

## **Low Intensity Conflict in Southern Lebanon: Lessons and Dynamics of the Israeli-Shi'ite War\***

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The short but intense military history of the state of Israel has produced a vast amount of material to be studied when considering the problems of modern military conflict. This material has often been characterized by dramatic Israeli military victories which are followed by precise and effective policies of military occupation. A more recent chapter in Israel's military history is, however, substantially less impressive. It involves Israel's struggle to control the 1983-85 Shi'ite Moslem insurgency of southern Lebanon. In this conflict the Israelis faced military and civil-military relations problems which ultimately proved unsolvable for them.

The purpose of this article is to present an overview of the problems of the occupation of southern Lebanon as well as the Israeli response to these problems. In this way, many lessons of the conflict should become apparent. Throughout this analysis, special emphasis will be given to Israeli policies which may have inadvertently helped to alienate the Shi'ite population of southern Lebanon from the occupying forces. Since the Shi'ites were not openly antagonistic toward Israel at the beginning of the occupation, special problems associated with the management of the occupation assume a critical importance in discovering how the Shi'ite war became one of the most disastrous chapters in Israeli military history. It also serves as an example of how an occupying force can deceive itself on the psychology and potential motivations of a civilian population within their area of control.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHI'ITE OPPOSITION**

Israeli military involvement in Lebanon initially had nothing to do with the Shi'ites of that country. Rather, from 1970 until 1982, Israel's primary concern in Lebanon was with the activities of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). It was in 1970, after being expelled from Jordan, that the PLO moved almost all of its independently controlled military assets into Lebanon<sup>1</sup>. The movement of these combat assets inevitably resulted in the escalation of conflict in southern Lebanon. This occurred as the PLO mounted almost all of its attacks on Israel from southern Lebanese bases. The Israeli response involved intense use of bombing attacks and commando raids.

The situation in Lebanon was of sufficient concern to Israel by March 1978 that it mounted a military operation into that country using approximately 25,000 troops. This action (initially code-named Operation Stone of Wisdom) involved intense fighting but only proceeded as far north as the Litani River with the city of Tyre excluded from occupation (although it was heavily bombed). The operation was considered at

least partially successful since PLO bases were devastated. The shortcoming of the operation, for Israel, was that most of the PLO fighters withdrew to the north in the face of the Israeli advance. This allowed them to maintain their combat power and to re-establish bases in the south of Lebanon following a rapid Israeli withdrawal.<sup>2</sup>

A more elaborate campaign to deal with the PLO was embarked upon in June 1982. In this operation (code-named Operation Peace for Galilee) Israeli forces consisting of at least 85,000 troops crossed the border and moved northward to the outskirts of Beirut. Their primary objectives were to destroy the PLO infrastructure in southern Lebanon and to install a friendly government in Beirut under Maronite Christian leader Bashir Gemayel. The first objective was met when the PLO was driven north to Beirut and then evacuated from the city to other Arab countries following a US mediation effort. The second objective appeared to have been met when Gemayel was elected President in the wake of Israel's invasion.

The 700,000 Shi'ite Moslems who comprise 80 per cent of the population of southern Lebanon perceived the possibility of gaining some substantial benefits from the Israeli invasion of their country. By 1982 the Shi'ites had their own list of grievances against the PLO and were very interested in seeing the organization expelled from southern Lebanon. Included among these grievances were: (1) the PLO's capacity to attract Israeli reprisal raids to southern Lebanon; (2) the arrogant and high-handed treatment of Shi'ite villagers by some PLO members; (3) religious differences with the predominantly Sunni Moslem Palestinians; and (4) considerable Shi'ite suspicion of PLO complicity in the 1979 disappearance in Libya of their religious leader, Imam Musa Sadr.<sup>3</sup>

The Shi'ite Lebanese political and military organization, Amal, was correspondingly careful not to interfere in the Israeli/PLO bloodshed. Mahmoud Ghadar, the military commander of the Amal in the south issued orders that none of his troops were to resist the Israeli advance. If necessary, Ghadar instructed, Amal members should even turn their weapons over to the Israelis rather than allow fighting to develop between the two sides. These orders were largely obeyed. All of the 200 Amal militias associated with the villages in southern Lebanon stayed out of the fighting. Only a small number of Amal members joined with the PLO during the fighting in the Burj Shemali refugee camp near Tyre.<sup>4</sup> The Amal leadership also refused to sanction Shi'ite participation in the battle of Beirut. When Israeli forces reached the Shi'ite "poverty belt" outside of the city, Amal head, Nabih Berri, allowed the Israelis to enter the area unopposed. He then made arrangements with them to keep his troops out of the fighting.<sup>5</sup> Those Amal troops that did fight beside the PLO did so without the sanction or operational support of their leadership.

