

The Israeli-Lebanese war of 2006: the international repercussions

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This article deals with the international repercussions of the recent Israeli attack on Lebanon, and the way in which it differs from previous Arab-Israeli wars. The first part addresses the root causes of the conflict and considers the reasons that made the war on Lebanon a joint American–Israeli–European–United Nations war. The second part looks at the political management of the war and the steps that led to the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, and the various aspects of this resolution. The third assesses the war’s international repercussions by looking at the potential positions of the world’s major powers vis-à-vis obstacles that could impede the implementation of the resolution.

Keywords: Lebanon; Israel; international repercussions of 2006 war; United States; Resolution 1701

Introduction

This article deals with the international repercussions of the recent Israeli attack on Lebanon, which differs, in the present author’s opinion, from all other Arab–Israeli wars in at least three ways. The first difference lies in the nature of the role America played in the war. The fact is that the United States did not only give Israel the green light to launch this war, or deal with it only after it had started as in previous wars; on this occasion America was a partner, an inciter and a sponsor, so much so that many considered it an American war by proxy. The second difference relates to the European position regarding the war, and perhaps even the role it played in it. Differences between the American and European positions on the war were so small that they were almost non-existent, and it seemed as if there was some sort of role distribution among the three main players: Israel, the United States and the European Union, each at a different level of commitment. The third difference relates to the role and position of the United Nations, which Israel, the United States and Europe succeeded in co-opting, and taking where they wanted it to go, irrespective of international law, generally accepted codes of behaviour or the principles inherent in its own Charter. In light of the above, it is difficult to grasp all this war’s repercussions on the international level without understanding its root causes. It is also important to take into consideration the positions of different international powers, as well as the transformation of Lebanon into an experimental laboratory for testing whether US–European relations can overcome divisions between the two wings of NATO caused by the invasion of Iraq.

The article will therefore be divided into three parts. The first will address the root causes of the conflict and consider the reasons that made the war on Lebanon a joint American–Israeli–European–United Nations war. The second will look at the

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political management of the war, the steps that led to the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and various aspects of this resolution. The third will assess the war's international repercussions by looking at the potential positions of the world's major powers vis-à-vis obstacles that could impede the implementation of this resolution.

The root causes

The origins of the 2006 war go back, in the opinion of the present author, to the year 2000, which witnessed two very important events. The first was the Lebanese resistance's success, under the leadership of Hezbollah, in liberating southern Lebanon and forcing Israel to withdraw unconditionally for the first time in the history of the Arab–Israeli conflict. The second was the failure of the second Camp David Summit, which American President Clinton had convened, between Israeli Premier Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, to reach a final settlement of the Palestinian issue. Although, at first glance, there seemed to be no link between these two events, they did interact later to impact on developments and take them in a particular direction. Had the second Camp David Summit succeeded in reaching an agreement that paved the way for an Israeli–Palestinian peace treaty that would ensure the basic rights of the Palestinian people and lay the foundations for a viable Palestinian state, events would have taken an entirely different course. The Israelis would then have portrayed their withdrawal from southern Lebanon as a step towards a comprehensive settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict on all tracks, based on a gradual return to the 1967 borders. General events in the region, however, took a different turn because the deal which Barak had put forward and Clinton had tried to modify to make it amenable to the Palestinians, a deal considered by some to be the maximum that any Israeli Labour leader could offer, fell short of what was required. It was in fact less than the minimum any Palestinian leader, no matter how moderate, could accept, and far beyond the maximum that any Israeli rightwing leader could live with. In other words, the difficulty of reaching a settlement became evident at the second Camp David Summit at the same time as Hezbollah presented its victory as a viable alternative. It may be argued that the dead-end of Oslo, on the Palestinian track, and the alternative presented by Hezbollah, on the Lebanese track, interacted and paved the way for the coming to power of the Israeli right, led by Ariel Sharon, and for the outbreak, and possibly the militarization, of the al-Aqsa *intifāda*.

With the advent to power of George W. Bush and the extreme rightwing in the US in 2000, and Sharon in Israel in early 2001, the peace process became clinically dead, and attempts to isolate and besiege Yasser Arafat politically for refusing to liquidate the Palestinian armed resistance started in earnest. It is at this time that the 11 September 2001 attacks took place in the United States and radically changed the entire world order. These attacks presented neo-conservatives with the golden opportunity to implement their 'New American Century' plan and consolidate unilateral American hegemony in the world. It also gave Sharon the long-awaited American green light to attack the Palestinian armed resistance and get rid of it once and for all, and then pretend that there was no Palestinian partner for peace, as a first step towards eliminating Arafat personally. Thus, for all practical purposes, Israel appeared to stand in the same trench as the United States, in the 'international

struggle against terrorism'. Likewise, all the groups that bore arms against Israel, including Hezbollah, were bound together under the label of terrorist organizations, not much different from Bin Laden's al-Qaeda. Therefore, while the United States was busy fighting in Afghanistan to bring down the Taliban regime and eliminate al-Qaeda, Sharon was free to do as he wished in the Palestinian occupied territories and destroy everything in his path, including the infrastructure which had been mainly financed by the European Union. These installations were supposed to become the backbone of the future Palestinian state.

