dislodge the Hizbullah fighters from them.

The town of Bint Jbeil , for example, right next to the border, was taken by the army three times, and the Hizbullah fighters remained there to the end. If we had occupied 20 towns and villages like this one, the soldiers and the tanks would have been exposed in 20 places to the mortal attacks of the guerillas with their highly effective anti-tank weapons.

If so, why was it decided, at the last moment, to carry out this operation after all – well after the UN had already called for an end to hostilities? The horrific answer: it was a cynical – not to say vile – exercise of the failed trio. Olmert, Peretz and Halutz wanted to create “a picture of victory,” as was openly stated in the media. On this altar the lives of 33 soldiers (including a young woman) were sacrificed. The aim was to photograph the victorious soldiers on the bank of the Litani. The operation could only last 48 hours, when the cease-fire would come into force. In spite of the fact that the army used helicopters to land the troops, the aim was not attained. At no point did the army reach the Litani.

For comparison: in the first Lebanon war, that of Sharon in 1982, the army crossed the Litani in the first few hours. (The Litani, by the way, is not a real river anymore, but just a shallow creek. Most of its waters are drawn off far from there, in the north. Its last stretch is about 25 km distant from the border, near Metulla the distance is only 4 km.)

This time, when the cease-fire took effect, all the units taking part

had reached villages on the way to the river. There they became sitting ducks, surrounded by Hizbullah fighters, without secure supply lines. From that moment on, the army had only one aim: to get them out of there as quickly as possible, regardless of who might take their place.

If a commission of inquiry is set up – as it must be – and investigates all the moves of this war, starting from the way the decision to start it was made, it will also have to investigate the decision to start this last operation. The death of 33 soldiers (including the son of the writer David Grossman, who had supported the war) and the pain this caused their families demand that!

BUT THESE facts are not yet clear to the general public. The brain-washing by the military commentators and the ex-generals, who dominated the media at the time, has turned the foolish – I would almost say “criminal” – operation into a rousing victory parade. The decision of the political leadership to stop it is now being seen by many as an act of defeatist, spineless, corrupt and even treasonous politicians.

And that is exactly the new slogan of the fascist Right that is now raising its ugly head.

After World War I, in similar circumstances, the legend of the “knife in the back of the victorious army” grew up. Adolf Hitler used it to carry him to power – and on to World War II.

Now, even before the last fallen soldier has been buried, the incompetent generals are starting to talk shamelessly about “another round,” the next war that will surely come “in a month or in a year,” God willing. After all, we cannot end the matter like this, in failure. Where is our pride?

THE ISRAELI public is now in a state of shock and disorientation. Accusations – justified and unjustified – are flung around in all

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directions, and it cannot be foreseen how things will develop.

Perhaps, in the end, it is logic that will win. Logic says: what has thoroughly been demonstrated is that there is no military solution. That is true in the North. That is also true in the South, where we are confronting a whole people that has nothing to lose anymore. The success of the Lebanese guerilla will encourage the Palestinian guerilla.

For logic to win, we must be honest with ourselves: pinpoint the failures, investigate their deeper causes, draw the proper conclusions.

Some people want to prevent that at any price. President Bush declares vociferously that we have won the war. A glorious victory over the Evil Ones. Like his own victory in Iraq.

When a football team is able to choose the referee, it is no surprise if it is declared the winner.

AUGUST 19, 2006

# The 155th victim

WITH A few words, a Lebanese army officer destroyed, the day before yesterday, the illusion that Israel had achieved anything in this war.

At a televised Lebanese army parade that was also broadcast on Israeli TV, the officer read a prepared text to his assembled troops, who were about to be deployed along the Lebanese-Israeli border.

This is what he said in Arabic: “Today, in the name of the comprehensive will of the people, you are preparing to be deployed on the soil of the wounded South, side by side with the forces of your Resistance and your people, which have amazed the world with their steadfastness and blown to pieces the reputation of the army about which it has been said that it is invincible.”

In simple language: “the comprehensive will of the people” – the will of all parts of the Lebanese public, including the Shiite community. “Side by side with the Resistance”: side by side with Hizbullah. “Which have amazed the world with their steadfastness”: the heroism of the Hizbullah fighters. “Blown to pieces the reputation of the army about which it has been said that it is invincible”: the Israeli army.