In the immediate aftermath of the 1982 invasion relations between the Shi'ites and the Israelis were not characterized by excessive tension or hostility. Israeli troops patronized Shi'ite stores and markets while some prominent Shi'ites visited Jerusalem. Religious fundamentalism was not

widespread in the south at this time. The Shi'ites believed that the Israeli presence was temporary and behaved with a corresponding caution, though this caution indicated neither acquiescence nor approval. It was only restraint in the face of a well-armed occupier who had promised to leave the country within one year. The Shi'ites had no intention of being drawn into a more sweeping relationship with Israel and were keenly aware that such a relationship would not be forgiven by many non-Shi'ite Lebanese.

The initial Shi'ite restraint was not to last. The September 14, 1982 assassination of Bashir Gemayel left the Israelis without the strong leader who they hoped would impose order on the south. A troop withdrawal was therefore increasingly seen as unwise by the Israelis. They also hoped to predicate their own withdrawal on similar actions being taken by Syrian troops in the Biqa Valley. This delayed any plans to withdraw from Lebanon although in September 1983 the Israelis did redeploy to a defensive line south of the Awali River, with approximately 33,000 Israeli troops remaining in Lebanon.

The Israeli decision to stay in southern Lebanon for an undetermined period was not well-received by the Shi'ites. A variety of early Zionist literature had suggested that the lands and waters of southern Lebanon were appropriate for incorporation into the Jewish homeland. While in Israel such literature had largely been relegated to an ideological past, the Shi'ites now began to reconsider the significance of these works.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the Israeli links to the Christians of Lebanon (including the Phalangists and the "Lebanese Forces") suggested that Israel would be willing to support a system of continuing Christian hegemony over the Shi'ite Moslems. Closer to home the Shi'ites also worried about the Israeli-created Christian militias which functioned on Israel's northern border. Led initially by Greek Catholic Major Saad Haddad, these militias were never seen as particularly friendly to the Shi'ites. Various attempts by the militias to introduce a limited number of Shi'ite Moslems into the junior ranks were made to partially overcome this problem but these met with only limited success. Potential recruits usually remained aloof out of a fear that the Israeli-sponsored troops would ultimately come into armed conflict with Amal.<sup>7</sup>

In this atmosphere of distrust, the Israelis committed an especially significant blunder. On October 16, 1983 an Israeli military convoy made its way through the Shi'ite town of Nabatiye during a ceremony honoring the Shi'ite martyr Hussein ibn Ali. The ceremony was a wild one involving self-flagellation and large scale processions in the street. While trying to pass through this procession the Israelis provoked a riot which resulted in the deaths of two Shi'ites and the wounding of several others. This event led to the issuance of a binding religious dictum (*fatwa*) by Sheikh Muhammad Mahdi Shams-al-Din, the leading Shi'ite cleric in southern Lebanon. The dictum stated that the Shi'ites were to engage in "civil disobedience" and "resistance to the occupation in the South." While no explicit call to violence was included in this statement, the Shi'ite campaign of armed resistance was about to begin in earnest.<sup>8</sup> As it

unfolded the Israelis faced a new military situation requiring a response from them.

## **THE NATURE OF ISRAELI SECURITY POLICIES IN LEBANON**

The Shi'ite decision to resist the Israeli occupation by force ultimately led to thousands of Israeli dead and wounded and to the decision by Israel to withdraw its forces unilaterally from Lebanon without gaining concessions from either Syria or the Lebanese government. The force that inflicted these casualties from September 1983 onward was drawn predominantly from Lebanon's Shi'ite community. This community represents Lebanon's largest sect, consisting of approximately 850,000 individuals of whom about 700,000 live in the southern part of the country. Actual fighting has been conducted by an umbrella organization known as the Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF), a front believed to include Amal, Islamic Amal, the Islamic Resistance Movement (which is linked to the fundamentalist Hezbollah party), and possibly the Islamic Jihad group and Lebanese Communist party.<sup>9</sup>

