

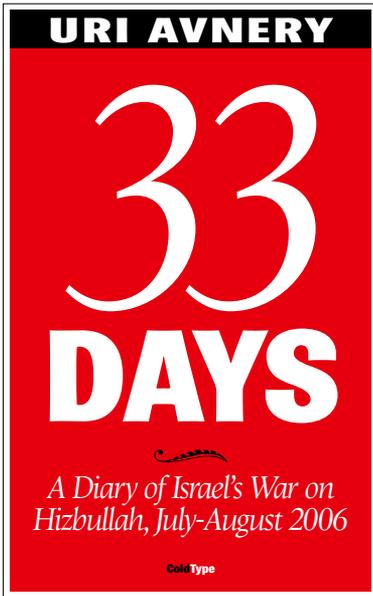
URI AVNERY

**33
DAYS**



*A Diary of Israel's War on
Hizbullah, July-August 2006*

ColdType



READ MORE BY

URI AVNERY

FIND HIS COLUMNS AT WWW.COLDTYPE.NET

This is a selection of columns written by Uri Avnery during and immediately after Israel's war against Hizbollah in Lebanon, July-August 2006

© Uri Avnery 2006

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD

www.coldtype.net



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Uri Avnery created a sensation when he crossed the lines during the battle of Beirut and met Yassir Arafat on July 3, 1982. Several Israeli cabinet ministers called for Avnery's indictment for high treason, while peace activists hailed the meeting as a historical breakthrough. It was the culmination of an effort started by Avnery many years earlier.

A former member of the Irgun underground, he joined Ha'aretz newspaper in 1949, quitting a year later to edit the magazine Haolam Hazeh magazine, which proved to be a thorn in the flesh to a number of Israeli governments.

Avnery was ambushed and both his hands broken in 1953 and escaped an assassination bid in 1975. He became a member of the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, in 1969 at the head of a party that took its name from his magazine.

JULY 15, 2006

The real aim

THE REAL aim is to change the regime in Lebanon and to install a puppet government. That was the aim of Ariel Sharon's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. It failed. But Sharon and his pupils in the military and political leadership have never really given up on it.

As in 1982, the present operation, too, was planned and is being carried out in full coordination with the US.

As then, there is no doubt that it is coordinated with a part of the Lebanese elite.

That's the main thing. Everything else is noise and propaganda.

ON THE eve of the 1982 invasion, Secretary of State Alexander Haig told Ariel Sharon that, before starting it, it was necessary to have a "clear provocation", which would be accepted by the world.

The provocation indeed took place – exactly at the appropriate time – when Abu-Nidal's terror gang tried to assassinate the Israeli ambassador in London. This had no connection with Lebanon, and even less with the PLO (the enemy of Abu-Nidal), but it served its purpose.

This time, the necessary provocation has been provided by the capture of the two Israeli soldiers by Hizbullah. Everyone knows that they cannot be freed except through an exchange of prisoners. But the huge military campaign that has been ready to go for months was sold to the Israeli and international public as a rescue operation.

(Strangely enough, the very same thing happened two weeks earlier in the Gaza Strip. Hamas and its partners captured a soldier,

33 DAYS

which provided the excuse for a massive operation that had been prepared for a long time and whose aim is to destroy the Palestinian government.)

THE DECLARED aim of the Lebanon operation is to push Hizbullah away from the border, so as to make it impossible for them to capture more soldiers and to launch rockets at Israeli towns. The invasion of the Gaza strip is also officially aimed at getting Ashkelon and Sderot out of the range of the Qassams.

That resembles the 1982 “Operation Peace for Gallilee”. Then, the public and the Knesset were told that the aim of the war was to “push the Katyushas 40 km away from the border”.

That was a deliberate lie. For 11 months before the war, not a single Katyusha rocket (nor a single shot) had been fired over the border. From the beginning, the aim of the operation was to reach Beirut and install a Qisling dictator. As I have recounted more than once, Sharon himself told me so nine months before the war, and I duly published it at the time, with his consent (but unattributed).

Of course, the present operation also has several secondary aims, which do not include the freeing of the prisoners. Everybody understands that that cannot be achieved by military means. But it is probably possible to destroy some of the thousands of missiles that Hizbullah has accumulated over the years. For this end, the army chiefs are ready to endanger the inhabitants of the Israeli towns that are exposed to the rockets. They believe that that is worthwhile, like an exchange of chess figures.

Another secondary aim is to rehabilitate the “deterrent power” of the army. That is a codeword for the restoration of the army’s injured pride that has suffered a severe blow from the daring military actions of Hamas in the south and Hizbullah in the north.

OFFICIALLY, THE Israeli government demands that the

Government of Lebanon disarm Hizbullah and remove it from the border region.

That is clearly impossible under the present Lebanese regime, a delicate fabric of ethno-religious communities. The slightest shock can bring the whole structure crashing down and throw the state into total anarchy – especially after the Americans succeeded in driving out the Syrian army, the only element that has for years provided some stability.

The idea of installing a Quisling in Lebanon is nothing new. In 1955, David Ben-Gurion proposed taking a “Christian officer” and installing him as dictator. Moshe Sharet showed that this idea was based on complete ignorance of Lebanese affairs and torpedoed it. But 27 years later, Ariel Sharon tried to put it into effect nevertheless. Bashir Gemayel was indeed installed as president, only to be murdered soon afterwards. His brother, Amin, succeeded him and signed a peace agreement with Israel, but was driven out of office. (The same brother is now publicly supporting the Israeli operation.)

The calculation now is that if the Israeli Air Force rains heavy enough blows on the Lebanese population – paralysing the sea – and airports, destroying the infrastructure, bombarding residential neighborhoods, cutting the Beirut-Damascus highroad etc. – the public will get furious with Hizbullah and pressure the Lebanese government into fulfilling Israel’s demands. Since the present government cannot even dream of doing so, a dictatorship will be set up with Israel’s support.

That is the military logic. I have my doubts. It can be assumed that most Lebanese will react as any other people on earth would: with fury and hatred towards the invader. That happened in 1982, when the Shiites in the south of Lebanon, until then as docile as a doormat, stood up against the Israeli occupiers and created the Hizbullah, which has become the strongest force in the country. If the Lebanese elite now becomes tainted as collaborators with Israel, it will be swept off the map. (By the way, have the Qassams

and Katyushas caused the Israeli population to exert pressure on our government to give up? Quite the contrary.)

The American policy is full of contradictions. President Bush wants “regime change” in the Middle East, but the present Lebanese regime has only recently been set up under American pressure. In the meantime, Bush has succeeded only in breaking up Iraq and causing a civil war. He may get the same in Lebanon, if he does not stop the Israeli army in time. Moreover, a devastating blow against Hizbullah may arouse fury not only in Iran, but also among the Shiites in Iraq, on whose support all of Bush’s plans for a pro-American regime are built.

So what’s the answer? Not by accident, Hizbullah has carried out its soldier-snatching raid at a time when the Palestinians are crying out for succor. The Palestinian cause is popular all over the Arab world. By showing that they are a friend in need, when all other Arabs are failing dismally, Hizbullah hopes to increase its popularity. If an Israeli-Palestinian agreement had been achieved by now, Hizbullah would be no more than a local Lebanese phenomenon, irrelevant to our situation.