Thus spoke a commander of the Lebanese army, the deployment of which along the border is being celebrated by the Olmert-Peretz government as a huge victory, because this army is supposed to confront Hizbullah and disarm it. Israeli commentators have created the illusion that this army would be at the disposal of the friends of the US and Israel in Beirut, such as Fuad Siniora, Saad Hariri and Walid Jumblatt.

It is no accident that this item was drowned in the deluge of TV

blabber, like a stone thrown into a well. After broadcasting the item itself, no meaningful debate about it took place. It was erased from the public mind.

But not only the balloon of the redeeming Lebanese army has been punctured. The same has happened to the multi-colored second balloon that was to serve as an Israeli achievement: the deployment of the international force that would protect Israel from Hizbullah and prevent its re-armament. As the days pass, it becomes increasingly clear that this force will be, at best, a mish-mash of small national units, without a clear mandate and “robust” capabilities. The commando raid carried out by our army today, in blatant violation of the cease-fire, will certainly not attract more international volunteers for the job.

So what remains of all the “achievements” of this war? A good question.

AFTER EVERY failed war, the cry for an official investigation goes up in Israel. Now there is a “trauma”, much bitterness, a feeling of defeat and of a missed opportunity. Hence the demand for a strong Commission of Inquiry that will cut off the heads of those responsible.

That’s what happened after the first Lebanon war, which reached its climax in the Sabra and Shatila massacre. The government refused any serious inquiry. The masses that gathered in what is now called “Rabin Square” (the mythical 400 thousand) demanded a judicial inquiry. The public mood reached boiling point and in the end the Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, gave in.

The Kahan Commission that investigated the event condemned a number of politicians and army officers for “indirect” responsibility for the massacre, even though its own factual conclusions would have justified a much stronger condemnation. But Ariel Sharon was, at least, removed from the Defense Ministry.

Before that, after the trauma of the Yom Kippur war, the government also refused to appoint a Commission of Inquiry, but public pressure forced its hand. The fate of the Agranat Committee, which included a former Chief-of-Staff and two other senior officers, was rather odd: it conducted a serious investigation, put all the blame on the military, removed from office the Chief-of-Staff, “Dado” Elazar – and acquitted the political leadership of any blame. This caused a spontaneous public uproar. In its wake, Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan – predecessors of Olmert and Peretz as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense – were forced to resign.

This time, too, the political and military leadership is trying to block any serious investigation. Amir Peretz even appointed a whitewash-committee, packed with his cronies. But public pressure is building up, and chances seem good that in the end there will be no way out but to appoint a judicial inquiry committee.

Generally, the one who appoints a commission of inquiry and sets its terms of reference predetermines its conclusions. Under Israeli law, it is the government which decides to appoint such a commission and determines its terms of reference. (As a Member of the Knesset, I voted against these paragraphs.) But the composition of the commission is determined by the President of the Supreme Court. If a commission is set up, I assume the present President of the Court, Aharon Barak, a highly respected chief justice, will appoint himself for the job.

IF INDEED such a commission is set up, what will it investigate?

The politicians and generals will try to restrict the inquiry to the technical aspects of the conduct of the war:

- Why was the army not prepared for a war against guerillas?
- Why were the land forces not sent into the field in the two first weeks?
- Did the military command believe that the war could be won

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by the Air Force alone?

- What was the quality of the intelligence?
- Why was nothing done to protect the rear, when the rocket threat was known?
- Why were the poor in the North left to their fate, after the well-to-do had left the area?
- Why were the reserve units not ready for the war?
- Why were the emergency arsenals empty?
- Why did the supply system not function?
- Why did the Chief-of-Staff practically depose the Chief of the Northern Command in the middle of the war?
- Why was it decided at the last moment to start a campaign that cost the lives of 33 Israeli soldiers?

The government will probably attempt to widen the investigation and to put part of the blame on its predecessors:

- Why did the Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon governments just look on when Hizbullah was growing?
- Why was nothing done as Hizbullah built up its huge stockpile of rockets?

All these are serious questions, and it is certainly necessary to clear them up. But it is more important to investigate the roots of the war:

- What made the trio Olmert-Peretz-Halutz decide to start a war only a few hours after the capture of the two soldiers?
- Was it agreed with the Americans in advance to go to war the moment a credible pretext presented itself?
- Did the Americans push Israel into the war, and, later on,

demand that it go on and on as far as possible?

