

The war that shattered Israel's invincibility myth

SYED MUAZZEM ALI

A ceasefire has finally taken effect in Lebanon from last Monday between Israeli and Hezbollah forces, in pursuance of UN Security Council Resolution 1701. Thousands of displaced Lebanese people are returning to their homes in the South. After 34 days of massive Israeli aerial bombings and ground attacks on Lebanon, the trillion-dollar question is: who won the war? The Hezbollah, it seems, have scored both political and military victory over their opponent.

Historically, Israel has been accustomed to defeating Arab opponents convincingly in every war from 1948 through the Six-Day War of 1967 and Yom Kippur War of 1973. Results in all these wars were decisive and quick. Israel literally thrashed them in a matter of days and agreed to ceasefires only when they thought they had achieved their targeted objectives.

This time, though, the table

seems to have turned against them as the motivated and determined Hezbollah forces made them face a different war and a different strategy. All-powerful Israeli forces, for the first time, failed to achieve any of its stated military objectives. The two Israeli troops who were abducted by Hezbollah forces, for which the attack was launched at the first place, still remain in the captors' custody. More importantly, Israel has neither been able to dislodge Hezbollah forces from their stronghold nor destroy their fear-some array of rockets.

Of course, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has claimed that the war has eliminated Hezbollah's "state within a state" status in Lebanon and that they expect that as per the Security Council resolution, there would be added international pressure on Lebanon to deploy its troops in the South with a view to "isolate" and "disarm" the Hezbollah forces. The Israelis also hope that Hezbollah's mentors Tehran and Damascus would be pressured by

the international community to curb their support for the militants. However, Tel Aviv surely has not forgotten that after their 18-year occupation of Southern Lebanon and the last six years of persistent efforts, the Lebanese army has not been able to take charge of the Southern region.

The war has definitely severely bruised the Israeli military machinery and boosted Hezbollah's standing in the Arab and Muslim world. The Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah has now emerged as an icon in the entire region and beyond and some are even calling him the "new Gamal Abdel Nasser." The question arises, how could a militant group, which had come into existence after Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, turn into a formidable force in the region within such a short time. The answer can be found in its leadership, the motivation of its cadre, and generous financial and material assistance that it received from wealthy Lebanese Shiites and Iran.

Israel has devastated Lebanon, killing 790 Lebanese people and leaving the entire country in shambles; but more importantly, Hezbollah has shattered Israeli invincibility myth. They not only withstood Israeli military onslaught but also launched over 4,000 rocket attacks, some even deep inside Israel, killing 155 and making hundreds of thousands flee their homes and take shelter in refugee camps.

In the process, Israel's security, based on its firm deterrence, has suffered a life-threatening blow. The Hezbollah has exposed Israeli forces' vulnerabilities. Critics of the war are openly asking that if couple of thousands of Shiite irregulars, supported by Iranians, could keep Israel's large and sophisticated conventional army at bay for over a month, what would happen when Tehran supplies more deadly weapons and sends thousands of "volunteers" to Lebanon. The Hezbollah rockets barrage threatened the entire northern region of Israel, and

many Israelis, for the first time, are worried about the survival of their state.

The Israeli debacle could be attributed to several factors. First, when Prime Minister Olmert waged the war, some of his political opponents who viewed this attack as an attempt to increase his flagging popularity, held back their political support to him. Secondly, the Israeli intelligence seriously miscalculated Hezbollah's military strength. Thirdly, Israel, in the past, has always relied on tanks and heavy armored vehicles to quickly knock off any Arab resistance, but this time, the mountainous terrain where the war was fought, was not suitable for tank operations. Fourthly, the under trained reservists, which are the backbone of the Israeli army, were not ready for a full-fledged combat operation against the well-equipped Hezbollah fighters who fought in small groups and mixed with the local population.

Some military analysts believe that Tel Aviv also made tactical

mistake when they relied too much on massive air strikes which devastated Lebanon but could do nothing to silence the Hezbollah. Instead, analysts feel, Tel Aviv should have gone for immediate troop deployment along the Litani River, north of where most of Hezbollah forces were entrenched, and then put pressure on them from the north and the south.

Israeli forces are still in Southern Lebanon; and Israel is putting pressure on France, the peace broker, for immediate deployment of Lebanese forces and disarming and removing of Hezbollah forces from the south. The Lebanese government is stationing its troops on the border with Israel, but how far they can disarm Hezbollah forces, especially at this hour, is another matter.