LESS THAN three months after its formation, the Olmert-Peretz government has succeeded in plunging Israel into a two-front war, whose aims are unrealistic and whose results cannot be foreseen. If Olmert hopes to be seen as Mister Macho-Macho, a Sharon # 2, he will be disappointed. The same goes for the desperate attempts of Peretz to be taken seriously as an imposing Mister Security. Everybody understands that this campaign – both in Gaza and in Lebanon – has been planned by the army and dictated by the army. The man who makes the decisions in Israel now is Dan Halutz. It is no accident that the job in Lebanon has been turned over to the Air Force.

The public is not enthusiastic about the war. It is resigned to it,

in stoic fatalism, because it is being told that there is no alternative. And indeed, who can be against it? Who does not want to liberate the “kidnapped soldiers”? Who does not want to remove the Katyushas and rehabilitate deterrence? No politician dares to criticize the operation (except the Arab MKs, who are ignored by the Jewish public). In the media, the generals reign supreme, and not only those in uniform. There is almost no former general who is not being invited by the media to comment, explain and justify, all speaking in one voice.

(As an illustration: Israel’s most popular TV channel invited me to an interview about the war, after hearing that I had taken part in an anti-war demonstration. I was quite surprised. But not for long – an hour before the broadcast, an apologetic talk-show host called and said that there had been a terrible mistake – they really meant to invite Professor Shlomo Avineri, a former Director General of the Foreign Office who can be counted on to justify any act of the government, whatever it may be, in lofty academic language.)

“Inter arma silent Musae” – when the weapons speak, the muses fall silent. Or, rather: when the guns roar, the brain ceases to function.

AND JUST a small thought: when the State of Israel was founded in the middle of a cruel war, a poster was plastered on the walls: “All the country – a front! All the people – an army!”

58 Years have passed, and the same slogan is still as valid as it was then. What does that say about generations of statesmen and generals?

JULY 18, 2006

"Stop that shit!"

A WOMAN, an immigrant from Russia, throws herself on the ground in total despair in front of her home that has been hit by a missile, crying in broken Hebrew: "My son! My son!" believing him dead. In fact he was only wounded and sent to the hospital.

Lebanese children, covered with wounds, in Beirut hospitals. The funeral of the victims of a missile in Haifa. The ruins of a whole devastated quarter in Beirut. Inhabitants of the north of Israel fleeing south from the Katyushas. Inhabitants of the south of Lebanon fleeing north from the Israeli Air Force.

Death, destruction. Unimaginable human suffering.

And the most disgusting sight: George Bush in a playful mood sitting on his chair in St. Petersburg, with his loyal servant Tony Blair leaning over him, and solving the problem: "See? What they need to do is get Syria to get Hizbullah to stop doing that shit, and it's over."

Thus spake the leader of the world, and the seven dwarfs – "the great of the world" – say Amen.

SYRIA? BUT only a few months ago it was Bush – yes, the same Bush – who induced the Lebanese to drive the Syrians out of their country. Now he wants them to intervene in Lebanon and impose order?

31 years ago, when the Lebanese civil war was at its height, the Syrians sent their army into Lebanon (invited, of all people, by the Christians). At the time, the then Minister of Defense Shimon Peres and his associates created hysteria in Israel. They demanded that

Israel deliver an ultimatum to the Syrians, to prevent them from reaching the Israeli border. Yitzhak Rabin, the Prime Minister, told me then that that was sheer nonsense, because the best that could happen to Israel was for the Syrian army to spread out along the border. Only thus could calm be assured, the same calm that reigned along our border with Syria.

However, Rabin gave in to the hysteria of the media and stopped the Syrians far from the border. The vacuum thus created was filled by the PLO. In 1982, Ariel Sharon pushed the PLO out, and the vacuum was filled by Hizbullah.

All that has happened there since then would not have happened if we had allowed the Syrians to occupy the border from the beginning. The Syrians are cautious, they do not act recklessly.

WHAT WAS Hassan Nasrallah thinking of, when he decided to cross the border and carry out the guerilla action that started the current Witches' Sabbath? Why did he do it? And why at this time?

Everybody agrees that Nasrallah is a clever person. He is also prudent. For years he has been assembling a huge stockpile of missiles of all kinds to establish a balance of terror. He knew that the Israeli army was only waiting for an opportunity to destroy them. In spite of that, he carried out a provocation that provided the Israeli government with a perfect pretext to attack Lebanon with the full approval of the world. Why?

Possibly he was asked by Iran and Syria, who had supplied him with the missiles, to do something to divert American pressure from them. And indeed, the sudden crisis has shifted attention away the Iranian nuclear effort, and it seems that Bush's attitude towards Syria has also changed.

But Nasrallah is far from being a marionette of Iran or Syria. He heads an authentic Lebanese movement, and calculates his own balance sheet of pros and cons. If he had been asked by Iran and/or

33 DAYS

Syria to do something – for which there is no proof – and he saw that it was contrary to the aims of his movement, he would not have done it.

Perhaps he acted because of domestic Lebanese concerns. The Lebanese political system was becoming more stable and it was becoming more difficult to justify the military wing of Hizbullah. A new armed incident could have helped. (Such considerations are not alien to us either, especially before budget debates.)

But all this does not explain the timing. After all, Nasrallah could have acted a month before or a month later, a year before or a year later. There must have been a much stronger reason to convince him to enter upon such an adventure at precisely this time.

And indeed there was: Palestine.

TWO WEEKS before, the Israeli army had started a war against the population of the Gaza Strip. There, too, the pretext was provided by a guerrilla action, in which an Israeli soldier was captured. The Israeli government used the opportunity to carry out a plan prepared long before: to break the Palestinians' will to resist and to destroy the newly elected Palestinian government, dominated by Hamas. And, of course, to stop the Qassams.

The operation in Gaza is an especially brutal one, and that is how it looks on the world's TV screens. Terrible pictures from Gaza appear daily and hourly in the Arab media. Dead people, wounded people, devastation. Lack of water and medicaments for the wounded and sick. Whole families killed. Children screaming in agony. Mothers weeping. Buildings collapsing.

The Arab regimes, which are all dependent on America, did nothing to help. Since they are also threatened by Islamic opposition movements, they looked at what was happening to Hamas with some Schadenfreude. But tens of millions of Arabs, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf, saw, got excited and angry with

their government, crying out for a leader who would bring succor to their besieged, heroic brothers.

Fifty years ago, Gamal Abd-el-Nasser, the new Egyptian leader, wrote that there was a role waiting for a hero. He decided to be that hero himself. For several years, he was the idol of the Arab world, symbol of Arab unity. But Israel used an opportunity that presented itself and broke him in the Six-day war. After that, the star of Saddam Hussein rose in the firmament. He dared to stand up to mighty America and to launch missiles at Israel, and became the hero of the Arab masses. But he was routed in a humiliating manner by the Americans, spurred on by Israel.