- Was it Condoleezza Rice who decided in fact when to start and when to stop?

- Did the US want to get us entangled with Syria?

- Did the US use us for its campaign against Iran?

This, too, is not enough. There are more profound and important questions.

THIS WAR has no name. Even after 33 days of fighting and six days of cease-fire, no natural name has been found. The media use a chronological name: Lebanon War II.

This way, the war in Lebanon is separated from the war in the Gaza Strip, which has been conducted simultaneously, and which is going on unabated after the cease-fire in the North. Do these two wars have a common denominator? Are they, perhaps, one and the same war?

The answer is: certainly, yes. And the proper name is: the War for the Settlements.

The war against the Palestinian people is being waged in order to keep the “settlement blocs” and annex large parts of the West Bank. The war in the North was waged, in fact, to keep the settlements on the Golan Heights.

Hizbullah grew up with the support of Syria, which controlled Lebanon at the time. Hafez al-Assad saw the return of the Golan to Syria as the aim of his life – after all, it was he who lost them in the June 1967 war, and who did not succeed in getting them back in the October 1973 war. He did not want to risk another war on the Israel-Syria border, which is so close to Damascus. Therefore, he patronized Hizbullah, so as to convince Israel that it would have no quiet as long as it refused to give the Golan back. Assad jr. is continuing with his fathers legacy.

Without the cooperation of Syria, Iran has no direct way of supplying Hizbullah with arms.

The solution is on hand: we have to remove the settlers from there, whatever the cost in wines and mineral water, and give the Golan back to its rightful owners. Ehud Barak almost did so, but, as is his wont, lost his nerve at the last moment.

It has to be said aloud: every one of the 154 Israeli dead of Lebanon War II (until the cease-fire) died for the settlers on the Golan Heights.

THE 155TH Israeli victim of this war is the “Convergence Plan” – the plan for a unilateral withdrawal from parts of the West Bank.

Ehud Olmert was elected four months ago (hard to believe! only four months!) on the platform of Convergence, much as Amir Peretz was elected on the platform of reducing the army and carrying out far-reaching social reforms.

In the course of the war, Olmert still announced that he would implement the “Convergence”. But the day before yesterday he conceded that we could forget about it.

The Convergence was to remove 60 thousand settlers from where they are, but to leave the almost 400 thousand settlers in the West Bank (including the Jerusalem area). Now this plan has also been buried.

What remains? No peace, no negotiations, no solution at all for the historic conflict. Just a complete deadlock for years, at least until we get rid of the duo Olmert & Peretz.

All over Israel, they are already talking about the “Next Round”, the war that will at long last eliminate Hizbullah and punish it for besmirching our honor. That has become, so it seems, a self-evident matter. Even Haaretz treats it as such in its editorials.

In the South, they don't speak about the “Next Round” because

the present round is endless.

To have any value whatsoever, the investigation must expose the real roots of the war and present the public with the historic choice that has become clear in this war, too: Either the settlements and an endless war, or the return of the occupied territories and peace.

Otherwise, the investigation will only provide more backing for the outlook of the Right, to wit: we only have to expose the mistakes that have been made and correct them, then we can start the next war and win.

AUGUST 23, 2006

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# Good morning, Elijahu!

A STORY has it that Oscar Wilde once attended the premiere of a colleague's play and every few minutes raised his hat. When asked about this odd behavior, he replied: "I am a courteous person. I raise my hat when I meet an old acquaintance."

If I wore a hat, I would have to raise it every few minutes these days when I view TV talk shows, listen to the radio or read the papers. I keep meeting things I wrote years ago, and especially things I have written since the beginning of this war.

For example: for decades I have warned again and again that the occupation is corrupting our army. Now the papers are full of learned articles by respected commentators, who have discovered – surprise! surprise! – that the occupation has corrupted our army.

In such cases we say in Hebrew: "Good morning, Elijahu!" You have woken up at long last.

If there is a touch of irony in my remark, I do apologize. After all, I wrote in the hope that my words would convince the readers – and especially people of the Israeli establishment – and that they would pass them on. When this is happening now, I am quite happy about the plagiarism.