Other players in the game, Iran and Syria, have not lost their influence in the region as Israel had hoped. In fact, they have gained significantly and as one analyst has put it, "the Iranians

have badly rattled the Israelis' cage." France, which played a catalytic role at the Security Council, has scored a diplomatic victory over the United States, for the latter's openly siding with the Israelis. Given its unique standing in Lebanon, Paris has also agreed to contribute troops to the expanded UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon) along with Italy and New Zealand. Bangladesh is also likely to be invited to contribute troops to the UNIFIL. We should not miss this good opportunity.

What are the political fallouts? Well, some Israeli politicians are asking for Olmert's resignation for the "humiliating defeat." His political future, however, will depend on what he can achieve on the ground through his diplomatic efforts with the peace brokers. On the other hand, this war has made Hezbollah a force to reckon with in Lebanon. Currently, they are a minor partner with twenty members in the parliament and one or two ministers in the present Lebanese Cabinet. Given their

current level of popularity and standing in Lebanon, they might very well emerge as one of the major players in any future elections as militant Hamas triumphed over the moderate Al Fatah at the last Palestinian elections.

The Israeli aggression, its continued occupation of Arab land, and the ongoing devastating Iraq war have unfortunately sidelined moderates in the Middle East and hard liners have gained power in Tehran, Damascus and Baghdad. Last week, a retired bureaucrat with long standing international exposure, summed it up very well when he expressed his happiness at Hezbollah's military victory but, at the same time, expressed his deep concern that it might give wrong signals to militants in our own region. This is the predicament of moderates in the entire Muslim world.

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A new man for the Middle East?

Today, this bizarre history leaves ordinary Arab men and women triply embittered. First by the cumulative ignominies of repeated defeat by Israel. Second by the West's chronic neocolonial disdain for Arabs and their world. And third -- the cruelest cut because it is self-inflicted -- the incompetence and inertia of their own societies, sapped by corruption, governmental fecklessness and repression. Is it any surprise, then, that hundreds of millions of Arab men and women, suddenly seeing a man who promises a way out of this emotional and political hell, should rally to his call, however misguided or suicidal it may be?

RAMI KHOURI

He appears, almost mystically, every decade or so in the Arab world -- a charismatic, militant figure who challenges Israel, defies the United States and rallies millions of Arabs to his cause, usually to disappear soon after in defeat or deflation. He is the Man who promises Arabs honor instead of shame, victory instead of defeat, empowerment instead of subjugation. And just about on schedule, he has emerged again today in the incarnation of Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasrallah.

Many have walked this dangerous path: Gamal Abdel Nasser in the late '50s and '60s, Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian guerrillas in the '60s and '70s, Muammar Kaddafi of Libya and Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran in the late '70s and early '80s, and Saddam Hussein in the '90s. All failed to alter history. Yet the Middle East seems to have a perpetual reservoir of contenders for this elusive and often fatal mantle. Nasrallah's rise says much about the Arab world's recurring, almost genetic need for a strong political personality who emerges to lead its quest to regain its honor. If he succeeds, he will be a truly historic figure, perhaps finally slaying the

ghosts of Arab humiliations past. But if he fails, the monster of mass degradation will grow, fed by the unquenched Arab need for a dose -- even a small dose -- of political and military victory.

To be sure, some Lebanese and other Arabs see Nasrallah and his party as reckless fanatics, bringing ruin to Lebanon. Yet many more rally to him, waving Hezbollah's distinctive yellow-and-green flag across the Middle East. The reason is not ideology, but psychology -- a basic human need for self-respect and affirmation. Three generations of Arabs have endured painful humiliation at the combined hand of Israel and the West. Five major wars, once each decade: 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982 -- all ending in defeat. The false and cruel promise of peace talks emerges and withers just as regularly. Meanwhile, Arab political systems remain stubbornly unchanging -- top-heavy security states riddled with favoritism, corruption and mismanagement, ruled in seeming perpetuity by the same autocrats and dictators and feudal families.

Today, this bizarre history leaves ordinary Arab men and women triply embittered. First by the cumulative ignominies of repeated defeat by Israel. Second by the West's chronic

neocolonial disdain for Arabs and their world. And third -- the cruelest cut because it is self-inflicted -- the incompetence and inertia of their own societies, sapped by corruption, governmental fecklessness and repression. Is it any surprise, then, that hundreds of millions of Arab men and women, suddenly seeing a man who promises a way out of this emotional and political hell, should rally to his call, however misguided or suicidal it may be?

