

In Retrospect: The Second Lebanon War

Ehud Olmert

The processes that led to the Second Lebanon War and the events that took place during the war are analyzed six years after the war. The starting point for the analysis is the withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, which, according to the analysis, was justified. However, from a broad perspective, it is evident that the overall processes since the withdrawal led to strategic choices that resulted in the IDF's reduced operational preparedness. The article examines the decision making processes near the start of and during the course of the war through a review of the IDF's main operational activity during the war. In addition, it describes the political moves during the fighting and at its conclusion. Finally, there is an analysis of the campaign's achievements and the main lessons derived from it.

Keywords: Second Lebanon War, Lebanon, IDF, strategy, Hizbollah

It is an overstatement to call the military effort undertaken by Israel in Lebanon during the summer of 2006 a "war." The events known today as the Second Lebanon War did not actually begin on July 12, 2006; they began on the day the State of Israel decided to adopt a policy of containment in response to the kidnapping and killing of its three soldiers in 2000 – when it threatened to make the ground shake in Lebanon but then did nothing. In fact, the Second Lebanon War began when Israel lost its deterrent capability; when it failed to act, explicitly contradicting its commitment to do so; when it decided to accept a situation in which the other side chose the timing, the scope, and the manner in which to drag Israel into a situation where it was forced to react rather than dictate. This was the state of affairs for six years after October 2000.

Ehud Olmert was the Prime Minister of Israel during the Second Lebanon War. This essay is based on his lecture "The Second Lebanon War: The Test of Time," delivered at the INSS conference "The Lebanon Wars and Israel's Security Concept," July 12, 2012.

This article will address only the military aspect of the campaign in Lebanon in 2006, from a six-year perspective. Firstly, it should be emphasized that the withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 was justified. I differ on this matter with my friend Effi Eitam – a great soldier, but one who is happy with our presence in territories that are not part of the State of Israel and do not contribute to its international legitimacy, although this legitimacy is necessary and essential in order to realize Israel’s strategic interests. This happiness is not part of my worldview and was not part of it when I was Prime Minister. Thus, the decision to withdraw from Lebanon was correct and justified, and although the manner in which we departed may be questioned, it is beyond the scope of this discussion. After withdrawing from Lebanon, for six years Israel closed its eyes to the situation forced upon it on the northern border. Not only did it refrain from responding to events and act, or fail to act, in direct contradiction to threats issued by officials who set Israel’s policy goals; it also diverted the vast majority of security operations and military preparations to combat in another arena, with other tools and other methods, regardless of the clearly predictable security and military needs that would ultimately be imposed on us on the northern border.

The lack of operational preparedness as reflected in certain events during the Second Lebanon War resulted from a deliberate strategic preference – and it no longer matters who made this decision, nor will I engage in accusations or assign responsibility. This strategic preference was manifested by the IDF’s failure to prepare as necessary, in terms of training and capabilities, to provide effective responses at the right time and in the right context during the Second Lebanon War.

Even before January 2006, I was a member of the security cabinet and, in that capacity, of the small team of ministers addressing the issue and arena of Lebanon. Beginning in January 2006, the question of Lebanon became an integral part of my agenda. To the best of my understanding and knowledge, having also examined the archives, no measure taken during the six years prior to 2006 compares to the measures taken during the six months after January 8, 2006 – in terms of focused assessment of the situation in Lebanon, the feasibility of operating there, and the need to address the emerging situation. On that date, I held my first meeting with a team of senior advisors, including then-Chief of Staff Lieut. Gen. Dan Haloutz, in order to discuss what we could and should do, given the

