

Keys to failure: Israel's performance in global perspective

By Emad El-Din Aysha

I DON'T want to harm the positive spirits of the reader following the clear and decisive victory of the Lebanese resistance – with no help from us, I might add – over the Zionist enemy, but it is important to look at this event in social science terms to extract lessons for the future that will spare us a lot of suffering. The Palestinians have been trying to imitate the Lebanese victory for ages and it hasn't got them anywhere and faith alone, with all due respect to Nabih Biri, is never enough.

Just as the war was grinding on, I got hold of this study of what was going on in Lebanon, in global political economy perspective (I'll write another article about that), from two of the most reliable and insightful researchers it has been my good fortune to read – Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler's 'Cheap Wars', <http://www.bnarchives.net>, August 2006). It is a bit irritating that both of them are Israelis and as usual are way ahead of us Arab journalists and our conspiracy theories – me included – but there's no harm in getting an inside account of what went wrong with the Israeli war. (Don't even get me started on Noam Chomsky and Seymour Hersh). And they figured it out before the war even 'went' wrong!

On the cheap

What went wrong with this and frankly all of Israel's military skirmishes up north since the end of the Cold War is, in a word, globalisation. It may seem hard to believe but that does seem to be it. During the Cold War, capitalism was very state-centric, thanks to the galvinising effect of the Communist threat and the lessons learnt during the great depression. As the Cold War wound down and the international economy became self-sustaining, capitalists increasingly found profitable opportunities abroad and no longer needed the Keynesian welfare-warfare state to keep the economy afloat.

They could have their cake and eat it, make lots of money and suffer unemployment at the same time. Normally you need high employment to have people who can spend money on the very consumer items manufactured by the capitalists – Keynesianism. One alternative to that



JONATHAN Nitzan with his, uh, thumb on the pulse of events as usual!

is just employing people for military manufacture, hence, military Keynesianism. With the lifting of capital controls, a goodly number of capitalists could just make money off the money markets without actually producing anything and so having to pay people wages to buy what was produced.

This had a tremendous effect on warfare since, with the end of the Communist umbrella, there was no longer any need to go and invade the Third World to get at its raw materials or cheap labour. The third-worlders themselves had no option but to 'open' themselves up since development funds weren't going to come from anywhere else. (They call it 'foreign direct investment', usually a euphemism for privatisation of key national assets – more on this below). The Sovs themselves had to borrow to stay afloat and eventually stopped staying afloat.

There was no need, moreover, to put up with the workers back home either, since the threat of a Communist rebellion was gone and there were plenty of financial opportunities abroad. As a consequence, the patriotism of the working classes – as

canon fodder for the war effort – was no longer called for. 'Smart bombs' came to replace dumb soldiers and the welfare benefits of being in the armed forces went into a nosedive. With that the whole emphasis shifted away from ground forces, relying instead on airpower to take out the enemy from afar with minimum effort and casualties on your part.

Nobody's going to go charging into enemy lines like they did during the First World War if he doesn't know that his family is going to get his pension and be taken care of if he's no longer there to do the job, is he? Alas, ground forces are called on when occupying someone else's territory, which explains how 'motivated' the Israelis – and Americans – have been in their recent military adventures.

Privacy wars

All this makes sense too on account of the peculiar nature of this war, that is, that it's more of an American war than an Israeli one. To cite Seymour Hersh, yet again, one American official told him: "Israel studied the Kosovo war as its role model... The Israelis told Condi Rice, 'You did it in about seventy days, but we need half of that — thirty-five days.' " (That was the actual timeframe of this war). Another official even said: "The Israelis told us it would be a cheap war with many benefits... Why oppose it? We'll be able to hunt down and bomb missiles, tunnels, and bunkers from the air. It would be a demo for Iran." (Seymour M. Hersh, "Washington's interests in Israel's war", *New Yorker*, August 14, 2006).

So, yet more vindication of the Nitzan-Bichler analysis. And to give you an impression of just how 'hollowed out' the Israeli state is, and how demoralised the Israeli Army and public are, we have this little embarrassing incident. Defence Minister Amir Peretz, while a Labourist critic of the right wing, "refused to use a law allowing IDF reservists called up for service recently to enjoy an exemption on fines and interest associated with debts they incur during their call-up period" ('Cheap Wars', 2006). This reminds me of the equally embarrassing incident that also happened at the beginning of the Lebanon War, when it was discovered that the State Department 'required'

that Americans "stranded in Lebanon sign a promissory note pledging to pay for their own rescue." (Please see Justin Raimondo, "Playing the Sunni Card: The Geopolitics of Israel's War", *antiwar.com*, July 19, 2006).

Socialism lives!

And this has nothing to do with the private sector taking the government for a ride. The Israeli regime did that more or less to itself. An example of this is that the chief benefactor of the latest wave of privatisation, Tzadik Bino, himself has said there was no need to privatise everything that was privatised and that at this rate the only thing left to sell off was the army!

The question the average Israeli, perfectly understandably, is asking himself is, what exactly is it that we are fighting and dying for? This is a problem that has faced the Lebanese in the south on more than one occasion with the endless shortages in power supply and the sectarian distribution of utilities and government services, not to mention the near concentration of all development projects within Beirut. Fortunately Hizbollah and frankly most parties in Lebanon have found an answer. Provide your own services because no-one else is going to do it for you. Hence the compensation and reconstruction funds Hizbollah is providing and has provided over the years, and the kind of services all the political parties provide their people in Lebanon, across the political spectrum.

The reversal of fortunes that took place in this war is doubly ironic given that the reason that one of the most important reasons that Hizbollah succeeded where Israel failed is that it absorbed, without even knowing it, many of the original causes of Israel's successes in the past. To cite Nitzan again, the "incentive to fight for 'one's country' when that country is so socially fractured is much reduced – particularly when confronted with socially embedded and highly motivated religious militias." But there's more to it even than that, something I'll have to get to in another article with some Arab input, for a change!!

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