The European Union was following with concern the violent reaction of the extreme right in America to the events of 11 September and the speed with which the American military machine mobilized its formidable potential behind the 'crusade' against 'terrorism'. However, in the light of the enormity of what had happened, the EU had no choice but to express its complete solidarity with the United States. The EU's endorsement and support for the US invasion of Afghanistan did not, therefore, come as a surprise, nor did its agreement to send NATO forces to stabilize that country after the overthrow of the Taliban regime. Not all European countries, however, were ready to go along with every whim of America's rightwing politicians, especially when they started planning for the invasion of Iraq. US-European disagreements started mounting, and reached their peak when the United States insisted on invading Iraq with or without the UN Security Council's approval. At the same time, the United States was extremely hostile, to the point of sarcasm, towards the European countries that opposed the invasion of Iraq, such as France and Germany, and Rumsfeld spoke about a 'new' Europe, as opposed to an 'old' Europe. However, the success of the US-led invasion in overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime and occupying Iraq, with more than 150,000 American soldiers supported by troop contingents from some 'new' European countries, presented the whole world, including European states that opposed the war, with a new *fait accompli*. The world had no choice but cope with this new-found situation.

The invasion of Iraq was part of a series of operations aimed at consolidating America's imperial designs, according to the neo-conservative ideology. No sooner had Saddam Hussein's regime been overthrown than speculation as to the next target among the axis of evil countries started in earnest. Would it be North Korea or Iran? However, despite the fact that the United States was worried about North Korea's nuclear programme, nobody took the possibility of a military confrontation between the two countries seriously, regardless of the extent of North Korean provocations. Attention therefore turned once again towards the Middle East, which, as most of those who follow neo-conservative ideology closely know, is the focal point of the Bush administration's foreign policy, especially after 11 September. It was clear that the neo-conservatives were seeking to accomplish a series of objectives, the most important of which were the following:

- maintaining a military presence in the region to secure America's control over the oil resources, and determine the fate of the international balance of power;
- empowering Israel, America's only reliable ally, to hold sway over the region;
- overthrowing regimes opposed to the US in the Middle East whenever the opportunity allowed and, at the same time, putting pressure on allied regimes to introduce radical political and cultural reforms to eliminate the roots of terrorism, even if this necessitated reconfiguring the political map of the region.

Seen from that perspective, it is clear that the Syrian and Iranian regimes are quickly moving into the American line of fire, which is now only a stone's throw away. In the American psyche, Iran is the inspiration behind all radical Islamic movements opposed to US policy in the region, added to the fact that its nuclear programme could pose, in the long term, a threat to its one reliable ally, Israel. As for Syria, to which Iraq's invasion of Kuwait gave an opportunity to forge good relations with the US, it no longer bore the same strategic importance for the US after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, and the occupation of Iraq. Moreover, Syria, despite being the country most strongly opposed to the US-led invasion of Iraq, had taken a very hard position in the Arab–Israeli conflict and maintained good relations with Iran and with a number of armed Palestinian resistance movements.

One could say, in this context, that circumstances were pushing the US administration towards seriously considering taking military action against Iran, Syria or both, once the situation in Iraq stabilized. However, faltering US plans in Iraq forced the American administration to reassess its strategy and modify its plans regarding Iran and Syria, although without altering its policy towards them. The military option was therefore temporarily ruled out, and the nuclear issue became the most convenient tool for applying pressure on Iran, while the Lebanon issue became a convenient tool for applying pressure on Syria. Since it was difficult for the United States to deal with any of these issues alone, it needed urgently to amend its relations with 'renegade' European countries, mainly with France, and show more readiness to turn a new leaf, as far as differences over the war in Iraq were concerned.

