

handed easy victories to Israel. Repeatedly, the Arab states chose to fight conventional wars: these backward, recently decolonised countries sent their poorly trained, poorly led, poorly motivated military to fight against the best, most determined military force the developed West could put together. Israel's victories against the Arab armies are overrated: it always was an unequal match. The Palestinians chose to fight a guerilla war in Jordan in the late 1960s, but they did so prematurely, without preparing the political conditions for their success. They were defeated because they were forced to fight on two fronts: against Arab enemy states and the Israelis.

The Israelis only deceive themselves when they use alibis -- bad decisions or inadequate preparation -- to "explain" their military failures. Since their withdrawal from southern Lebanon in April 2000, the Israeli leadership had prepared for an opportunity to deal a knockout blow to Hizbullah. Indeed, when the Israelis launched their latest invasion of Lebanon on July 12, 2006, they had had more than six years to prepare; and more than two decades to study their adversary.

The Hizbullah, too, had prepared. Without fanfare, but with