

MIDDLE EAST PROGRAM

OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES



FALL
2006

A Polarized Middle East
Will Remain Volatile for
Years to Come **5**

The Israeli-Islamist War **8**

The Hizbullah-Israeli
War: an American
Perspective **10**

Rising Power: Domestic
and Strategic Factors of
the Iran-Hizbullah
Connection and their
Regional Implications **13**

Lebanon: Between
Israel's Rock and Syria's
Hard Place **15**

Prelude to War or
Diplomacy? Reflections on
the "Sixth War" **17**

A View from the Region: Different Perspectives on Israel's War with Lebanon's Hizbullah

Introduction

Haleh Esfandiari, Director, Middle East Program

This issue of the Middle East Program's Occasional Paper Series is dedicated to an analysis of the wider and long-term implications of the summer 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon's Hizbullah as seen from the perspective of the key regional and international actors involved in the crisis: Israel, Lebanon, Iran, Syria, and the US and, at one remove, Turkey. To provide these perspectives, we have called on a number of seasoned regional specialists, each with considerable experience in and knowledge of the politics and policies of one of the countries that played a major role in the crisis.

Two of the contributors, Martin Kramer (Israel) and Hadi Semati (Iran), are former scholars at the Woodrow Wilson Center; two, Aaron David Miller (the United States) and Soli

Ozel (Turkey) are current Wilson Center Scholars; and two, Rami Khouri (Lebanon) and Murhaf Jouejati (Syria) have been guest speakers at the center.

Not surprisingly, as the papers in this publication show, the assessment of the causes of the war and its implications, the balance sheet of 'who won?' and 'who lost?' can appear starkly different when viewed from the perspective of, say, Tehran or Tel-Aviv, Damascus or Washington and from the perspective of our own analysts. What is certain, all the contributors to this brief volume agree, is that the war, though of short duration, has far-reaching implications for the strategic balance of power in the region and will shape the calculus and therefore the regional policies of all the major players.

Needless to say, the views presented here are the authors' and do not reflect the policies or

views of the Middle East Program or the Wilson Center. In view of the topicality of the subject, these articles were placed on the Wilson Center's website prior to publication.

The immediate cause for the outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Hizbullah in July 2006 was a raid carried out by Hizbullah in which three Israeli soldiers were killed and two abducted. However, cross-border conflict between Israel and Hizbullah has a longer history. A bloody

three-week border confrontation ended in late April 1996 only through intensive shuttle diplomacy by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher. The relative quiet of the border following Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon was occasionally shattered by Hizbullah rocket attacks.

In the July 2006 Hizbullah raid, three Israeli soldiers were killed and two Israeli soldiers were abducted. Israel refused Hizbullah's offer of a

About the Middle East Program

Director

Dr. Haleh Esfandiari

Assistant

Azucena Rodriguez

Special thanks


Special thanks to: Azucena Rodriguez for coordinating this publication; Jason Blake for his editing work; and Lianne Hepler for designing the Occasional Paper Series.

The Middle East Program was launched in February 1998 in light of increased U.S. engagement and the profound changes sweeping across many Middle Eastern states. In addition to spotlighting day-to-day issues, the Program continues to concentrate on long-term developments and their impact on political and social structure, economic development, and relations with the United States.

The Middle East Program draws on domestic and foreign regional experts for its meetings, conferences, and occasional papers. Conferences and meetings assess the policy implications of long-term political, social, and economic developments in the region and individual states; the Middle East's role in the international arena; American interests in the region; the threat of terrorism; and strategic threats to and from the regional states.

The Program pays special attention to the role of women, youth, civil society institutions, Islam, and democratic and autocratic tendencies. In addition, the Middle East Program hosts programs on cultural issues, including contemporary art and literature in the region.

- **Current Affairs:** The Middle East Program emphasizes analysis of current issues and their implications for long-term developments in the region, including Arab-Israeli diplomacy, Iraq and its neighbors, political participation, globalization, technology transfer, U.S. foreign policy, economic and political partnerships, and the impact of developments in Central Asia and the Caucasus.
- **Gender Issues:** The Middle East Program examines employment patterns, education, legal rights, and political participation of women in the region. The role of women in advancing civil society, the problem of trafficking in women, and the attitudes of governments and the clerical community toward women's rights are areas to which the Program devotes considerable attention. The Program also has a keen interest in exploring women's increasing roles in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction activities.
- **Islam, Democracy and Civil Society:** The Middle East Program monitors the growing demand of people in the region for democratization, accountable government, the rule of law, and adherence to international conventions on topics such as human rights and women's rights. It continues to examine the role of Islamic movements in shaping political and social developments and the variety of factors that favor or obstruct the expansion of civil society.



prisoner exchange and responded to the incursion by air strikes on Hizbullah's strongholds in south Lebanon and on the port of Beirut, runways at Beirut airport, bridges, roads, highways, electricity plants, and other vital infrastructure in the Lebanese interior. Israel also sent ground forces into Lebanon and imposed a sea blockade on the country. Hizbullah retaliated by a barrage of Katyusha rocket attacks on Israeli border towns and settlements, and on the city of Haifa, and engaged Israeli ground forces on Lebanese territory. Civilians on both countries fled the war zone.

Internationally, Iran and Syria, the sponsors of Hizbullah and its principal source of weapons and funding, continued to champion the Hizbullah cause. The U.S. strongly supported Israeli military action as a legitimate act of self defense, supplied Israel with arms, provided Israel with diplomatic support, and resisted demands for a ceasefire before Israel could neutralize Hizbullah's ability to fire rockets into Israel. Arab states, initially critical of Hizbullah for unnecessarily initiating the crisis, grew increasingly critical of Israel and more vociferous in their demand for a ceasefire as civilian casualties and physical damage to Lebanon mounted.

A ceasefire, brokered by the United Nations, came into effect on August 14. It called for Lebanese and international forces to be deployed in South Lebanon and other strategic points to prevent further Hizbullah attacks on Israel and block the re-supply of weapons to Hizbullah; for the disarming of non-state militias in Lebanon, and for the assertion of Lebanese government control over the whole of Lebanese territory. A Lebanese army contingent was deployed in the south for the first time in 20 years in August; UNIFIL, the United Nations force in Lebanon was reinforced with troops contributed by France, Italy and other European states. By early September, active hostilities had ceased; Israel continued a withdrawal of its forces from Lebanon and ended the blockade of Lebanese ports; and Lebanese and international troops replaced the withdrawing Israelis.

Major problems remained, however neither the Lebanese nor the UNIFIL regarded disarming Hizbullah as part of their mandate. The kid-

napped Israeli soldiers were not returned and any prisoner exchange remained to be negotiated, as was the vexed question of Israeli occupation of Sheba Farms. No one could be certain if the Lebanese and UNIFIL forces would prove effective in preventing a new outbreak of violence. Lebanon faced a huge task of repairing damaged infrastructure and housing.

In the papers in this issue, our contributors analyze the national and regional implications of the war.

Rami Khouri argues in his piece the war has only intensified polarization in the region. He describes three circles of polarization. The first is between governments that are losing credibility with their own people and non-state actors, including political parties and armed resistance groups, emboldened by Hizbullah's success and increasingly occupying the vacuum left by non-performing regimes. A second polarization has emerged between regional states and the political forces allied to them in the competition to define the political identity of the Middle East. Syria and Iran, allied with Hizbullah, Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, are challenging the conservative Arab states. A third polarization is reflected in the struggle between the United States and its ally, Israel, and radical states and groups in the Middle East to define the ideological, social and economic orientation of the region. Khouri argues that these three polarizations intersect in Lebanon. He warns that another Israel-Hizbullah war will lead to the total destruction of Lebanon by Israel. He also points also to the dangers stemming from the increasing assertiveness of Islamic movements, the unresolved Palestinian issue, the presence and role of Western armies, and impatience of Arab citizens with things as they are. Khouri argues for a renewed US effort to address and resolve the many problems in the region, culminating in peace treaties between Israel and Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians.