International and regional developments that followed the war in Iraq compelled both the US and France to search for common ground. On the one hand, France had to accept the fact that, although the invasion and occupation of Iraq took place against the will of the international community, the United States was now in a position that allowed it to control the fortunes of the Middle East and its oil reserves. On the other hand, the United States discovered, especially following the collapse of the Iraqi state and the escalation of the resistance, that it was incapable of dealing alone with the fallout from the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Because rightwing conservatives, under the leadership of Bush, saw the invasion of Iraq as a first step, to be followed later by others, within the framework of the 'global war on terror', they had to admit that it was impossible for them to deal unilaterally with unfolding events, as had happened earlier in the case of Iraq. They therefore needed to build an international consensus, impossible without the active participation of France. It is also possible that France felt that the United States would never leave Iraq, no matter what the cost, and would probably succeed sooner or later in overcoming its difficulties there. In this context, France could have felt that the region was on the verge of another Sykes–Picot, and that it would not share in the spoils this time around if it did not find a role that entitled it to a share. This scenario alone allows us to understand why Lebanon has become the centre of renewed French activities, totally in tune with the American strategy in the region and the world.

In fact, the US–French rapprochement began sooner, straight after the secret visit to Damascus of French President Jacques Chirac's envoy, Maurice Gourdault-Montagne in November 2003. According to an article in the *Washington Post* (Ignatius 2005), Gourdault-Montagne told Bashar al-Asad that regional and

international factors had changed after the US occupation of Iraq, which was now a *fait accompli*, and that Syria would have to change too. He suggested that the President make a goodwill gesture, such as a visit to Jerusalem, or take any other bold step of the same calibre, to give chances for a settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict a boost. When President Asad asked him if he was speaking now on behalf of the Americans, Gourdault-Montagne answered that it was not only George Bush’s view, but that of Chirac, Putin and Schroeder as well. Although the French envoy was aware that he was asking the impossible of President Asad, and that such a step would be tantamount to suicide on his part, France still needed that rejection to justify its rapprochement with the United States. In August 2004, secret channels of communications were opened between the two countries, namely between Maurice Gourdault-Montagne and Steven Hadley, the US President’s National Security Advisor, and the two men started holding regular meetings, every five to six weeks on average, in addition to daily telephone conversations.

It could be entirely possible that, following the visit of the French envoy, President Bashar al-Asad sensed the threat that awaited Syria in Lebanon, which could explain his insistence on prolonging President Lahoud’s mandate. However, irrespective of whether this decision was right or wrong, it gave France an additional pretext to throw itself in the arms of the United States. This jump-started the coordination between the two countries, and ultimately produced Resolution 1559, which marked the beginning of tensions in Lebanon. It is interesting to note that Syria did not at first take very seriously this resolution which some officials had described as ‘weak’ and ‘colourless, tasteless and odourless’. This might have been an accurate assessment from a strictly legal point of view, for the resolution was passed with a only small majority in the Security Council, given that six members, including two permanent members, China and Russia, abstained, and given that it did not include an explicit condemnation of Syria, which was not even mentioned by name in the executive part of the Resolution. Moreover, the resolution was passed under Chapter VI, not Chapter VII, of the Charter, which meant that there were no means to compel its implementation, or to impose sanctions if the deadline was not observed. The constitutional legality of the Resolution was also in doubt, since it violated Article 2 of the Charter, which forbids intervention in the internal affairs of member-states, except in the case of resolutions under Chapter VII of the Charter.

In spite of this, the danger the Resolution posed to both Syria and Lebanon was obvious from the first moment. An article published in *Al-Ḥayāt* in 2006, entitled ‘Lebanon in the eye of the storm’, said:

The moment Resolution 1559 was issued, it set in motion a series of grave political repercussions on the region, which the Syrian and Lebanese Governments would have difficulty containing. These repercussions could be the prelude to a storm that would unleash another big explosion that Israel seems to be seeking, threatening with and preparing for. The United States believes erroneously, as usual, that it will be able to control and use this fracas to serve, above all, its strategic interests. Indeed, more than anyone else, the United States is well aware that the conditions imposed on Syria are intractable and impossible to implement. A total Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, the dismantling of Hezbollah’s armed resistance, the prevention of a Palestinian armed presence outside refugees camps, not to mention the closure of all offices belonging to Palestinian factions that reject Israel’s conditions for a settlement, can only mean, ultimately, the submission of Lebanon to total Israeli–American control. It also means that Syria’s national security, and the security of its society and regime, will come under the American–Israeli gun.