In order to understand the dynamics of the escalation in the fighting, one must first understand the nature of the Israeli occupation and how it evolved in the face of increasing military operations against the Israeli army. Overall policy was set by the Israeli cabinet, which usually deferred most judgments to the Defense Ministry. The Defense Ministry, in turn, issued detailed guidelines for the administration of the occupation. These guidelines were passed to Northern Command headquarters for distribution to the Israeli brigades and their subordinate units throughout the Lebanese area of operation.<sup>10</sup> In most cases, command, control and communications worked well with the upward/downward flow of information and orders functioning smoothly. As fighting intensified, it was also not uncommon for the Defense Minister to fly to the site of a successful Shi'ite ambush and get on-the-spot feedback on how guidelines might be improved.<sup>11</sup>

In making decisions about what type of policy guidelines to apply, the Israelis relied upon a large body of doctrine on military occupation and controlling resistance movements. The doctrine was based primarily on the experience of occupation in the aftermath of the June 1967 War. This doctrine stressed reducing the resources of hostile forces through military action, pre-empting enemy attacks through intelligence work and reducing the damage that hostile forces could inflict through physical security measures.<sup>12</sup> While these practices seemed sound, the doctrine also minimized the dangers of occupation duties and suggested that they could be entrusted to administrative and rear area troops performing other functions. Early adherence to this principle caused increased casualties in the early stages of the insurgency, although the Israelis corrected this deficiency wherever possible by placing more experienced troops in areas of special danger.<sup>13</sup> Consistent with all doctrinal principles was the basic Israeli strategy of maximizing the physical security of its own troops and attempting to regulate any Shi'ite behavior that could impact adversely on Israeli ability to accomplish this objective.

The protection of one's troops in the field is a logical and understandable policy for any army. Measures to insure the protection of Israeli troops were to include: (1) the identification and possible arrest of hostile individuals and groups within the Shi'ite community; (2) the seizure of weapons, explosives and ammunition that might be used against the Israel Defense Force (IDF); (3) the development and nurturing of surrogate forces which could perform some of the duties and absorb some of the casualties that would otherwise accrue to the IDF; (4) the regulation of the movement of the population through such things as checkpoints, curfews, bans on night travel, etc.; and (5) the penetration of the Lebanese economy with Israeli imports in order to exert more effective control over occupied areas (and possibly to shore-up domestic support for the war). Each of these policies will be examined in order to discern its effectiveness within the context of the overall campaign to pacify southern Lebanon.

The first policy to be considered involves the Israeli attempt to identify their enemies in Lebanon. In order to identify individuals and groups operating against the Israeli occupation, the IDF instituted policies of arresting, interrogating and detaining large numbers of Shi'ites who could be involved in anti-Israeli activity. This began on a moderate scale but was expanded when fighting between the two sides intensified. Shi'ites living near areas where anti-Israeli ambushes occurred were particularly suspect. The arrest of these people was often conducted on a very large scale and involved placing them at the Ansar prison camp or other places of detention for varying periods of time.<sup>14</sup> Such actions frightened and humiliated both the individuals arrested and their families. Those left behind lived in uncertainty as to the fate of their relatives and friends. This policy therefore made enemies.

The seizure of Shi'ite weaponry, explosives and ammunition was another important policy of the Israeli occupation troops which was utilized more frequently as the conflict intensified. This was designed to disarm a population which had shown an ability and a willingness to attack Israeli troops. The weapons themselves were often especially well-hidden in secret caches. The existence of these caches was a direct result of the 1975-76 breakdown in civil order as well as an earlier desire for protection against the PLO guerrillas who operated from southern Lebanon. To find these caches, the Israeli made surprise sweeps of Shi'ite villages where weapons were believed to be hidden.

The Israeli sweeps to discover hidden Shi'ite weaponry were usually conducted in the early hours of the morning, involving detailed searches of Shi'ite households. Those opposing such searches were restrained at gunpoint. This is a policy which makes enemies. To complicate matters further, some of the Shi'ites hid weapons in mosques and other places of religious significance,<sup>15</sup> giving the Israelis the unpleasant choice of either leaving the sites (and potentially the weapons) untouched or desecrating a Shi'ite religious site by combing it for weapons. The decision to hide weapons at these sites may be seen as a situation in which hostile Shi'ites attempted (with some success) to provoke the Israelis into a policy which

helped to alienate the balance of Shi'ite co-religionists from the occupation forces.