assessment that there was very little time before we would be challenged in the north. According to the situation assessment, we were progressing toward a conflict on the northern border, and the question was whether, under the circumstances, we should continue the policy of containment that had been in place for six years, or whether we should change this policy, taking into account that doing so would drag us into a violent conflict and state of friction with the opposing forces. Without exception, the position of all those in the military leadership – from the Chief of Staff, to the head of Military Intelligence, to the head of Military Intelligence’s Research Division, and all other officials – was that we could not maintain the policy of containment. This was also the view of the General Security Services (GSS), the Mossad, and all the other advisors. The salient position, including of the Chief of Staff, was that if we were attacked in the north in accordance with Hizbollah’s regular pattern – that is, kidnapping of soldiers and firing of rockets against towns on the northern border – and we failed to respond, then Israel would suffer strategically very much, worse even than if the regime in Syria changed unexpectedly. Then-head of Military Intelligence (today the Director of the Institute for National Security Studies) has said similar things, and when the Second Lebanon War broke out, he stated that the kidnapping incident on the northern border, which led to the war, was the result of a failure to address the abduction of the soldiers on the same border in October 2000. In other words, the position of the officials to whom we can listen and from whom we can learn – those who have the information and who deal with the issue of Lebanon on all levels and from all directions – was uniform: we would have to operate according to an entirely different model from the one applied during the six years after October 2000 and, in effect, since we left Lebanon in May of that year.

I too took the position that there was no option but to change the rules of the game, and not only was there was no alternative but that it was nearly certain this would happen. Accordingly, I instructed military officials to take all precautions and prepare as best as possible to prevent a situation in which we would have no choice but to respond more forcefully than before under comparable circumstances, but of course to be ready to act if such a situation in fact developed. I remember my warning – one of many – in one of the preliminary discussions, when I said, “In the end, from one person’s blunder, Israel is entering a strategic tailspin.”

On the day in June 2006 of Gilad Shalit's abduction on the southern border and in the days that followed, we held a series of discussions in which the salient question was not what happened at that border, rather, what is expected to happen on the northern border. The army was requested and explicitly instructed by the political leadership (by me and by the Defense Minister, whose actions were responsible, restrained, level-headed, measured, and impressive) to be on the highest level of alert along the northern border to prevent the possibility that the blunder I mentioned would occur: a kidnapping that would lead to events such as those that ultimately did transpire. I remember that we were curious about whether the model of a tunnel, as it existed in Gaza, was possible on the northern border, and the answer from defense officials was that the possibility always existed, but the likelihood was very low. In the end, the event that took place in July 2006 on the northern border was not the result of an operation using the tunnel model, but the classic model that Hizbollah has used throughout the years. Unfortunately, we fell into this trap, in spite of the orders to be on high alert to prevent precisely such an incident. To a certain extent, the events that led to the outbreak of the war may be attributed to a failure to carry out the order conveyed through the military high command, in accordance with a directive from the political leadership, to make every effort to avoid a particular situation that would lead to an inevitable development. This order stemmed from our rational and agreed assessment that if such a situation emerged, we must change our manner of response, meaning that we had no intention of continuing the policy of containment.

One of the arguments I have heard in retrospect from various individuals – in contrast to what they said at the time – is that when the kidnapping on the northern border took place, we should have taken time out in order to consider our response. In fact, during the six months preceding the kidnapping, we had been thinking about what to do if such an incident took place. There is no need to elaborate on what we all well know – that if one does not respond when the provocation occurs, one loses legitimacy. Legitimacy for the type of operation that can be launched close to the time of the provocation is lost within two to three days.

Some of those officials from the period of the Second Lebanon War subsequently changed jobs but remained within decision making bodies. At that time we had to prepare a possible response to the missile fire from

the Gaza Strip. It was clear even then that a response – which ultimately emerged as “Operation Cast Lead” – was only a matter of time, and we would have no choice but to act because we could not continue to live with constant, daily containment of missile fire against Ashkelon and the communities, kibbutzim, and development towns in the south, especially when this fire could reach Ashdod and Beersheba as well. The question, therefore, was when to respond. The answer was as soon as the first missile strikes Ashdod we must start to act. I recall that during this discussion, I pounded hard on the table and responded to these comments by pointing out that we had waited several years to hear this, and from the very same people who had said on the eve of the Second Lebanon War that we should take a time out, as if the other side were giving us such a time out for thinking! Indeed, sometimes the way one views a course of action changes, especially when one sees things from a different place and a different angle. In any case, during countless deliberations we discussed the possible model of response in the event that what did actually happen were to happen on the northern border, so that we would not need to take the time out in order to consider how to proceed.