But it is important to spell out how the occupation has "corrupted our army". Otherwise it is just an empty slogan, and we shall learn nothing from it.

A PERSONAL flashback: in the middle of the 1948 war I had an unpleasant experience. After a day of heavy fighting, I was sleeping soundly in a field near the Arab village Suafir (now Sapir). All

around me were sleeping the other soldiers of my company, Samson's Foxes. Suddenly I was woken up by a tremendous explosion. An Egyptian plane had dropped a bomb on us. Killed: none. Wounded: 1.

How's that? Very simple: we were all lying in our personal foxholes, which we had dug, in spite of our fatigue, before going to sleep. It was self-evident to us that when we arrived anywhere, the first thing to do was dig in. Sometimes we changed locations three times a day, and every time we dug foxholes. We knew that our lives depended on it.

Not anymore. In one of the most deadly incidents in the Second Lebanon War, 12 members of a company were killed by a rocket near Kfar Giladi, while sitting around in an open field. The soldiers later complained that they had not been led to a shelter. Have today's soldiers never heard of a foxhole? Have they been issued with personal shovels at all?

Inside Lebanon, why did the soldiers congregate in the rooms of houses, where they were hit by anti-tank missiles, instead of digging foxholes?

It seems that the army has been weaned from this practice. No wonder: an army that is dealing with "terrorists" in the West Bank and Gaza does not need to take any special precautions. After all, no air force drops bombs on them, no artillery shells them. They need no special protection.

THAT IS true of all our armed forces on land, in the air and on the sea. It is certainly a luxury to fight against an enemy who cannot defend himself properly. But it is dangerous to get used to it.

The navy, for example. For years now it has been sailing along the shores of Gaza and Lebanon, shelling at pleasure, arresting fishermen, checking ships. It never dreamed that the enemy could shoot back. Suddenly it happened – and on live television, too. Hizbullah

hit it with a land-to-sea missile.

There was no end to the surprise. It was almost considered as Chutzpah. What, an enemy who shoots back? What next? And why did Army Intelligence not warn us that they have such an unheard of thing, a land-to-sea missile?

IN THE air as on the sea. For years now, Air Force pilots shoot and bomb and kill at will. They are able to hit a moving car with great precision (together with the passers-by, of course.) Their technical level is excellent. But what? Nobody is shooting at them while they are doing this.

The Royal Air Force boys during the blitz (“the few to whom so many owe so much”) had to confront the determined pilots of the Luftwaffe, and most of them were killed. Later, the British and Americans who bombed Germany ran the gauntlet of murderous flak.

But our pilots have no such problems. When they are in action over the West Bank and Gaza, there are no enemy pilots, no surface-to-air missiles, no flak. The sky belongs to them, and they can concentrate on their real job: to destroy the infrastructure of life and act as flying executioners, “eliminate” the objects of “targeted liquidations”, feeling only a “slight bang on the wing” while releasing a one-ton bomb over a residential area.

Does that create a good air force? Does that prepare them for battle with a real enemy? In Lebanon the pilots have not (yet) met anti-aircraft fire. The only helicopter shot down was hit by anti-tank fire while landing troops. But what about the next war everybody is speaking about?

AND THE ground troops? Were they prepared for this war?

For 39 years now they have been compelled to carry out the jobs

of a colonial police force: to run after children throwing stones and Molotov cocktails, to drag away women trying to protect their sons from arrest, to capture people sleeping at home. To stand for hours at the checkpoints and decide whether to let a pregnant woman reach the hospital or send back a sick old man. At the worst, they have to invade a casbah, to face untrained “terrorists” who have nothing but Kalashnikovs to fight against the tanks and airplanes of their occupiers, as well as courage and an unbelievable determination.

Suddenly these soldiers were sent to Lebanon to confront tough, well trained and highly motivated guerilla fighters who are ready to die while carrying out their mission. Fighters who have learned to appear from an unexpected direction, to disappear into well-prepared bunkers, to use advanced and effective weapons.

“We were not trained for this war!” the reserve soldiers now complain. They are right. Where could they have been trained? In the alleys of Jabalieh refugee camp? In the well-rehearsed scenes of embraces and tears, while removing pampered settlers with “sensitivity and determination”? Clearly it was easier to blockade Yasser Arafat and his few untrained bodyguards in the Mukata’ah compound in Ramallah than to conquer Bint Jbeil over and over again.