The Israeli searches noted above had mixed results. While they were sometimes successful in discovering large amounts of such hidden weaponry, the resistance nevertheless remained well-armed with weapons successfully hidden from the Israelis, bought on the international arms market, or smuggled from sources originating in Syria and Iran. The Syrian involvement in supplying weapons and explosives is openly acknowledged. In one case Syrian television even played a pre-prepared interview with a woman (in this case a non-Shi'ite) who had killed two Israeli soldiers in a suicide car bomb attack. In the interview she said that she was "happy to give her life for [Syrian President] Hafez Assad."<sup>16</sup> The Iranians, for their part, chose to work with the more religious elements who would also become known for their suicide attacks against Israeli targets.<sup>17</sup> The activities of both states were responsible for a continuing flow of arms and explosives into Lebanon to which the Israelis responded with the self-defeating searches.

A third Israeli policy for managing the occupation involved the use of surrogate forces. These forces consisted of the Southern Lebanese Army (SLA) and some smaller pro-Israeli civil guard groups associated with the SLA. The SLA was a reorganized version of Major Saad Haddad's Free Lebanon force. It never included more than 2,100 troops although the Israelis had hoped that they might eventually expand the force to include more than 3,500 troops.<sup>18</sup>

The SLA is composed of troops which have been armed, equipped, and paid by the Israelis. As such, it is seen by the population as an instrument of Israeli policy and it is the Israelis who are blamed by the Shi'ites for the indiscretions and abuse of power by this force. This is a significant problem since many of the SLA troops lack discipline or any semblance of military professionalism.

Of all of the abuses of authority that the SLA committed, the most notorious occurred in September 1984. In response to a Shi'ite ambush, soldiers of the SLA raided the village of Sukmour. About 200 male villagers were rounded up "for questioning" and placed in the village square. At this point troops of SLA fired into the crowds killing 13 and wounding 30. The SLA command quickly disowned this action as the revenge of renegade Druze troops, some of whose family members had been killed in the previous night's ambush. The IDF also flew the wounded to hospitals in Israel and pledged a full inquiry in which the guilty would be brought to trial.<sup>19</sup>

The massacre remained a significant setback for Israel since few Shi'ites chose to view the action as an isolated act of revenge. According to the generally accepted Shi'ite view, Israel was at best not exercising adequate control over its mercenaries; at worst, it was using them for intimidation tasks too sensitive for the IDF to become directly involved. Some Shi'ite villagers from Sukmour even chose to embellish the story of the massacre by claiming that Israeli troops participated in the event.<sup>20</sup>

The problem was made worse by the fact that SLA troops on their way to Sukmour had been wearing red headbands (a sign of revenge) while they passed through SLA checkpoints without incident. This led to a belief throughout the Shi'ite community that their intentions regarding Sukmour were not being disguised and must have been known to Israel and the authorities of the SLA.

The incident at Sukmour helped to make Israel's support of the SLA one of the most unpopular policies associated with the occupation. At this juncture Israel was also handicapped by the fact that it could not withdraw support from the SLA without betraying individuals who had pledged to work with Israel. The Israelis, therefore, had become victims of their own willingness to entrust sensitive tasks to individuals whose shortcomings had been consistently overlooked due to their pro-Israel orientation.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to having a significant impact on the political life of southern Lebanon, the Israeli occupation also had a decisive influence on the economy. In this regard, one particularly important policy was the IDF's regulation of the movements of people and goods. This was done by using a variety of special procedures designed to prevent such things as arms smuggling, the emplacement of ambushes, and the use of car bombs. These measures included check-points, curfews, bans on night travel, bans on the use of motorcycles, bans on only one person traveling in a car, and lengthy searches. All of these measures made good sense from a security standpoint but they also served to encourage the development of further difficulties between the Israelis and the Shi'ite population.

By regulating the movement of people and goods the Israelis may have been able to slow the flow of weapons to the south and restrict the ability of the guerrillas to strike at them. These measures, however, had important side effects for the economy of southern Lebanon. In particular check-points at the Awali river and bans on the movements of some products northward resulted in a crippling of commerce between north and south Lebanon without discovering significant numbers of arms.<sup>22</sup> Unreliable delivery of materials due to the security regulations also hurt a variety of southern Lebanese enterprises.