Nobody expected the storm which many had predicted to be unleashed by the planned assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. However, and irrespective of who was behind it, this criminal act set in motion a series of interactions that culminated in Syria's humiliating withdrawal from Lebanon and which are likely to continue until both Hezbollah and Palestinian groups in Lebanon are disarmed. Hezbollah's quick reaction, however, in conjunction with other nationalist forces opposed to Western influence in Lebanon, created an internal political situation that made the implementation of Resolution 1559 impossible, unless it were to be achieved within the framework of an internal Lebanese consensus. Given that the general elections held in the aftermath of Hariri's assassination had not produced a clear winner on either side and created the right circumstances for Hezbollah's participation in the government formed following those elections, there was no alternative but to embark on a national Lebanese dialogue to address all outstanding issues, including Hezbollah's weapons. There was a general feeling at this point that the US–French strategy in Lebanon was faltering. It is therefore reasonable to believe that when the US and Israel became convinced that Hezbollah could not be disarmed, either through internal pressure or by the threat of a possible confrontation with Iran on account of its nuclear programme and successful Uranium enrichment, the American administration decided to launch a military strike against Iran, Syria or both. At the same time, Israel and the United States began thinking seriously about possible ways to implement Resolution 1559 by force. Consultations, between the two countries to consider planning a military attack on Lebanon began well before Hezbollah's operation of 12 July 2006, which resulted in the death of eight Israeli soldiers, the wounding of eighteen others, and the capture of two more.

Israel was neither obliged nor expected to retaliate against this limited operation by launching an all-out war on Lebanon. It had, in theory at least, other alternatives for containing the crisis, alternatives that could have been less costly and more effective. It could have picked any from a wide range of options, such as an exchange of prisoners, applying political pressure, or launching a limited military operation to liberate the two soldiers. However, for several reasons, Israel chose to use the opportunity to implement the American plan that involved changing the entire rules of the game which was still under preparation. Two different reports, one in the *New Yorker* by Seymour Hersh (Hersh 2006), and the other by Wayne Madison, large sections of which were translated into Arabic and published in the Lebanese daily, *Al-Safir* (Madison 2006), are ample proof of that. The reports reveal that, under the cover of a seminar organized by the American Enterprise Institute, a meeting took place on 18 and 19 June 2005 in Beaver Creek (Colorado) between US Vice-President Dick Cheney, current Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, three former Israeli ministers (Benjamin Netanyahu, Ehud Barak and Shimon Perez), and Knesset member Nathan Sharansky. At that meeting, the final touches were put to a plan to destroy Hezbollah militarily. This meant only one thing: that the decision to launch a war on Lebanon was a joint American–Israeli decision, and part of a larger operation aimed at changing the rules of the game, not only in Lebanon, but in the entire region. This is what Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice meant when she said, 'These are the birth pangs of the new Middle East' expected to emerge from the Lebanon crisis. At that meeting (probably preceded and/or followed by others, yet to be revealed) there was, it may be surmised, a distribution of roles, according to which

Israel would assume the military burden, and therefore decide on the most suitable opportunity and time, while America's military arsenal would remain open for Israel to pick and choose the weapons it needed. The United States, for its part, would lead the diplomatic battle in a way that would allow Israel all the time it needed to achieve its mission and declared objectives, which could be summarized as follows: destroying Hezbollah's military infrastructure, disarming its fighters and pushing them up beyond the Litani River, liberating the two Israeli soldiers without preconditions, and consolidating these military achievements on the ground. The United States, in the meantime, would assess the military and political results of the operation, and consider how best to use them in its strategy regarding Syria and Iran.

Political management of the war and the significance of Resolution 1701

The United States, with prior coordination with Israel, as we have seen above, took charge of the diplomatic offensive to ensure that the common objectives were achieved. One could say that Israel's declared objectives, noted above, plus, if possible, the conclusion of a peace treaty with Lebanon, were rather limited in scope in comparison with America's agenda. The United States, for its part, viewed the Israeli military operations as an early example of what the US itself would do on a larger scale in Iran whenever time and opportunity allowed. This is the reason it made sure that Israel had all the time it needed to eliminate Hezbollah and guarantee that the Lebanese front would remain neutral in the eventuality of war breaking out with Iran. In this way, the US could also guarantee Israel's continued ability to give it support, and provide it with military and logistical backup if and when necessary. The United States estimated that the elimination of Hezbollah would weaken Syria to such an extent that Damascus would have no choice but to abandon its alliance with Iran, and maybe also with Palestinian resistance movements, and accept minimum conditions for a settlement with Israel. If, after that, the US succeeded in destroying Iran's nuclear programme, the entire Middle East would be ready to be born anew, according to their specifications.