That applies even more to the tanks. It is easy to drive a tank along the main street of Gaza or over a row of houses in a refugee camp, facing only stone-throwing boys, when the opponent has no trained fighters or half-way modern weapons. It’s a hell of a difference driving the same tank in a built-up area in Lebanon, when a trained guerilla with an effective anti-tank weapon can lurk behind every corner. That’s a different story altogether. The more so as our army’s most modern tank is not immune from missiles.

The deepest rot appeared in the logistics system. It just did not function. And why should it? There is no need for complex logistics to bring water and food to the soldiers at the Kalandia checkpoint.

THE SIMPLE truth is that for decades now our army has not faced a serious military force. The last time was 24 years ago, during the First Lebanon War, when it fought against the Syrian army.

At the time we said in my magazine, Haolam Hazeh, that the war was a complete military failure, a fact that was suppressed by all the military commentators. In that war, too, our army did not reach its targets on time according to the plan: it reached them either late or not at all. In the Syrian sector the army did not reach its assigned objective at all: the Beirut-Damascus road. In the Palestinian sector, it reached that road much too late, and only after violating the agreed cease-fire.

The last serious war of our army was the Yom Kippur war. After the initial disgraceful setbacks, it did indeed attain an impressive victory. But that was only six years into the occupation. Now, 33 years later, we see the full damage done by the cancer called occupation, which by now has spread to all the organs of the military body.

How to stop the cancer?

The military commentator Ze'ev Schiff has a patent medicine. Schiff generally reflects the views of the army high command. (Perhaps over the last 40 years, there may have been instances when he voiced opinions that were not identical with those of the General Staff, but if so, they have escaped me.) He proposes to shift the burden of occupation from the army to the Border Police.

Sounds reasonable, but is completely unrealistic. How can Israel create a second big force to maintain the occupation, on top of the army, which already costs something approaching 12 billion dollars a year?

But, thank goodness, there is another remedy. An amazingly simple one: to free ourselves from the occupation once and for all. To get out of the occupied territories in agreement and cooperation with the Palestinians. To make peace with the Palestinian people, so

they can establish their independent state side by side with Israel.

And, while we are at it, to make peace with Syria and Lebanon, too.

So that the “Defense Army for Israel”, as it is officially called in Hebrew, can go back to its original purpose: to defend the recognized international borders of the State of Israel.

AUGUST 26, 2006

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# America's Rottweiler

IN HIS latest speech, which infuriated so many people, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad uttered a sentence that deserves attention: “Every new Arab generation hates Israel more than the previous one.”

Of all that has been said about the Second Lebanon War, these are perhaps the most important words.

The main product of this war is hatred. The pictures of death and destruction in Lebanon entered every Arab home, indeed every Muslim home, from Indonesia to Morocco, from Yemen to the Muslim ghettos in London and Berlin. Not for an hour, not for a day, but for 33 successive days – day after day, hour after hour. The mangled bodies of babies, the women weeping over the ruins of their homes, Israeli children writing “greetings” on shells about to be fired at villages, Ehud Olmert blabbering about “the most moral army in the world” while the screen showed a heap of bodies.

Israelis ignored these sights, indeed they were scarcely shown on our TV. Of course, we could see them on Aljazeera and some Western channels, but Israelis were much too busy with the damage wrought in our Northern towns. Feelings of pity and empathy for non-Jews have been blunted here a long time ago.

But it is a terrible mistake to ignore this result of the war. It is far more important than the stationing of a few thousand European troops along our border, with the kind consent of Hizbullah. It may still be bothering generations of Israelis, when the names Olmert and Halutz have long been forgotten, and when even Nasrallah no longer remember the name Amir Peretz.

In order for the significance of Assad’s words to become clear,

they have to be viewed in a historical context.

The whole Zionist enterprise has been compared to the transplantation of an organ into the body of a human being. The natural immunity system rises up against the foreign implant, the body mobilizes all its power to reject it. The doctors use a heavy dosage of medicines in order to overcome the rejection. That can go on for a long time, sometimes until the eventual death of the body itself, including the transplant.