The disruption of the economy by Israeli security measures was further complicated by a flow of Israeli goods northward and a corresponding inability of Shi'ites to sell their produce (such as citrus and tobacco) anywhere else than Israel. This simplified security problems but it also inflicted severe hardships on Shi'ite economic enterprises which had to cope with both Israeli competition and the security restrictions. A number of Lebanese businesses failed because of an inability to cope with the problems noted above.<sup>23</sup> This correspondingly added to an unemployment rate which was already high due to the previous destruction of factories and other economic enterprises. Furthermore, the influx of Israeli products helped to contribute to a rising cost of living and an increasing rate of inflation. The implications of this situation were very serious since any Shi'ite political motivations to fight the Israelis were

now strongly reinforced by a desire to be rid of them for economic reasons.

One other aspect of Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon also deserves comment. This is the use of the so-called "Iron fist" policy. This policy was announced by Israeli Defense Minister Rabin in early 1985 as a response to increasing effectiveness of Shi'ite guerrillas. It is (perhaps intentionally) not a well-defined concept but rather a murky promise by Rabin to take extremely harsh action against Shi'ites for attacks on the IDF.

The "Iron fist" therefore represents a general policy of retaliation and as such has included many measures such as those already noted (curfews, etc.). The difference is that when these policies have been used in the name of the "Iron fist" the punishment as well as the security aspects were a primary consideration. The action which is usually considered the prime example of this policy is a March 1985 Israeli attack on the village of Zrariyah which occurred in the aftermath of a successful car bombing. This attack resulted in the deaths of 34 Shi'ite fighters who attempted to resist the incursion. While Israeli Chief of Staff Levy denied the raid was a reprisal, other high-ranking Israeli sources suggest that the raid would never have occurred had it not been for the car bombing.<sup>24</sup> Israeli troops participating in the raid painted "The Revenge of the IDF" on a large wall within the village and blew up a number of houses.

The above policies, however necessary they may have seemed or have been, united the population of Shi'ite Lebanon squarely behind the resistance. Active encouragement of policies of resistance came from all traditional sources of guidance for the Shi'ite community and increased over time.

## **THE EXPANSION OF THE SHI'ITE RESISTANCE**

The decision by Israel to allow a significant alienation of its troops from the population under occupation was made in the interest of the physical security of these same troops. As such the decision was seen to have merit and was not a radical departure from previous Israeli policies. On the West Bank, for instance, a hostile (although largely unarmed) population has been effectively controlled despite its resentment of the Israeli presence in the area. In Lebanon, however, there were special problems with the Shi'ite psychology, weaponry, and circumstance that made it possible for the LNRF to expand resistance as relations with the Israeli occupation forces deteriorated. These factors are explored below.

On the psychological level there can be no doubt that members of the Shi'ite resistance opposed the Israeli presence with a level of intensity directly correlated with the degree to which they perceived themselves as wronged by Israel. The reasons for this are related to an array of political events occurring both in Lebanon and the larger Islamic and Shi'ite worlds. In particular a variety of factors combined to convince Shi'ites that they could play a major role in determining their own future provided that they were willing to fight for their demands. These events



involved: (1) the formation of Amal as a pressure group for Shi'ite rights; (2) the related outrage over the disappearance of the Amal's first leader, the charismatic and unifying Imam Musa Sadr; and (3) the example of Shi'ite assertiveness inherent in the Iranian revolution.<sup>25</sup>

While the above events had nothing to do with the Israeli occupation itself they did involve a Shi'ite assertiveness that was a source of pride within large segments of the Shi'ite community. This pride helped to prod the Shi'ites out of a traditional fatalism which often caused them to accept passively whatever they deemed their fate to be. In making this psychological transition some Shi'ites, therefore, developed a bias for action that rapidly spread throughout their community. This bias was reinforced by a Shi'ite knowledge that southern Lebanon was now free of the PLO and that control of their own destiny was finally within Shi'ite grasp. With this mindset the Shi'ites were totally unwilling to accept any Israeli equivocation about withdrawal. Additionally, any Israeli assertiveness at this point only increased Shi'ite resolve to resist the occupation and fed the process of escalation.

Escalation of the fighting in Lebanon occurred not only because the Shi'ites were well-motivated but also because they are relatively well-armed and accustomed to assuring their own security. This presented an unusual situation for the Israelis since all other Arab civil populations who previously had come under their control did not have large numbers of firearms, due mainly to the policies of the Arab governments who formerly had controlled these areas. Jordan, in particular, was careful to ensure that firearms did not fall into the hands of the West Bank Palestinians that were under its jurisdiction prior to 1967.<sup>26</sup> Lebanon, without a functioning authoritative government since 1975, obviously did not have this option and the Shi'ites, correspondingly, armed themselves without government interference. Shi'ite weapons included small arms, machine guns, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), land mines and explosives. The LNRF made use of these weapons in skirmishes and ambushes directed against Israeli forces. In doing so they had the advantage of total familiarity with the terrain and population of their country as well as the previously noted flow of replacement weapons from Syria. This resulted in a Shi'ite ability to inflict casualties on the Israeli occupation force and expanded resistance to Israel by use of the now infamous car bombs.