One of the first pieces of advice, or more accurately, the first positions presented to me by the military leadership about responding to an incident on the Lebanese border – and in this regard, it is clear that the military leadership is ultimately included in the positions expressed by the Chief of Staff – was not to draw a distinction between Hizbollah and the Lebanese state, but to regard the Lebanese state as a target for response and, therefore, to strike its national infrastructures by means of a quick, destructive, and very short operation. My main disagreement with the Chief of Staff was on this issue, and it remains so to this day. I believe that then-Chief of Staff Dan Haloutz maintains the same position on this issue even today. In his book, he explained and elaborated on his stance, but even after following his explanation I did not agree with him, nor do I agree with him today. This is a good example of the gap between the positions of the operational military leadership and those of the political leadership. Naturally, under the circumstances, the latter has a broader picture of the world. Although I do believe that Lieut. Gen. Haloutz’s world view is very broad and comprehensive, by virtue of his position as Chief of Staff, and under the circumstances at the time, his perspective has been

limited to what appears to him to be critical at that moment, while the political leadership must see the bigger picture.

One of the most important elements that must be understood – and I say this not only in retrospect about the Second Lebanon War, but also to invite thinking about what some people want to see happen in the future – is that Israel is a strong country with tremendous power. We have tools that few states have. We have capabilities that few countries in the world have. However, we cannot take action unless we also establish a broad foundation of international legitimacy. Anyone who thinks that we can act without international legitimacy has a faulty perception of reality and understanding of Israel's status, position, and relationships. One source of satisfaction in relation to the Second Lebanon War is that although our military action included heavy shelling and bombardment – which inflicted pain and loss and affected the way of life of civilian populations on a huge scale, causing some one million people in Lebanon to leave their homes and go north – the international community stood behind us. This support did not emerge by chance. It was created because we knew how to secure international legitimacy, which gave us the backing to carry out our action.

What would have happened had we attacked Lebanon's infrastructures at a time when the Western world, first and foremost the United States and Europe, believed that there was a chance of cooperating with the Siniora-Hariri government in a way that would change the situation, and demonstrated true concern for it and for its future? It is very possible that the war would have ended within forty-eight hours and Hizbollah would have continued to fire missiles, harass the northern border, and disrupt the way of life of the entire population in Israel's north. In my opinion, the decision we made not to attack Lebanon's infrastructures was correct and responsible. It reduced – although it did not eliminate – the possibility that the entire population of Lebanon, including its Christians, would become Israel's mortal enemies forever because we had equated all of them with Hizbollah. Bombing Lebanon's infrastructures would have been a mistake, and I am happy we were not dragged into such action.

Another issue that should be addressed is the question of a ground operation deep into Lebanese territory. On this matter, my position and that of the Chief of Staff were identical from the outset, and Defense Minister Amir Peretz, whose actions during this war justified my confidence in him, agreed with us. Our position was that we were not interested in a

ground penetration deep into Lebanon because we realized that the days of entering and occupying territory with ground forces for the sake of deterrence or prevention of harm to the population are past. I say this as a person who over the years, even before I served as Prime Minister and certainly during my term in office, developed a more balanced perspective toward the possibilities, the needs, and the preferences of a country on Israel's scale. If you do not understand this point, you do not understand a very fundamental component of our ability to conduct Israel's military and defense affairs in a way that is balanced, responsible, cautious, and smart. Nevertheless, I should note – and I am in full agreement with Lieut. Gen. Haloutz's angry remarks in defending himself when he was attacked for allegedly telling the cabinet that we should rely solely on airpower – that during a July 12 cabinet meeting, when the Chief of Staff was asked what would be considered a victory in the process recommended by the army, which in turn I recommended that the cabinet adopt, he answered: "There will be no knockout here . . . If anyone expects that they will raise white flags and we'll end the war that way, that isn't going to happen." What the Chief of Staff said, which I also thought was correct, is that we must create such military pressure that ultimately, in as short a process as possible, it leads to international intervention, thereby altering the situation existing on the Lebanese border since 2000 and achieving the goals adopted by the cabinet and issued in a public announcement following the meeting on July 12.