The sad truth is, they have never had any other option. Individually or collectively, Arabs have never had the opportunity to build democratic cultures, enrich civil society, develop quality education or promote the rule of law and globally competitive businesses. Their three nemeses -- self-appointed leaders for life, constant war with Israel, tensions with the West -- have never let ordinary, decent Arabs construct what amounts to a more modern culture, reflecting the consent of the governed. Their choices have always been war or enforced docility -- each inhuman, in its way, and terrible.

Nasrallah's fate could well be different from that of the charismatics who preceded him. Under his leadership, Hezbollah became the first Arab movement to

force Israel to withdraw from occupied Arab land. Now it is also the first to fight the Israelis for a month and compel them to seriously explore a diplomatic solution. However violent Hezbollah's military aims, it has offered a model of local governance based on knowing its people and delivering on promises -- among them useful human services, from health clinics to schools. Hezbollah's leaders have also shunned the corruption and public ostentatiousness that plagued many other Arab movements and maintained the internal cohesion, sense of purpose and secrecy that so far have largely preserved them from betrayals by spies and collaborators. And they have presented their message to the entire Middle East through skillful media work that highlights their achievements without making boasts they cannot fulfill.

The fervent support that Hezbollah enjoys will grow with a cease-fire and diplomatic settlement that sees Israel leave occupied Lebanese lands. Almost overnight, Nasrallah will have produced what three generations of ordinary Arabs have yearned for: military effectiveness instead of haplessness; political empowerment instead of marginalization; resistance instead of forced submission to Israeli-American threats. A new man, indeed, responding to a stubborn need among all Arab societies.

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The prime minister's constitutional power

The constitution of Bangladesh does entrust the outgoing prime minister with the power of appointing the chief adviser under the provision of clause 5 of article 58C. The president is constitutionally obliged to act upon the advice of the prime minister during the fifteen-day period in between the dissolution of parliament and the appointment of the chief adviser under the provision of article 48 (3) and 58C (2).

MUHAMMAD MIZANUR RAHAMAN

As far as we ordinary citizens of Bangladesh know, the president of Bangladesh has the sole constitutional power to appoint the chief adviser to the caretaker government. And we seem to assume that there is no constitutional power assigned to the prime minister who was in office immediately before. But what does the Bangladeshi constitution say about this matter?

Article 48(3) of the constitution states: "In the exercise of all his functions, save only that of appointing the Prime Minister pursuant to Clause (3) of article 56 and the Chief Justice pursuant to clause (1) of article 95, the President shall act in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister."

It means that the president of Bangladesh shall act on the advice of the prime minister in all matters except appointing the prime minister and the chief justice. As long as the prime minister and his cabinet continue to hold office, article 48 (3) is in operation.

Clause 3 of article 58C states: "The Chief Adviser and other Advisers shall be appointed

within fifteen days after Parliament is dissolved or stands dissolved, and during the period between the date on which the Parliament is dissolved or stands dissolved and the date on which the Chief Adviser is appointed, the Prime Minister and his cabinet who were in office immediately before Parliament was dissolved or stood dissolved shall continue to hold office as such."

That means that the prime minister is in power until the chief adviser of the caretaker government is appointed. During the 15-day period between dissolution of Parliament and appointment of the chief adviser, article 48 (3) of the constitution is valid.

Article 58C(1) states: "Non-Party Care-Taker Government shall consist of the Chief Adviser and not more than ten other Advisers, all of whom shall be appointed by President." But as the prime minister and his cabinet are still in power during this appointment period, the president is obliged to act on the advice of the prime minister according to article 48(3).

Clauses 3 and 4 of article 58C make clear arrangement for appointing the chief adviser. Article 58C (3) states: "The President shall appoint as Chief

Adviser the person who among the retired Chief Justices of Bangladesh retired last ... but if such a retired Chief Justice is not available or is not willing to hold the office of Chief Adviser, the President shall appoint the Chief Adviser the person who among the retired Chief Justices of Bangladesh retired next before the last retired Chief Justice."

As per clause 4 of article 58 (C), if no retired chief justice is available or willing to hold the office as the chief adviser, the judge who retired last from the appellate division shall be appointed the chief adviser. If such a retired judge is not available or is not willing to hold the office of the chief adviser, the president shall appoint the person who among the retired judges of the appellate division retired after the judge that retired first.

So if the chief justice or a retired justice of the appellate division is available to hold the office of the chief adviser, the president and the prime minister have an obligation, according to the constitution, to appoint such a person as the chief adviser of the care-taker-government.

But the president will have to consult the prime minister if he has to appoint the chief adviser under the provision of clause 5 of

the article 58C: "If no retired Judge of the Appellate Division is available or willing to hold the office of Chief Adviser, the President shall, after consultation, as far as practicable, with the major political parties, appoint Chief Adviser from among the citizens of Bangladesh who are qualified to be appointed as Advisers."