In considering the differences between the occupation of Lebanon and that of the West Bank, the weaponry factor is probably the most important reason making one occupation significantly more manageable than the other. Additional factors pointed out by Palestinian writer Daoud Kuttab included: (1) the prior existence of militias among Lebanese Shi'ites; and (2) the availability of well-paying jobs for West Bank Palestinians in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war due to an Israeli labor shortage. Kuttab suggests that West Bankers were less organizationally able to mount an effective resistance campaign and less motivated due to a different economic situation.<sup>27</sup>

The situation in Lebanon was, therefore, one with which the

Israelis had increasing difficulties in coping. In their prior experience fighting Arab adversaries, the Israelis had probably never encountered such determination. They certainly had never encountered suicide car bombs. Furthermore, while over any long period Shi'ite casualties always exceeded Israeli casualties, those Israeli casualties had the most corrosive effect on its society and army. Unlike the Israelis, the LNRF was not plagued by the doubts which characterized the attitude of many Israelis over their country's sacrifices in Lebanon.

As the fighting intensified the Lebanese resistance also became more adept at exploiting the weaknesses of the Israeli military. In particular the vulnerability of thinly armored or unarmored vehicles to ambush remained a problem. The American-built M-113 armored personnel carrier (APC) was an especially significant disappointment. This system displayed acute vulnerability to Shi'ite ambushes. Previously in the 1982 war Israeli troops regarded the system as so unsafe that they often chose to walk beside the vehicle rather than ride inside.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, open-sided trucks which the Israelis used to enable their troops to fire on the move proved especially vulnerable to ambush.<sup>29</sup> Casualties therefore continued to mount with Israeli military solutions serving as an inadequate way of dealing with a fierce increase in the intensity of the fighting.

The level of conflict present in southern Lebanon by early 1985 left little doubt that the Israelis had become bogged down in an unproductive guerrilla war. The political decision to leave Lebanon became more important as the fighting continued with no Israeli gains and a significant drain on Israeli resources as well as a partial demoralization of the army. The way for this decision was cleared by the voluntary withdrawal of Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin from Israeli politics and his eventual replacement in 1984 by a government of national unity. This government involved power sharing between both the Labour and Likud political blocs. In January 1985 its leaders decided by a 16 to 6 vote of the cabinet in favor of a unilateral Israeli withdrawal of a remaining 22,000 troops. Only a limited force was to be left in Lebanon to coordinate with the SLA. In summarizing the government's reasons for leaving Lebanon, Defense Minister Rabin cited Shi'ite assertiveness and maintained that the eventual level of Shi'ite resistance came as a total surprise to both the Israeli government and intelligence community.<sup>30</sup>

## **CONCLUSION: THE FAILURE OF ISRAELI COUNTER-INSURGENCY AND CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS**

The unique feature of the Israeli/Shi'ite war is that it provided a striking example of escalating conflict between two antagonists who had not initially viewed each other as committed enemies. The security policies of the Israelis fed the fears of the Shi'ites whose resistance to the Israelis then provoked more stringent security measures and repression. This vicious circle of resistance and reaction destroyed any chance of the two sides establishing a *modus vivendi*. It also provides a warning to other states that may become involved in especially sensitive occupations

One of the more noteworthy aspects in the whole cycle of violence emerged from an environment of suppressed hostility. Once that environment had been set up only a handful of individuals were required to precipitate incidents resulting in tremendous escalations in the levels of tension and conflict. This occurred with both the riot at Nabatiye in October 1983 and the SLA massacre at Sukmour in September 1984.

The Israeli problems in southern Lebanon were the result of two factors: (1) the steady development of an atmosphere of hatred in which no significant elements of the Shi'ite population acknowledged Israel in a favorable light; and (2) the occurrence of incidents which ignited hatred and pushed the conflict to new levels of confrontation.