There was one objective that we did not achieve, which we knew in advance we would not achieve, having discussed it as well in the cabinet meeting. We announced, inter alia, that we were working to bring about the release of the two kidnapped soldiers. We did not say they were murdered, although even then we had almost no doubt that they had been. In case there was even a 1 percent chance they were alive, we did not want to raise the possibility of Hizbollah murdering them lest it then turn this possibility into fact. Furthermore, we concluded at the cabinet meeting that there was no chance of rescuing the soldiers in a military operation. Nevertheless, the government could not announce its objectives in launching such an operation without mentioning the two kidnapped soldiers. It cannot bring about an international operation placing pressure on all actors in Lebanon, without itself declaring that the liberation of the soldiers is an objective. The fact that this declared goal was not achieved is sometimes brandished against the government. I am amazed when I see people

writing, responding, and arguing about matters that were published and are publicly known, but because they do not conveniently fit into a thesis or a conception, they are ignored. Accordingly, I would like to reiterate the following point: sometimes objectives are announced because they are part of the relevant context of a struggle that combines military action, diplomatic moves, and explanations, even though it is known in advance that they are not likely to be achieved.

The main undertaking during the first phase of the campaign was the aerial effort, which resulted in remarkable achievements. It infuriates me to hear certain people say that the Israel Air Force and the Chief of Staff think that “everything is the air force.” To this I reply that in the future battlefield those in charge of all the military systems will fall under the air command of the State of Israel, and their role, their weight, and their scope will exceed all the other elements. The entrenched, conventional, and dogmatic approach regards war as entailing a thousand tanks bursting forth across enemy lines – because once it was customarily believed that war must be shifted to the enemy’s territory – then conquering it and seizing control over it, and therefore, according to this view, only an infantryman knows how to wage war. This approach is valid only for a ground battle. The best man will know how best to synchronize the various components of a modern war in the future battlefield. Such a person can be in either the ground forces or the air force, and on this matter, neither one is better than the other.

As noted, the first operation of the Lebanon campaign in 2006 achieved great success – striking targets selected by the army, using mainly aerial capabilities and other precision weapons in our possession, which were operated wisely, diligently, resolutely, precisely, and unhesitatingly. This opening operation deeply shocked and unnerved Hizbollah officials.

The second effort we sought to undertake was on the ground. It was on the first Saturday night of the war. We flew to the Northern Command, and I personally instructed the OC Northern Command to “clear” the territory up to a depth of three kilometers from the border. This meant that we would not enter Lebanon – not reach the Litani River, not reach the Awali River, and certainly not north of that. One of the IDF generals on whose abilities, talents, and achievements there is general agreement, told me two years later that he thought, as did the Chief of Staff and I, that had we decided then to enter deep into Lebanese territory we would have still been fighting there. The desire to enter territories where there is no need to

be is a drive that should be restrained, and in fact, we did enter the battle in Lebanon with restraint in this regard. The decision to clear an area of three kilometers stemmed from the desire to prevent a daily threat from light weapons, which could have made the life of those living along the border impossible. Once they cannot be threatened with such weapons, the security situation improves, and soldiers patrolling the border cannot be abducted. This was the optimal ground objective, and no more.

It turned out that a considerable number of the failures in the use of forces in Lebanon were within limited range and were not a result of an extensive, large scale, dramatic military ground operation. These were tactical failures that require us to learn lessons and draw conclusions. In fact, an enormous effort was made in this regard after the war. However, these failures do not overshadow the significant achievements of the overall effort in the Lebanon campaign, which resulted from the correct combination of the military effort and the political effort.

As mentioned, we sought international legitimacy for the operation in Lebanon. Not only did we receive it, but we were not pressured, even by the Americans. I cannot recall when or whether any defensive military operation along these lines in Israel's history resulted in less pressure from any international player, especially the most important player in our view, the US government. Moreover, despite the rumors and published reports, I did not speak with President Bush during the war even once. The only conversation we had was on the Friday on which the Security Council passed a ceasefire resolution. Prior to that, we had reached a final agreement on the draft resolution through phone calls with the president's National Security Advisor and his Secretary of Defense, and we went over every word and every comma. Only later, long after midnight, did President Bush call me, saying he had not wanted to call earlier because he realized that I needed the time to do as I saw fit. It is no trivial matter to hear such things in the context of a relationship with the country most important for our security and our existence.