A week ago, Nasrallah faced the same temptation. The Arab world was crying out for a hero, and he said: Here am I! He challenged Israel, and indirectly the United States and the entire West. He started the attack without allies, knowing that neither Iran nor Syria could risk helping him.

Perhaps he got carried away, like Abd-el-Nasser and Saddam before him. Perhaps he misjudged the force of the counter-attack he could expect. Perhaps he really believed that under the weight of his rockets the Israeli rear would collapse. (As the Israeli army believed that the Israeli onslaught would break the Palestinian people in Gaza and the Shiites in Lebanon.)

One thing is clear: Nasrallah would not have started this vicious circle of violence, if the Palestinians had not called for help. Either from cool calculation, or from true moral outrage, or from both – Nasrallah rushed to the rescue of beleaguered Palestine.

THE ISRAELI reaction could have been expected. For years, the army commanders had yearned for an opportunity to eliminate the missile arsenal of Hizbullah and destroy that organization, or at least disarm it and push it far, far from the border. They are trying to do this the only way they know: by causing so much devastation,

that the Lebanese population will stand up and compel its government to fulfill Israel's demands.

Will these aims be achieved?

HIZBULLAH IS the authentic representative of the Shiite community, which makes up 40% of the Lebanese population. Together with the other Muslims, they are the majority in the country. The idea that the weakling Lebanese government – which in any case includes Hizbullah – would be able to liquidate the organization is ludicrous.

The Israeli government demands that the Lebanese army be deployed along the border. This has by now become a mantra. It reveals total ignorance. The Shiites occupy important positions in the Lebanese army, and there is no chance at all that it would start a fratricidal war against them.

Abroad, another idea is taking shape: that an international force should be deployed on the border. The Israeli government objects to this strenuously. A real international force – unlike the hapless UNIFIL which has been there for decades – would hinder the Israeli army from doing whatever it wants. Moreover, if it were deployed there without the agreement of Hizbullah, a new guerilla war would start against it. Would such a force, without real motivation, succeed where the mighty Israeli army was routed?

At most, this war, with its hundreds of dead and waves of destruction, will lead to another delicate armistice. The Israeli government will claim victory and argue that it has “changed the rules of the game”. Nasrallah (or his successors) will claim that their small organization has stood up to one of the mightiest military machines in the world and written another shining chapter of heroism in the annals of Arab and Muslim history.

No real solution will be achieved, because there is no treatment of the root of the matter: the Palestinian problem.

MANY YEARS ago, I was listening on the radio to one of the speeches of Abd-el-Nasser before a huge crowd in Egypt. He was holding forth on the achievements of the Egyptian revolution, when shouts arose from the crowd: “Filastine, ya Gamal!” (“Palestine, oh Gamal!”) Whereupon Nasser forgot what he was talking about and started on Palestine, getting more and more carried away.

Since then, not much has changed. When the Palestinian cause is mentioned, it casts its shadow over everything else. That’s what has happened now, too.

Whoever longs for a solution must know: there is no solution without settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And there is no solution to the Palestinian problem without negotiations with their elected leadership, the government headed by Hamas.

If one wants to finish, once and for all, with this shit – as Bush so delicately put it – that is the only way.

JULY 26, 2006

The 15th Day

Q. Who is winning this war?

On the 15th day of the war, Hizbullah is functioning and fighting. That by itself will go down in the annals of the Arab peoples as a shining victory.

When a featherweight boxer faces a heavyweight and is still standing in the 15th round – that is a victory, whatever the final outcome.

Q. Can Hizbullah be pushed out of the border area?

The question is based on a misunderstanding of the essence of Hizbullah.

Not by accident is the organization call Hizb-Allah (“Party of Allah”) and not Jeish-Allah (“Army of Allah”). It is a political organization, with deep roots in the Shiite population of South Lebanon. For all practical purposes, it represents this community. The Shiites are 40% of the Lebanese population, and together with the other Muslims they form the majority.

Hizbullah can be “moved” only if the whole Shiite population is moved – an ethnic cleansing that (I hope) no one is thinking about. After the war the population will return to their towns and villages, and Hizbullah will continue to flourish.

Q. What would happen if the Lebanese Army were deployed along the border?

That has been one of the slogans of the Israeli government from the first moment. They will announce this as the main victory. That is

very convincing – for anyone who has no idea about the complexities of Lebanon.

Anyone who was in Lebanon in 1982 and saw the Lebanese Army in action knows that it is not a serious army. Furthermore, many of its officers and soldiers are Shiites. Such a force will not fight Hizbullah.

Its deployment in the South would depend entirely on the agreement of Hizbullah – and that also applies to every day it stays there.

Q. Would an international force help?

Ditto. That is a slogan especially tailored for diplomats, who look for an idea they can easily agree on. It sounds nice, especially if one adds the word “robust”.

What exactly is the robust international force supposed to do?

It is proposed that it will remove Hizbullah from the border area. Not by words – like the hapless UNIFIL, that everyone ignored right from the beginning – but by force.

If the deployment of this force were to take place with the agreement of both sides – Israel and Hizbullah – alright. It may serve as a ladder for the Israeli government to climb down from the tree it has climbed up.

But if the force is placed there contrary to the will of Hizbullah, a guerilla war against it will start. Will the international force stand up and fight in a place which the mighty Israeli army fled with its tail between its legs?

For Israel, there will be a special dilemma: what will happen if Hizbullah attacks Israel in spite of the force? Will the Israeli army enter the area, risking a clash with the international force? With German soldiers, for example?

Q. Olmert has said that we will not negotiate with Syria. Is that practical?

So he said. He has said a lot of things, and his tongue is still wagging.

Syria is a central player in this field. No real settlement in Lebanon will succeed without the participation – direct or indirect – of Syria.

True, Hizbullah was created by us. When the Israeli army invaded Lebanon in 1982, the Shiites received the soldiers with rice and sweets. They hoped that we would evict the PLO forces, who were in control of the area. But when they realized that our army was there to stay, they started a guerilla war that lasted for 18 years. In this war, Hizbullah was born and grew, until it became the strongest organization in all Lebanon.

But this would not have happened without massive Syrian support. Syria wants to get back the Golan heights, which have been officially annexed to Israel. Therefore, it is important for the Syrians not to allow the Israelis any quiet. Since they do not want to risk trouble on their own borders with Israel, they use Hizbullah to cause trouble on Israel's border with Lebanon.

The Lebanese border will not become quiet until we reach an agreement with Syria. That is to say: until we give the Golan back. The alternative is to start a war with Syria, with its ballistic missiles, chemical and biological weapons and an army that has proved itself. President Bush is pushing Israel to do this, perhaps in order to divert attention from his fiascoes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Q. How can one evaluate the conduct of the military campaign?

Dan Halutz will not enter the history books as one of the greatest captains of all time.

He pushed the government into this war, partly in order to cover

up two embarrassing military failures: the Palestinian commando action in Kerem Shalom and the Hizbullah action on the Lebanese border. No officer has been called to bear responsibility for them. The ultimate responsibility rests, of course, with the chief-of-Staff.