As according to clause 3 of article 48 the president is obliged to act according to the advice of the prime minister, the constitution renders power to the prime minister of the said period in appointing the chief adviser. In this case, the role of the prime minister as a leader of a major political party and his/her constitutional role as the prime minister in appointing the chief adviser are different and they should not be mixed up.

The constitution of Bangladesh does entrust the outgoing prime minister with the power of appointing the chief adviser under the provision of clause 5 of article 58C. The president is constitutionally obliged to act upon the advice of the prime minister during the fifteen-day period in between the dissolution of parliament and the appointment of the chief adviser under the provision of article 48 (3) and 58C (2). It is, therefore, a wrong perception that the outgoing prime minister does not have any constitutional power to appoint the chief adviser.

Mr Rahaman is currently conducting doctoral research in Finland.

Freedom under the shadow of hope and terror

ND BATRA

On the occasion of India's Independence Day observed on August 15, while the world has plunged into gloom because of the pre-emptive discovery of the terrorist plot to blow up ten transatlantic airlines -- only a month after the horrific train attacks in Mumbai -- I still believe the good will ultimately prevail. The bonds between the United States and India are very strong. Terrorism will be finally beaten, if the free world continues cooperating.

There is so much common between India and the United States that I can't love one without the other. Freedom deeply rooted in secularism makes every one a productive citizen in the United States, for the simple reason that when an individual cannot assert his superiority or make a special claim on the basis of his race or religion, he has no choice but to show his natural born abilities and talents to succeed, which has turned the United States into a merit-based a society, more or less.

The idea that success, in whatever terms it is defined, is possible for any one with talent, from Wall Street to sports arena, Silicon Valley to Hollywood, is essentially everyone's ambition. It is a secular version of the Biblical oration: "If you knock, it shall open unto you." The price of not knocking at the door is that you are left in the cold. There's no choice but to try and try again, which has made the

US a highly competitive society.

Secular freedom has proved productive not only in economic terms, but in every field of human endeavour. It breeds in you a sense of equality, dignity and self-worth, and your heart cries out, Go and take the risk. Every field of activity in the United States teems with talented people drawn from various nationalities, cultures, races, and colours.

Americans are so unafraid of the otherness of "others," though it has not always been so if you recall the burning of witches to Japanese-Americans' incarceration during WWII and the McCarthy era terrorism.

The foundation of secular freedom was laid in the United States with the Declaration of Independence, as it was done in India when Nehru evoked India's "Tryst with Destiny" at midnight hour of the August 15, 1947. It has been a long struggle to keep up with the demands of secularism, freedom and equality in the United States as it has been in India. The struggle isn't over. It will never be over.

It has been a long struggle when you consider how much it has taken for African-Americans to reach their present status. A generation ago it would have been impossible to think of an African-American woman occupying one of the most powerful diplomatic and political positions in the United States.

The rise of Condoleezza Rice as the US Secretary of State demonstrates the truth that talent matters and freedom has many possibilities.

So does the rise of a Muslim scientist to become the President of India; a Sikh to become the Prime Minister of India; an Italian-born Christian woman to become the leader of a major political party. The richest man in India is a Muslim. Some of the most successful and glamorous Bollywood personalities are Muslims. Christians in India run some of the best schools, colleges and hospitals. That's what India should be celebrating.

But the elevation of a few in the United States from the dungeon of invisible oppression might also give a misleading impression that all American Blacks, Hispanics and native Americans are upwardly mobile. Far from it. The painful truth is that racial profiling is a common occurrence in the United States, which prompts the police sometimes to shoot first then ask questions, if the non-White person, especially if he is Black, Hispanic, or Middle-East/South Asian-looking, is not properly responsive.

In India the equivalent of racial profiling is caste-and-religious profiling. A Muslim might be under suspicion for no reason except that terrorism has become associated with Islamic extremism with its hub in Pakistan.

Like the United States, India has a long way to go to eliminate blind and irrational prejudice, though the most heartening aspect of it is that no one is giving up the fight. Acceptance of diversity has become a necessary condition for political survival both in India and the United

States, which is another fascinating parallel between two great democracies founded on multiculturalism and secularism and now both fighting Islamic terrorism.

For me freedom has no meaning unless it breeds equality in the sense of equal opportunities for everyone, a level playing field where a person can prove his best and give his best and be rewarded for it. That's more than a personal sentiment if you consider it from India's national interest. You cannot have a strong market economy in upwardly perpetual motion unless the best and the brightest are allowed to come forward and compete for and expand economic opportunities. The marketplace, however Darwinian it might be at times -- rather than one's caste, gender, or religion -- should determine the competition and reward the best.