We did not intend and we did not wish to extend the ground operation in Lebanon beyond the narrow sector that we considered important for achieving our goals – very significant goals from the perspective of the civilian population in the north of the country. In addition, we conducted military maneuvers that created the pressure that ultimately led to activity by the international community. This activity enabled us to achieve the

goal of placing an international military force in southern Lebanon, which significantly changed the security situation that had existed there for six years. All the conditions for achieving this objective emerged after two and a half weeks of fighting, a very reasonable amount of time according to all those involved.

On July 29, 2006, in a conversation in my home with the US Secretary of State, we agreed on the details and drafted a resolution to be put to a vote in the UN Security Council three days later, after she had presented it to Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora and the draft was finalized. Then, as sometimes happens, an incident occurred: the IDF shelled a multi-story building in Kafr Qana in southern Lebanon. As a result of this incident, Lebanon presented a dramatic picture of a terrible disaster in which one hundred civilians were killed, mostly women and children. The Lebanese reaction created a strong impression in world public opinion, to the point that for the first time since the start of the campaign we thought we had to defend ourselves against it. Given the situation, the President of Lebanon also asked the US Secretary of State not to come to Lebanon. Thus, the timetable that would have allowed us to end the fighting two and a half weeks earlier than it actually ended was disrupted. This was a turning point that in turn disrupted the overall course of events. Eventually we realized, as did the Americans, that we had to find a way to enable the resolution to be passed in the Security Council and, to this end, to secure the consent of the Lebanese sovereign, i.e., the government of Lebanon, to the stationing of international military forces in southern Lebanon. We found a way to do this, and the United States resumed negotiations with all those concerned.

Thus we advanced toward Wednesday, August 9, the day on which the political-security cabinet met. The issues on the agenda were, on the one hand, the possibility of implementing the proposal that was intended to provide a long term solution to the security situation in southern Lebanon, and on the other, the possibility that passage of the resolution would be delayed and that further debates and discussions would be needed before it was finalized. During that cabinet meeting, I was surprised by a telephone call from the US Secretary of State, who asked to speak with me directly. I assumed that she wanted to influence the cabinet discussion, especially in light of the rumors that had begun circulating among the public and in the international media to the effect that Israel was planning a large scale ground campaign in southern Lebanon. Instead, Condoleezza Rice told me

explicitly that the United States accepted Israel's position and would do what was necessary to bring about the stationing of a NATO intervention force with 12,000 soldiers in southern Lebanon, and that it would present a draft resolution on the matter to the Security Council that evening or the next day. After this conversation, the cabinet decided to authorize me and the Defense Minister to decide whether or not to engage in a more extensive operation in Lebanon, of course taking into account developments related to the Security Council resolution.

On that occasion and on others as well, the Americans asked us how much time we would need to bring hostilities to an end once the Security Council resolution was passed. Israel's answer then was ninety-six hours. This answer was based on experience and on the understanding that we could not know in advance whether passage of the Security Council resolution would coincide with an optimal situation with respect to the troops on the ground or whether we would need more time to improve it. It was also unclear whether the other side would accept the resolution and cease fighting.

While at that stage the IDF wanted to enter into a ground operation in Lebanon, we in the government saw this operation only as a means of applying pressure, not as a strategic shift toward territorial occupation. By increasing the pressure, we intended to lead the international community to adopt a resolution that we expected would yield the results necessary for achievement of the objectives we had set for the war. At that point, the Chief of Staff told me that soldiers had been deployed on the ground and that there were division commanders pressing to enter Lebanon. I spoke with the commanders, I explained my position to them, and I added that I was proud of the soldiers and commanders who wanted to enter Lebanon, but that the political leadership has a broader view, which includes additional considerations that it must weigh, and it is the leadership that will decide if and when to act.

