Last update - 11:30 16/07/2006

Operation Peace for the IDF

By [Gideon Levy](#)

Every neighborhood has one, a loudmouth bully who shouldn't be provoked into anger. He's insulted? He'll pull out a knife. Spat in the face? He'll draw a gun. Hit? He'll pull out a machine gun. Not that the bully's not right - someone did harm him. But the reaction, what a reaction! It's not that he's not feared, but nobody really appreciates him. The real appreciation is for the strong who don't immediately use their strength. Regrettably, the Israel Defense Forces once again looks like the neighborhood bully. A soldier was abducted in Gaza? All of Gaza will pay. Eight soldiers are killed and two abducted to Lebanon? All of Lebanon will pay. One and only one language is spoken by Israel, the language of force.

The war that the IDF has now declared on Lebanon and before it on Gaza, will never be considered another "war of no choice." Let's save that debate from the historians. This is unequivocally a war of choice. The IDF absorbed two painful blows, which were particularly humiliating, and in their wake went into a war that is all about restoring its lost dignity, which on our side is called "restoring deterrent capabilities." Neither in Lebanon nor certainly in Gaza, can anyone formulate the real goals of the war, so nobody knows for sure what will be considered victory or an achievement. Are we at war in Lebanon? With Hezbollah? Nobody knows for sure. If the goal is to remove Hezbollah from the border, did we try hard enough over the last two years through diplomatic channels? And what's the connection between destroying half of Lebanon and that goal? Everyone agrees that "something must be done." Everyone agrees that a sovereign state cannot remain silent when it is attacked within its own borders, though in Israel's eyes Lebanese sovereignty was always subject to trampling, but why should that non-silence be expressed solely by an immediate and all-out blow?

In Gaza, a soldier is abducted from the army of a state that frequently abducts civilians from their homes and locks them up for years with or without a trial - but only we're allowed to do that. And only we're allowed to bomb civilian population centers.

The painful steps taken in Gaza, which included dropping a one-ton bomb on a residential building, or killing an entire family of seven children under cover of darkness in Lebanon, killing dozens of residents, bombing an airport, cutting off electricity and water to hundreds of thousands of people for months were a response lacking

any justification, legitimacy or proportion. What goal did it serve? Was the soldier released? Did the Qassams stop? Was deterrence restored? None of that happened. Only lost honor was supposedly restored, and immediately the next evil wind showed up, this time from the north.

Two more soldiers were abducted and it was clearly proven that the deterrent power was not restored, while IDF failures repeated themselves. How does one erase those searing failures? On the backs of innocent populations. In Lebanon, the situation is more complicated. There is no Israeli occupation and no justification for provoking Israel. If Hezbollah is so worried about its Palestinian brethren, it should have first of all done something for the hundreds of thousands of refugees living in camps in Lebanon in conditions that are just as bad as those under the Israeli occupation, before it grabbed soldiers in their name.

But does the fact that Hezbollah is a cynical organization that exploits the misery of Palestinians for its own purposes justify the disproportionate reaction? The concept that we have totally forgotten is proportionality. While we're in no hurry to get to the negotiating table, we're eager to get to the battlefield and the killing without delay, without taking any time to think. That deepens suspicions that we need a war every few years, with terrifying repetition, even if afterward we end up back in exactly the same position.

The war we declared on Lebanon has already exacted from us, and of course from Lebanon, too, a heavy price. Did anyone give any thought to the question whether it should be paid?

Everyone knows how this war begins, but does anyone know how it ends? Heavy casualties in the Israeli rear? A war with Syria? A general war? Is it all worth it? Look what a new rookie government can do in such a short time.

Behind the operations in Lebanon and Gaza is the same foolish idea about pressure on the population leading to political changes that Israel wants. In the history of the Israeli-Arab conflict, that concept has only led us from one disaster to the next. We "cleansed" southern Lebanon of Palestinians in 1982, and what did we get? Hezbollahstan instead of Fatahland. Hamas won't fall because Gaza is in the dark, and not even because we bombed the Palestinian Foreign Ministry building at the weekend - another nonsensical move; Hezbollah won't be smashed because the international airport in Beirut has been put out of commission.

Israel once again is not distinguishing between a justified war against Hezbollah and an unjust and unwise war against the Lebanese nation. The camouflage concealing the war's real goals was ripped off by this defense minister, who says what he means: "Nasrallah is going to get

it so bad that he will never forget the name Amir Peretz," he bragged, like a typical bully. Now at least we know that Israel went to war so that the name Amir Peretz is never forgotten. It's the war for the perpetuation of the name Peretz and the blurring of Dan Halutz's failures. And to hell with the cost.