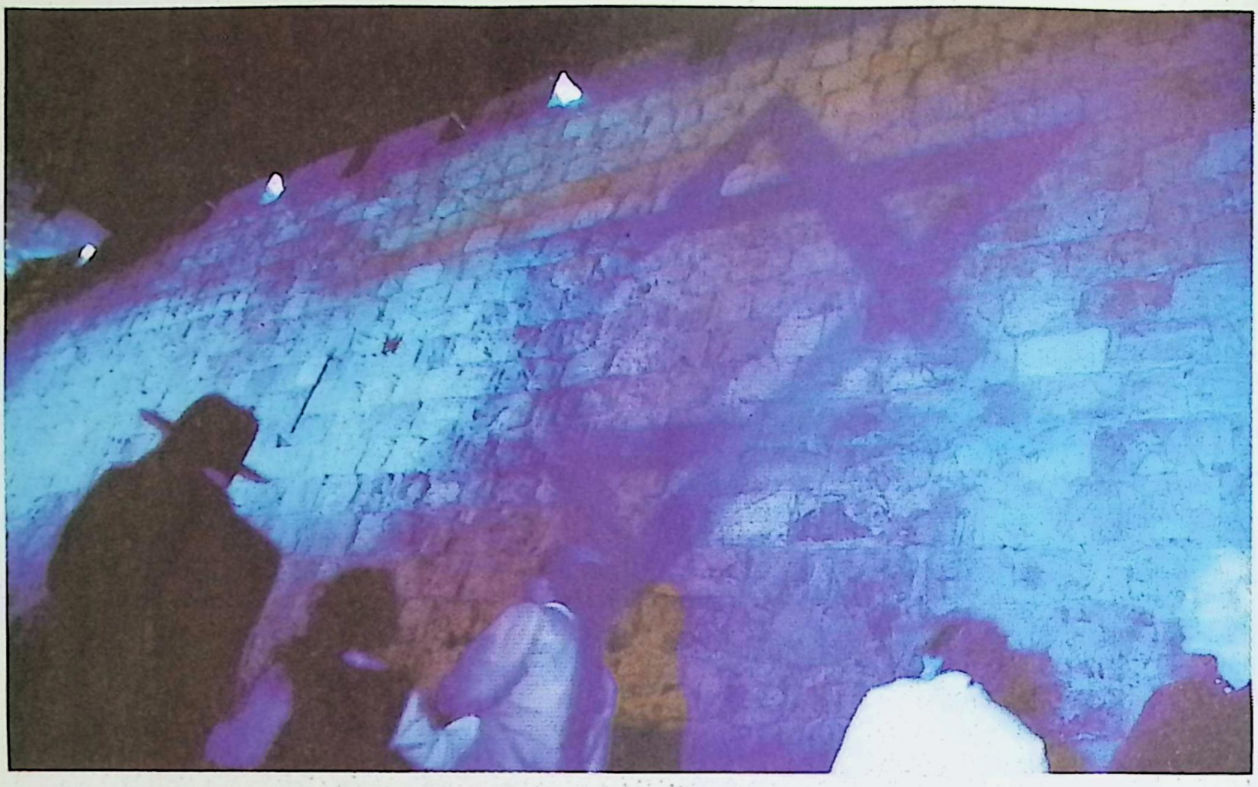


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morale, and it enjoys complete popular support amongst Lebanon's Shi'ites. It can launch thousands of low-tech rockets, which rendered sophisticated anti-missile defenses useless. It has also acquired, and learned to use with great effectiveness, anti-tank missiles that make Israel's most advanced tanks vulnerable. They have even successfully targeted Israeli warships.

If the Hizbullah can extend these advantages, if it can add shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles to its arsenal and bring down a few Israeli helicopters and jets, Israel could quickly lose its unchallenged control over Lebanese skies. Israel's daily and wanton violations of Lebanese airspace would also come to an end.

The Hizbullah offers Israel a new kind of asymmetric warfare: it combines low-tech guerilla tactics with sophisticated missile and communications technology. Understandably, the Israelis find these Hizbullah achievements hard to digest. What the world witnessed in Lebanon in July 2006 were events that contain the potential for shifting the balance of power in the Middle East. Earlier, the Iraqi insurgents had demonstrated that they could make an occupation -- even by the world's greatest power -- very costly. Now, the Hizbullah has shown that a disciplined guerilla force, with access to advanced missiles, can repel the most powerful invading army.

It appears that the weapons gap that had opened up in recent decades between Western powers and the weaker, technologically backward nations may be closing. How rapidly this happens will depend on the willingness of countries like Russia, China, North Korea, Iran -- with other countries getting ready to join them -- to make these weapons available to movements of resistance.

Alternatively, if these countries hesitate, the arms smugglers will step in to provide this service. Once anti-tank, anti-ship and shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles can be bought on the world's illicit arms markets as readily as AK-47s, the fortunes of resistance movements battling great powers will be altered.

In the late nineteenth century, the advanced Western nations had opened a lethal weapons gap with their automatic weapons: this gave them a quick, nearly costless colonisation of Africa and Southeast Asia. When that gap began to close in the interwar period, it gave an impetus to resistance movements in Indonesia, Vietnam, Kenya and Algeria. Already weakened from fighting their own fratricidal wars, the Western colonial powers retreated: and the Third World was born.

Will the twenty-first century herald the dawn of another era of gains for movements of resistance across Asia, Africa and Latin America?

M. Shahid Alam *is professor of economics at Northeastern University, Boston. He is the author most recently of Challenging the New Orientalism (IPI: 2007). You may email him at alqalam 02760 @yahoo.com.*