

# Israel-Lebanon: The Lessons of a War

Thursday 31 May 2007, by [WARSCHAWSKI Michael](#) (Date first published: 17 May 2007).

**The Israeli national commission of enquiry into the war in Lebanon has just published an intermediate report. The final document is expected only some months from now. It is already clear that, for the Vinograd commission - so-called from the name of the judge who chairs it - the second Lebanon war - that it is the official name which the Israeli government has just given it - was a fiasco. Those responsible for it are the Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, the Minister of Defence, Amir Peretz, and the former chief of staff, General Dan Halutz - who did not wait for the recommendations of the commission to resign his post and hurriedly leave the country, on the pretext of pursuing studies at the University of Harvard in the United States.**

We did not need to wait nine months in order to demonstrate the extent of the fiasco last summer's war represented for Israel. We were able to do that as of August 2006, without having at our disposal the thousands of documents and dozens of depositions that were available to the Vinograd commission. It should nevertheless be recognized that we underestimated the extent to which the Israeli army is in bad shape, its general staff incompetent, its officers completely unmotivated and its soldiers badly trained.

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That is one of the important lessons of the Vinograd commission. Admittedly, we had a presentiment of it and we wrote along those lines throughout the summer, sometimes provoking sceptical reactions on the part of experts who considered that these analyses were seriously exaggerated. The report proves, in fact, that we erred not by exaggeration but quite the contrary, by underestimating the gravity of the crisis of the Israeli military machine.

The Vinograd commission is extremely severe on the way in which the political and military decisions were made and, even more, on the irresponsible way in which these decisions were implemented. It does not have, on the other hand, a word to say about the war crimes that were committed during the Lebanon war: not a word of criticism of the bombardment of civilian populations, of the massacres in Tyre and Bint Jbeil, of the destruction of infrastructures and the criminal pollution of the Mediterranean following the destruction of the refineries in Beirut.

When, one day, the war criminals are judged, we should not forget Judge Vinograd and his two assistants who, by their silence, have become the accomplices of the criminals into whose actions they were mandated to inquire and make recommendations.

## **A Fiasco**

If General Dan Halutz has resigned, it is not the case of his two accomplices, Olmert and Peretz, who announced that it was up to them to correct what did not function correctly, and that they were the only ones capable of doing it! The fact is that, in the Israeli political world, there is indeed no one ready to take over from them. Benyamin Netanyahu puts himself forward as an alternative, but his party, the Likoud, is reduced to a small group in Parliament. To rebuild its political strength, Likoud needs new elections, which neither Peretz's Labour Party, nor Kadima, the party of Ehud Olmert, want.

There is however one political leader who would willingly take over, the man of all treasons, all defections, all chicaneries: Shimon Peres. At over 80, he says that he is ready to take on his responsibilities to save the fatherland. That says a lot about the state of decay of the Israeli political world and the depth of the political crisis.

However, throughout this crisis, share prices on the Stock Exchange did not fall! Because, contrary to its politicians, who have lost any *raison d'être*, Israel is in fact doing very well: the economy is flourishing, exports are on the increase, the balance of trade is positive and the standard of living of the rich and the middle classes is above the European average. Apart from the student strike, all is calm on the social front.

As for the "Palestinian problem", it is relegated to page four of the daily newspapers. Olmert prefers by far just to have dinner with President Abbas once a week, rather than proposing measures which would open the way to a resumption of negotiations on the end of the occupation. There remains, nevertheless, the Iranian question, but even on this terrain, it seems that the voices of the warmongers - especially in the army - are increasingly giving way to those who count on Washington to negotiate with Tehran a compromise on the nuclear question.

In any event, in order to undertake a new warlike adventure, whether it is against Iran or Syria, it is first of all necessary to restructure the army and its general staff, so as to limit to the maximum the risks of a second fiasco, which would deal a death blow to the capacity of dissuasion of the Hebrew State. Which will take time.

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### **P.S.**

\* From International Viewpoint Online magazine : IV389 - May 2007.

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