Both of the above problems are serious and difficult to control. The first is, however, the result of deliberate policy while the second tends to be the result of mistakes that occur within the framework of the policy. The first type of problem is therefore more subject to systemic controls. The second problem, if not controlled within the framework of policy, will require continued good judgment which cannot be present among all ranks at all times. The roots of Israel's failure in Lebanon must, therefore, be understood by considering overall policy and not just the specific unforeseen and unplanned incidents at Sukmour and Nabatiye.

Israel's deliberate policies in Lebanon were clearly linked to Jewish public opinion in Israel and must be understood in that context. The policies of the Israeli occupation like those of any democratic state were subject to public scrutiny and thus politicized to a considerable degree. This had the effect not only of forcing the Likud government (which was responsible for the initial invasion of Lebanon) to minimize casualties but also of forcing it to show tangible Israeli gains resulting from the decisions to invade Lebanon in 1982 and to stay on in that country after the PLO had been expelled from Beirut in September.

Two ways in which the Likud could demonstrate the benefits of its policies in Lebanon were through economic gains in the south and through the establishment of a strong Christian militia that could exercise considerable authority in that same area. Such a militia might eventually link itself with an anti-Palestinian Maronite government in Beirut and thus help to tilt the entire Lebanese political structure toward cooperation with the Israelis. This would be in addition to the security benefits such an organization would provide if it was disciplined and professional. The Israelis therefore linked themselves to a marginal (and potentially dependent) minority group within south Lebanon in order to address the issue of Palestinian terrorism. A side-effect of this policy was to inject Israel into internal Lebanese power politics and alienate a vast majority of the mainstream population of the south by doing so.

However natural it is for elected leaders to respond to their constituencies, the sum total of these policies was to make enemies of the mainstream population of southern Lebanon and to be driven out of southern Lebanon by these new enemies. Israel lost credibility with the Shi'ites because it defined its own security interests as being dependent

on a small minority group and as totally contrary to the Shi'ite desire to have an important voice in Lebanon's political future. Furthermore, it displayed unwarranted confidence by assuming that such changes would be passively accepted merely because the country was occupied. Had the Israeli leadership more carefully considered Shi'ite objections to their economic policies and to the nurturing and expansion of the SLA they might have been able to contain the Shi'ite resistance at a more manageable level. The Israelis might also have been able to gain open or tacit supporters within the Shi'ite community. These supporters could have been supplied with covert aid and other encouragement.

Another important possibility within the above context is that in a less confrontational environment Israeli security needs might not be as stringent as those which eventually became necessary. Furthermore, the Israelis might have at least partially compensated for those problems by an aggressive program of supporting the Shi'ite economy through the restriction of Israeli imports to the south and by backing the attempts of Shi'ites to remain competitive in the Beirut market. This would certainly involve, where possible, lifting the bans on products moving northward to markets in Beirut. It might also have involved the limited use of some Israeli military resources such as storehouses to support Shi'ite economic enterprises.

In summary, the Israeli military policies in southern Lebanon were eventually perceived by the Shi'ites as requiring total subservience to Israel and its Christian allies for an indefinite but possibly very long period of time. The Shi'ites believed that the economy was to be reordered as an Israeli appendage and that their non-Moslem countrymen were to be given responsibility for their internal security. With this vision of the future they felt that they had no alternative but to resist.

The lessons for the West from this situation are apparent. Structural changes imposed on a political-economic system cannot endure (without perpetual occupation) if such changes disproportionately consider the needs of the occupying power at the expense of the population. Such changes will, instead, tend to produce a backlash and encourage the development of resistance movements when the capacity to resist is intact. Such resistance movements, unless controlled by military means, might ultimately define the future of the territory in question. It, therefore, becomes imperative for occupation policies to be based on considerations other than domestic public opinion.

Ironically, the Israelis could have achieved their paramount goal of expelling the PLO from southern Lebanon by simply giving the Shi'ites some latitude to resolve their own futures. The mid-1985 "War of the Camps" near Beirut between the PLO and the Amal and its allies illustrated that at least one politically important Shi'ite group was completely unwilling to allow the PLO to return to southern bases. These anti-PLO sentiments were not disguised prior to the 1982 invasion and should not have been dismissed in its aftermath (when Shi'ite groups friendly to the PLO were much weaker). The problem for Israel was that domestic public opinion needed to see the development of clear gains

in southern Lebanon. Tacit allies were an unacceptable exchange for losses and Israel correspondingly demanded more open collaboration. Unable to work within these constraints the Shi'ites saw their only remaining option as armed resistance.