Everything seemed to be set on the diplomatic front, with no obstacles on the horizon like those encountered in the run up to the invasion of Iraq. Moreover, the European Union was ready, especially after the change of government in Germany and the tight rapprochement with France, and although political changes in Italy following Berlusconi's departure appeared worrisome at first, chances for an anti-war current to form again in Europe were dismissed. All that the United States needed to do now was delay the arrival of the Lebanon crisis in the UN Security Council for as long as possible. This proved not to be so difficult in light of the American-French rapprochement. The only thing remaining was the provision of an Arab cover for the war, a problem that had been plaguing the United States for sometime. However, it found the ideal solution when it stumbled on the idea of making the war seem like an attempt at containing the threat posed by Iran, and cutting its influence in the region down to size.

In fact, observing events in the region in the months that preceded the war on Lebanon, one cannot dodge the impression that invisible fingers were pushing several Arab states to make Iran out to be the biggest threat to the security of the region. They used all means, honourable and dishonourable, to widen Iranian-Arab

disparities to the largest extent possible, even if by doing so they provoked sectarian tensions. It was not so surprising to see Jordan leading this drive, followed by Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The King of Jordan had been making statements regarding the threat of an Iranian-led 'Shi'ite crescent' in the region, and Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faysal's statement about America's foreign policy mistakes that led to the transformation of Iran into a major power in the region, soon followed. Then there was Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's explosive statement, to *Al-'Arabiyya* television, which openly accused the Shi'ites of Iraq of being loyal to Iran rather than Iraq. It was not so strange, therefore, that these three countries were the ones that openly blamed Hezbollah and held it responsible for the 'miscalculated' military adventure that led to the outbreak of the war. If we link that statement with those made by the above-mentioned three countries earlier in the war, it becomes easy to see how they all fall within the framework of the American strategy aimed at forming a Sunni alliance to face a Shi'ite alliance led by Iran and spearheaded by Hezbollah in Lebanon. It is against this backdrop that Israel's war on Lebanon was touted as an attempt to destroy one of Iran's most important mainstays in the region, i.e. Hezbollah, as a first step towards containing its influence in Arab countries where Shi'ites are either the majority, or form a large sector of the population.

Seen from this perspective, it was only normal for the United States to be entirely confident about its diplomacy's ability to deal effectively with the developments of the crisis and achieve the desired goals. The G8 Summit held in St Petersburg on 16 July 2006 was the first forum on which the crisis imposed itself. At the Summit, US diplomacy succeeded in placing all the blame for the war on 'Hezbollah and its allies in Syria and Iran', which it considered to be 'at the root of instability in the Middle East'. It rejected calls on it to lead efforts towards a ceasefire under the pretext that, in the words of Ms Rice: 'There cannot be a return to a status quo of political uncertainty and instability in Lebanon', and that any ceasefire must be 'sustainable'.

However, the success of American diplomacy in achieving its goals was based upon two major expectations. The first was that Israel would succeed in destroying Hezbollah's military infrastructure within a reasonable amount of time, and the second was that losses resulting from Israel's military operations would turn most Lebanese against Hezbollah, so that the former would then blame the latter for starting the war, and isolate it politically as a prelude to its elimination by military means. None of these two expectations materialized for two interconnected reasons. First, the heroic resistance of Hezbollah's fighters, and their ability to score major military successes on the battlefield, surpassed expectations and surprised many, including Israel itself, which appeared confused and incapacitated, if not frightened and defeated, at times. The second reason was the amount of destruction wrought by Israel on Lebanon's infrastructure and the massacres it perpetrated against innocent civilians all over the country. This painted Israel as a savage and brutal monster, constrained by neither ethical nor legal considerations, a monster that exacts revenge on innocent civilians when it fails to defeat the enemy on the battlefield. The interaction between the resistance's steadfastness and the savagery of the Israeli war machine produced three very important outcomes, which gradually interacted in turn with other factors to thwart America's plans in the region. The first outcome was the steadfast stand by the Lebanese people in general, and their rallying round the resistance, which preserved the cohesion of the Lebanese government and isolated elements that sympathized and interacted with American designs ahead of

the expected collapse of the resistance. The second outcome was the eruption of the Arab street in mass demonstrations in overwhelming support for the resistance, which sent a crystal-clear message that the sectarian trump card had failed to produce the desired effect. The third outcome was the fact that some Arab and non-Arab governments had no choice but to modify their positions and start working seriously to bring about an unconditional ceasefire.