The government's obligation is to build the infrastructure, maintain law and order and take care of the poor because the marketplace cannot solve these problems. It is only through the power of the open marketplace that minorities and other left-behind-people could be integrated into the fabric of India.

Hope is the best front against despair and terrorism. Let's keep our hearts and minds open, as Gandhi, Tagore and Nehru would have wanted us to do.

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The Voice of Tomorrow

Civil service and the younger generation

CHOWDHURY ABD-ALLAH QUASEED

In moderating the second episode of the interactive discussion program Agamir Kontho: The Voice of Tomorrow, aired on Tuesday, August 8, at the usual time of 9:20 pm, on Bangla Vision, my objective was to try and gather the opinions of the demerits of civil service as it stands today, to try and encourage improvement in the sector. I wanted to have the discussion encompass various aspects of government service, but it mostly revolved around the bureaucracy.

When asked why youngsters do not prefer civil service, the answers included inclination for private service, entrepreneurship, joining family businesses and even going abroad for higher studies or immigration. When the panellists were asked what factors they had considered for not joining government service, they frankly indicated the lure of higher salaries, incentive systems, and better work environment as being the key motivations for private service.

They decry the low salary structure of the civil service and the fact that it is now widely believed that anyone who works for the government has to be involved in corruption to sustain personal and family expenses, for which even those who retain their honesty, still suffer a tarnished reputation. Many admitted that though their parents and grandparents may have been in civil service, that they would prefer not to join,

though it does have fringe benefits and ensures a lot of respect.

However, some of the audience did show interest for joining civil service on condition that its image could be purged of the stigma of corruption, while a few declared that unless some people were bold enough to join the civil service and change things around that matters would continue to worsen which ultimately would mean that the nation would fall into the hands of a mediocre bureaucracy deprived of a lot of the intelligence and talent gone to the private sector or elsewhere.

Some also said that it is only possible to join civil service and remain honest if there is a source of additional income from part-time jobs or consultancies or business ventures as it is virtually impossible to live on the low pay of government jobs. Some said that they would rather prefer to go abroad and work for the UN agencies and the World Bank to try and contribute to the nation from there, though the idea did meet with some criticism.

A few hinted that going abroad or to private service was not doing proper service to one's nation which according to one participant could only be possible through government service, but the panellists countered that by pointing out that establishing an industry and creating employment for hundreds or thousands of people could be doing the country an immense service as well. Going abroad and contributing to national fame was also defended

as a means of serving the nation well.

On exploring more reasons for avoiding civil service, some more brilliant analytical points arose such as: that the majority of the younger generation wanting to come to or remain in Dhaka, whereas government jobs require postings to even remote districts; that with nearly a hundred thousand youth studying in private universities now or in autonomous institutions like IBA, that they become acclimatised to a very good work environment, which they do not find in government service. Some deplored the fact that the BCS exams, which are a pre-requisite for entering into civil service, is a faulty examination system where there are frequent leakage of questions and where the results are often delayed by up to two years or even manipulated through political nepotism.

In order to encourage more of the younger generation to join the civil service, the panellists and audience specifically recommended some ideas which I helped to streamline into the following suggestions: that in-kind benefits should be reduced and cash salary should be increased; that there should be performance based incentives and bonuses to reduce the need for corruption; that there should be extensive training programs on not only functional skills, but English language and technology; that quicker promotions should be ensured; that investments have to be made on improving the physical

work environment; that the recruitment process should be made more transparent and simpler; that experts from the private sector have to be brought in as consultants and deputed to improve the public sector at high payments; that competition and interaction between public and private sectors have to be improved; that communication has to be improved between the different levels of the hierarchy; that the hierarchy itself has to be flattened; that the staff number should be "right-sized"; that decision making should be expedited and red-tape reduced; that ministries can be relocated to other districts to enhance decentralization; that government revenue has to be increased in order to be able to increase pay rolls; that educational institutions have to be improved in other districts so that people do not only want to stay in Dhaka for ensuring better educations for their children and hence do not use that as an excuse to quit civil service, and much more.

Indeed all the ideas forwarded were specific, concrete, and powerful, each one of which can indeed be implemented if there is the willingness and will to do so. It is the appeal of the younger generation through this program to all policy makers to help carry out these recommendations so that more of the youth can get an opportunity to serve the nation even more closely by joining the improved modernised version of the civil service of the future.