

War plan: Bombing civilians does not win much leverage

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [September 5, 2006](#) issue

On July 12, Hezbollah fighters crossed the border separating Israel from Lebanon. They killed several Israeli soldiers and captured two others, spiriting them across the border into Lebanon. Those who want to believe the best about Israel will say that this single action started this summer's war between Hezbollah and Israel.

But a closer look reveals that it is not that simple. After the border incursion by Hezbollah there was still time to negotiate for the return of the prisoners, something that Israel had done in the past (1996, 1998, 2004). Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah held a press conference shortly after his unit returned from its incursion into Israel to say he was ready to negotiate a prisoner exchange.

But Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert had a different plan. In an emergency meeting, Olmert told his cabinet: "This morning's events are not a terror attack, but the act of a sovereign state that attacked Israel for no reason and without provocation. . . . The Lebanese government, of which Hezbollah is a part, is trying to undermine regional stability. Lebanon is responsible, and Lebanon will bear the consequences."

By 9 p.m. *Ha'aretz* was reporting that Israel had bombed bridges in central Lebanon and attacked "Hezbollah's posts" in southern Lebanon. The next day, Amnesty International reported that 40 Lebanese civilians had been killed, including several families, with 60 other civilians injured.

In the *Palestine Chronicle*, Tanya Reinhart reported: "Israel launched its first attack on Beirut. . . . Israeli warplanes bombed Beirut's international airport and killed at least 27 Lebanese civilians in a series of raids." It was not until after those initial Israeli attacks inside Lebanon that Hezbollah began to fire rockets into northern Israel. Israel said it was attacking Lebanon to recover its soldiers; instead, it was launching a massive air attack, not just against Hezbollah, but against the entire country with no effort at diplomacy or negotiations. The word *disproportionate*

began to emerge in media coverage.

In the U.S., both Congress and the White House embraced Israel's preemptive strike. There was no pretense that the U.S. would act as an honest broker. The Senate unanimously condemned Hamas and Hezbollah and their state sponsors and supported Israel's exercise of its right to self-defense. A House version passed 410 to 8.

According to Ari Berman, writing for the *Nation*, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) not only lobbied for the resolution, but wrote it. "They [Congress] were given a resolution by AIPAC," said former national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Israel knew that the war would be costly. *Ha'aretz* reported that the Israeli cabinet was aware that Hezbollah had been stockpiling rockets since 2000, and expected that Hezbollah would use them if provoked. Matthew Kalman wrote in the *San Francisco Chronicle* that Olmert had been waiting for any incident Israel could use as an excuse for an attack and had a plan in place.

Kalman says that over a year ago "a senior Israeli army officer began giving PowerPoint presentations on an off-the-record basis to U.S. and other diplomats, journalists and think tanks, setting out the plan for the current operation in revealing detail." The war plan called for a three-week air assault and land invasion, which would explain Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's foot-dragging as she claimed to be seeking a cease-fire in the United Nations Security Council.

Kalman reports:

The first week concentrated on destroying Hezbollah's heavier long-range missiles, bombing its command-and-control centers, and disrupting transportation and communication arteries. In the second week, the focus shifted to attacks on individual sites of rocket launchers or weapons stores. In the third week, ground forces in large numbers would be introduced, but only in order to knock out targets discovered during reconnaissance missions as the campaign unfolded.

Yet Hezbollah's resistance surprised both the Israelis and the U.S. Israel seems to have joined George W. Bush and Tony Blair in believing that "Arab nationalism could be bombed into defeat" (Jackie Ashley in the *Guardian*).

This is a delusion. As Ashley writes, “In a hearts and minds struggle, it does not win much leverage to bomb civilians and kill children. . . . Arab Shias are the same as anyone else: murder makes them angry, not conciliatory.”

Making the region over in the image of the West was the U.S. goal in Iraq; it is the Israelis’ goal in Lebanon and Palestine. But the war in Lebanon benefits no one. As the conflict continued, Brzezinski warned: “The radicalization of the Arab masses is going to become more pervasive, the sympathy for Hizbullah more extensive and, as a consequence, the prospects for a favorable outcome beyond some sort of ad hoc solution will be reduced” (*Christian Science Monitor*).

Had the July 12 border incident ended in negotiations for a prisoner exchange, many lives would have been spared. But that was not part of the plan.