The United States was surprised at the Rome conference by Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's seven-point plan. The conference was supposed to be a rallying drive round the Lebanese government and a vehicle for finding the best means of helping Lebanon extend its authority over its entire territory. For the United States, Hezbollah was a mere terrorist organization, which, in an open challenge to the Lebanese government, had taken control of part of Lebanon's territory and prevented the government from deploying its troops over all areas of the country. Siniora's seven-point plan was the minimum on which all parties in Lebanon agreed in a consensus that reflected the will of various groups that made up the government, including Hezbollah. The United States could therefore do nothing but procrastinate to allow Israel more time to settle the matter militarily to make it able to impose conditions on the ceasefire to which it would have finally to agree. Given that its margin for manoeuvre to obstruct progress at the Security Council was gradually narrowing, the United States started working with France on a joint draft resolution that involved the dispatch of an multinational force to Lebanon under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. This force was to be invested with all the necessary prerogatives to assist the Lebanese army to extend its control over the south up to the Litani River, and implement previous Security Council resolutions, including 1559, i.e. the disarmament of Hezbollah by force. Hezbollah, of course, rejected this draft, making it impossible for the Lebanese government to accept.

American diplomacy, which had so far succeeded in obstructing the convening of an Arab summit, could not afford to paralyse joint Arab action any longer. Arab foreign ministers therefore agreed to hold an emergency meeting in Beirut to adopt a unified position in support of Prime Minister Siniora's seven-point plan submitted at the Rome Conference. At their meeting, the Arab foreign ministers decided to send an Arab delegation to New York to take part in talks underway at the Security Council, and try to amend the joint US–French draft resolution to include the Lebanese government's seven-point plan. Although the Arab delegation did play a constructive role, we should not overestimate their accomplishment, for were it not for the heroic steadfastness of the resistance, their efforts would not have had the desired effect on the draft resolution. Nevertheless, the outcome was Resolution 1701.

In principle, each party can interpret Resolution 1701 as it wishes, though we would like to distinguish here the difference between the legal and political interpretations. A purely legal interpretation suggests that the Resolution is clearly biased towards Israel and gives it, thanks to America's influence, all that it failed to achieve on the battlefield. A political interpretation, on the other hand, suggests that the balance of power on the ground prevents the literal implementation of the resolution in the way Israel, the United States and some Western countries would like, and that any implementation will depend, in any case, on the way the political situation develops in the region and throughout the world. Indeed, although this

particular battle between Israel and Hezbollah is over, the war itself is on-going, and may, as Robert Fisk puts it, have just started (Fisk 2006).

The reasons that UN Security Council Resolution 1701 can be seen, in its legal interpretation, to be skewed in favour of Israel, are as follows:

- The Resolution holds Hezbollah fully responsible for the war, and for the destruction it wrought on, among other things, Lebanon's infrastructure, without making any reference to Israeli violations, which many international human rights organization saw as war crimes. The Resolution also fails to mention Israel's violation of legal and moral principles inherent in the Geneva Convention, and applied in times of war. Paragraph 2 of the Resolution's Preamble states that the Security Council 'expresses its utmost concern at the continuing escalation of hostilities in Lebanon and in Israel since Hezbollah's attack on Israel on 12 July 2006, which has already caused hundreds of deaths and injuries on both sides, extensive damage to civilian infrastructure and hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons'.
- The Resolution calls neither for a comprehensive and unconditional ceasefire, nor for the cessation of offensive actions, as is usually the case in similar conditions, and distinguishes between the commitments that each of the parties, Israel and the Hezbollah, had to make. The Resolution calls 'for a full cessation of hostilities based upon, in particular, the immediate cessation by Hezbollah of all attacks and the immediate cessation by Israel of all offensive military operations'. The textual interpretation of this paragraph shows that while Hezbollah is prevented from undertaking any military activities, which the Resolution described as 'attacks', Israel is given the right to undertake military operations if construed as defensive actions. Israel, however, describes all its military operations as defensive, as evidenced by the land operation it launched straight after the Resolution came into effect, under the pretext that it was preventing arms supplies from reaching Hezbollah. In the meantime, it still maintains its air and sea embargo on Lebanon, without this being considered a violation of the Resolution's provisions.
- The Resolution drew a distinction between Israeli prisoners, which it described as 'abducted soldiers' and Lebanese detainees, which it described as 'Lebanese prisoners'. Thus, while it calls for 'the unconditional release of the abducted Israeli soldiers', it is simply 'mindful of the sensitivity of the issue of prisoners and encourages the efforts aimed at urgently settling the issue of Lebanese prisoners detained in Israel.'
- The Resolution places emphasis in several of its paragraphs on the need for both parties to respect the 'Blue Line', and only mentions the Shebaa Farms in the paragraph that requests the UN Secretary General to develop, in liaison with relevant international actors and the concerned parties, proposals to implement various pending issues. These include the 'delineation of the international borders of Lebanon, especially in those areas where the border is disputed or uncertain, including by dealing with the Shebaa Farms area, and to present to the Security Council those proposals within 30 days'.
- The Resolution did not ask for an immediate Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, and linked an eventual withdrawal to the deployment of the Lebanese armed forces and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