(Of course, this analogy, like any other, should be treated cautiously. An analogy can help in understanding things, but no more than that.)

The Zionist movement has planted a foreign body in this country, which was then a part of the Arab-Muslim space. The inhabitants of the country, and the entire Arab region, rejected the Zionist entity. Meanwhile, the Jewish settlement has taken roots and become an authentic new nation rooted in the country. Its defensive power against the rejection has grown. This struggle has been going on for 125 years, becoming more violent from generation to generation. The last war was yet another episode.

WHAT IS our historic objective in this confrontation?

A fool will say: to stand up to the rejection with a growing dosage of medicaments, provided by America and World Jewry. The greatest fools will add: There is no solution. This situation will last forever. There is nothing to be done about it but to defend ourselves in war after war after war. And the next war is already knocking on the door.

The wise will say: our objective is to cause the body to accept the transplant as one of its organs, so that the immune system will no longer treat us as an enemy that must be removed at any price. And if this is the aim, it must become the main axis of our efforts. Meaning: each of our actions must be judged according to a simple

criterion: does it serve this aim or obstruct it?

According to this criterion, the Second Lebanon War was a disaster.

FIFTY NINE years ago, two months before the outbreak of our War of Independence, I published a booklet entitled “War or Peace in the Semitic Region”. Its opening words were:

“When our Zionist fathers decided to set up a ‘safe haven’ in Palestine, they had a choice between two ways:

“They could appear in West Asia as a European conqueror, who sees himself as a bridge-head of the ‘white’ race and a master of the ‘natives’, like the Spanish Conquistadores and the Anglo-Saxon colonists in America. That is what the Crusaders did in Palestine.

“The second way was to consider themselves as an Asian nation returning to its home – a nation that sees itself as an heir to the political and cultural heritage of the Semitic race, and which is prepared to join the peoples of the Semitic region in their war of liberation from European exploitation.”

As is well known, the State of Israel, which was established a few months later, chose the first way. It gave its hand to colonial France, tried to help Britain to return to the Suez Canal and, since 1967, has become the little sister of the United States.

That was not inevitable. On the contrary, in the course of years there have been a growing number of indications that the immune system of the Arab-Muslim body is starting to incorporate the transplant – as a human body accepts the organ of a close relative – and is ready to accept us. Such an indication was the visit of Anwar Sadat to Jerusalem. Such was the peace treaty signed with us by King Hussein, a descendent of the Prophet. And, most importantly, the historic decision of Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Palestinian people, to make peace with Israel.

But after every huge step forward, there came an Israeli step backward. It is as if the transplant rejects the body's acceptance of it. As if it has become so accustomed to being rejected, that it does all it can to induce the body to reject it even more.

It is against this background that one should weigh the words spoken by Assad Jr., a member of the new Arab generation, at the end of the recent war.

AFTER EVERY single one of the war aims put forward by our government had evaporated, one after the other, another reason was brought up: this war was a part of the "clash of civilizations", the great campaign of the Western world and its lofty values against the barbarian darkness of the Islamic world.

That reminds one, of course, of the words written 110 years ago by the father of modern Zionism, Theodor Herzl, in the founding document of the Zionist movement: "In Palestine... we shall constitute for Europe a part of the wall against Asia, and serve as the vanguard of civilization against barbarism." Without knowing, Olmert almost repeated this formula in his justification of his war, in order to please President Bush.

It happens from time to time in the United States that somebody invents an empty but easily digested slogan, which then dominates the public discourse for some time. It seems that the more stupid the slogan is, the better its chances of becoming the guiding light for academia and the media – until another slogan appears and supersedes it. The latest example is the slogan "Clash of Civilizations", coined by Samuel P. Huntington in 1993 (taking over from the "End of History").

What clash of ideas is there between Muslim Indonesia and Christian Chile? What eternal struggle between Poland and Morocco? What is it that unifies Malaysia and Kosovo, two Muslim nations? Or two Christian nations like Sweden and Ethiopia?

In what way are the ideas of the West more sublime than those of the East? The Jews that fled the flames of the auto-da-fe of the Christian Inquisition in Spain were received with open arms by the Muslim Ottoman Empire. The most cultured of European nations democratically elected Adolf Hitler as its leader and perpetrated the Holocaust, without the Pope raising his voice in protest.