Martin Kramer sees the Israel-Hizbullah war in Lebanon as opening a third phase in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The first phase between the Arab states and the state of Israel ended with the defeat of the Arabs in the 1967 war. The second phase, between the Palestinians and Israel, ended with


the death of Arafat and the increasing ineffectiveness of the PLO and its successors. The third phase, the Israeli-Islamist conflict, was pioneered by Ayatollah Khomeini, with Hizbullah in Lebanon as its instrument. The Hamas electoral victory in the West Bank and Gaza and the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran has put the Islamists in the driver's seat. Iran under President Ahmadinejad has revived the idea that a combination of Iranian nukes, Hizbullah rockets and Hamas resistance make possible a new, multi-front offensive against Israel. The recent war in Lebanon highlighted both the strength and the real weaknesses of the Islamist movement. But it is essential that U.S. prevents Iran from going nuclear and the Islamists from gaining more military and political power. Otherwise, more Israel-Islamist wars are certain to follow.

Aaron Miller analyzes the Bush Administration's perspective on the recent Lebanon crisis. He notes the unstable situation created on the Israeli-Lebanese border by Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon, the arming of Hizbullah and the empowerment of Hamas, the collapse of Israeli Palestinian and Israeli-Syrian negotiations, and Syrian resentment at its forced withdrawal from Lebanon. More important, he notes, is the impact of 9/11 on America's perception of the world. The exigencies of the 'war on terror,' the emphasis on spreading democracy in the region, and the strengthened commitment to Israel in this new and dangerous Middle East shaped America's response to the outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Hizbullah. Israel had to be supported and Hizbullah defeated because broader strategic goals were in play. The US, however, lacked the diplomatic means to match its goals; and Israel was unable to achieve its military aims in Lebanon. The UN resolution that ended hostilities made the best of a situation for which a satisfactory solution, from the U.S. perspective, was not available. The future in Lebanon, Miller notes, is full of uncertainties; but he argues that the U. S. must commit funds and effort to stabilizing Lebanon, engage with Syria, have an honest dialogue with Israel about where we go next, invest in long-term development in Gaza and the West Bank, and lay out the parameters for a final solution of the core issues

still obstructing final peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

Hadi Semati, examining the Iran-Hizbullah connection, believes that Hizbullah has become less dependent on Iran in recent years. He notes that the Lebanon crisis initially sparked a debate in Iran. Reformists argued Hizbullah blundered when it precipitated the crisis with Israel, damaging both Iran's and Hizbullah's interests. A broad conservative coalition argued that Hizbullah had to resist an Israeli-U.S. project to reshape the Middle East and to weaken Iran. However, the war itself altered the strategic calculus inside Iran. The civilian casualties and material damage resulting from Israeli military action in Lebanon made difficult further criticism of Hizbullah, made support for it domestically imperative, and gave the government freedom of action on Lebanon policy. The enhanced standing of both Hizbullah and Iran on the Arab street, Iran's sense of success and growing self-confidence, the perception in Iran and the Muslim world that the Israeli army under-performed, and the confirmation of the belief that Israel and the U.S. are bent on damaging Iran and dominating the region have, ironically, reinforced Iran's inclination to project itself in the region. While Semati expects Iran to continue to act pragmatically in Lebanon, he thinks Iran increasingly sees Hizbullah as an instrument for furthering its strategic interests. Iran will not support disarmament of Hizbullah or attempts to reduce its influence in Lebanese politics. On the contrary, he expects that Iran's financial and logistical support for Hizbullah to continue "without hesitation" in the future.

Murhaf Jouejati, examining the war from the perspective of Damascus, points out that Syria, never reconciled to the February 2005 UN Security Council resolution that required it to withdraw its forces from Lebanon, has worked assiduously to undermine the Lebanese government. It cajoled, pushed, and threatened. It has tried to cripple the Lebanese economy, smuggled weapons to Palestinian militants and assassinated Syria's Lebanese critics. Syria fears that a Lebanese government independent from Syria might sign a peace treaty with Israel, greatly weakening Syria's bargaining position vis-à-vis



Israel. Had there been peace between Syria and Israel, Jouejati asserts, the Israel-Hizbullah war would not have occurred. Peace between Israel and Syria would not be difficult to achieve, Jouejati argues, if Israel agrees to full withdrawal from the occupied Golan. But a series of U.S. measures hostile to Syria suggest Washington is an unlikely mediator between Syria and Israel; and without a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, he argues, Lebanon will remain “the battlefield of choice” between Syria and Israel.

Soli Ozel analyzes the broad regional repercussions of the war. Israel’s military credibility was damaged; and Hizbullah suffered losses but emerged politically robust and regionally popular. The war also highlighted the growing

Shi’ite-Sunni sectarian polarization in the Middle East, and Iran’s growing influence which the Arab states are scrambling to contain. Ozel sees the war as part of a broader American-Iranian struggle to shape the region. One result has been to enhance Turkey’s role as a regional player. The Arabs are eager to include Turkey in a coalition of Sunni states to contain Iran; it might provide peace-keeping troops in Lebanon. Another round of war is not inevitable, however. What is required is “multidimensional diplomatic leadership” by the U.S. aimed at a “grand settlement” of regional disputes that will engage Syria and Iran and take the security needs and interests of these two countries into consideration.

A Polarized Middle East Will Remain Volatile for Years to Come

By **Rami G. Khouri**, is editor-at-large of the Beirut-based Daily Star newspaper, he is an internationally syndicated political columnist and author.

The month-long war between Israel and Lebanon has inflicted severe human and material damage on the two countries—but the political phase of this contest that has now started will send out ripples that will be felt throughout the Middle East and perhaps the world. The most important political consequences of the Israel-Lebanon clashes will reflect the fundamental political polarization that is most dramatically seen in Lebanon, but that defines trends throughout the entire region. Three simultaneous circles of polarization and confrontation should be appreciated.

The first is that between official governments and non-state actors in the Arab world. As governments have lost credibility and impact in recent decades, the vacuum has been filled by political parties and armed resistance groups, of which Hizbullah is the most impressive to date. Its historic successes in driving Israel out of Lebanon in 2000 and fighting it to a draw in 2006 will stimulate other like-minded movements in the region to emulate its organizational and political prowess. Tensions will increase throughout the region between

worried governments and emboldened opposition movements.

Inside Lebanon itself in the coming months, Hizbullah will find itself locked in a profound political struggle with those forces that want to disarm it. That contest will be only a microcosm of the wider struggle in the region between the legitimacy of the state and the counter-legitimacy of Islamist and resistance movements that feel they respond more effectively to their citizens’ needs and rights.

The second polarization is between countries and political forces within the region that are waging a regional cold war for the political identity of the Middle East. Syria and Iran, along with groups like Hizbullah, Hamas, the Moslem Brotherhood and others, are actively challenging the more conservative, often pro-Western states like Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Egypt. This contest will continue to simmer for many years. It is intimately linked to the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the more militant or even “revolutionary” and Islamist parties confronting Israel while the moderate and traditionally pro-Western countries take a more relaxed position.



One of the reasons for the rise of non-state parties and armed resistance groups in Lebanon and Palestine is precisely because the long-reigning Arab governments in the region have failed miserably either to make war or peace with Israel.