- Although the Resolution did not mention Chapter VII of the UN Charter, it nevertheless affirms in one of its paragraphs that the situation in Lebanon constitutes a threat to international peace and security. In Article 12, it grants wide-ranging prerogatives to UNIFIL, and authorizes it ‘to take all necessary action in areas of deployment of its forces and as it deems within its capabilities, to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind, to resist attempts by forceful means to prevent it from discharging its duties...’
- In the paragraph relevant to the long-term solution, the Resolution ‘requires the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, so that there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State’.

Based on a legal interpretation of the above, it is evident that Israel got all it wanted, including the release of its two soldiers, control over the weapons of Hezbollah and the creation of a buffer zone south of the Litani River.

Nevertheless, a political reading of the Resolution based on the balance of power on the ground suggests that Hezbollah was not defeated but has, on the contrary, achieved a brilliant military victory. It still holds the two abducted Israeli soldiers and has control over its entire military capability (despite the deployment of the Lebanese army in the south). Furthermore, the Shebaa Farms are now on the international community’s table as an occupied territory, or at least a disputed area, and the sensitivity of the Lebanese prisoners issue was given credence, as was the need to attend to it urgently. It also became clear that if Israel did decide to put an end to its military operations, which is possible, then any settlement based on the existing balance of power would ultimately lead to an exchange of Israeli and Lebanese detainees and to the restoration of the Shebaa Farms to Lebanese sovereignty, which are basically Hezbollah’s two main demands. As for the disarmament of Hezbollah, it is now clear that this can only take place within the framework of a Lebanese national accord that first ensures the ability of the Lebanese army to defend its territory. It might entail additional international guarantees to prevent any repeat of Israel’s attack on Lebanon and to settle the issue of Palestinian refugees in that country, both of which will take quite a long time to achieve and might require special arrangements to be put in place. A settlement of these issues would probably also require the participation of other international parties, as well as establishing links between them and other factors related to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

One may therefore say that the political interpretation of Resolution 1701 implies that the United States and Israel have not won the war, and might even be on the verge of losing it, if it is not lost already. The war is, in any case, not over yet.

Possible repercussions on the international level and the chances for the implementation of Resolution 1701

It is difficult to determine the repercussions of a war that has not yet ended, especially considering its obscure and complicated nature and intertwined objectives and interests. On the surface, the war seems to have taken place between two players. On one side, there was Israel, a member of the United Nations that enjoys strong relations with the great powers, and with many other member states, including Arab states; and on the other, Hezbollah, a non-state actor, and regarded by many as an illegal terrorist organization that deserves elimination because it has committed acts

of aggression against a member of the world community. At the same time, this non-state actor is a political party that takes part in general elections, has strong representation in parliament, and two members acting as ministers in the Lebanese Cabinet. In other words, it is part of a government which Israel claims to have gone to war in order to help it regain its sovereignty and independence, and extend its authority throughout Lebanon!

Hezbollah, one of the parties in this war, is in fact a popular resistance movement created during, and as a result of, Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon, when the country was in the grip of a civil war and incapable of carrying out its responsibilities. It also played an essential role in the liberation and reconstruction of this ailing country. From the Lebanese political point of view, Hezbollah is a legal movement and part of the government and the state of Lebanon. It is also one of the main participants in the ongoing National Dialogue. Among this dialogue's objectives is laying the foundations for a strong central state, capable of determining issues of peace and security and fulfilling all its obligations, including the maintenance of security, the lack of which, at a certain point in time, gave rise to the movement.

The recent war, however, was not limited to these two protagonists; many regional and international actors have taken part in it directly or indirectly and in different degrees. The United States, the sole hegemonic superpower in the world, was not just Israel's ally and a biased actor in the war—it was an instigator and a direct participant, at least as far as the supply of weapons and the political and diplomatic management of the war were concerned. Although, as everyone knows, Hezbollah is on America's list of terrorist organizations, the European Union does not consider it as such. Yet the latter's position during the war was more like that of an ally of Israel's than a neutral bystander. The reason could be the close similarity in views between France and the United States, which goes back to the prolongation of President Lahoud's mandate. The positions of Russia and China in the crisis were neither clear nor effective, despite their attempt at neutrality and retaining relative freedom of movement, which is partly due to the weak, hesitant and divided Arab position. On the other hand, Hezbollah enjoyed the strong and unequivocal support from Iran and Syria, as well as substantial endorsement from many civil society organizations in the Arab and Islamic worlds.