Halutz, the first Chief-of-Staff who rose through the ranks of the Air Force, was convinced that he could finish it off by aerial bombardment, with the assistance of the artillery and navy. He was vastly mistaken. Even after sowing havoc in Lebanon, he did not succeed in vanquishing the opponent. Now he is compelled to do the one thing that everybody was afraid of: sending large land forces into the Lebanese quagmire.

On the 15th day of the war, not one of the aims is any nearer to being achieved. As far as Halutz is concerned, both as a strategist and as a commander, his marks are close to zero.

Q. Have the civilians at the head of the government proved themselves?

After the elections, many people in Israel thought that a civilian era had begun, since both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense are complete civilians, without a military background. As it turns out, the opposite is the case. History shows that political functionaries who succeed strong leaders are capable of doing terrible things. They want to prove that they, too, are strong leaders, that they have guts, that they can wage war. Harry Truman, who replaced Franklin Roosevelt, is responsible for what is perhaps the biggest war crime in history – the dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Anthony Eden, who succeeded Winston Churchill, started the foolish Suez war, in collusion with France and Israel.

The Olmert government started this war in shocking irresponsibility, without serious debate or deliberation. They were afraid to oppose the demands of the Chief-of-Staff, afraid to be branded as cowards.

Q. Olmert has promised that after the war the situation in the region will be different from what it was before. Is there a chance of this?

Absolutely. But the new situation will be very much worse for us.

One of Hassan Nasrallah's aims is to unite Shiites and Sunnis in a common fight against Israel.

One has to realize that for centuries Sunnis and Shiites were mortal enemies. Many orthodox Sunnis consider the Shiites heretics. By coming to the aid of the Palestinians, who are Sunnis, Nasrallah hopes, among other aims, to forge a new alliance.

In the Middle East, a new axis may be coming into being, one that includes Hizbullah, the Palestinians, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Syria is a Sunni country. Iraq is now controlled by the Shiites, who wholeheartedly support Hizbullah. But the Iraqi Sunnis, who are waging a tough guerilla war against the Americans, also support Hizbullah.

This bloc enjoys a wide popularity among the masses throughout the Arab world, because of their fight against the USA and Israel. The opposite bloc, which includes Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, is losing popularity by the day. These regimes are considered by the masses as mercenaries of the Americans and agents of Israel. Mahmoud Abbas is strenuously trying to avoid being included in this category.

Q. So what can be done about this?

To put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which causes ferment throughout the Middle East.

To draw Hamas out of this hostile front, by negotiating with the elected Palestinian government.

To reach a settlement in Lebanon. For it to last, this settlement must include Hizbullah and Syria. This will oblige us to give the Golan back.

It should be remembered that Ehud Barak had already agreed to that and almost signed a peace treaty, similar to the one signed with Egypt, but unfortunately chickened out at the last moment for fear of public opinion.

JULY 31, 2006

In the gunsight: Syria

IT IS the old story about the losing gambler: he cannot stop. He continues to play, in order to win his losses back. He continues to lose and continues to gamble, until he has lost everything: his ranch, his wife, his shirt.

The same thing happens in the biggest gamble of all: war. The leaders that start a war and get stuck in the mud are compelled to fight their way ever deeper into the mud. That is a part of the very essence of war: it is impossible to stop after a failure. Public opinion demands the promised victory. Incompetent generals need to cover up their failure. Military commentators and other armchair strategists demand a massive offensive. Cynical politicians are riding the wave. The government is carried away by the flood that they themselves have let loose.

That is what happened this week, following the battle of Bint-Jbeil, which the Arabs have already started to call proudly Nasrallahgrad. All over Israel the cry goes up: Get into it! Quicker! Further! Deeper!

A day after the bloody battle, the cabinet decided on a massive mobilization of the reserves. What for? The ministers do not know. But it does not depend on them anymore, nor on the generals. The political and military leadership is tossed about on the waves of war like a boat without a rudder.

As has been said before: It is much easier to start a war than to finish one. The cabinet believes that it controls the war, but in reality it is the war that controls them. They have mounted a tiger, and can't be sure of getting off without being torn to pieces.

War has its own rules. Unexpected things happen and dictate the

next moves. And the next moves tend to be in one direction: escalation.

DAN HALUTZ, the father of this war, thought that he could eliminate Hizbullah by means of the Air Force, the most sophisticated, most efficient and the generally most-most air force in the world. A few days of massive pounding, thousands of tons of bombs on neighborhoods, roads, electricity works and ports – and that's it.

Well, that wasn't it, as it turned out. The Hizbullah rockets continued to land in the north of Israel, hundreds a day. The public cried out. There was no way round a ground operation. First, small, elite units were put in. That did not help. Then brigades were deployed. And now whole divisions are demanded.

First they wanted to annihilate the Hizbullah positions along the border. When it was seen that that was not enough, it was decided to conquer the hills that dominate the border. There, the Hizbullah fighters were waiting and caused heavy casualties. And the rockets continued to fly.

Now the generals are convinced that there is no alternative to occupying the whole area up to the Litani River, about 24 km from the border, in order to prevent the rockets from being launched from there. Then they will find out that they have to reach the Awali River, 40 km inside – the famous 40 km which Menachem Begin talked about in 1982.

And then? The Israeli army will be extended over a large area, and everywhere it will be exposed to guerilla attacks, of the sort Hizbullah excels in. And the missiles will continue to fly.

What next? One cannot stop. Public opinion will demand more decisive moves. Political demagogues will shout. Commentators will grumble. The people in the shelters will cry out. The generals will feel the heat. One cannot keep tens of thousands of reserve soldiers mobilized indefinitely. It is impossible to prolong a situation which

paralyzes a third of the country.

Everybody will clamor to storm forward. Where to? Towards Beirut in the North? Or towards Damascus, in the East?

THE CABINET ministers recite in unison: No! Never ever! We shall not attack Syria!

Perhaps some of them really don't intend to. They do not dream of a war with Syria. Definitely not. But the ministers only delude themselves when they believe that they control the war. The war controls them.

When it becomes clear that nothing is helping, that Hizbullah goes on fighting and the rockets continue to fly, the political and military leadership will face bankruptcy. They will need to pin the blame on somebody. On who? Well, on Assad, of course.

How is it possible that a small "terror organization," with a few thousand fighters altogether, goes on fighting? Where do they get the arms from? The finger will point towards Syria.

Even now, the army commanders assert that new rockets are flowing all the time from Syria to Hizbullah. True, the roads have been bombed, the bridges destroyed, but the arms somehow continue to arrive. The Israeli government demands that an international force be stationed not only along the Israeli-Lebanese border, but on the Lebanese-Syrian border, too. The queue of volunteers will not be long. Then the generals will demand the bombing of roads and bridges inside Syria. For that, the Syrian Air Force will have to be neutralized. In short, a real war, with implications for the whole Middle East.

EHUD OLMERT and Amir Peretz did not think about that when they decided 17 days ago in haste and lightheartedly, without serious debate, without examining other options, without calculating

the risks, to attack Hizbullah. For politicians who do not know what war is, it was an irresistible temptation: there was a clear provocation by Hizbullah, international support was assured, what a wonderful opportunity! They would do what even Sharon did not dare.

