Two Lebanon's

The "Good" Wars?

Justifications?

- Israel perceived itself to be reacting to major changes in its external environment and thus to have had important, arguably overwhelming, strategic reasons for responding as it did. Nevertheless, the three cases were not situations of immediate and overwhelming compellence, such as the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

- Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and the war in 2006 have been extensively chronicled.

  - The reports of the Winograd Commission (2007 and 2008) provide unparalleled insight into the DMP during the 2006 war. Biographies of major figures such as Begin and Sharon help understand the Lebanese invasion of 1982.

Invasion 1982

- Israel's invasion of Lebanon on June 5, 1982 was directed against two distinct enemies, Syria and the PLO, and the strategic rationale for attacking each differed.

- Syria had long been Israel's most implacable enemy, and with the Israeli– Egyptian peace treaty of 1979, it now succeeded Egypt as the primary one as well.

- Lebanon, conversely, was the only one of Israel's neighbors that had refrained from initiating hostilities against it ever since 1949.

- Preservation of this heretofore peaceful border, now challenged by both the growing Syrian and PLO roles in Lebanon, constituted a fundamental strategic objective for Israel.

Motives, 1982

- For Prime Minister Begin, the invasion was designed to lead to the PLO's expulsion from Lebanon and to its destruction. Thus enabling Israel to dictate the terms both of a settlement there and of the Palestinian issue.

    - At the very least, stall the momentum of Palestinian nationalism and greatly diminish the possibility that the West Bank might ever be severed from Israel.

- Ariel Sharon sought a fundamental solution to the Lebanese problem, including destruction of the PLO and withdrawal of Syrian forces, which he believed would pave the way for a Lebanese government willing to make peace with Israel.

Invasion 1982

- The Syrian and PLO threats were perceived by Israel as constituting severe changes in its environment that required commensurate responses.

- In acting in Lebanon, Israel's motivations were initially clearly reactive, but by the time of the invasion, a year had passed since the deployment of the Syrian missiles and PLO shelling.

- As such, the invasion was a case of Israel taking the initiative to shape its environment and attain objectives exceeding those militated by immediate circumstances

DMP, 1982

- The cabinet's rejection of the "big invasion plan" in December 1981, as well as five scaled-down versions over the following months, led to Sharon's decision, in cooperation with Begin, to adopt a more circuitous approach. Instead of requesting cabinet approval for the full-scale invasion, Sharon now sought and received approval for a limited operation, which he then used to lead the cabinet in piecemeal fashion in the desired direction.

- The invasion was the product of extensive planning in the defense establishment and reflected an overall, if controversial, strategic construct, largely shared by Begin and Sharon.

- A number of basic "unknowables," however, such as whether the Phalangists would indeed live up to their role, turned the DMP into an incremental one, while the need to obtain cabinet approval in piecemeal fashion ultimately made it sequential and even improvisational.

War 2006

- On July 12, 2006, two IDF soldiers were kidnapped and eight killed in a Hizbollah border attack.

- The resulting war would turn out to be Israel's longest since 1948, putting an end to the six-year period of relative quiet along the Lebanese border.

Prelude to War 2006

- Having completely withdrawn from Lebanon to its international border in 2000, with UN confirmation, Israel maintained that no further justification existed for conflict with Hizbollah. But, as a deterrent to Hizbollah, it adopted a declared retaliatory policy stating that it would respond massively to any future attacks.

- With the outbreak of the Second Intifada in September 2000, however, Israel found that it could not effectively wage two wars at the same time, diplomatically or militarily, and chose to give priority to the Palestinian front.

- In October 2000 it refrained from retaliating to Hizbollah's first major attack in the post-withdrawal period, setting a pattern that continued throughout the following years, despite periodic shelling of the north, repeated attempts to kidnap Israeli soldiers, and other painful, but low-level, attacks.

- Israel found itself in a bind. The small number of casualties did not provide clear justification for a major response, particularly given its preoccupation with the Palestinian front. Conversely, it was clear to Israel's decision makers that the relative calm on the Lebanese border would not last long and that Hizbollah would ultimately initiate a major escalation, or force Israel to do so.

- Moreover, Hizbollah was making use of the passing time to build up a massive rocket arsenal—from 7,000 at the time of the withdrawal to over 13,000 by 2006.

Prelude

- Following the withdrawal from Gaza in August 2005, Hamas and other Palestinian organizations fired over a thousand rockets into southern Israel. Moreover, in late June 2006, two Israeli soldiers were killed on the Gaza border and one abducted (Gilad Shalit).

- As with the withdrawal from Lebanon, both Israel's public and decision makers were increasingly becoming convinced that even a complete Israeli withdrawal from Arab territory, albeit a unilateral one, had only diminished its security.

- Israel's deterrent image was crumbling and its leaders increasingly felt that something had to be done.

External factor

- In a broader context, Israel's leaders viewed Hizbollah as part of the far greater confrontation with Iran.

- Israel assumed that the massive rocket arsenal Iran provided Hizbollah was intended primarily as a deterrent—to threaten Israel with severe punishment in the event that it attacked Iran's nuclear facilities.

- A strategic threat to Israel in its own right, Hizbollah was thus part of a much greater, in this case potentially existential, one.

Motives, 2006

- Formally, the cabinet merely authorized a "strong" strike against Hizbullah on July 12, 2006. Most of the ministers agreed that they had only approved a limited operation, but beyond that there were substantial differences.

- The objectives, according to Prime Minister Olmert, were as follows

  - changing the strategic situation in southern Lebanon;

  - pushing Hizbullah from the border and deterring further attempts to abduct soldiers;

  - strengthening Israel's general deterrence; and

  - engendering a diplomatic process that would lead to international

  - intervention and to the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559.24

DMP, 2006

- From the beginning, the 2006 war was explicitly designed as a "rolling," i.e., sequential, operation. Olmert and Peretz knew that the operation might have to be expanded significantly, though they hoped that this would not prove necessary.

- IDF planning explicitly called for a suspension of operations on day five to assess the situation and decide if and how to proceed.

- For CoS Dan Halutz, the war's length and scope were flexible variables to be determined by two factors: one military—Hizbollah's responses to IDF operations, especially its counter-attacks on July 12 and 13—and the other, political—the cabinet's willingness to continue approving further operations.

  - He accounted that the operation might end within days if Hizbollah exercised restraint, but the planning he presented to the cabinet on July 12 was based on the assumption of four to six weeks of fighting.

- The Winograd Commission found that the fear of casualties and of a prolonged guerrilla war were among the primary factors contributing to the sequential nature of the DMP.

- The DMP was found to have been essentially sequential in nature.

DMP, 2006

- On August 1, after nearly three weeks of fighting, the IDF now requested approval to conquer a six-kilometer zone along the border, in effect to reestablish the zone Israel had left six years earlier.

- On August 5, Halutz again pushed strongly for a major ground operation, but Olmert and Peretz remained opposed.

- On August 9, with the Security Council cease fire resolution looming, the cabinet finally approved a major operation, but even then only "in principle," with Olmert and Peretz authorized to decide when (and thus if) to launch it.

- Olmert vacillated for two days and only on August 11, with the cease re hours away, finally ordered the IDF into action, but with instructions to be ready to stop virtually immediately. Combat was apparently planned to last five days; the cabinet, however, approved only three.

  - In reality, the operation ended a little after one day, once the cease re had come into effect.

DMP Outcomes

- During the half-year preceding the 1982 invasion, the cabinet discussed the situation in Lebanon repeatedly and met daily during the early weeks of the fighting.

- Unlike most major military operations in Israeli history, the cabinet plenum, not the MCoD or some other sub-cabinet forum, was the formal locus of decision making.

  - The real decision making, however, was done elsewhere. AKA: Begin and Sharon

- Paradoxically, it was the cabinet's firm opposition to the "big plan" in December 1981 that led to its circumvention.

  - For Begin, the cabinet became an obstacle to be overcome; for Sharon, it was an adversary to be defeated through selective and slanted reporting.

- From the beginning in 2006, Olmert decided that in-depth discussions of Israel's wartime objectives and options would not be held in the leak-prone cabinet plenum. Instead, substantive discussion of policy and wartime developments would be held in the MCoD, with actual operational matters to be further restricted to a specially constituted and discrete "Forum of Eight." Thus, the cabinet was by design not the true locus of decision making.

Highly-political DMP

- Partisan politics were minimal in the cabinet throughout the invasion DMP. Following the rejection of the "big plan" in December 1981, however, cabinet meetings came to be all about coalition politics, not policy, with Begin and Sharon seeking to build the minimum majority necessary to obtain approval for almost any invasion.

- A process of political give-and-take, of compromise and deception, became the order of the day.

  - The ministers' opposition was substantive, not partisan.

- The 2006 Second Lebanon War was not politically divisive and both party and coalition politics were of little significance. By rapidly taking decisive action and then further expanding the operation, Olmert defused opposition from the right.

- Given the events preceding the war, including the perceived failure of the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza as well as the kidnappings on both the Gaza and Lebanese borders, the left supported the war too. Indeed, with dovish Labor Party leader Peretz serving as defense minister, opposition from the left could have only come from the fringe.

Highly political DMP

- Partisan politics were thus not an issue in the cases studied. Significant differences did exist within the cabinet in 1982, but they were substantive, not partisan.

- In 2006 they were again substantive, not political.

- Public opinion, conversely, played a significant role in all three cases, contributing to the decisions to expand the fighting in 1982 and 2006.

Results

- Groupthink

  - rational choice (individual) not a factor

- Failure to incorporate strategic lessons "its national security decision-making process" in 2006, Israel repeated the mistakes of 1982 in the Second Lebanon War by establishing political goals that its military means were unable to fulfill.

- The result in both cases was the failure of the IDF to achieve the policy goals, a diminution of the deterrent value of the IDF, and a loss of faith in Israel's civilian government.

Sources

- Itamar Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon* (Ithaca, 1984), p. 122.

- Ze'ev Schiff, "The Green Light," *Foreign Policy*, No. 50 (Spring, 1983), 73–85;

- Ariel Sharon, *Warrior: An Autobiography* (New York, 1989), p. 430, 433.

- Amos Perlmutter, *The Life and Times of Menachem Begin* (New York, 1987), pp. 375, 383.

- Winograd Commission Final Report, pp. 89, 92; Shelah and Limor, op. cit., p. 177;

- Matt M. Mathews, *We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hizbullah–Israeli War*

- Chuck Freilich, *"National Security Decision-Making in Israel: Processes, Pathologies and Strengths," Middle East Journal,* LX : 4 (Autumn 2006), 635–663.

- *Haaretz*: 1982-85; 2006