In this context, the political and military imbalance between the protagonists and their allies was immense, so much so, that the conflict looked more like a confrontation between an official regime, allied to regional and international power centres, and an Arab-Muslim popular movement, led by Hezbollah and supported by Iran and Syria.

On a parallel level, the gap between the explicit and implicit causes and objectives of the war, which differed from one party to another, was very wide. Indeed, while Israel sought, among other things, to exact revenge on Hezbollah for its defeat in 2000, and to eliminate the Palestinian resistance, France sought to restore its old influence in Lebanon, and the United States saw in it an opportunity for the birth of a new Middle East. This new Middle East, as envisaged by America, would be free of Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and free of Iran's nuclear ambitions and maybe, also, of the Syrian and Iranian regimes. This leads us to the conclusion that since this war did not only involve Israel and Hezbollah, but was also a war, by proxy, between major regional and international powers, it follows that its

repercussions would have a regional and international impact too. It also means that the mere fact that Hezbollah was able to survive the war, both militarily and politically, is in itself an international and regional success. Indeed, the Lebanese resistance has proved that it can preserve the status quo, despite the fact that one of the major aims of the war was to change the rules of the game.

Furthermore, the fact that the United Nations, whose role is to preserve peace and security in the world, showed clear bias and neglect of its own principles due to America's influence at the Security Council, dealt another blow to its aura and credibility. It revealed, once again, the urgent need to reform the organization, especially from the point of view of increasing the number of Security Council members to reflect better the distribution of power worldwide. There is also a need to amend the organization's decision-making system, given the overreaching role of the veto power, which is more like Damocles' sword over the neck of justice than a means of maintaining the international balance of power. During this latest war, contradictions between various United Nations' bureaux, and between them and international civil society organizations, were amply evident. For while the Security Council blamed the war on Hezbollah alone, and failed to utter a word about the crimes and massacres perpetrated by Israel, the Human Rights Council of the United Nations' General Assembly condemned these acts and called for the formation of an investigation committee. In another development, Amnesty International did not hesitate to condemn Israel's violations, or describe them as massacres and war crimes.

Hezbollah's heroic steadfastness led to Israel's failure to settle the war's outcome militarily, which means that the objective for which Israel went to war failed to materialize. The United States has, by the same token, failed to settle the matter politically, despite securing the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1701, which is, by all accounts, flagrantly biased towards Israel. The adoption of this Resolution at a time when Israel had failed to settle the matter militarily places the international community at a crossroads. This war proved, among other things, how closely connected the Arab-Israeli conflict is to other regional and international issues, including the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, the matter of Iran's nuclear programme and the issues of terrorism and religious extremism. The fact that they insist on the implementation of Resolution 1701, while scores of other Security Council and General Assembly resolutions remain forgotten, renders 1701 moot, notwithstanding the fact that it is difficult to implement on the ground. We should also point out that in one of its final paragraphs, 1701 mentions the need to implement Resolutions 242 and 338, adopted 38 and 33 years ago, respectively.

In spite of the large-scale destruction wrought by this war, it nevertheless provides all parties with an excellent opportunity to settle all pending Middle East issues once and for all. For this to become possible, an international conference to which all parties, including Syria and Iran, are invited, should be convened and given all the prerogatives to ensure that what the parties agree on is actually implemented. However, the hope that the current crisis would lead to such an outcome is very slim, given the policies of the current US administration under George W. Bush, which sees all issues from an unflinching ideological and dogmatic perspective.

In the present writer's opinion, since Resolution 1701, in its present form, is impossible to implement given the existing balance of power on the ground, future developments in Lebanon will largely depend on the political option the United

States chooses in dealing with the Iranian nuclear programme. There might be attempts to isolate Syria from Iran or temporarily calm down the Arab–Israeli conflict, once a national unity government is formed in Palestine. However, these attempts will most probably end in abject failure because Israel lacks the requisite clear vision and political leadership to arrive at a settlement that fulfils minimum Arab demands. In the absence of such leadership, the possibility of a real settlement seems impossible in the short term, not forgetting that the current American administration is likely to resort to the military option in dealing with Iran, despite the extreme danger it involves. If this happens, it will probably lead not only the region, but also the whole world into a war that will embody a real clash of civilizations. Though it is not that surprising to hear President Chirac openly warn against such an eventuality, the mere fact that he considered it warranted a warning from him means that the possibility cannot be excluded.

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