Dan Halutz submitted an offer that could not be refused. A nice little war. Military plans were ready and well rehearsed. Certain victory. The more so, since on the other side there was no real enemy army, just a “terror organization.”

How hotly the desire was burning in the hearts of Olmert and Peretz is attested by the fact that they did not even think about the lack of shelters in the Northern towns, not to mention the far-reaching economic and social implications. The main thing was to rush in and gather the laurels.

They had no time to think seriously about the war aim. Now they resemble archers who shoot their arrows at a blank sheet and then draw the rings around the arrow. The aims change daily: to destroy Hizbullah, to disarm them, to drive them out of South Lebanon, and perhaps just to “weaken” them. To kill Hassan Nasrallah. To bring the captured soldiers home. To extend the sovereignty of the Lebanese government over all of Lebanon. To establish a new-old Security Zone occupied by Israel. To deploy the Lebanese army and/or an international force along the border. To rehabilitate deterrence. To imprint into the consciousness of Hizbullah. (Our generals love imprinting into consciousnesses. That is a wonderfully safe aim, because it cannot be measured.)

THE MORE the nice little war continues, the clearer it becomes that these changing aims are not realistic. The Lebanese ruling group does not represent anybody but a small, rich and corrupt elite. The Lebanese army cannot and will not fight Hizbullah. The new “security zone” will be exposed to guerilla attacks and the international

force will not enter the area without the agreement of Hizbullah. And this guerilla force, Hizbullah, the Israeli army cannot vanquish.

That is nothing to be ashamed of. Our army is in good – or, rather, bad – company. The term “guerilla” (“small war”) was coined in Spain, during the occupation of the country by Napoleon. Irregular bands of Spanish fighters attacked the occupiers and beat them. The same happened to the Russians in Afghanistan, to the French in Algeria, to the British in Palestine and a dozen other colonies, to the Americans in Vietnam, and is happening to them now in Iraq. Even assuming that Dan Halutz and Udi Adam are greater commanders than Napoleon and his marshals, they will not succeed where those failed.

When Napoleon did not know what to do next, he invaded Russia. If we don't stop the operation, it will lead us to war with Syria. Condoleezza Rice's stubborn struggle against any attempt to stop the war shows that this is indeed the aim of the United States. From the first day of George Bush's presidency, the neo-cons have been calling for the elimination of Syria. The deeper Bush sinks into the Iraqi quagmire, the more he needs to divert attention with another adventure.

By the way: One day before the outbreak of this war, our Minister of National Infrastructures, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, took part in the inauguration ceremony of the big pipeline that will conduct oil from the huge Caspian Sea reserves to the Turkish port of Ceyhan, just next to the Syrian border. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline avoids Russia and passes through Azerbaijan and Georgia, two countries closely aligned with Israel, like Turkey itself. There is a plan to bring a part of the oil from there along the Syrian and Lebanese coast to Ashkelon, where an existing pipeline will conduct it to Eilat, to be exported to the Far East. Israel and Turkey are to secure the area for the United States.

MUST THE sliding into a war with Syria happen? Is there no alternative?

Of course there is. To stop now, at once.

When President Lyndon Johnson felt that he was sinking into the morass of Vietnam, he asked his friends for advice. One of them answered with five words: "Declare victory and get out!"

We can do that. To stop investing more and more in a losing business. To be satisfied with what we can get now. For example: an agreement that will move Hizbullah a few kilometers from the border, along which an international force and/or the Lebanese army will be deployed, and to exchange prisoners. Olmert will be able to present that as a great victory, to claim that we have got what we wanted, that we have taught the Arabs a lesson, that anyhow we had no intention of achieving more. Nasrallah will also claim a great victory, asserting that he has taught the Zionist Enemy a lesson it will not forget, that Hizbullah remains alive, strong and armed, that he has brought back the Lebanese prisoners.

True, it will not be much. But that is what can be done to cut losses, as they say in the business world.

That can happen. If Olmert is clever enough to extricate himself from the trap, before it closes entirely. (As folk wisdom says: a clever person is one that gets out of a trap that a wise one would not have got into in the first place.) And if Condoleezza gets orders from her boss to allow it.

ON THE 17th day of the war, we must recognize that soon we will be faced with a clear choice: to slide into a war with Syria, intentionally or unintentionally, or to get a general agreement in the North, that will necessarily involve also Hizbullah and Syria. At the center of such an agreement will be the Golan Heights.

Olmert and Peretz did not think about that in those intoxicating moments on July 12, when they jumped at the opportunity to start a nice little war. But then, were they thinking at all?

AUGUST 2, 2006

The knife in the back

THE DAY after the war will be the Day of the Long Knives. Everybody will blame everybody else. The politicians will blame each other. The generals will blame each other. The politicians will blame the generals. And, most of all, the generals will blame the politicians.

Always, in every country and after every war, when the generals fail, the “knife in the back” legend raises its head. If only the politicians had not stopped the army just when it was on the point of achieving a glorious, crushing, historic victory...

That’s what happened in Germany after World War I, when the legend gave birth to the Nazi movement. That’s what happened in America after Vietnam. That’s what is going to happen here. The first stirrings can already be felt.

THE SIMPLE truth is that up to now, the 22nd day of the war, not one single military target has been reached. The same army that took just six days to rout three big Arab armies in 1967 has not succeeded in overcoming a small “terrorist organization” in a time span that is already longer than the momentous Yom Kippur War. Then, the army succeeded in just 20 days in turning a stunning defeat at the beginning into a resounding military victory at the end.

In order to create an image of achievement, military spokesmen asserted yesterday that “we have succeeded in killing 200 (or 300, or 400, who is counting?) of the 1000 fighters of Hizbullah.” The assertion that the entire terrifying Hizbullah consisted of one thousand fighters speaks for itself.

According to correspondents, President Bush is frustrated. The

Israeli army has not “delivered the goods”. Bush sent them into war believing that the powerful army, equipped with the most advanced American arms, will “finish the job” in a few days. It was supposed to eliminate Hizbullah, turn Lebanon over to the stooges of the US, weaken Iran and perhaps also open the way to “regime change” in Syria. No wonder that Bush is angry.

Ehud Olmert is even more furious. He went to war in high spirits and with a light heart, because the Air Force generals had promised to destroy Hizbullah and their rockets within a few days. Now he is stuck in the mud, and no victory in sight.

AS USUAL with us, at the termination of the fighting (and possibly even before) the War of the Generals will start. The front lines are already emerging.

The commanders of the land army blame the Chief-of-Staff and the power-intoxicated Air Force, who promised to achieve victory all by themselves. To bomb, bomb and bomb, destroy roads, bridges, residential quarters and villages, and – finito!

The followers of the Chief-of-Staff and the other Air Force generals will blame the land forces, and especially Northern Command. Their spokesmen in the media already declare that this command is full of inept officers, who have been shunted there because the North seemed a backwater while the real action was going on in the South (Gaza) and the Center (West Bank).

There are already insinuations that the Chief of Northern Command, General Udi Adam, was appointed to his job only in homage to his father, General Kuti Adam, who was killed in the First Lebanon War.

