

Gaza and Lebanon: Beware the Iron Wall, the Coming War

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The Israeli military may be much less effective in winning wars than it was in the past, thanks to the stiffness of Arab resistance. But its military strategists are as shrewd and unpredictable as ever. The recent rhetoric that has escalated from Israel suggests that a future war in Lebanon will most likely target Syria as well. While this doesn't necessarily mean that Israel actually intends on targeting either of these countries in the near future, it is certainly the type or language that often precedes Israeli military maneuvers.

Deciphering the available clues regarding the nature of Israel's immediate military objectives is not always easy, but it is possible. One indicator that could serve as a foundation for any serious prediction of Israel's actions is Israel's historical tendency to seek a perpetual state of war. Peace, real peace, has never been a long-term policy.

"Unlike many others, I consider that peace is not a goal in itself but only a means to guarantee our existence," claimed Yossi Peled, a former army general and current Cabinet Minister in Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing government.

Israeli official policy – military or otherwise – is governed by the same Zionist diktats that long preceded the establishment of the state of Israel. If anything has changed since early Zionists outlined their vision, it was the interpretation of those directives. The substance has remained intact.

For example, Zionist visionary, Vladimir Jabotinsky stated in 1923 that Zionist "colonization can...continue and develop only under the protection of a force independent of the local population – an iron wall which the native population cannot break through." He was not then referring to an actual wall. While his vision took on various manifestations throughout the years, in 2002 it was translated into a real wall aimed at prejudicing any just solution with the Palestinians. Now, most unfortunately, Egypt has also started building its own steel wall along its border with the war-devastated and impoverished Gaza Strip.

One thing we all know by now is that Israel is a highly militarized country. Its definition of 'existence' can only be ensured by its uncontested military dominance at all fronts, thus the devastating link between Palestine and Lebanon. This link makes any analysis of Israel's military intents in Gaza, that excludes Lebanon – and in fact, Syria – seriously lacking.

Consider, for example, the unprecedented Israeli crackdown on the Second Palestinian Uprising which started in September 2000. How is that linked to Lebanon? Israel had been freshly defeated by the Lebanese resistance, led by Hizbullah, and was forced to end its occupation of most of South Lebanon in May 2000. Israel wanted to send an unmistakable message to Palestinians that this defeat was in fact not a defeat at all, and that any attempt

at duplicating the Lebanese resistance model in Palestine would be ruthlessly suppressed. Israel's exaggeration in the use of its highly sophisticated military to stifle a largely popular revolution was extremely costly to Palestinians in terms of human toll.

Israel's 34-day war on Lebanon in July 2006 was an Israeli attempt at destroying Arab resistance, and restoring its metaphorical iron wall. It backfired, resulting in a real – not figurative – Israeli defeat. Israel, then, did what it does best. It used its superior air force, destroyed much of Lebanon's civilian infrastructure and killed more than 1,200 people, mostly civilians. The resistance, with humble means, killed more than 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers during combat.

Not only did Hizbullah had penetrated the Israeli iron wall, it had also filled it with holes. It challenged, like never before, the Israeli army's notion of invincibility and illusion of security. Something went horribly wrong in Lebanon.

Since then, the Israeli army, intelligence, propagandists and politicians have been in constant preparation for another showdown. But before such pending battle, the nation needed to renew its faith in its army and government intelligence; thus the war in Gaza late December 2008.

As appalling as it was for Israeli families to gather en masse near the Israeli Gaza border, and watch giddily as Gaza and Gazans were blown to smithereens, the act was most rational. The victims of the war may have been Palestinians in Gaza, but the target audience was Israelis. The brutal and largely one-sided war united Israelis, including their self-proclaimed leftist parties in one rare moment of solidarity. Here was proof that the IDF still had enough strength to report military achievements.

Of course, Israel's military strategists knew well that their war crimes in Gaza were a clumsy attempt at regaining national confidence. The tightly lipped politicians and army generals wanted to give the impression that all was working according to plan. But the total media blackout, and the orchestrated footage of Israeli soldiers flashing military signs and waving flags on their way back to Israel were clear indications of an attempt to improve a problematic image.

Thus Yossi Peled's calculated comments on January 23: "In my estimation, understanding and knowledge it is almost clear to me that it is a matter of time before there is a military clash in the north." Further, he claimed that "We are heading toward a new confrontation, but I don't know when it will happen, just as we did not know when the second Lebanon war would erupt."

Peled is of course right. There will be a new confrontation. New strategies will be employed. Israel will raise the stakes, and will try to draw Syria in, and push for a regional war. A Lebanon that defines itself based on the terms of resistance – following the failure to politically co-opt Hizbullah – is utterly unacceptable from the Israeli viewpoint. That said, Peled might be creating a measured distraction from efforts aimed at igniting yet another war – against the besieged resistance in Gaza, or something entirely different. (Hamas' recent announcement that its senior military leader Mahmoud al- Mabhouh was killed late January in Dubai at the hands of Israeli intelligence is also an indication of the involved efforts of Israel that goes much further than specific boundaries.)

Will it be Gaza or Lebanon first? Israel is sending mixed messages, and deliberately so.

Hamas, Hizbullah and their supporters understand well the Israeli tactic and must be preparing for the various possibilities. They know Israel cannot live without its iron walls, and are determined to prevent any more from being built at their expense.

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Check out this short film (in [English](#) and [Arabic](#)) about my latest book: My Father was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story (Pluto Press; Palgrave Mcmillan, 2010). The book is available at [Pluto Press](#) (UK) and [Amazon](#).

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