The third circle of polarization goes beyond the Middle East, and is focused around the American pressure on Iran to stop its plans to develop a full nuclear fuel cycle. If nuclear issues form the core of this contestation, the wider struggle is about the ideological, social and economic orientation of the Middle East region. The Iranian-Syrian-Hizbullah-led camp sees itself fighting back against Israeli and American hegemony in the region, while the United States, closely allied with Israel, for its part speaks openly about creating a “new” Middle East of societies closely linked to Western values and interests. Hizbullah’s leader Hassan Nasrallah has explicitly stated in recent television addresses that his group fought Israel in part to prevent Lebanon from permanently becoming part of American plans for a new Middle East.

These three circles of polarization intersect very sharply in Lebanon and especially in Hizbullah’s multiple roles as a political party, anti-occupation resistance group and Islamist movement that sees itself as part of a wider regional identity. The severe mutual attacks during the 34-day Lebanon war—the longest such war Israel has ever had to fight since its birth in 1948—are the harbinger of the sort of political intensity the region will witness in the years ahead.


Islamist movements throughout the Middle East will take heart and lessons from Hizbullah’s performance, and are likely to challenge incumbent governments more directly in the political arena, through elections but also in civil society activities like the media and youth groups. Hizbullah and Hamas are the two leading Islamist resistance movements in the region, and their fate will have a major influence on how other such political and social movements develop.

Hizbullah has emerged from the war with stronger political support throughout Arab public opinion, but greater opposition among governments. It has started to shift the center of

gravity of its identity and political constituency from its military resistance to Israel to its political engagement in Lebanon. One reason for this is the dawning appreciation that this was a war that Hizbullah could wage only one time, to prove its capabilities and political will, which it did rather emphatically. If it happens again, though, Lebanon will be destroyed, literally burned by Israeli fire.

Hizbullah would not be destroyed, and it will regroup and fight again, perhaps with more destructive power that penetrates deeper into Israel. But Lebanon would become a wasteland, a biblical desolation. Like Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis, Lebanon would be burned and left to smolder as an eternal reminder to all generations to come of the utter devastation that people or states can expect as their fate if they challenge Israel’s army, threaten Israel’s security, or defy Washington too often. Israel would willingly wage such war over and over again, against Syria and perhaps Iran, possibly in collusion with the United States. Some in Washington relish such destruction and chaos in Arab and Islamic lands, feeling that only a sustained frontal assault on the prevailing Arab political culture can break the mould that has defined many of our violent lands in modern times.

Afghanistan and Iraq are examples of this approach. Palestine is halfway there. Lebanon is a candidate for political oblivion, and has just had its warning. The message of Israel’s attack and siege of Beirut is simple: Those who thought they could transform Beirut—the Paris of the Middle East—into its Hanoi would only end up seeing it turned into Mogadishu, the shattered capital of a failed and wayward Somali state, fought over by alternating gangs and warlords and forgotten by the world. Hizbullah cannot wage this war again, and must now shift to building on the gains it has made through political engagement, inside Lebanon and around the region. It has not signaled the direction or tone of its political plans, but the signs of the past month indicate that it will reorient its energies to domestic Lebanese politics—if Lebanon, Israel, the US and others allow it to do so. I see no other interpretation of the five significant decisions Hizbullah has made since early



August: accepting Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's 7-point peace plan, accepting the Lebanese government decision to send the army to the southern border region, accepting UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and its call for a beefed up UN force in southern Lebanon, energetically repopulating and rebuilding the mainly Shiite civilian areas that had been bombed and evacuated during the war, and calling for a new government of national unity in which it and its allies would play a major role.

Hizbullah claims, with some credibility, that it has forced Israel and the international community to address the issues that matter for Lebanon, such as Shabaa Farms, prisoners, and cross-border attacks. The UN-mandated political process in Resolution 1701 offers a route to resolve those issues. It could, if successful, even reinvigorate a regional conflict-resolution process that is anchored in law, and driven by negotiations, rather than emotionalism, and desolation.

Such a development relies in part on an unknown but important element: the standing of the United States in the region. The US in many ways was marginalized in the recent war — supporting and supplying Israel but unable to engage the Arabs in serious diplomacy. Condoleezza Rice was told by the Lebanese prime minister not to come to Beirut at one point unless she was prepared to push for an immediate cease-fire. She went home instead. The Saudi Arabian leadership issued a rare public statement admonishing the US and Israel, and reminding the world that the Arabs had a war option alongside their peace offer to Israel. Washington's standing in the region will remain clouded for some time—unless the US suddenly reverses policy and adopts a more balanced position in the Arab-Israeli conflict, actively engages as an impartial mediator in the quest for a negotiated peace, and winds down its neo-con-driven military forays into the region to change regimes and remake nations. Critics of the United States have not hesitated to point out that last year it heralded Lebanon as a model of its freedom-promotion strategy in the Arab world, while this year Washington actively supported Israel's widespread destruction of Lebanon's airports, roads, bridges and power plants. Relying

on Washington, many Arabs now feel, is a reckless and desperate endeavor. The four countries where the US has intervened recently to promote freedom and democracy—Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon—are now in bad or desperate shape, plagued by active wars and disintegrating state systems in many cases.

The Lebanon-Israel war highlighted the linkages that exist among many of the conflicts or political confrontations in the region. The continued tensions between the US and Iran keep becoming more acute, Iraq simmers in its own problems, Lebanon and its testy ties with Syria remain volatile, and the Arab-Israeli conflict moves in and out of center-stage. One of the important potential developments of the Lebanon-Israel war has been the heightened appreciation of how the unresolved Palestine issue impacts on Arab public opinion and therefore on these conflicts. An increasing number of political analysts and officials seem to recognize the need to resolve the Palestine-Israel conflict in order to move towards peace and stability in the region as a whole.

This will also create new tensions in the months and years ahead, as the growing power of Islamist movements such as Hizbullah and Hamas runs up against the desire of more moderate Arab states to explore signing peace agreements with Israel—if Israel finally accepts to withdraw from all the lands occupied in 1967 and live alongside a viable Palestinian state. In exploring how to move ahead in view of the linkages between the many conflicts in the Middle East, two options seem to prevail. The first is to try and solve them all in a great package deal that touches on Iran's nuclear power, Israeli peace agreements with Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, winding down the foreign presence and the violence in Iraq, and sorting out Lebanon's internal issues and its ties with Syria. The second is to address the issues sequentially, building on the gains of each successive agreement.

This could see the cease-fire in south Lebanon followed by a full Israeli withdrawal, and exchange of prisoners and a permanent end of hostilities, capped by an Israeli withdrawal from Shabaa Farms. Resolving the bilateral Lebanese-Israeli issues could then trigger a

resumption of the 1991 Madrid peace conference, aiming to sign peace treaties between Israel and each of Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. That in turn would allow Syrian-Lebanese ties to be normalized, allowing the parties then to focus on cooling down Iraq and Iran.

One thing is sure, though: the region cannot be expected to remain calm while the underlying issues that anger people remain unresolved. Two key ones from the Arab perspective are Palestine and the role of Western armies in the region. The strength and assertiveness of the Islamist movements—whether through military con-

frontation like Hizbullah or winning elections as in many other cases—is a sign that majorities of Arab citizens are not content to remain docile and dejected in the state of subjugation and defeat that has defined them for the past several decades. The war in Lebanon is a reminder that unresolved political tensions can remain hidden under the rug for some time, but eventually they burst out with a vengeance. We should expect a period of years of dynamic political and perhaps military confrontations, as the new and old forces of the Middle East do battle to define its future identity.



The Israeli-Islamist War

By Martin Kramer, is the Wexler-Fromer Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and a Senior Fellow at the Shalem Center in Jerusalem.

Who won the summer war between Israel and Hizbullah?