THE MUTUAL accusations are all quite right. This war is plastered with military failures – in the air, on land and on the sea.

33 DAYS

They are rooted in the terrible arrogance in which we were brought up and which has become a part of our national character. It is even more typical of the army, and reaches its climax in the Air Force.

For years we have told each other that we have the most-most army in the world. We have convinced not only ourselves, but also Bush and the entire world. After all, we did win an astounding victory in six days in 1967. As a result, when this time the army did not win a huge victory in six days, everybody was astounded. Why, what happened?

One of the declared aims of this war was the rehabilitation of the Israeli army's deterrence power. That really has not happened.

That's because the other side of the coin of arrogance is the profound contempt for Arabs, an attitude that has already led to severe military failures in the past. It's enough to remember the Yom Kippur war. Now our soldiers are learning the hard way that the "terrorists" are highly motivated, tough fighters, not junkies dreaming of "their" virgins in Paradise.

But beyond arrogance and contempt for the opponent, there is a basic military problem: it is just impossible to win a war against guerillas. We have seen this in our 18-year stay in Lebanon. Then we drew the unavoidable conclusion and got out. True, without good sense, without an agreement with the other side. (We don't speak with terrorists, do we? – even if they are the dominant force on the ground.) But we did get out.

God knows what gave today's generals the unfounded self-confidence to believe that they would win where their predecessors failed so miserably.

And most of all: even the best army in the world cannot win a war that has no clear aims. Karl von Clausewitz, the guru of military science, pronounced that "war is nothing more than the continuation of politics by other means". Olmert and Peretz, two com-

plete dilettantes, have turned this inside out: “War is nothing more than the continuation of the lack of policy by other means.”

MILITARY EXPERTS say that in order to succeed in war, there must be (a) a clear aim, (b) an aim that is achievable, and (c) the means necessary for achieving this aim.

All these three conditions are lacking in this war. That is clearly the fault of the political leadership.

Therefore, the main blame will be laid at the feet of the twins, Olmert-Peretz. They have succumbed to the temptation of the moment and dragged the state into a war, in a decision that was hasty, unconsidered and reckless.

As Nehemia Strassler wrote in Haaretz: They could have stopped after two or three days, when all the world agreed that Hizbullah’s provocation justified an Israeli response, when nobody was yet doubting the capabilities of the Israeli army. The operation would have looked sensible, sober and proportional.

But Olmert and Peretz could not stop. As greenhorns in matters of war, they did not know that the boasts of the generals cannot be relied on, that even the best military plans are not worth the paper on which they are written, that in war the unexpected must be expected, that nothing is more temporary than the glory of war. They were intoxicated by the war’s popularity, egged on by a herd of fawning journalists, driven out of their minds by their own glory as War Leaders.

Olmert was roused by his own incredibly kitschy speeches, which he rehearsed with his hangers-on. Peretz, so it seems, stood in front of the mirror and already saw himself as the next Prime Minister, Mister Security, a Second Ben-Gurion.

And so, like two village idiots, to the sound of drums and bugles, they set off at the head of their March of Folly straight towards political and military failure.

It is reasonable to assume that they will pay the price after the war.

WHAT WILL come out of this whole mess?

No one talks anymore about eliminating Hizbullah or disarming it and destroying all the rockets. That has been forgotten long ago.

At the start of the war, the government furiously rejected the idea of deploying an international force of any kind along the border. The army believed that such a force would not protect Israel, but only restrict its freedom of action. Now, suddenly, the deployment of this force has become the main aim of the campaign. The army is continuing the operation solely in order to “prepare the ground for the international force”, and Olmert declares that he will go on fighting until it appears on the ground.

That is, of course, a sorry alibi, a ladder for getting down from the high tree. The international force can be deployed only in agreement with Hizbullah. No country will send its soldiers to a place where they would have to fight the locals. And everywhere in the area, the local Shiite inhabitants will return to their villages – including the Hizbullah underground fighters.

Further on, the force will also be totally dependent on the agreement of Hizbullah. If a bomb explodes under a bus full of French soldiers, a cry will go up in Paris: bring our sons home. That is what happened when the US Marines were bombed in Beirut.

The Germans, who shocked the world this week by opposing the call for a cease-fire, certainly will not send soldiers to the Israeli border. That’s just what they need, to be obliged to shoot at Israeli soldiers.

And, most importantly, nothing will prevent Hizbullah from launching their rockets over the heads of the international force, any time they want to. What will the international force do then? Conquer all the area up to Beirut? And how will Israel respond?

Olmert wants the force to control the Lebanese-Syrian border. That, too, is illusory. That border goes around the entire West and North of Lebanon. Anybody who wants to smuggle weapons will stay away from the main roads, which will be controlled by the international soldiers. He will find hundreds of places along the border to do this. With the proper bribe, one can do anything in Lebanon.

Therefore, after the war, we will stand more or less in the same place we were before we started this sorry adventure, before the killing of almost a thousand Lebanese and Israelis, before the eviction from their homes of more than a million human beings, Israelis and Lebanese, before the destruction of more than a thousand homes both in Lebanon and Israel.

AFTER THE war, the enthusiasm will simmer down, the inhabitants of the North will lick their wounds and the army will start to investigate its failures. Everybody will claim that he or she was against the war from the first day on. Then the Day of Judgment will come.

The conclusion that presents itself is: kick out Olmert, send Peretz packing and sack Halutz.

In order to embark on a new course, the only one that will solve the problem: negotiations and peace with the Palestinians, the Lebanese, the Syrians. And: with Hamas and Hizbullah.

Because it's only with enemies that one makes peace.

AUGUST 5, 2006

Junkies of war

FOR ME it was a moment of shocking revelation. I was listening to one of the daily speeches of our Prime Minister. He said: “We are a wonderful people!” He said: We have already won this war, it is the greatest victory in the history of our state. He said: We have changed the face of the Middle East. And more to that effect.

Well, I told myself, that’s Olmert.

I have known him since he was 20-something. At that time, I was a member of the Knesset, and Olmert was the book-carrier (literally) of another member. Since then I have followed his career. He has never been anything but a party functionary, a small-time politician specializing in manipulations, a run-of-the-mill demagogue. On the way changed parties several times and served as a mayor with a grade of D minus, until he climbed on the bandwagon of Ariel Sharon. More or less by accident he was given the empty title of “Deputy Prime Minister”, and when Sharon suffered his stroke, something happened that took Olmert too by surprise: he became Prime Minister.

Throughout his career he has remained a complete cynic, basically a right-winger but willing to pretend to be a liberal when faced with leftists. So, I told myself, this is just another cynical speech. But suddenly a ghastly thought struck me: No, the man believes what he is saying!

Hard as it is to imagine, it seems that Olmert really believes that this is a successful war. That he is winning. That he has radically changed Israel’s situation. That he is building a New Middle East. That he is a historic leader, far superior to Ariel Sharon (who, after all, was beaten in Lebanon and who allowed Hizbullah to build up

its arsenal of rockets). That the longer he is allowed to go on with the war, the more his stature in history will grow.