#### Endnotes

- \* The views presented by the author are not intended to reflect the views of Analytical Assessments Corporation or any of its governmental or non-governmental sponsors.
1. See Paul A. Jureidini and William E. Hazen, *The Palestinian Movement in Politics* (Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1976) and Itamar Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon 1970-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 40-43.
  2. The best source detailing the 1978 invasion is P. Edward Haley and Lewis W. Snider, *Lebanon in Crisis* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1979); also see Rabinovich, and Kamal Salibi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon 1958-1976* (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1976), for events leading to the 1978 invasion.
  3. Zeev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), pp. 79-80; 133-134; 234.
  4. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
  5. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
  6. Fouad Ajami, "Lebanon and Its Inheritors," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 63, no. 63 (Spring 1985).
  7. See "S. Lebanon Shi'ites Raise Resistance Call," *Al Fajr Weekly*, vol. IV, no. 183, November 4, 1983, p. 2.
  8. Ajami, *op. cit.* Also see "Interview with Sheikh Muhammad Mahdi Shams-al-Din," *Al Qabas*, December 29, 1983, p. 27.
  9. See Charles P. Wallace, "Israelis Storm Village in Lebanon Killing 32," *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1985, part 1, p.1.; and "Who's Killing the Israelis," *The Middle East*, July 1983, p. 16.
  10. Dan Fisher, "Israelis Kill Two in Raid on South Lebanon Village," *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1985, part 1, p. 6; and "Rabin Warns: Scorched Earth if Shi'ite Terror Continues," *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, April 6, 1985, p. 1.
  11. This applied to both Defense Ministers Arens and Rabin. See for example Wolf Blitzer, "Front-Line Minister," *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, August 10, 1984, pp. 4-5.
  12. See Hanon Alon, *Countering Palestinian Terrorism in Israel: Toward a Policy Analysis of Countermeasures N-1567-FF* (Santa Monica, California: Rand, 1980), pp. 68-87.
  13. Gunther E. Rothenberg, "The Israeli Defence Forces and Low Intensity Operations," in David Charters and Maurice Tugwell, eds., *Armies in Low Intensity Conflict: A Comparative Study of Institutional Adoption to New Forms of Warfare*. ORAE Extra-Mural Paper no. 38 (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 1985), pp. 60 and 84.
  14. Israel closed Ansar prison camp on April 4, 1985. It released 752 prisoners while over 1,000 were transferred back to Israel for release later.
  15. "Israel Gets Tough on Shi'ite Terrorism," *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, March 2, 1985, p. 2.
  16. Hirsh Goodman, "Suicide Bombers 'not even religious'," *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, April 20, 1985, p. 1.
  17. See Daniel Pipes, "'Death to America' in Lebanon," *Middle East Insight*, vol. 4, no. 1 (March/April 1985), pp. 3-9.
  18. "IDF Giving More Reits to Pro-Israeli Military," *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, August 26 - September 1, 1984, p. 6.
  19. "Israel Still Backs Lebanon Militia," *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, September 23-24, 1984, p. 2.
  20. Dan Fisher, "Lebanon Villagers Vent Their Anger, Grief After Massacre of 13 Civilians," *Los Angeles Times*, September 22, 1984, part 1, p. 22.

21. Kenneth Freed, "Withdrawing Israelis Leaving Behind a Dubious 'Security Zone' in South Lebanon," *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1985, p. 26.
22. See Sue Bolton "Israel, Islam and the Resistance," Beirut *Monday Morning*, no. 613 (April 1984), pp. 46-55, and especially London, *Al-Majallah*, "Shi'ite Leader Nabih Berri Views International Situation," cited in Joint Publications Research Service, *Near East/South Asia Report* (September 15, 1983), pp. 83-85.
23. *Ibid.*
24. "Terror Won't Dictate Pace of Pullback," *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, March 23, 1985, p. 1.
25. See Ajami, *op. cit.* for details of how these specific events influenced the Shi'ites of Southern Lebanon.
26. See Shaul Mishal *West Bank/East Bank: The Palestinians in Jordan, 1949-1967* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), especially pp. 5-6.
27. Daoud Kuttab, "Why the West Bank is not South Lebanon," *Al Fajr Weekly*, May 3, 1985, p. 5.
28. Richard A. Gabriel, *Operation Peace for Galilee* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), p. 200.
29. "Terror Won't Dictate Pace of Pullback," *op. cit.*, p. 1.
30. "An Interview with Yitzhak Rabin," *Time*, February 11, 1985, p. 44.