It is important to understand that entering Lebanon requires several hours of mobilization. Thus, to do so when darkness falls on Thursday requires making a decision at noon or in the early afternoon on that day. But it was not possible to make such a decision because passage of the Security Council resolution was on the agenda for that same night, and we had reached understandings with representatives of the Secretary of State, almost to the last detail. Late in the hours between Thursday and

Friday, a message arrived from a very senior US government official, conveyed to us by our UN ambassador, Dan Gillerman. The message said that a completely different resolution, initiated and drafted by France, was going to be presented to the Security Council, and that the United States was unable to withstand the pressure applied by France. When we examined the sequence of events, we reached the conclusion that the only way we could alter their course was to have the more extensive IDF action in Lebanon appear to be factually underway, thereby exerting the necessary pressure on the actors in the international arena. The attempts we made on Friday morning to contact someone from the American team were in vain; they were all asleep at that hour (10 A.M. in Israel and 3 A.M. on the East Coast in the United States), and of course, we could not wake the Secretary of State or the President. Therefore, everything ultimately came down to a point in time in which, if we had postponed the decision on expanding the operation, there might very well have been insufficient pressure to pass the resolution in the form that we had been discussing all along with the United States. This could have resulted in a different resolution being passed that was contrary to our interests, which we would not have been able to accept and would have had to oppose. These are the circumstances that led to the operation that comprised the final forty-eight hours of the war.

The Chief of Staff of that time would testify that the IDF received approval to begin the ground effort only, and that the first question he was asked was how many hours he needed in order to terminate the operation once he received the order to do so. The Chief of Staff replied that he would need from eight to nine hours. These facts indicate that here too, from the outset, there was no intention to change strategy, but only to create the conditions that would lead the international community to finalize a Security Council resolution along the lines we considered appropriate.

When morning arrived, we managed to reach the US Secretary of State, the National Security Advisor, and President Bush at his ranch in Texas. In a conversation with the National Security Advisor, it became apparent that there had been a misunderstanding and that the French draft resolution was not the correct draft. We began once again to review the wording of the original resolution, and we reached agreement on a new version that was slightly less precise than the agreement we had had before the incident in Kafr Qana on July 29, but that still accorded with the basic parameters we

sought. As a result, it was decided, in coordination between me and the Secretary of State and the UN Secretary General, that the resolution would enter into force within sixty hours – the length of time the IDF had told us it would need between passage of the resolution and implementation of a ceasefire.

Looking back after six years at the results of the Second Lebanon War, we see first grade children in Kiryat Shmona who have never sat in bomb shelters. Before 2006, northern Israel had not known such quiet, even among the parents of that generation's soldiers. During the preceding decades, residents of the north had spent much time in shelters. There is no doubt that the effort we invested in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, which was restrained relative to the demands or expectations some people had of placing IDF troops in all sectors on a large scale, created a state of deterrence that had never before existed along the Lebanese border, with the possible exception of the years preceding the Six Day War. I do not accept the argument that the Second Lebanon War generated a state of mutual deterrence. Since then, we have undertaken whatever action we wanted in the northern arena without being even momentarily deterred by the possibility that matters would escalate to a point where Hizbollah was firing on us. Hizbollah's supposedly highly resourceful leader, who is still living in his bunker, testified to this when he stated that had he known we would respond in such a way to our soldiers' abduction on the northern border, he would not have acted as he did.

The media lost its sense of proportion and, alongside political figures with vested interests, sought to prove that Israel had failed in the Second Lebanon War. These claims encouraged Hizbollah's leaders to ask why, if the Israelis themselves admit defeat, they should believe otherwise. Nevertheless, they have not ceased to fear the long arm of the State of Israel, and in the six years that have elapsed since the war, they have not taken action against us. When rockets were fired from Lebanese territory on three occasions – and we know with certainty that whoever fired them has no connection to Hizbollah – the instinctive response from the organization's leadership was to make sure we were informed that they were not responsible, in the hope Israel would not strike back at them. Accordingly, it is safe to conclude we succeeded in creating a strong state of deterrence as a result of the Second Lebanon War.

Anyone who thinks Hizbollah will never use its stockpiles of weapons, including missiles, and will not fire from the north, or will not fire on Israel from the south or from Syrian territory, who claims Israel can do whatever it wishes, including occupying territories, and that all of those around us will sit quietly without responding, is mistaken and is misleading others. The arena around us will not be quiet forever, especially if we attempt to change the equation through operations that are outside the usual range of expectations. In this context, it should be emphasized that our enemies' ability to influence our way of life in Israel will be judged not in the number of missiles they have but in their desire to make use of them. This is where our deterrent capability serves us.

