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## Days of darkness

By [Gideon Levy](#)

In war as in war: Israel is sinking into a strident, nationalistic atmosphere and darkness is beginning to cover everything. The brakes we still had are eroding, the insensitivity and blindness that characterized Israeli society in recent years is intensifying. The home front is cut in half: the north suffers and the center is serene. But both have been taken over by tones of jingoism, ruthlessness and vengeance, and the voices of extremism that previously characterized the camp's margins are now expressing its heart. The left has once again lost its way, wrapped in silence or "admitting mistakes." Israel is exposing a unified, nationalistic face.

The devastation we are sowing in Lebanon doesn't touch anyone here and most of it is not even shown to Israelis. Those who want to know what Tyre looks like now have to turn to foreign channels - the BBC reporter brings chilling images from there, the likes of which won't be seen here. How can one not be shocked by the suffering of the other, at our hands, even when our north suffers? The death we are sowing at the same time, right now in Gaza, with close to 120 dead since the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit, 27 last Wednesday alone, touches us even less. The hospitals in Gaza are full of burned children, but who cares? The darkness of the war in the north covers them, too.

Since we've grown accustomed to thinking collective punishment a legitimate weapon, it is no wonder no debate has sparked here over the cruel punishment of Lebanon for Hezbollah's actions. If it was okay in Nablus, why not Beirut? The only criticism being heard about this war is over tactics. Everyone is a general now and they are mostly pushing the IDF to deepen its activities. Commentators, ex-generals and politicians compete at raising the stakes with extreme proposals.

Haim Ramon "doesn't understand" why there is still electricity in Baalbek; Eli Yishai proposes turning south Lebanon into a "sandbox"; Yoav Limor, a Channel 1 military correspondent, proposes an exhibition of Hezbollah corpses and the next day to conduct a parade of prisoners in their underwear, "to strengthen the home front's morale."

It's not difficult to guess what we would think about an Arab TV station whose commentators would say something like that, but

another few casualties or failures by the IDF, and Limor's proposal will be implemented. Is there any better sign of how we have lost our senses and our humanity?

Chauvinism and an appetite for vengeance are raising their heads. If two weeks ago only lunatics such as Safed Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu spoke about "wiping out every village where a Katyusha is fired," now a senior officer in the IDF speaks that way in Yedioth Aharonoth's main headlines. Lebanese villages may not have been wiped out yet, but we have long since wiped out our own red lines.

A bereaved father, Haim Avraham, whose son was kidnapped and killed by Hezbollah in October 2000, fires an artillery shell into Lebanon for the reporters. It's vengeance for his son. His image, embracing the decorated artillery shell is one of the most disgraceful images of this war. And it's only the first. A group of young girls also have their picture taken decorating IDF shells with slogans.

Maariv, which has turned into the Fox News of Israel, fills its pages with chauvinist slogans reminiscent of particularly inferior propaganda machines, such as "Israel is strong" - which is indicative of weakness, actually - while a TV commentator calls for the bombing of a TV station.

Lebanon, which has never fought Israel and has 40 daily newspapers, 42 colleges and universities and hundreds of different banks, is being destroyed by our planes and cannon and nobody is taking into account the amount of hatred we are sowing. In international public opinion, Israel has been turned into a monster, and that still hasn't been calculated into the debit column of this war. Israel is badly stained, a moral stain that can't be easily and quickly removed. And only we don't want to see it.

The people want victory, and nobody knows what that is and what its price will be.

The Zionist left has also been made irrelevant. As in every difficult test in the past - the two intifadas for example - this time too the left has failed just when its voice was so necessary as a counterweight to the stridency of the beating tom-toms of war. Why have a left if at every real test it joins the national chorus?

Peace Now stands silently, so does Meretz, except for brave Zehava Gal-On. A few days of a war of choice and already Yehoshua Sobol is admitting he was wrong all along. Peace Now is suddenly an "infantile slogan" for him. His colleagues are silent and their silence is no less resounding. Only the extreme left makes its voice heard, but it is a voice nobody listens to.

Long before this war is decided, it can already be stated that its

spiraling cost will include the moral blackout that is surrounding and covering us all, threatening our existence and image no less than Hezbollah's Katyushas.

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