In what way are the spiritual values of the United States, today's Empire of the West, superior to those of India and China, the rising stars of the East? Huntington himself was compelled to admit: "The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion, but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact, non-Westerners never do." In the West, too, women won the vote only in the 20th century, and slavery was abolished there only in the second half of the 19th. And in the leading nation of the West, fundamentalism is now also raising its head.

What interest, for goodness sake, have we in volunteering to be a political and military vanguard of the West in this imagined clash?

THE TRUTH is, of course, that this entire story of the clash of civilizations is nothing but an ideological cover for something that has no connection with ideas and values: the determination of the United States to dominate the world's resources, and especially oil.

The Second Lebanon War is considered by many as a "War by Proxy". That's to say: Hizbullah is the Dobermann of Iran, we are the Rottweiler of America. Hizbullah gets money, rockets and support from the Islamic Republic, we get money, cluster bombs and support from the United States of America.

That is certainly exaggerated. Hizbullah is an authentic Lebanese movement, deeply rooted in the Shiite community. The Israeli government has its own interests (the occupied territories) that do not depend on America. But there is no doubt that there is much truth

in the argument that this was also a war by substitutes.

The US is fighting against Iran, because Iran has a key role in the region where the most important oil reserves in the world are located. Not only does Iran itself sit on huge oil deposits, but through its revolutionary Islamic ideology it also menaces American control over the near-by oil countries. The declining resource oil becomes more and more essential in the modern economy. He who controls the oil controls the world.

The US would viciously attack Iran even it were peopled with pigmies devoted to the religion of the Dalai Lama. There is a shocking similarity between George W. Bush and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, The one has personal conversations with Jesus, the other has a line to Allah. But the name of the game is domination.

What interest do we have to get involved in this struggle? What interest do we have in being regarded – accurately – as the servants of the greatest enemy of the Muslim world in general and the Arab world in particular?

We want to live here in 100 years, in 500 years. Our most basic national interests demand that we extend our hands to the Arab nations that accept us, and act together with them for the rehabilitation of this region. That was true 59 years ago, and that will be true 59 years hence.

Little politicians like Olmert, Peretz and Halutz are unable to think in these terms. They can hardly see as far as the end of their noses. But where are the intellectuals, who should be more far-sighted?

Bashar al-Assad may not be one of the world's Great Thinkers. But his remark should certainly give us pause for thought.

AUGUST 30

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# The bees in the lion's carcass

EHUD OLMERT has found a convincing proof of his great victory over Hassan Nasrallah: “I am touring the country freely while Nasrallah is hiding in his bunker!”

It is said that “the style is the man,” and by these words Olmert shows his quality (or lack thereof). At the moment, dozens of Israeli airplanes and helicopter gunships are standing by, ready to kill Nasrallah if he as much as shows himself. Nasrallah does not have a single airplane or helicopter to kill Olmert. The vast material superiority of the Israeli army over a guerilla organization is no achievement of Olmert - but Hizbullah’s ability to survive the massive onslaught of our army is certainly the achievement of Nasrallah.

And, by the way, why would Nasrallah want to kill Olmert? After all, why should he mind Israel being led by a failed politician, whose incompetence has been proved and who most Israelis say should go?

A cynic might say: Nasrallah wants Olmert to stay, and that’s why he hurried to help him out. When everyone in Israel believed that Olmert had failed miserably, Nasrallah said, this week, in an interview: “If I had known that Israel would react as it did, I would not have captured the two soldiers.”

As could be expected, Olmert’s men pounced on this sentence. Look: Nasrallah is apologizing! That proves that he has been beaten! So Olmert won after all!

But most Israelis do not buy this spin. They still believe that we did not win the war, that the deterrent power of the Israeli army has

been hurt, that the Lebanese army and the International Force that will be employed along the border will not do our job for us after our own army failed to do it.

So what to do when the public believes that it is being led by a group of political and military failures?

That is the great question that is now occupying the entire nation. A few dozen reserve soldiers and civilians demonstrate opposite the Prime Minister's office, others sit at home and gripe. They know that Olmert, Peretz and Halutz must be removed. But how can this be done?

The obvious answer is to get out into the street and demonstrate. If hundreds of thousands filled the squares, perhaps Olmert would resign, as Golda Meir did in her day. However, Olmert is no Golda, and even Golda clung to office for half a year after her dismal failures of the Yom Kippur War. And where are the hundreds of thousands?

Another possibility is to appoint a State Inquiry Commission, which could dismiss the trio. That's good, that's even very good, but that's difficult. According to the law, only the government can decide to set up such a commission, and only the government can decide on the commission's terms of reference. Only after such a decision is made, does the matter pass into the hands of the President of the Supreme Court, who then decides upon the composition of the commission.

Such an inquiry demands, of course, time. Before it can accuse anyone of failure, it must warn them, allow them to be represented by lawyers, to cross-examine witnesses and provide documents, and that's a slow process. In the meantime, the incompetents will continue to rule and perhaps even start another war, in order to make us forget the last one. Even if the commission were to publish an interim report, that would take half a year at least.

But Olmert & Co. are not prepared to risk even that. That's why

they appointed two inquiry committees this week that are not State Inquiry Commissions, allowing them to decide their membership themselves. No inquiry committee demands the dismissal of the people who appointed them.

WHAT OTHER way is there to get rid of this trio? The simplest thing is to have new elections. But that is not as easy as it sounds. Only the Knesset can decide to do that. Meaning, the Knesset Members must decide to dismiss themselves. Fat chance.

Moreover, as things look now, if elections were to take place in the present situation, the Right would win big. The voice of the peace camp was completely silenced during the war, and now, too, it has no exposure in the media. As a result, the criticism of the war that is being heard comes almost entirely from the Right. The public is not asking: Why did we start this war? It asks: Why did we not win? And it answers: The corrupt politicians did not allow the army to win. A new government is needed, a rightist and patriotic one, in order to rehabilitate the army and start another war to finish the job.

The setting up of a new government without elections, in the present Knesset, would lead to the same result, because the only alternative to the current setup is a coalition that would include the Likud and at least one of the two fascist parties. No good.

Another possibility: to leave the present coalition in office but to replace Olmert and Peretz. How? By a revolt in Kadima that would replace Olmert and a revolt in Labor to replace Peretz. In Labor there is indeed such a possibility. But who would revolt in Kadima, a fictitious grouping that has no party institutions at all?

To resume: there are in theory several options - all of them bad. This fact splits the "protest camp". Some protesters demand a State Inquiry Commission, whatever the cost. Others want the Gang of Three - Olmert, Peretz and Halutz - to resign without any inquiry.

What the two groups have in common is that they are supported by the extreme Right, and especially the settlers, who declare, according to the best tradition of the inventors of the “stab-in-the-back” legend in Germany after World War I: “The treasonous politicians have stabbed the victorious army in the back!”

By the way, the total number of demonstrators is very much smaller than the thousands that the peace camp mobilized in the middle of the war to protest against it.

SO WHAT will happen? One can only answer with the saying: The art of prophecy is difficult, especially with respect to the future.

It is impossible at this moment to know what is going to happen in the near future. But it is worthwhile to think about the impact of the war on public opinion in the longer run.

When Samson the Hero saw a swarm of bees making honey in the carcass of a lion he remarked: “Out of the strong came forth sweetness.” (Judges 14). (That’s the same Samson who was abducted by the Philistines and became the first suicide bomber in the history of this country.) Can this phrase become true this time too? Can something good come out of this horrible war?

Perhaps. True, for the time being the result of this war in Israel has only been feelings of anger, frustration, insult and humiliation: Why couldn’t we overcome a small “terror organization”? Our political leaders have proved to be foolish, our military leaders incompetent. Things must be put in order.

But I believe that gradually a new conviction will form in the public mind: that this war marks the end of the days of easy victories. That from now on, in any new war our rear will be exposed. That our army is not almighty, as we were led to believe. And mainly: that the war did not solve anything, that perhaps the solution is not military and we would do better talking with our neighbors.

True, it is not easy to arrive at such a conclusion, which demands

### **33 DAYS**

an emotional and ideological revolution. That will take time. But one need not be a university professor to get there. Simple common sense is enough, as well as the experience that has accumulated during the last decades. Many people, including those usually described as “the common people”, have both, thank God.

Those who complain that the Second Lebanon War was stopped before it was finished, should note the success of Schubert’s Unfinished Symphony.



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