As for Syria, even if the Syrian President's days in office are numbered, we must remember that since 1974, as a rule there has been quiet along our border with Syria, and neither the government of Hafez al-Assad nor that of Bashar al-Assad changed this situation, even when events unfurled touching upon us and the Syrians: during the Second Lebanon War, when Syria did not respond, and afterwards as well, when Imad Mughniyeh, Hizbollah's special operations chief, was killed in Damascus. The Syrians believed they knew who was responsible, yet they have not responded. Furthermore, they know of other operations that have not been revealed in the media, and they have not responded to those either. The reason for this is the deterrence we created!

It would be wrong to claim the Second Lebanon War did not include any errors or failures. I would be the last to make such a ridiculous assertion. Even the Chief of Staff said there were failures in carrying out military operations and we were not fully prepared, although I was never told the IDF was not capable of carrying out all the tasks required of it. In fact, the opposite was the case. Indeed, there were failures in various operations during the Second Lebanon War, such as in Bint Jbeil and Maroun al-Ras. It is impossible to overlook these failures, and we have not ignored them. We learned from the failures and drew the necessary conclusions. In this context, we examined the origins of the disparagement that caused the problems we encountered in Lebanon, and of the exclusive focus on the war on terror, which disrupted the internal balance in the military.

In spite of the failures, during the Second Lebanon War, for the first time, we conducted an integrated campaign, exceptional in its scope, intensity, and success. We did this by means of what we can call a strategic staff,

which combined all the responsible bodies – the IDF, the other security agencies, the foreign policy bodies, and ultimately, the Prime Minister, who is responsible for all these bodies together. This staff met every day, together with the National Security Staff and all other relevant bodies, and was headed by the Prime Minister’s Chief of Staff and his political advisor. Military personnel received all the relevant information and prepared working papers that suggested options and formulated proposals for decision makers. This is one of the only points on which the Winograd Commission understood things properly, as reflected in its praise for the work of the strategic staff in its second report. In other words, despite the claims there was no integration or coordination between military operations and diplomatic activity, in fact, the commission’s second report greatly praised this coordination, the scope and intensity of which were unprecedented.

Many lessons were learned from the Second Lebanon War, including about home front preparedness. The government that I headed adopted the necessary changes indicated by those lessons, made the appropriate decisions, and allocated the necessary resources in order to allow these changes to take place. In addition, we drew the correct conclusions about priorities in procuring weapons, which in our opinion are relevant to the type of threat that will confront us in the future.

The future battlefield will be within cities, not along a line hundreds of kilometers from our homes. Anyone who thinks that in order to better protect Israel’s security we must conquer another thirty kilometers eastward or northward is making an ignorant assumption that our enemies will not be able to develop or acquire a rocket reaching Israeli population centers, irrespective of the depth of our presence within enemy territory. We must build our capabilities not in order to conquer territories, but to create deterrence by using special offensive tools that are relevant to the current types of threat while working within the boundaries of international legitimacy, which as noted, is a crucial element of Israel’s security structure. If we know how to create deterrence correctly, to allocate resources appropriately, and not to waste billions for purposes that are ostensibly strategic but in fact constitute a complete waste of funds that could have been spent on Israel’s critical needs, we will achieve our objectives.

The government that I had the privilege of heading made no less of an effort than other governments to reach peace settlements with the

Palestinians and with Syria, two endeavors that were both correct and justified, in their time and their scope. At the same time, the government I headed struck at those who threatened our security, with greater force and determination than Israeli governments in the past thirty years. On the basis of this experience, it may be asserted that what is required of us is action that is more intelligent, more cautious, and more proportionate regarding investment of the necessary resources in order to be generally prepared for the threats we anticipate. These resources exist, but some are wasted and some must be allocated to the address of other problems related to strengthening Israeli society – education, welfare, and additional issues not traditionally defined as security issues. We must continue to do so, and in particular we must bear in mind – and this is my most important point, one I often reiterate – we are a very strong state and we know how to mobilize the international community for objectives we consider critical for survival, especially those in the international community who support us, who are committed to ensuring our needs, and who provide us with tools crucial for our existence. We must continue on this path so as not to separate ourselves from the international community, which is important to the success of our struggle and to achievement of the goals we set for ourselves.