Ehud Olmert has obviously cut himself off from reality. He lives in a bubble all by himself. His speeches show that he has a very real problem. Of all the dangers facing Israel now, this is the most severe. Because this man is deciding, quite simply, the fate of millions: who will die, who will become a refugee, whose world will be shattered.

BUT OLMERT'S problem with megalomania is nothing compared to what has happened to Amir Peretz.

Exactly nine months ago, after his election as Labor Party chairman, Peretz made a speech in Tel-Aviv's Rabin Square in which he revealed his dream: that in the no-man's land between Israel and the Gaza Strip a football field will be built, and a match between the Israeli children of Sderot and the Palestinian children of nearby Bet-Hanoun will take place. An Israeli Martin Luther King.

Nine month's later, a monster has been born to us.

In the Knesset election campaign, Peretz appeared as a social revolutionary. He announced that he would change the face of Israeli society, set new national priorities, cut billions from the military budget and transfer them to education, welfare and measure to reduce the glaring gap between rich and poor. As a veteran peace-lover, he would, of course, achieve peace with the Palestinians and the entire Arab world.

This won him the votes of many citizens, including many who would normally never consider voting for the Labor Party.

What followed is history. He seduced himself, when Olmert offered him the Ministry of Defense. That was still Olmert the cynic. He knew, as we all did, that Peretz was walking into a trap, that as a rank civilian without serious military experience he would be easy prey for the generals. But Peretz did not shrink back. The supreme

aim of his life is to become Prime Minister, and in order to become a credible candidate he believed that he must present himself as a security expert.

Since then, Peretz has become a rabid warmonger. Not only does he endorse all the demands of the generals, not only does he act as their spokesman – he has also helped to push Israel into war, and since then he has been demanding that it should continue, enlarge, widen, kill more, destroy more, occupy more. He himself declared, “Nasrallah will never forget the name Amir Peretz!” – like a spoilt child inscribing his name on a tourist attraction.

At the moment, he is trying to be more extreme even than Olmert. While the Prime Minister is afraid of continuing to advance, fearing that too many casualties from the rockets and the battle on the ground might cloud the brilliance of his victory, Peretz wants to reach the Litani River, whatever the cost. There’s no other way – if one wants to become Prime Minister, one has to walk over dead bodies.

Thus a monster has been born to us. Rosemary’s Baby.

TODAY, THE 25th day of the war, we can draw up an interim balance. What were the aims? What are the results?

“To destroy Hizbullah”

Who would have believed it, but on the 25th day Hizbullah is still standing and fighting. A few thousand fighters against the fifth strongest army in the world. Nobody speaks anymore about eliminating it. Not Olmert, not Peretz, not even Dan Halutz – the third corner of this unholy triangle.

“To weaken Hizbullah”

That is a watered down version of the first aim. It is more convenient, because it cannot be measured. After all, in any war both sides

are weakened. People are killed and wounded, arms are destroyed, installations demolished. But while the Israeli army can mobilize another division and another one, and the Americans are rushing more bombs to us, can Hizbullah absorb such losses?

Nobody knows how many fighters the organization has lost. The Israeli army distributes estimates, without being able to prove them. The Lebanese speak about far smaller numbers, and do not have any proof either.

But that is not the main thing. An organization like Hizbullah has no problem in raising more and more volunteers for “holy war”. Be their losses as they may, after the war the organization will train as many new fighters as necessary. Their arsenals will also be replenished with new weapons arriving from Iran and Syria. The border is long, it is impossible to seal it.

“To push Hizbullah away from the border”

That is the crumpled aim, after the two preceding ones were shown to be unattainable. It, too, has not been realized yet, and never will be, because it is also unattainable. Most Hizbullah fighters are local boys of the South Lebanese towns and villages. They will continue to be there, overtly or covertly. No international force can prevent that, and certainly not the Lebanese Army.

The rockets can be moved further away. How many kilometers? Ten? Twenty? That will not remove the threat from Nahariya, Haifa and Tel-Aviv – especially since the range of the missiles is bound to grow with time, when technologically more advanced types arrive.

“To kill Hassan Nasrallah”

For the time being, so it seems, the report of his death was an exaggeration, to quote Mark Twain. True, in a kind of parody of the Entebbe exploit, Nasrallah was pulled out of a hospital in Baalbek,

but it was another Hassan Nasrallah. Oops.

In the meantime, the original Nasrallah is flourishing. Compared to the kitschy speeches of Olmert, with their endless clichés and the fist thumping on the table, the Hizbullah leader comes over as a sober speaker, measured and mostly quite credible.

“To return to the Israeli army the power of deterrence”

Nobody has any doubt that the Israeli army is a good, professional army, capable of defeating regular armies. But this war proves that it is not capable of achieving a military decision against an able guerilla organization with determined fighters. If Hizbullah is alive and kicking after 25 days, the deterrence power of the Israeli army has been weakened – whatever happens from now on.

From this point of view, the war has harmed the security of Israel. It has proved that the Israeli rear is exposed, that the Hizbullah fighters are not inferior to the Israeli soldiers, that there is no deluxe war, that the Air Force cannot win without land forces. Not even in ideal circumstances, when the other side has no anti-air defense to speak of.

Some comfort themselves with the thought that “the Arabs have seen that we are crazy”. We react to a small local provocation with an orgy of killing and destruction, destroying whole countries, a sort of national amok. But running amok is not a policy. It does not solve any problem. It is an uncontrollable reflex. It does not allow for straight thinking. It even allows the other side to manipulate us with premeditated provocations.

“Deploying an International Force along the border”

That is a kind of emergency exit, after all the other aims have gone up in smoke.

At the beginning of the war, Olmert himself strenuously objected

to such a force, because it would restrict the freedom of action of the Israeli army. Clearly, no international force will dare to come, unless there is a cease-fire in place and an agreement with Hizbullah has been reached. Nobody wants to be exposed to cross-fire. Therefore, this force will also have to serve Hizbullah's interests, for fear of a guerilla war starting against it. Have all the sacrifices been made for this?

“We shall create a new situation in the Middle East”

This aim has indeed been achieved – but not the way Olmert told himself (and us).

The long-range results of the war are not immediately obvious. They belong to the category defined by Bismarck as “imponderables” – things that cannot be measured.

Every day on their TV screens tens of millions of Arabs and hundred of millions of Muslims see the atrocious pictures of crushed babies, the sights of the horrible destruction. These are deeply imprinted in the consciousness of the masses and will leave behind them an accumulation of anger and hatred that is far more dangerous than an arsenal of missiles. In these 25 days, thousands of new suicide bombers have been created. And as the stature of Nasrallah as the hero of the Arab world increases, so the respect for the “moderate” Arab regimes hit new lows – the very regimes that the US and Israel rely on for creating the New Middle East.

AFTER THE 25th day, the 26th will arrive, and so on and on. President Bush, who pushed us into this war to start with, is now pushing us to fight on (“Until the last Israeli soldier,” as the saying goes.) Like Olmert, he lives in an imaginary world.

Bush, Olmert and their like can incite and draw the masses behind them, until the call of “the Emperor is naked” finds receptive ears.