Right after the ceasefire, Hizbullah and its Iranian patrons declared the war a “divine victory,” and the *Economist* concurred, running this headline across its cover: “Nasrallah Wins the War.” Israel sank into a funk of self-recrimination.

But a few weeks later, Hizbullah leader Hasan Nasrallah admitted that if he had it to do again, he would have avoided provoking Israel in the first place. Now it was the turn of Israel’s government to claim victory. *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer chimed in, claiming that Hizbullah “was seriously set back by the war,” and *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman called it a “devastating defeat”—for Hizbullah.

The question of who got the upper hand will remain contested. But the debate over who won and who lost obscures the deeper significance of the summer war. It marks the beginning of the third stage in the conflict over Israel.

An evolving conflict

In the first stage, from Israel’s creation in 1948 through 1973, rejection of Israel dressed itself as pan-Arab nationalism. In the classic Arab-Israeli conflict, Arab states formed alliances in

the name of Arab unity, with the aim of isolating Israel and building an Arab coalition that could wage war on two or more fronts.

The fatal flaw of this strategy lay in the weakness of pan-Arabism itself. The failure to coordinate led Arab states to humiliating defeats in the multi-front Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967. In 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a coordinated Arab assault on Israel, with partial success. But Egypt then opted out of the Arab collective by reaching a separate peace with Israel in 1979, and the Arab-Israeli conflict came to an end.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict took its place. In this second stage, the Palestine Liberation Organization used a mix of politics and “armed struggle” to open up new fronts against Israel—in Jordan and Lebanon in the heyday of the *fedayeen*, in the West Bank and Gaza in the first *intifada*, and in Israel proper in the second.

But the Palestinian struggle also stalled as the PLO grew sclerotic, inefficient, and corrupt. Its transformation into the ramshackle Palestinian Authority only amplified its weaknesses. The death of its leader Yasir Arafat in 2004 effectively marked the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the third and present stage, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been superseded by the Israeli-Islamist conflict.



There had always been an Islamist component to the “resistance” against Israel, but it had traditionally played a supporting role, first to the Arab states, and then to the PLO. It was Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of the Islamist revolution in Iran, who pioneered an entirely different vision of the role Islamism should play opposite Israel.

Khomeini rejected the view that Israel had become a *fait accompli* and thereby entitled a place in the region. He believed that Islam had the power to call forth the sacrifice and discipline needed to deny legitimacy to Israel and ultimately defeat it.

To achieve that goal, Islamists could not rest content with a supporting role; they had to push their way to the front. By establishing Hizbullah as an armed vanguard in Lebanon, Khomeini sought to open a new Islamist front against Israel, independent of weak Arab states and the ineffective PLO.

In the 1990s, Islamist movements gained ground across the Middle East. A Palestinian Islamist movement, Hamas, filled the vacuum left by the PLO’s incompetence. Hizbullah waged a successful campaign to end the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon. But while Islamists rejected peace with Israel and called for “resistance,” they could not challenge the prerogative of the Arab states and the PLO to make grand strategy toward Israel.

That is, until this past year.

The Islamist moment

Two developments have put the Islamists in the driver’s seat. First, Palestinian elections last winter carried Hamas to power in the West Bank and Gaza. Hamas has regarded the elections as a mandate not merely to substitute good government for PLO corruption, but to bend Palestinian strategy to the Islamist vision of gradual attrition of Israel.

Second, Iran’s nuclear drive under President Ahmadinejad has revitalized the idea that Israel can be confronted on the external front.

The possible combination of Iranian nukes, Hizbullah rockets, and Hamas “resistance” has electrified the Arab-Muslim world. Might the forces of Islamism, acting in concert, achieve the

victory that eluded Arab states and the PLO? Might they make it possible, once more, to wage a multi-front offensive against Israel? Might an Islamist coalition achieve greater success, by tapping the self-sacrificial spirit of Islam?

This summer brought the Islamist coalition into play against Israel in a multi-front war for the first time. It was not the war Iran would have chosen: Iranian strategy would have deployed the coalition at a moment of Iran’s own choosing, perhaps closer to the make-or-break point in Tehran’s nuclear plans. But Israel preferred to meet the challenge early, launching a preemptive war against Hizbullah’s missiles, rockets, and infrastructure.

Paradoxically, Israel was not fully prepared for the war it launched; Hizbullah, surprised by the outbreak of war, was nevertheless ready for it. The media then hyped those analysts who drew extravagant conclusions from Israel’s hesitant performance. Viewers of one American network could hear a gushing consultant declare: “Hizbullah is a powerhouse... Hizbullah delivers the goods... Hizbullah has proven its muscles... Israel is a paper tiger after all... The rules of the Arab-Israeli conflict will have changed for good.” Of course, it would be easy to make the opposite case, beginning with the new rules in Lebanon that constrain Hizbullah.

Strengths and weaknesses

The verdict is still out—this has been the cautious refrain of the most serious analysts. But the war does offer some glimpse into the possible character of the Israeli-Islamist conflict, by showing the intrinsic strengths and weaknesses of the Islamist coalition.

The Islamist coalition is strong in areas of ideological discipline and leadership authority. The ideology purports to be “authentic,” and efficiently mobilizes pent-up resentments against Israel and the West. The leaders personify a spirit of defiance that is overvalued in their societies, and they command nearly total obedience. Training is exacting; everyone follows orders; no one surrenders.

The Islamist coalition also brings together a flexible mix of assets, comprised as it is of a state actor (Iran), a quasi-state actor (Hamas),

and a sub-state actor (Hizbullah). They have developed innovative weapons systems, from suicide bombings to rockets, which go around and under Israel's conventional military strengths.

And if Iran were to acquire missile-launched nuclear weapons, they would transform Israel's small size from an advantage (short lines of defense and supply) into a liability (total vulnerability to one strike). An Iranian nuclear weapon could transform the Israeli-Islamist conflict into a much more dangerous game, in which periodic nuclear-alert crises could bring about the economic, political, and demographic attrition of Israel.

But the Islamist coalition also has weaknesses. First, its backbone is Shi'ite. Some Sunnis, including Islamists, see the coalition as a threat to traditional Sunni primacy, as much as it is a threat to Israel. Saudi Arabia, in particular, has mobilized against the Iranian-led coalition, which makes it more difficult for the coalition to keep Sunni Islamists in its orbit. And while the coordination between Iran and Hizbullah is total, Hamas has its own strategy, which reflects its own predicament and the constraints imposed by its Arab patrons.

The other major weakness of the Islamist coalition is its lack of direct access to Israel's borders. The unmarked turf between Israel and the West Bank has been closed off by Israel's separation barrier to the detriment of

Hamas. In the summer war, Hizbullah lost its exclusive control of Lebanon's border with Israel, arguably the most significant strategic outcome of the war. Without access to Israel's borders, the Islamist coalition cannot conduct a sustained war of attrition against Israel. Moreover, if the coalition uses its rocket arsenal (its remaining offensive capability), it effectively licenses Israel to retaliate with devastating force.

Absent nuclear weapons, the Islamist coalition is thus likely to remain blocked, unless and until it includes an Arab state that neighbors Israel. Syria is an obvious candidate for that role, but its present leadership acts as an ally of the coalition, and not a full-fledged member in it. There are Islamist political movements in Egypt and Jordan that would eagerly join the coalition, but they are presently kept at bay by moderate regimes.

Given these limitations, the Israeli-Islamist conflict is still far from defining the "new Middle East." But it could come to define it, if the United States allows the Islamist coalition to gain more military and political power. If the United States stops Iran's nuclear drive, and bolsters moderate Arab rulers against their Islamist opponents, the summer of 2006 may be remembered as the first Israeli-Islamist war—and the last. If not, more wars will almost certainly follow.




