

MERIA

THE WAR'S FALL-OUT IN LEBANON

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This article deals with Hizballah's conduct during the 2006 Lebanese War as well as Iran's role in the conflict.

Regarding Lebanon, I will not contradict the claims that we missed an opportunity. This was indeed the case. I am sure we missed opportunities in the past as well—and those who are familiar with the history know that there were indeed chances for peace—but to claim that nothing was achieved in the last war in Lebanon is simply wrong.

Today's Lebanon is not the same Lebanon that we faced on the eve of the war. Hizballah in Lebanon suffered a serious blow and will now think twice about what steps to take, despite Iranian backing. Hizballah now has a very serious partner in southern Lebanon, the Lebanese Army—which represents the UN and legitimacy with which it must coordinate. Martin, my friend here, just said that this automatically blocks the Hizballah from attacking Israel directly. So to claim that nothing has happened is wrong. Something has indeed happened; certainly not enough, and less than we had hoped for, but it has definitely changed Lebanon.

Furthermore, I would like to describe a scenario to you regarding Iran's interests and position, as someone who has some concerns regarding Iran's role in that matter. Hamas abducted the soldier Gilad Shalit in the Gaza Strip. The following morning, Khalid Mashal, one of the Jihad's leaders, declared that he was not ready to

negotiate for the release of Shalit and would also get several hundred prisoners released. A few days later, two more Israeli soldiers were abducted in Lebanon. Nasrallah then appeared on television claiming to speak not only on behalf of Hizballah, but also on behalf of the Palestinians. Iran very cleverly decided to take advantage of this development in order to steal the show from Khalid Mashal. This was a clear sign that Iran wanted to be at the forefront in the confrontation with Israel.

My colleagues have informed me that the abduction on the Lebanese border had been prepared in advance, and that it was simply a matter of pressing a button to get it going. This was well planned out. They waited until the time was right. Of course, I could be wrong, but this is plausible, and I take full responsibility for what I say. I won't go into the details of the war itself, but what is clear to me, and from what the others have said, is that the Iranians, the Lebanese authorities, and Hizballah were not prepared for Israel's response of an all-out confrontation with Hizballah.

The Israeli response came as a surprise and forced Hizballah to open its strategic missile arsenal much earlier than it had planned. This made the whole world know that the Hizballah had a strategic missile arsenal in Lebanon. Israel did not realize, the full scale of the accommodated

missilery and should have known and been prepared to deal with it. This, however, did not turn out to be the case. Thus the propaganda offensive began; how did Hizballah fail to fully conceal and protect their long-range Zelzal missiles against Israel? Israel took them out in an undeniably successful operation. In my opinion, this clearly proves that we had managed to pull the rug out from under Iran's feet. Perhaps the effect was not quite what we had expected, but nevertheless, Iran will now have to think hard about its future actions.

Hizballah has two limitations: (1) an international force is stationed in southern Lebanon, and (2) UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701 is being fully implemented. I am not referring to Resolution 1559 in connection with the Hariri assassination (a resolution which was not being dealt with at all at the time), but Hizballah's hands are tied to an effect; Iran and Hizballah are now trying to find ways to overcome these obstacles. This led to a very intense conflict in Lebanon, which Hizballah saw as an opportunity to try to accomplish what was ordained from the start and was clear to anyone who had understood Iran's intentions.

When the riots started in Iran in 1978-1979, we foresaw what would happen. One thing that became clear from the start was that the State of Israel and Israeli representatives no longer had a place in Iran. It was evident that the new regime would make the export of the Islamic Revolution its top priority. This was clear from the outset, but people didn't want to take it seriously. As soon as Khomeini chose this as one of their doctrines, it became the building block of Iran's foreign policy.

The Iranian people are known to be unusually patient and the Iranian regime

maintains a great deal of patience. Two or three years do not matter to them. They are, however, consistent. It is like a game of chess. Chess is a game that originated in Iran, and the most important principal of the game is to be able to think and plan ahead. They have always attempted to see three steps ahead. What is happening now in Lebanon is that they have decided they are going to turn Lebanon into an Islamic Republic. That is the direction they are heading towards. God forbid that anyone should get in their way. I am not saying that this will happen tomorrow, and the Iranians are well aware of this. Their persistence, resourcefulness, their deviousness, and their achievements so far are apparent in how they have managed their matters.

Unfortunately, I am bothered by this all the time. Let us close our eyes and imagine how the Middle East would look had the United States been successful in Iraq, instead of the humiliation it has experienced there until now. Such a victory could have changed the entire region. Now imagine what would happen if the Iranian people were to overthrow their current regime and a new government that is friendly to the West were established. Though this is presently an unlikely scenario, the entire Middle East would be different. This, however, is not the case. We are in a situation in which our ally cannot cope with the hatred, hostility, and aggression it is facing.

Martin Kramer mentioned that we are in the "third stage," the confrontation between Israel and Islam. I believe this is a conflict between the West and an extremist Islamic group that believes they should attack the West and reclaim the assets that they lost 1,000 years ago in Spain, the Balkans, and so on. Whoever doesn't believe that doesn't understand what Ahmadinejad and his people want. I belong to those who take this

group seriously, and I know that Ahmadinejad is serious about what he says.

I read about Ahmadinejad's meeting with his entourage following his return from the UN after his first appearance at the UN General Assembly, in a booklet published in Teheran. In that meeting, he described to his cronies how he stood in front of some 190 representatives and how everyone was enthralled by his speech. He also claims that the *imam* stood behind him whispering what to say, and that there was a sense of emulation in the air. These are the words of a supposedly serious person, a president of a country, and they took it for granted. Ladies and gentlemen, this is serious.

Someone, whose opinion I have the greatest respect for, said about Ahmadinejad, "He is crazy but not stupid." We must deal with this phenomenon. I personally always look for the positive side of things, and while I believe that there are ominous developments in the Middle East—as I have elaborated—there is also a process in Iran. We don't see it, but things are happening in Iran. On the other hand,

there are some people who believe that nothing serious is happening and that Ahmadinejad and his antics are all nonsense.

I must recall the intelligence people who at the time said I was crazy when I approached them in 1978 and said that there was going to be a mind boggling revolution in Iran. They said there was no evidence to support that. We were not the only ones who lacked evidence; the Americans also had no proof. I told Moshe Dayan, the foreign minister at the time, we had to expect convulsive changes in Iran. He did not believe me and tried to have me replaced. He did so, but by the time my replacement arrived, the revolution had started. The Americans also said my information was unreliable and that nothing would happen during the next ten to fifteen years. Today, I carry with me the same feeling as I did then. Changes will take place in Iran; I cannot however say when.

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