33 DAYS

One of the most sickening sights of the war is the picture of the international diplomats doing everything they can to enable Olmert & Co. to go on with the war. The UN has long since become an agent of the White House. Hypocrisy and sanctimoniousness are having a field day, while lives are being destroyed and the dead buried on both sides of the border.

Olmert wants to “gain” as many days as possible for continued fighting. What sort of gain is this? We are conquering South Lebanon as flies conquer fly-paper. Generals present maps with impressive arrows to show how Hizbullah is being pushed north. That might be convincing – if we were talking about a front-line in a war with a regular army, as taught in Staff College. But this is a different war altogether. In the conquered area, Hizbullah people remain, and our soldiers are exposed to attacks of the kind in which Hizbullah has excelled from its first day.

So we shall get to the Litani River. Beyond it, there is another river, and another one. Lebanon has an abundance of rivers we can get to.

Perhaps it would be worthwhile for these two junkies, Olmert and Peretz, to come down from their “high” and study the map.

AUGUST 9, 2006

Who? Me?

TODAY, THE war entered its fifth week. Hard to believe: our mighty army has now been fighting for 29 days against a “gang” and “terrorist organization”, as the military commanders like to describe them, and the battle has still not been decided.

Yesterday, military sources in Israel announced that 400 of the 1200 Hizbullah “terrorists” have been killed. That’s to say, a mere 1200 fighters have been standing against the tens of thousands of our soldiers, who are equipped with the most advanced weapons on earth, and hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens are still under rocket fire while our soldiers continue to be killed.

WHO? ME? Now everybody already admits that something basic has gone wrong in this war. The proof: the War of the Generals, that previously started only after the conclusion of a war, has now become public while the war is still going on.

The Chief-of-Staff, Dan Halutz, has found the culprit: Udi Adam, the chief of the Northern Command. He has practically dismissed him in the middle of the battle. That is the old ploy of the thief shouting “Stop thief!” After all, it is obvious that the person mainly to blame for the failures of the war is Halutz himself, with his foolish belief that Hisbullah could be defeated by aerial bombardment alone.

But it is not only at the top of the army that mutual accusations are flying around. The army command accuses the government, which is retaliating in kind.

On the eve of his downgrading, Udi Adam publicly accused the government of tying his hands. Meaning: the government is guilty.

Ehud Olmert did not remain silent and declared that the army had not submitted any plans for widening the campaign. That's to say: if you are incompetent, don't blame me!

To justify himself, Olmert added a significant sentence: "From the first day of the war, the government has not refused the army a single request!" In other words, it is the Chief-of-Staff who makes policy and conducts the war, while the political leadership just rubber stamps everything that the army "requests".

But this is a sterile debate, because it ignores the main fact, which is becoming clearer from day to day: it is altogether impossible to win this war. That's why nothing is working as planned.

PLAN? WHAT PLAN? Years ago the military commentator of Haolam Hazeh, the magazine I was editing at the time, got fed up with the boast the our army excels in improvisation. "The ability to improvise," he wrote, "Is just another name for our inability to plan."

According to the reports, the Israeli army has been preparing for this war for more than three years. The last exercise took place a month before the war started and included the invasion of Lebanon by land forces. It is clear that the command did not anticipate a campaign that would last for four weeks and more. What the hell! After all, it was against a small gang of terrorists. This just confirms the dictum that even the best war plan does not survive the first day of war.

THE WAR OF THE POOR. It is quite clear that the army command's wonderful plan did not include the defense of the rear within rocket range. There was no plan for the solution of the hundred and one problems emanating from the attack on Hizbullah: from the protection of the civilian population from thousands of missiles to the necessary economic arrangements when a third of the coun-

try's population is living under bombardment and is paralysed.

Now the public is crying out, and soon the ministers and generals will have to try to find somebody to blame for that, too.

For this war is being fought on the backs of the weak, who cannot afford to "evacuate themselves" from the rockets' area. The rich and well-to-do have got out long ago – in Israel as well as in Lebanon. The poor, the old, the sick and the handicapped remain in the shelters. They are the main sufferers. But that does not cause them to oppose the war. On the contrary, they are the most vociferous group in Israel demanding "to go to the end", "to smash them", "to wipe them out".

That is not new, either: the weakest in society always want to feel that they belong to the strongest nation. Those who have nothing become the biggest patriots. And they are also the main victims.

Those who initiated and planned the war cynically flatter the inhabitants of the North, who are stuck there, calling them "heroes" and lauding their "wonderful steadfastness".

UNITED CYNICS. Now the end of the killing depends on the UN.

David Ben-Gurion called it contemptuously "UNO-SHMUNO" (UM-SHMUM in Hebrew). In the 1948 war, he violated its cease-fire resolutions whenever it suited him (as a soldier I took part in some of these actions). He and all his successors over the years have violated almost all the UN decisions concerning us, arguing (not without justification) that the organization was dominated by an automatic anti-Israeli majority, consisting of the Soviet bloc and Third World countries.

Since then, the situation has changed. The Soviet bloc has collapsed and the UN has become an arm of the US State department. Kofi Annan has become a janitor and the real boss is the US delegate, John Bolton, a raving neo-con and therefore a great friend of Israel. He wants the war to go on.

33 DAYS

The name of the American game is: to give the Israeli army more days, and perhaps more weeks, to go on with the war, to pursue the mirage of victory, while pretending to make great efforts to stop the war. It seems that Olmert has promised Bush to win after all, if given time.

The new proposals of the Beirut government have lit red lights in Jerusalem. The Lebanese government proposes to deploy 15 thousand Lebanese troops along the border, declare a cease-fire and get the Israeli troops out of Lebanon. That is exactly what the Israeli government demanded at the start of the war. But now it looks like a danger. It could stop the war without an Israeli victory.

Thus a paradoxical situation has arisen: the Israeli government is rejecting a proposal that reflects its original war aims, and instead demands the deployment of an international force, which it objected to strenuously at the start of the war. That's what happens when you start a war without clear and achievable aims. Everything gets mixed up.

GENERALS AND COMMENTATORS. I have a proposal to solve all the problems caused by this war: to switch the generals and the commentators. The generals have not excelled in conducting the war. But they and their comrades, the ex-generals, have proved themselves excellent commentators. They have crowded everyone else out of the studios, created a national consensus and silenced all real criticism. (Except one sort of criticism: Why do we not advance deeper into Lebanon? Why haven't we reached the Litani? Why don't we go beyond the Litani? Why don't we eradicate the Lebanese villages from the face of the earth?)

On the other side, the broadcasts prove that the military commentators know exactly how to wage the war. They have forceful opinions and plenty of expert advice. They know when to advance and where, which troops to deploy and what weapons to use.

So why not let them conduct the war?

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.

33 DAYS

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.

33 DAYS

- 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 prostitutes, 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

33 DAYS

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

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

33 DAYS

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

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

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

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.



READ MORE POLITICAL ESSAYS

Download political essays by many of the best and brightest commentators from around the world, plus books, booklets, essays, newspapers and magazines – all in pdf format – all free of charge, at www.coldtype.net
(Click on this link to enter web site)



ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD