

Moral Morass

The war against Hizballah has become a tangle of strategic, tactical, legal and moral issues — but only for one side: Israel. How closely must a victim of attack adhere to the rules of war when the enemy’s disregard for them is a core element of its strategy?

Ina Friedman

“Israel claims that it has been launching surgical strikes against military targets using precision weapons. The death and injury toll and the massive damage to civilian objects indicate that some attacks may have been indiscriminate or disproportionate.... Intentionally launching a disproportionate attack is a war crime.... Launching an indiscriminate attack resulting in loss of life or injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects is a war crime.”

Amnesty International, July 13

“Our research shows that Israel’s claim that Hizballah fighters are hiding among civilians does not explain, let alone justify, Israel’s indiscriminate warfare.”

Kenneth Roth, executive director of
Human Rights Watch, August 3

“There is much talk, mainly in public opinion worldwide, that Israel’s operations are inappropriately disproportionate. What proportions can be discussed with a family whose home has been destroyed by a [Hizballah] rocket and whose dear ones have been killed?... War is not a school for good manners... We must continue until we achieve victory, with more determination and less sensitivity.”

Amnon Dankner, editor,
and Dan Margalit, columnist, of the
Israeli daily Ma’ariv, July 27

“Which is more correct? To suffer the killing of the best of our fighters to prevent the slaughter of villagers in south Lebanon and to be the most moral army in the world, or to wipe out the villages that serve as hideouts for Hizballah terrorists to save the blood of our sons and be considered less moral? When we are fighting against a terrorist organization and its patrons who declare, over and over, that their purpose is to destroy us, is it not logical and legitimate to make moral compromises with ourselves...”

Rafi Ginat, editor of the daily
Yediot Aharonot, July 28

THOUGH BOTH AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL and Human Rights Watch (HRW) also score Hizballah for conducting indiscriminate warfare, these statements illustrate the double bind — and, some say, double standard — that Israel, and Israel alone, faces as it battles against a mortal enemy and powerful military foe. The war in Lebanon, that famed quagmire in which Israeli troops were bogged down for 18 years, has proved to be a moral muddle, as well. On July 12, Hizballah committed an armed act of aggression against Israel by launching Katyusha rocket fire at the Galilee while sending a squad of guerrillas across the border to attack an Israeli patrol,

killing three soldiers and abducting two others. Israel immediately responded by sending a small force into Lebanon in pursuit of the kidnappers and, when it ran into an ambush that cost the lives of five soldiers, bombed bridges in South Lebanon in an attempt to prevent its soldiers from being spirited out of the area, and perhaps out of the country. That elicited more Hizballah rocket fire. Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah then proposed negotiations on an exchange of the two abducted soldiers for Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners in Israeli hands. But the Israeli government decided to launch a heavy air assault on the installations of the Iranian- and Syrianbacked Islamist guerrillas, in a bid to put paid to their repeated provocations, by changing the strategic balance on its northern border from mutual deterrence to the crippling of Hizballah.

The result has been a 33-day war, up to the U.N.-mandated cease-fire set to go into effect on August 14, in which some 1,000 Lebanese civilians have reportedly been killed in Beirut, where Hizballah maintained its headquarters in the Dahiya neighborhood, and in smaller cities, towns and villages in South Lebanon and the Biqa valley, where it likewise maintains facilities. As of August 13, Israel suffered 43 civilian casualties, as a result of close to 4,000 short-range Katyusha rockets and longerrange missiles of various types falling on cities and towns across the Galilee, and lost 115 soldiers. Israel's army has explained that, honoring the international conventions prohibiting the deliberate and indiscriminate targeting of civilians, it has attacked only military targets, in a pinpointed manner. As Hizballah has purposely positioned itself among civilians, it explains, the loss of innocent life was unavoidable. Hizballah, which is not a party to these conventions and has chosen weapons that are inherently incapable of precision, has made no similar claim. On the contrary, violating their restrictions is a key element of its strategy.

Any war waged under these conditions is excruciatingly messy. There's no question that among the civilians killed on the Lebanese side were those trying to flee the war zone. Four U.N. monitors from the UNIFIL force were killed in an air strike on their position, prompting U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan to charge that Israel had targeted the building on purpose. (Israel apologized for the error, noting that Hizballah rockets had been launched from very close by.) It's always easy to criticize from a distance. But at the same time it's fair to take a closer look at what has been demanded of Israel not just in terms of complying with international law but of following its own moral compass.

AS THE FIGHTING DRAGGED ON, taking a rising toll of Israel's troops while, if anything, only heightening Hizballah's rocket assaults on its civilians, calls to redress the lopsided ethical equation created by Hizballah came not just from frustrated public-opinion makers but from government ministers, who bear both moral and legal responsibility for Israel's actions. Their proposal: Toss international law to the winds and play by Hizballah's rules; abandon all efforts to pinpoint targets that serve as Hizballah command-and-control headquarters and hiding places for its guerrillas and rocket launchers and simply raze any village, even city, in south Lebanon that is a source of Hizballah fire.

"We must strike every place from which they are [launching missiles] on us with heavy bombardment," Labor's Agriculture Minister Shalom Simhon recommended on August 7. "It's untenable that missiles were fired on Haifa last night from Tyre, and Tyre is still standing."

"Any village from which fire is emanating on Israel should be thoroughly annihilated before

troops go in for mopping-up operations,” said Industry and Labor Minister Eli Yishai of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party in explaining his abstention in the August 9 government vote to extend the army’s ground operations up to the Litani River — a policy that he actually supported.

Whether turning South Lebanon into a 21st-century version of Dresden would have been an effective military tactic — and the fact that Hizballah’s guerrillas are holed up in bunkers deep beneath the ground made that questionable — it would definitely have been a poor strategy if, in the eyes of the world and many of Israel’s own citizens, it turned a just war into a legally and morally indefensible one. Despite charges of Israeli “aggression” emanating mainly from Lebanon, Syria and Iran, there’s no question that Israel’s right to respond to Hizballah’s unprovoked attack was sanctioned by Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, which grants member states the right to self-defense. But that’s not the end of the story from the standpoint of international law, because the rules of legitimate conduct fall under two rubrics. The first is *jus ad bellum*, which relates to the circumstances in which a state can legitimately go to war. The other is *jus in bello*, which pertains to the way a country conducts itself in the course of hostilities. The questions that have been raised since the start of fighting on July 12 are only about the latter issue.

Two salient features of the battle fuel the debate on Israel’s conduct: asymmetry and proportionality. In terms of military might, the firepower and mobility of Israel’s air force, artillery and tanks would appear to have tilted the balance in its favor. Yet asymmetry was created not only by the fact that in employing these weapons Israel is constrained by laws that its enemy flouts, but by the political tangle that exists in Lebanon.

Hizballah is not Lebanon. It is effectively a state within a state that committed its act of aggression without the sanction of the Lebanese government. Does this mean that only Hizballah’s combatants and their armaments are legitimate targets? Israel has argued that “civilian objects” such as Lebanese roads, bridges and airport runways are *bona fide* military targets, as they are instrumental in enabling Hizballah’s backers, Syria and Iran, to rearm the guerrillas. Yet the damage inflicted on these targets, along with Israel’s naval blockade of Lebanon, has also hampered the supply of fuel, food and medicines to the Lebanese population and could therefore be seen as a policy of “collective punishment.” Amnesty International, for example, has pronounced the targeting of “dozens of bridges, roads, power stations, the airport and port, and other civilian facilities and infrastructure” as “blatant violations of international law, which include war crimes.”

At the same time, for the past two years, Lebanon’s national government has ignored Security Council Resolution 1559, which requires it to deploy its army on the border with Israel and to disarm Hizballah. Justice Minister Haim Ramon has forcefully argued that because the Lebanese government failed to implement this directive, it had rendered itself a tacit accomplice of Hizballah and bears “full responsibility” for “allowing attacks on Israel.” “We are now up against the Lebanese government [not just Hizballah],” he said, after Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora rejected the original French-American cease-fire resolution drafted on August 5. By blocking that cease-fire effort, he reasoned, Lebanon had placed itself in a state of war with Israel. And given that purported change in Lebanon’s status, he urged the government to “attack its national infrastructure,” including its electrical-power facilities, as it would do to any sovereign state that had committed aggression against Israel.

Ramon's proposal was not accepted. For even as things stood, Israel had been charged by figures in the international community, and most prominently Annan, with mounting a "disproportionate" response to Hizballah's attack. That term has different connotations — political, legal and moral — in different contexts. But the complaint voiced by Annan and some voices in the European Community essentially was that although Israel had the right to defend itself, by failing to limit its actions to the Hizballah guerrillas, and by bombing Lebanese infrastructure beyond the border area, it had wildly overreacted to the magnitude of Hizballah's killing of three soldiers and kidnapping two others on sovereign Israeli soil.

That assessment irks various Israeli strategic experts no end. Characterizing it as "stupid," reserves Maj. Gen. Yaacov Amidror, former commander of the army's National Security College and now a fellow at the conservative think tank, the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, stresses that "nowhere in international law is it stated that a military response must be proportional to an attack." And even if proportionality were judged not just in terms of the nature of a provocation but of the objectives of the response, he suggests, Israel was justified in acting as it did. "What happened here is that a guerrilla group aimed to drag the army of a sovereign state into low-intensity warfare, in which guerrillas have the advantage," he says. "Had we responded on that level, we would have found ourselves playing on Hizballah's court, and we had absolutely no obligation to do that." In this sense, he posits, Israel is being blamed for Hizballah's strategic mistake. "If a dog bites a tiger," he says, "no one can expect or demand that it respond like a kitten."

In any case, Amidror argues heatedly, the real source of Annan's complaint is not strictures in the law but the double standard applied to Israel. "NATO forces bombed Yugoslavia for 78 days — without sanction from the U.N. Security Council — and killed more than 1,500 civilians," he notes. "The Americans, the French and the British took part in these bombings, and no one said a word. But when it comes to the State of Israel, actions that harm civilians are suddenly forbidden."

Not to be overlooked in this equation, adds former national security adviser Uzi Dayan, is Hizballah's constant and punishing rocket and missile attack of Israel's civilian population. "The critics are effectively saying: Because you're militarily stronger, you're obliged to exercise restraint," he says. "But if their argument is that Israel should counter rockets and missiles with bullets, rather than bombs and artillery," Dayan continues, "my answer is that precisely because Israel has military power, it is obliged, to its own beleaguered citizens, to wield it."

Speaking in even stronger terms, Gidi Grinstein, director of the Reut Institute, a strategic think tank in Tel Aviv, calls the disproportional-force complaint "immoral," because it fails to acknowledge that "Hizballah practices the logic of chaos, which includes the manipulation of its own civilian population." Blurring the lines between combatants and civilians, and between military and civilian installations by placing military headquarters in densely populated areas and even in buildings that house civilian families, he elaborates, "is part of the theory that things have to get much worse, for everyone, before they get better." And faced with this sort of enemy, Western democracies inevitably find themselves embroiled in fighting "that has very problematic consequences for civilian populations." But Israel and Hizballah cannot be lumped together in sharing responsibility for these consequences, he argues. "Hizballah fired indiscriminately on Nahariya; we fired at their headquarters in Beirut. There's a substantial moral difference between those two objectives."

In a similar vein, Prof. Michael Walzer of Princeton University, who authored the seminal work “Just and Unjust Wars” and is considered an oracle on just-war theory, holds that “before you talk about proportionality, you must address the issue of responsibility.” Because Hizballah hides among the civilian population and fights from civilian areas, Walzer argues, it bears the “primary responsibility” for putting civilians at risk. “You can’t do what Kofi Annan has been doing: acknowledging that Israel has a right to defend itself and then attacking everything it does toward that end,” he says. “Since the rules of war cannot stop you from defending yourself, and there must be some way of doing so,” Walzer reasons, “anyone who faults you for your actions is obliged to tell you what you should be doing instead.”

DISPROPORTION ALSO HAS A FOCUSED legal meaning that is spelled out in international humanitarian law. Certain rules are categorical: Deliberately targeting a civilian population and firing at it indiscriminately is forbidden. Even if one side defies this injunction, the other is obliged to honor it. Things get knottier, though, when the line between civilian and military targets is blurred, such as a civilian structure that serves combatants for cover or in hiding arms, which Israeli ground troops found to be common in the villages of South Lebanon.

Amidor notes that according to the 4th Geneva Convention, if a certain structure serves the interests of a military operation, it becomes a legitimate military target. “This means that all the villages in South Lebanon from which Katyusha rockets are fired — and all the rockets in that area are stored in homes, hospitals, mosques and other civilian facilities — have lost their immunity from attack.” And Hebrew University philosophy professor Moshe Halbertal, a member of the panel that framed the Israeli army’s code of ethics, says that “provided that we don’t deliberately target civilians, as such” — and he does not believe that Israel has done so — “we have every right to strike Hizballah positions disguised within civilian population centers, even though that may cause collateral damage to civilians.” But it is imperative, he qualifies, first to weigh “the ratio between the prospective harm to civilians and the military benefit to be gained from an attack.”

This is the gist of the proportionality rule. It appears, in fact, not in the 4th Geneva Convention of 1949, drawn up in the wake of World War II, but in the Additional Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions, 1977, framed after the Vietnam War. The precise wording of the rule, found in Article 57.2, requires parties to the convention to “refrain from deciding to launch any attack which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.”

The words “which may be expected” and “military advantage anticipated,” says Tel Aviv University law professor Eyal Benvenisti, an expert in international law, “leaves the decision to the discretion of the commander who issues the attack order, according to the data available to him at that time with the demand that it be as updated as possible.”

To illustrate how this rule should be applied in battle in South Lebanon, Walzer poses a situation in which a Hizballah fighter launches a rocket and then disappears into an apartment building. In planning a response, he explains, “you must consider how many civilians are living in that building, according to the best information you can gather,” he says. “If it’s full of civilians, then eliminating one fighter is not worth the risk you’re imposing on them.”

What’s a justifiable ratio? The proportionality principle doesn’t provide a numerical standard, Walzer explains. “It’s a judgment call, made on a case-by-case basis, ideally by morally

intelligent people.” What’s more, he says, “it’s important to state that the rule applies to both sides,” and stands even when the calculus of civilian loss for military gain differs on the other side. If Hizballah fighters are committed to the principle of martyrdom, taking innocent civilians along with them, “then the proportionality rule has no meaning for them,” Walzer concedes. “But that doesn’t mean that we can’t hold them to it.”

Still, there’s controversy over whether Israel has been observing not only the proportionality principle but the more cardinal rule of not targeting civilians. Support for the claim that Israel has been engaged in pinpoint bombing solely sites of military value to Hizballah, say both Halbertal and Grinstein, can be found in the civilian death toll in Lebanon. “If Israel were systematically targeting civilians,” says Halbertal, “and I know that no commander gave an order to do so, because that would have led to [a wholesale] massacre, of which there is no evidence,” he adds, “the casualty figures would be far higher, given the kind of air power we’ve used.”

But in summarizing its detailed report on civilian casualties in Lebanon, based on testimony gathered by field workers, Human Rights Watch implies the opposite conclusion. “The Israeli government claims that it targets only Hizballah, and that fighters from the group are using civilians as human shields, thereby placing them at risk,” the organization states. Yet “Human Rights Watch found no cases in which Hizballah deliberately used civilians as shields to protect them from retaliatory IDF attack.” This finding, though, raises questions of its own. For example, what would constitute the deliberate use of civilians as shields against retaliation? Arranging a circle of children around a rocket launcher? Painting the words “civilian target” on the roof of a home containing arms? And are we to extrapolate from the 21 cases HRW documented in its report that Israel has violated the rules of war as a matter of policy?

This is not to say that the Israeli army is exempt from examining its own probity. In the wake of the July 30 missile strike on a house in the village of Kana, which resulted in the deaths of 28 civilians taking shelter in its basement, the army conducted an investigation and issued a communiqué that suggested conflicting conclusions. On the one hand, after noting that over 150 rockets had been fired from within the village during the 18 days before the attack, it clearly states that the air force had “operated according to information that the building was not inhabited by civilians and was being used as a hiding place for terrorists.” But on the other, it takes the trouble to explain that the house was targeted according to military guidelines on the use of fire against “suspicious structures” that are “adjacent to areas from which rockets are fired toward Israel.” These guidelines, the statement further notes, are based on “surveillance and study of the behavior of the terrorists, who use civilian structures inside villages to store weaponry and hide in after launching rocket attacks.”

Suspicious based on the “surveillance and study of the behavior of the terrorists” were also presumably the rationale behind the August 5 bombing of a fruit-packing plant in the eastern Lebanese town of Kaa, killing 33 Syrian workers. Perhaps because this incident did not spark the kind of uproar that erupted over Kana, the army did not publish an explanation for such an egregious error. But it can be assumed that because Kaa lies in close proximity to the Syrian border, and Syria has been attempting to resupply Hizballah with weapons, someone concluded that the truck being unloaded at the site was carrying arms. But are suspicions, based on an analysis of the enemy’s patterns of behavior, sufficient grounds for carrying out an attack?

Halbertal is troubled by this question and connects it to Israel’s deep conviction that it has been fighting a just war in which its own civilians have been under indiscriminate fire. “These beliefs

tempt you to feel that you have a certain leeway to act not only on the basis of what you actually see or believe you know, but even when you harbor doubts,” he says. That’s why it is so important, “both morally and strategically,” he says, “to try to isolate terrorists from their civilian environment.”

To ease the dilemma posed by that intimate mix in South Lebanon, the army has repeatedly urged all civilians in the area to leave for the sake of their own protection. In its statement on the Kana incident, for example, it emphasized that the residents of the village had been cautioned, “several times, through various media,” to evacuate it. Thereafter, that warning was issued to all Lebanese residents from the Israeli border up to the Litani River and three mostly Shi’ite neighborhoods in Beirut. But if they don’t leave, are they responsible for the harm they may endure? And do such warnings absolve Israel of the need to constantly apply the proportionality principle?

Halbertal and Walzer agree that it does not. “It’s right to warn civilians, but it’s not enough,” says Halbertal, “and it still doesn’t allow you to shoot at anything but a [military] target, per se.”

“In endless arguments over this during the Vietnam War, I maintained that if American troops take fire from a village, they can fire back — and that responsibility for civilian deaths lay with the Vietcong,” says Walzer. “But you can’t just drop warning leaflets over a wide area and then declare it a free-fire zone.”

Despite fears by human rights advocates that this is precisely what has happened in South Lebanon, demands, like Yishai’s, to abandon all consideration for civilian lives indicate this is not so. Indeed, the army has taken pains to explain to a public increasingly exasperated by the toll of Israeli casualties that a free-fire policy is not an option. Asked in a television interview why the air force doesn’t just “erase Bint Jbail” (a town in which costly guerrilla attacks on tanks and infantry had been going on for weeks), Brig. Gen. Ya’akov Ayish, chief of staff of the Ground Corps, sounded almost offended by the need to explain, unapologetically, that the Israel Defense Forces “does not erase villages, absolutely for ethical reasons.”

THE BULK OF THE ETHICAL charges lodged against Israel result from its exclusive recourse to air power for the first two weeks of the war, yielding harrowing pictures of dead women and children and extensive destruction in Lebanon. Initially, expectations were raised in Israel that this approach would at least make the war brief. Dr. Reuven Pedatzur of the Strategic Studies Program at Tel Aviv University, and a sharp critic of that assumption, says that the air strategy was chosen in the misguided belief “after a softening-up operation for four or five days, Hizballah would collapse. No one on the General Staff imagined,” he adds, “that after more than a month, we’d still be taking 160 Katyushas a day.”

Yet it was also widely suggested that wielding air power was designed, at least in part, to spare the Israeli casualties that would inevitably be incurred in a ground assault onto “Hizballah’s court,” even if it meant putting Lebanese civilians at greater risk. By legal standards, says Benvenisti, this consideration is legitimate. “International law does not oblige you to risk the lives of soldiers during an attack to lessen the harm to civilians.” In 1945, this principle was taken to the extreme in dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in order to promptly bring Japan to its knees. But it has also had a more recent application: During NATO’s extended air strikes on Yugoslavia in 1999, planes bombing from an altitude of 15,000 feet inevitably killed civilians. This might

have been avoided, or occurred with less frequency, had they flown at a lower altitude. But doing

so would have enhanced the risk to the pilots. And after the operation, although there were calls to place pilots and their commanders on trial for war crimes, no grounds were found for pursuing this, as they were not obliged to endanger their lives.

Morally, however, the issue is less definitive than it is legally. Halbertal, for example, says that opting for a strategy to lessen risk to soldiers at the expense of civilians is justified. “But here, too,” he immediately qualifies, “the issue of proportionality comes into play.” Clearly, he posits, it’s unacceptable to carpet bomb an area where civilians are present to avoid engaging the enemy on the ground. But even short of that, “you must exercise your discretion on the nature and the extent of the risks to each side, which may not be easily measurable.” Observers like Halbertal are reluctant to judge how closely Israel has held to this standard before the fog of war lifts and it’s actions can be empirically examined.

The issue is also not clear-cut when viewed through the lens of Jewish ethics, says Rabbi Shlomo Fox of the army’s Purpose and Identity program, which invites soldiers to thrash out the moral dilemmas they encounter in the line of duty (see “Teach Them Well,” July 25, 2005). “I personally believe that it’s morally unjustified to harm many innocent people to reduce the risk to your life,” he declares. “From a halakhic standpoint, it’s not clear that you’re even entitled to damage property in order to save your life.” But it would be impossible to find consensus among rabbis on these issues, he says, because the Talmud — where some of them are discussed — does not offer categorical answers.

The question came up on August 5, when Israel dispatched naval commandos to storm a specific apartment in Tyre out of which, intelligence indicated, senior Hizballah people were operating, with civilians inhabiting the other apartments in the building. Whether this was a bid to assuage international opinion after the Kana incident or a move to knock Hizballah off balance, as the army implied, it was a very hazardous venture. Eight of the commandos were wounded in the firefight, one so critically that he required surgical treatment on the spot. But not everyone was impressed by the army’s daring. “Imagine if there had been a major hitch and soldiers were killed or captured in that assault,” former justice minister Yosef (Tommy) Lapid said during a televised panel discussion shortly thereafter. “Would the army have deserved kudos for placing its men in such jeopardy rather than bombing the building,” civilians and all? These are quandaries that commanders face every day, says Fox, who is himself an officer in the reserves. And from his work as a facilitator of discussions among soldiers, he reports that many fighter pilots are troubled about the harm they may inflict on innocents. “They demand of themselves a consummate level of professionalism,” he says, “and indulge in considerable selfcriticism.” This is especially so, he observes, because they know that — in this war, at least — they operate in relative safety and comfort. Unlike their comrades who engage the enemy on the ground and are exposed to the terrible sounds and smells of the battlefield, Fox says, “they fire from a great distance and essentially experience the war via a video screen.”

But Yonatan Shapira — one of 30 pilots who in September 2003 declared their refusal to fire on civilian concentrations in the territories and were dismissed from the air force — is skeptical of this reading. The sterile atmosphere enjoyed by those with the greatest power to wreak damage, he says, is hardly conducive to qualms. “Sitting in an airconditioned cockpit at high altitudes, it’s easy to feel confident that the mark you’re assigned to hit is really a military target; that enemy fire has come from the house on your screen; and that if you don’t hit it, people will be killed in Haifa,” he says. “So you press the button, with considerable emotional detachment,

out of faith in what you've been told." Former air force commander and now Chief of Staff Dan Halutz confirmed this reading in an interview given in 2002, shortly after the air force had dropped a one-ton bomb on an apartment house in Gaza. Designed to kill Hamas military chief Salah Shehada, the action also took the lives of 12 civilians in and around the building. Asked what he felt when a bomb like that is released, Halutz coolly replied, "a slight shudder to the plane's wing."

"What happened to us three years ago," Shapira continues, "is that we lost our trust in the system that chooses the targets." And after the dust of this war settles, when pilots emerge from their bubble and confront different perspectives about the level of discretion employed in target selection, Shapira ventures, some of them may experience the same doubts.

Should this transpire, it would not be the only instance of unintended consequences to emerge from this war. As it entered the fifth week, and the government wavered between injecting a massive force of ground troops into South Lebanon to mend Israel's damaged deterrent image or accepting a ceasefire under terms that satisfied only some of its fluctuating war aims, the broad consensus supporting the war fractured. Leading intellectuals, journalists and politicians (mostly from the left) blasted Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz for the misguided, confused and incompetent way in which the campaign had been run on every level: strategic, tactical and diplomatic. And while the criticism generally held that the military response was justified but had been bungled, some voices suggested that even if going to war had been just, it wasn't smart, or even necessary, and could have been avoided through adept diplomacy. Disapproval grew even more strident when the government decided to expand the ground operation to the Litani River after the Security Council had set a cease-fire to begin some 72 hours later.

The controversy over these questions will undoubtedly preoccupy the country well into the future. While the fighting rages, observes Halbertal, "moral qualms are obscured by the overwhelming sense of the justice of the war." But they will surely emerge, he believes, in the soul-searching that will follow it.

Would that the same could be said for Hizballah.

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