

Thirty Three Days of War

The longest of our wars since 1949.

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Global Research, August 21, 2006

Gush Shalom 16 August 2006

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
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From Mania to Depression

On the Israeli side: 154 dead – 117 of them soldiers. 3970 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:

0 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.

0 Hizbullah 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.

0 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.

0 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 Hizbullah. Hizbullah 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 Hizbullah. Their very presence there depends on Hizbullah'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 Hizbullah, 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 presstitutes, 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 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 twenty 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.

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