The Hizbullah-Israeli War: an American Perspective

By Aaron David Miller, is a Woodrow Wilson Center Public Policy Scholar, he also served at the Department of State as an adviser to six Secretaries of State.

It was unusual for an Israeli Prime Minister to break open a bottle of champagne in front of American negotiators at a formal meeting. But that's exactly what Shimon Peres did. It was late April 1996, and Peres was marking the end of a bloody three week border confrontation with Hizbullah diffused only by an intense ten day shuttle orchestrated by Secretary of State Warren Christopher. Those understandings negotiated between the governments of Israel and Syria (the latter standing in for Hizbullah) would create an

Israeli-Lebanese monitoring group, co-chaired by the United States and France. These arrangements were far from perfect, but contributed, along with on-again-off-again Israeli-Syrian negotiations, to an extended period of relative calm along the Israeli-Lebanese border.

The April understandings would last until Israel's withdrawal. The recent summer war between Hizbullah and Israel, triggered by the Shia militia's attack on an Israeli patrol on July 12, masked a number of other factors which



would set the stage for the confrontation as well as the Bush administration's response. Six years of relative quiet had witnessed Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in June of 2000, a steady supply of Katushya rockets—both short and long range—from Iran to Hizbullah, the collapse of Israel's negotiations with Syria and the Palestinians, and the onset of the worst Israeli-Palestinian war in half a century. A perfect storm was brewing, spawned by the empowerment of both Hizbullah and Hamas, Iranian reach into the Arab-Israeli zone, Syria's forced withdrawal from Lebanon, a determination by Israel to restore its strategic deterrence in the wake of unilateral withdrawals from Lebanon and Gaza, and an inexperienced Israeli prime minister and defense minister uncertain of how that should be done.

But that's not all that had changed. Perhaps the single most important factor that would set the point of departure for the American response to the crisis was the 9/11 syndrome. The attacks in 2001, the Afghanistan campaign, the invasion and occupation of Iraq, and the war against terror would fundamentally alter the United States' perception of the world and how best to protect American interests there.

The new priorities were clear: fighting terror abroad to safeguard American security at home; spreading democracy through regime change in Iraq and Palestine while pressing a reformist agenda throughout the Arab world to ensure that democratic regimes would be anti-terrorist and pro-western in character; and using preemptive, preventative military power and counterterrorism instead of conventional diplomacy to address the problem.

This new and dangerous world required toughness and a moral clarity and consistency which almost by definition reduced the incentive and opportunity for traditional engagement in the Arab-Israeli arena, particularly on the Israeli-Palestinian problem. Standing by Israel in this new world was critical as two democracies confronted terror. But from the administration's standpoint, dealing with Arafat (an acquiescor in terror) or Hamas (a proponent) or Syria (a junior member of the Middle Eastern axis of evil) was neither possible nor desirable.

With Abu Mazen too weak and Ariel Sharon headed off in the direction of unilateral withdrawal (a policy the administration rightly hailed as withdrawing Israeli settlers, soldiers, and moving toward ending Israeli occupation) there appeared little else to be done. Indeed, anyone looking at the prospects for significant breakthroughs in Arab-Israeli negotiations between 2001 and 2005 might have turned and run. There were no negotiations; no trust between the parties, no mutually agreed framework (the Quartet Road Map, a convenient fiction which neither Israelis nor Palestinians really accepted); and of course no third party mediator willing to take the problem on in a serious way. In short, Arab-Israeli peace was not a top priority for the Bush administration.

It should have come as no surprise then that the administration responded to the Lebanon-Israeli crisis with the software that had guided its overall Middle East policy. Iran had changed the status quo by providing Hizbullah with a new and more dangerous rocket capacity; Hizbullah had provoked the crisis; and Israel needed to be supported. From Washington's perspective, this was never about kidnapped prisoners or a localized border confrontation. There were broader strategic goals that needed to be achieved: a Hizbullah defeat, a setback for Iran, and a change in the Lebanon situation that would strengthen central authority, build on the Cedar Revolution, and keep the Syrians at bay.

The goals may have been worthwhile but the administration lacked the wherewithal to achieve them. Conventional diplomacy was never an option. This was not 1996 where an administration could use Israel and Syria to broker an accord. The administration was not going to engage with Bashar al-Assad, a man already tarred with the assassination of a Lebanese prime minister, and who seemed to have all the flaws of his father but none of the strengths. In any event, Syria wasn't eager to rush in. It saw Israel's destruction of Lebanon as a payback to the Lebanese for forcing Syria out; and it relished Hizbullah's capacity to rocket northern Israel with impunity.

Moreover, if the administration was counting on Israel to hand Hizbullah a strategic defeat, it

quickly became apparent that this was not to be. After relying on airpower, then on limited ground forces, the Israelis finally used mobilized reserves in an attempt to clear Hizbullah fighters and infrastructure south of the Litani. That Hizbullah succeeded on the final day before the UN ceasefire took effect to launch more rockets into northern Israel than on any previous day of the confrontation demonstrates just how short Israel fell in accomplishing its goals.

The administration's efforts to defuse the crisis through a UN Security Council resolution may have been somewhat paradoxical given Washington's suspicion of New York corridor diplomacy, but it was a pragmatic calculation. A UN initiative would not only reinforce UN Security Council Resolution 1559 but it would share the responsibility for post-ceasefire arrangements with others, particularly a UN mandated international force. That said, the administration really had no choice. Israel lacked the military strategy to stop Hizbullah rockets; and there was no negotiating process that would have either. Four weeks after the crisis began with American credibility (and power) much diminished, the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 gave Hizbullah and Israel what both now wanted and needed: an excuse and justification to stand down.

It may take months for the full impact of the Israel-Lebanon war to play out in the region. Uncertainties abound: the effectiveness of an international force in Lebanon; the political future of Ehud Olmert; developments in a confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians; and Syrian and Israeli calculations in the wake of the current crisis. What is safe to assume, however, is that the new Middle East will likely be as messy and complicated as the old—if not more. Looking at the region in September 2006, the post-war environment would appear to be decidedly unfriendly for the United States. Battered down in Iraq, facing an emboldened Iran and Hizbullah, allied with a weakened Israeli government with few good options on the Palestinian and Syrian tracks, and with damaged credibility throughout the region, America confronts many problems and few genuine opportunities. As it seeks to navigate this unpredictable and unstable

region, there are key elements that it ought to bear in mind as it seeks to protect its interests and restore American credibility.

1. Lebanon may be better but it won't be perfect:

The summer war could actually help stabilize the border area and enhance Lebanese central authority south of the Litani. To have any chance of succeeding however, the United States needs to make Lebanon a top priority. That means appointing a high level presidential envoy to serve as a facilitator and expeditor to work with the Lebanese, the Israelis, the UN, the Arabs, and the Europeans in an effort to marshal economic assistance, stabilize the security situation, and facilitate the implementation of as much of UN Security Council resolution 1701 as possible.

2. Engage Syria with eyes open and expectations low:

Stability in Lebanon will not be possible without Syrian acquiescence. The administration should probe the Syrians on Lebanon looking for areas of congruence and determine what may be possible on broader issues such as negotiations with Israel on the Golan and to enhance stability in southern Lebanon. Israeli-Palestinian peace is still the core issue but Hizbullah's rockets have emerged as a much greater threat to Israeli security than Palestinian terror. That's enough reason for the United States (and Israel) to see what's possible with Damascus.

3. A reassuring but honest dialogue with Israel:

The Israelis are defensive and unsteady and will be look for ways to demonstrate their reach, particularly in Lebanon. Killing Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah and interdicting Iranian and Syrian resupply of Hizbullah may be on their agenda. The administration needs to work closely with the Israelis to enhance stability in Lebanon and to understand Prime Minister Olmert's thinking on both the Syrian and Palestinian tracks.

4. Manage the Israeli-Palestinian impasse:

Options on the Israeli-Palestinian front are bleak. Prime Minister Olmert's realignment

plan is almost certainly dead and the prospects for a negotiated solution between Israel and Hamas are remote. But the administration needs to focus on stabilizing the Palestinian front beginning with a negotiated solution to the problem of the kidnapped Israeli soldier and those Palestinians taken by Israel. Broader goals should be a longer term ceasefire and economic development in Gaza and the West Bank.

5. **A new Bush vision:** There is no possibility for a negotiated solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the creation of a Palestinian state

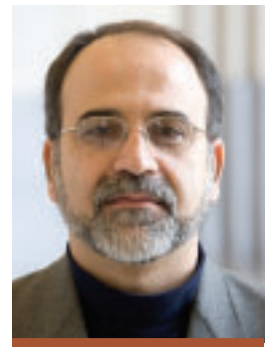
by the end of this administration's term. At the same time, American interests would be well served if the administration were to lay out at an appropriate time its vision for an end game. It's up to Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate the details. The administration could lay out parameters on the four core issues: territory, Jerusalem, refugees, and security. Reaffirming the desirability and the feasibility of a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians is important for American credibility and the advancement of our interests in the region, even if for the time being that goal is unachievable.

Rising Power: Domestic and Strategic Factors of the Iran-Hizbullah Connection and their Regional Implications

By **Hadi Semati**, was a former Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, and a Professor of Political Science at the Faculty of Law and Political Science at Tehran University.

The cross border operation by Hizbullah and the massive response of Israel has exacerbated the already impaired (in)security complex in the region. The war brought the region much closer to a wider conflict and shattered the operating framework of the Bush administration and its supporters that the intractable conflicts of the Middle East could be delinked and dealt with separately. From the beginning of the crisis, many pointed fingers at Iran as the major accomplice in Hizbullah's adventure, for Tehran was desperately trying to divert attention from the looming confrontation with the West over its nuclear program. We will probably never know the extent and nature of the Iranian involvement. Hizbullah, however, has become much more independent in recent years both operationally and financially, and would not necessarily consult with Tehran on every operation that it undertakes. But it has become clear that the Iranian sway in the region is inexorably growing and almost impossible to stop or reverse. Hizbullah occupies a central part of this dynamic.

The Shi'a community in Lebanon has had centuries of cultural, intellectual, and political ties with Iran. These enduring relations assumed a greater salience in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution when Iran was seeking hospitable environments for its message. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 provided the ultimate opportunity for Iran to interconnect the revolutionary zeal against Israel and its Shi'a coreligionists' desire for empowerment for a community that has traditionally been the disadvantaged group in Lebanon. More than two decades of persistent help has transformed the once small guerilla organization into a popular and powerful political force inside Lebanon. For Iran, Hizbullah is a great success story in the Arab world, one that is rooted in a strong sense of common identity and religious affinity. These ideational reasons underlie the strong commitment that Iran has and will have to Lebanese Shiites, in particular Hizbullah, and one should not in any way underestimate them. It is inconceivable therefore that Iran would reduce its strong commitment to Hizbullah anytime soon, if ever. To understand



the relation between Hizbullah and Iran one needs to take into account the domestic and strategic dimensions.

Domestic Dynamics

From the beginning of the crisis two broad narratives were articulated by the elite in Iran. First was the position taken by some reformists who argued that Hizbullah's action was a strategic blunder and would have costly repercussions for Lebanon and Iran. Proponents of this view suggested that the Israeli response would undermine Hizbullah's power, hinder its transformation into a broad political party, and would probably reduce its deterrence capability, an asset that Iran badly needs. Moreover, they argued, the tension would complicate Iran's nuclear diplomacy as the U.S. and Israel would find it convenient to blame Iran for all the ills of the Middle East, thus doubling their efforts to pressure Iran in the Security Council. Hizbullah's action, others in this camp suggested, might reinforce the anxiety of the Arab governments of the region about the perceived rising power of the Shiites, leading to a possible strain in Iran's regional diplomacy.


The second narrative advocated by the broad conservative coalition couched the massive retaliation of Israel as part of the U.S. agenda to shape a new Middle East in which Iran and its allies are weakened. The ultimate objective of United States and Israel, as they understood it, was to destroy Hizbullah and divide the Sunni and Shi'a world in a politically reconfigured Middle East. The prescription thus was to stand by Hizbullah to the end. The relentless attack on Lebanon, the high number of civilian casualties, and the military successes of Hizbullah made it very difficult for the advocates of the former narrative to have any inroads in the debate about Lebanon. Constantly watching the images of the war in television, the public too tilted toward more expressive support of Hizbullah. The broadcasts of the state-run media, by highlighting the humanitarian aspects of the war in Lebanon, were somewhat effective in constraining critical public and elite debate of the war.

It is in this context that the support for Hizbullah became imperative within domestic political dynamics of Iran. Different political forces had to demonstrate their solidarity with Lebanon and Hizbullah. A rare case of unity developed among competing forces during the crisis enabling the government to have a total freedom of action. It was an issue containing deep-seated emotions which easily transcended political rivalries. Moreover, the war in Lebanon and the way it ended enabled the government to sell its narrative about U.S. plans in the region to the Iranian public and a substantial part of the elite. In other words, U.S. unequivocal support for Israel in its retaliation against Hizbullah and the perceived defeat of Israel further consolidated the conservative forces and discredited the moderate voices.

Strategic Context

Iran's sense of loneliness and strategic vulnerability in a hostile neighborhood has left her no choice but to cultivate allies wherever she can. Lebanon, with its indispensable Shi'a community, has been the natural place where shared values and tangible strategic objectives have compelled Iran to be present at all cost. By the end of 1990s, ideological interests notwithstanding, Iran's calculation vis-à-vis Hizbullah and Lebanon started becoming more complex to include strategic considerations. The changing strategic balance of power in the region since the U.S. invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan led to the rearrangement of regional politics in favor of Iran. The indisputable influence in post-Saddam Iraq, a strategic partnership with Syria, and central presence in Lebanon through Hizbollah have all made Iran the most powerful actor in the region for the foreseeable future. The Israeli blunder in the recent war with Hizbullah, and the perception by the Muslim world that for the first time the Israeli army did not perform well has reinforced the self-confidence of Iran to project itself in the region.

The growing strength of Iran, however, does not necessarily mean inflexible positions on key issues. Iran would probably pursue a careful pragmatic and/or idealistic policy that best



serves its long-term objectives. It is highly unlikely, though, that Iran would support any form of disarmament of Hizbullah or any political framework that would reduce Hizbullah's leverage within Lebanese politics. Moreover, there is every indication that the financial and logistical support for Hizbullah would be even more crucial in the coming years and Iran will not hesitate in extending such support.

Although the leading Arab states of the region have grown nervous of Iran's increasing power, the Arab streets have been more receptive to Iran's position and uncompromising support for Hizbullah. This has gained a more salient role in Iran's calculations considering the heightened anti-American sentiments in the region and the composition of the new government in Iran. The increasing anger in the Arab streets and the rising popularity of Hizbullah as the result of the fierce fight it put up against Israel seem to have strengthened Iran's clout even further. In pursuing its policies, Iran usually takes into account three separate audiences:

the Iranian public, the wider Muslim world, and the international community. It is a delicate balance that Iran has to carefully manage, and it seems that Israel's devastating attack on Lebanon has extended Iran's reach and influence into the opinions of the Arab masses more than ever than in the last twenty seven years. This has had a strong impact on Iran's self-confidence and the ability to project power.

Hizbullah is a key in Iran's vision of the Middle East. It is no longer a simple ideological issue, but increasingly defined in terms of Iranian national interests. Lebanon and the vast power of Hizbullah give Iran a strategic depth and a significant gateway to the Arab world where Iran had already made significant inroads by positioning itself as the ultimate player in Iraq. Iran will continue supporting Hizbullah for the foreseeable future without hesitation. Any attempt to deal with the emboldened Iran should be cognizant of the recent events in Lebanon and how they ended by producing the opposite results and unintended consequences.

Lebanon: Between Israel's Rock and Syria's Hard Place

By Murhaf Jouejati, is the Director of the Middle East Studies Program at George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs.

From the time the UN Security Council ordered Syria to withdraw from Lebanon in February 2005, the Assad regime appears to have done everything it can to undermine the new Lebanese government's efforts at restoring Lebanon's sovereignty and independence. Among other things, Syria is reported to have seized Lebanese fishermen, temporarily closed the Syrian border to Lebanese truckers, smuggled weapons to Palestinian militants, and, as if these were not enough, allegedly ordered the assassination of several Lebanese Syria critics. More recently, Syria threatened to choke off Lebanon's fragile economy by shutting down its border with Lebanon should an international force patrol the Syrian-Lebanese border. What explains Syrian jingoism vis-à-vis Lebanon? Can't Syria just let go of its former fiefdom?

Some argue that the Assad regime still thinks in terms of "Greater Syria" and is trying to create the necessary conditions (civil strife) to return to Lebanon and restore Syria's privileged position there. Others argue that Syria's forced withdrawal was so humiliating that the Assad regime is out to seek vengeance.

Although these may be factors in Bashar Assad's decisional calculi, they are only minor ones. Though Syria has still not formally recognized Lebanese sovereignty, Damascus did withdraw most of its troops from Lebanon, albeit gradually, before the passage of UNSCR 1559. Between 2000 and 2005, Syria drew down its 40,000-man contingent in five separate redeployments to 14,000, a drop of 65%. All indications are that Syria intended to leave Lebanon altogether, regardless of 1559.



If history is any guide, the Assad regime's current ferocious behavior towards Lebanon has more to do with its fear that, absent Syrian influence, Lebanon's independent-minded Fouad Siniora government will eventually embark on a separate deal with Israel—Siniora's denials notwithstanding. From a Syrian perspective, a split between Syria and Lebanon ultimately weakens Syria's negotiating position vis-à-vis Israel and undermines its ability to recover the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights. For Damascus, US-French actions in Lebanon are reminiscent of Henry Kissinger's Machiavellian step-by-step diplomacy that led not to a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict as Washington had promised, but to a separate Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in the late 1970s. It was precisely this fear that prompted Syria to torpedo the May 17, 1983 agreement between Israel and Lebanon. In sum, this explanation sheds more light on the Assad regime's stubborn effort to maintain Syrian influence in Lebanon (through the support of its local allies) than do others.

In retrospect, many of the ills that have befallen Lebanon since Syria's withdrawal (including the recent Hizbullah-Israel confrontation) would not have occurred had there been peace between Syria and Israel. This is not an illusion. During the Syria-Israel peace talks at Shepherdstown in January 2000, Syria accepted the principle of normalization of relations with Israel, including the establishment of diplomatic relations and the free flow of people and goods and services across the Syria-Israel border; a mutual security regime; and the establishment of a joint water-sharing mechanism. In so doing, Syria was fulfilling its share of the deal, i.e., the "peace" component of the land-for-peace resolutions upon which the peace talks were based. In return, Israel was expected to commit itself to a total withdrawal from the Golan Heights, as required by the "land" component of the same resolutions. That did not happen. Nor did former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak rectify his country's

position in March 2000 during the Clinton-Assad summit meeting in Geneva. Had Barak then committed to a total Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, or alternatively, had former President Clinton then leaned on Barak, even slightly, to fulfill Israel's part of the deal, there would have been peace between Syria and Israel, relieving Syria of the need to use Hizbullah as one of its instruments of power (or Lebanon as its crutch) against Israel.

Fixing the Syrian "problem," as Washington has come to call it, is not difficult. If the Bush administration were to press Israel to fulfill its part of the land-for-peace bargain, a Syrian-Israeli deal on the Golan would have a positive outcome for many. Peace between Syria and Israel isolates Iran. Peace between Syria and Israel marginalizes Hizbullah. It also ensures stability in Lebanon.

This, however, will unfortunately not happen. Instead of pressing Israel to abide by the land-for-peace formula and, simultaneously encouraging Syria on the path to peace Damascus had hitherto adopted, the Bush administration encouraged Israel to shun Syria and, as part of its "war on terrorism," imposed unilateral economic sanctions against Syria; torpedoed the EU-Syria trade agreement; conspired with France to push Syria out of Lebanon; and more recently, stopped short of calling for a regime change in Damascus. In a nutshell, the Bush administration pushed Syria further into the arms of Iran, making a Syrian-Israel agreement less likely.

In sum, like it or not, Lebanon is caught between the Israeli rock and the Syrian hard place. As long as a just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict is not achieved, Lebanon will remain the battlefield of choice in the Syrian-Israeli confrontation. Nor are Lebanon's problems purely external. As long as the Lebanese body politic is divided between those who view Beirut as Hong Kong—an international center of freewheeling capitalism, and those who perceive it as Hanoi—a symbol of popular resistance against imperialism, Lebanon will continue to be the object of external manipulation.

Prelude to War or Diplomacy? Reflections on the "Sixth War"

By Soli Ozel, is the Southeast Europe Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center and a Professor at Bilgi University in Turkey

The war that was waged by Israel against Hizbullah upon the organization's abduction of two soldiers and the killing of eight may yet turn out to be just the overture of another, longer and bloodier struggle. It may also contain the seeds of a political opening that might lead to a regional settlement.

The current precarious cessation of hostilities achieved by the UN Security Council's resolution 1701 may or may not hold. If it does not the war to come might involve not just this hybrid organization and its Palestinian kin, Hamas, but Iran and Syria as well.

The latest Lebanese crisis cannot be analyzed independently of other events in the region, either. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, post-Saddam Iraq, Iran's regional ambitions, and the Israeli incursion into Lebanon are all interrelated. Therefore the war, dubbed the "Sixth War" by the Arab public, allows a number of important observations and opportunities for those willing to reconfigure the politics of the Middle East.

"The owl of Minerva" wrote the great German philosopher Hegel, "spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk." It may be too early to give its full meaning to this as of yet inconclusive war, but the contours of a line of analysis are well in place. So are radically different and equally difficult choices available to policy makers in pursuit of a new order in the Middle East.

A relatively safe conclusion to draw from the recent conflict is that its meaning goes well beyond a Hizbullah-Israel war. By now it is well established that the war started out of a local dispute but is related to wider dynamics that made Lebanon once more the battlefield of other powers. Both Israel and Hizbullah have prepared for their confrontation for a long time. In the end, when judged by its original statements, Israel did not suc-

ceed in achieving its goals even if the IDF's actual performance proves to be better than appeared at first.

Still, Hizbullah was not destroyed militarily and the credibility of Israel's deterrence was damaged and perhaps its security problems exacerbated. Hizbullah's status as a state within a state did not change despite the deployment of Lebanese troops in the south of the country. In fact, Lebanese politics may have become more precarious with the threat of another round of civil war looming in the distance. Finally, the two Israeli soldiers have not been found or returned despite supposed negotiations taking place.

Hizbullah ended the war, despite its casualties and the loss of most of its long range missiles, politically more robust than before. Not only did the war terminate the effort of the Lebanese polity to finish off the special status of the organization, it saw Hizbullah's popularity skyrocket throughout the Arab world. Hizbullah became the institutional symbol of rising Islamic-Arab nationalism. Its leader Hasan Nasrallah emerged as the personification of a much longed-for Arab hero even if the remaining Lebanese constituencies, in due time, come to resent the devastation his organization wrought upon them.

In any event, Hizbullah's perceived "victory" had a somewhat intriguing twist in terms of Islamist politics and Islam invoking violence. Its success undermined arch-rival al Qaeda's appeal for the angry masses of the region and perhaps the Muslim world. In fact, Shi'a Hizbullah provided the antidote to the viciously sectarian outlook and recipes of Sunni al Qaeda. It is highly unlikely under these circumstances that Hizbullah will subordinate itself to the central government in Beirut or that it will be disarmed as a result of the Security Council Resolution 1701.



Nasrallah, however, will be hard pressed in choosing between Hizbullah's Lebanese political vocation and the selfish demands of its Syrian and Iranian patrons.

When one moves towards the regional context whose fragility made this latest confrontation almost inevitable, it is possible to discern three inherently conflicting trends. First, there is today in Middle Eastern societies a polarization along sectarian lines that was brought to light and exacerbated by the war in Iraq. The defining cause of this polarization is the rise of Shi'a to predominance in Iraq and the associated expansion of the Iranian sphere of influence in the region. Not only does this polarization play itself out in the brutality of the civil war now raging in Iraq, it also has spill-over effects in other countries where Shi'a minorities demand more citizenship rights and the Sunni majorities resent and react against such a development.

Secondly, as suggested earlier, Shi'a Hizbullah managed at the popular level to forge a pan-Arab/pan-Muslim sentiment because of its fight against the common enemy. It thereby reduced the schism between the Sunni and the Shi'a at least as it pertained to the Lebanese-Israeli conflict. Perhaps it is more correct to say that Hizbullah's popularity also derives from its solidarity with the Palestinians and therefore relates to the core problem of the Middle East, which is the irresolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.


Thirdly, the states in the region are scrambling to contain Iran, whose influence has risen considerably since the U.S. eliminated the regimes of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, widely considered to be mortal enemies of Tehran. The concern of the Sunni Arab states for Iran's rise was expressed by King Abdullah of Jordan, who warned about a rising "Shi'a crescent" two years earlier. This also explains why the Arab regimes for all intents and purposes initially sided with Israel.

Saudi King Abdullah's visit to Turkey symbolized the Arab regimes' quest to forge alliances to balance and contain Iran. In the context of the Iranian challenge, this visit,

the first in forty years by a Saudi King, was suggestive of new openings by Riyadh to include Turkey in a coalition of Sunni states that would block Iran's growing influence. Ankara was also asked by the United Nations to serve in UNIFIL, an invitation supported wholeheartedly by the U.S., Israel and the Siniora government. Most recently, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, in talks with Turkey's Foreign Minister, assured him of Syria's full cooperation with Turkey if Ankara decided to send troops to join the UNIFIL force. This commitment, if genuine, may prove important since many Western analysts favour policies and incentives to decouple Syria from Iran after twenty-six years of a mutually beneficial alliance between the two regimes. However, Mr. Assad later declared that he would consider UNIFIL a hostile force if it were deployed along the Lebanese-Syrian border. Obviously, the Syrian President does not wish to alienate Turkey but he is unlikely to change his policy because Turkish troops will be in Lebanon.

Related to this concern regarding Iran's hegemonic aspirations is the discomfort with the political power and credibility of a non-state actor such as Hizbullah (and Hamas, to a lesser extent) that is substantially supported by Iran. The distress of the Arab regimes with the power of a non-state actor must have been shared by Russia and EU members as well, since they initially stood by expecting Israel to finish its work in a relatively short period of time. This would have given the Lebanese state a chance to extend its authority unchallenged over the entire territory of the country. Hizbullah on its own prevented this. Iran and Syria made every effort to ensure that their ally/client would remain an autonomous actor within the Lebanese body politic with a great potential to disrupt the restoration of order.

The broader framework of these dynamics and the war itself consists of an American-Iranian struggle to shape the region and define Iran's role in it. Furthermore, the contest is also about the nature of the regime in Tehran as well as that in Damascus. Formulated thus, the confrontation becomes an existential one



for many regional protagonists (including Israel) given the rhetoric of both the American and Iranian presidents. Iran's presumed desire to produce nuclear weapons attests both to its drive to acquire the status symbol of modern nationhood and to Tehran's ambition to become a regional hegemon.

In its quest for such a role, Iran also managed to use the Bush administration's unwillingness to engage with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The well calculated (and earnest) bigotry in the speeches of Mahmud Ahmedinejad about Israel and his denial of the Holocaust resonated with the Arab and broader Muslim publics and neutralized the disadvantages generated by the fact that the Iranian regime is Shi'a. Posturing as the champion of all the struggles dear to the Arabs, "the Iranians", Olivier Roy suggests, "were the real winners of the Lebanon conflict and will maintain their upper hand as long as Hizbullah is seen as a legitimate champion of the Arab cause, and not as part of the Shi'a crescent."

Iran's role in Iraq, its controversial nuclear-enrichment program and its support for Hizbullah as well as Hamas are manifestations of Iran's desire to be a regional hegemon and its willingness to confront the U.S. and its allies in the Middle East. Due to American miscalculations, lack of a realistic strategy, and obsession with ideological and military pre-

eminence, Iran found the perfect conjuncture to pursue these aspirations. Rising oil revenues undoubtedly facilitate this task for a regime that is singularly negligent in managing its economy and providing for its own society.

Many commentators assert that this general strategic picture and the interconnectedness of the problems that plague the turbulent region that they liken to Europe in 1914, can lead to another round of war. On the other hand the ingredients of a regional settlement are also there. The course of settlement could only succeed if the military option for the resolution of these problems is discarded and diplomacy is given the upper hand. This would necessitate engagement in good faith by both Iranian and the Syrian elites with other regional powers as well as with the West. However, Iran and Syria would require guarantees of regime security and recognition of their legitimate interests before engaging in responsible behavior. Most important, though, is sober and multi-dimensional diplomatic leadership on the part of America as well as her regional allies for such a grand settlement to take place. As Henry Kissinger noted, "Diplomacy never operates in a vacuum. It persuades not by the eloquence of its practitioners but by assembling a balance of incentives and risks." We are indeed at a crossroads.

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Lee H. Hamilton, President and Director

Board of Trustees

Joseph B. Gildenhorn, Chair

David A. Metzner, Vice Chair

Public Members:

James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress; John W. Carlin, Archivist of the United States; Bruce Cole, Chair, National Endowment for the Humanities; Michael O. Leavitt, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Tamala L. Longaberger, designated appointee within the Federal Government; Condoleezza Rice, Secretary, U.S. Department of State; Lawrence M. Small, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution; Margaret Spellings, Secretary, U.S. Department of Education.

Private Citizen Members:

Carol Cartwright, Robert B. Cook, Donald E. Garcia, Bruce S. Gelb, Sander Gerber, Charles L. Glazer, Ignacio E. Sanchez.

Middle East Program

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

One Woodrow Wilson Plaza

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20004-3027

(202) 691-4000

ONE WOODROW WILSON PLAZA, 1300 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW, WASHINGTON, DC 20004-3027



**Woodrow Wilson
International
Center
for Scholars**

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE \$300