

# Mission Impossible? The deployment of the ground forces during Operation Change of Direction

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## Introduction

*If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither your enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.<sup>2</sup>*

This contribution describes the ground operations of the Israel Defense Force (IDF) and Hezbollah<sup>3</sup> during their confrontation in the summer of 2006, which began with an ambush on an Israeli patrol on 12 July, during which two servicemen were abducted, and which ended with a cease-fire on 14 August. This conflict was characterised by the deployment of a western-oriented armed force as an instrument of state against an irregularly, but also partially regularly, operating non-state opponent in southern Lebanon.

The IDF ground forces had the greatest trouble dealing with the resistance Hezbollah put up, and when it was all over, both parties claimed victory. The question is whether defeating Hezbollah was a 'mission impossible' for the IDF ground forces. By studying the ground operations of both parties, conclusions can be drawn that can contribute towards finding an answer to this question.

This contribution begins with a description of the principles on which the Dutch army doctrine is based, as an instrument of analysis, and is followed by an overview of the preparations both parties made prior to the outbreak of the conflict. Subsequently, the ground operations of the parties will be described by means of a chronological survey of the combat actions. With the help of the principles the ground operations will be analysed, and the conclusions drawn from this can give an indication about the extent to which it was indeed a mission impossible for the IDF ground forces to defeat Hezbollah. Moreover, the conclusion may be of help to western armed forces in the preparation of their operations against a possible opponent operating in both a regular and irregular manner.

## Principles

In order to analyse the ground operations of both parties the principles laid down in the Dutch doctrines will be used. They are:<sup>4</sup>

1. Retention of morale: This principle relates to the combat readiness of personnel, and covers such concepts as group cohesion, motivation, et cetera.
2. Security: This principle is essential for retaining own assets, freedom of action, concentrating the force and for taking risks outside the point of main effort. Withholding information from the enemy is a contributing factor to it and security encompasses taking active and passive measures.
3. Concentration of assets: By concentrating means at the right place and time, a point of main effort can be created, so that a decision can be forced or an effect with a high priority achieved.
4. Effectiveness: Every soldier should be focused on an unambiguous, clearly defined and attainable objective. If this is not the case, it usually results in the failure of the operation.
5. Economy of effort: Military means are almost always scarce, and in order to create a point of main effort, a commander must deploy his assets according to type and quantity in relation to the set objective. In this respect, he is expected to take well-considered risks.
6. Unity of effort: The assets and effort applied in the pursuit of a single objective have to be synchronised. This enables the commander to deploy all available military capacity to achieve his objective efficiently, while at the same time reducing his vulnerability to the enemy.
7. Simplicity: Composite and difficult plans and orders increase the likelihood of confusion, especially at times when events rapidly succeed each other. The complexity of the modern military operations also creates chaos, stress, et cetera. Clear plans and simple orders, therefore, increase the chance of success.
8. Flexibility: Commanders are expected to be able to adapt their plans if necessary and respond to unexpected opportunities or threats in order to achieve their objective. An important aspect of flexibility is mobility.
9. Initiative: Commanders should strive to achieve or maintain their freedom of action. The objective is to act sooner and faster than the opponent and to avoid a situation in which they can only respond to the actions of other parties.
10. Offensive operations: This principle is considered the most important means available to a commander to enable him to act effectively and decisively to achieve his objective. This requires the right attitude for constantly gaining and holding the initiative.

11. Surprise: By attacking an opponent before he finds out where, when and how the attack is to occur, or by deploying means for which he is not prepared, a decision or an advantage for the own operations can be achieved.
12. Sustainability: A force must be able to sustain an operation once it has embarked on it until the objective set has been achieved. This can only be done if the logistic preparation has been included in the planning and can be realised.

### **The run-up to the conflict: Hezbollah**

Between 2000 and the summer of 2006 Hezbollah formed a well-trained, well-armed, motivated and highly-developed war machine on the border with northern Israel.<sup>5</sup> The movement transformed from a successful guerrilla organisation directed against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon between 1982 and 2000 to an organisation which was to employ conventional, guerrilla as well as terrorist methods.<sup>6</sup>

Hezbollah had prepared itself well for a future conflict by carefully studying Israel and the IDF's manner of operating in the past and present as well as the terrain. It had learned many lessons during the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, and expected large-scale Israeli ground operations in reaction to its irregular operations directed at bringing war-fatigue to the IDF and its allies and at chasing them from southern Lebanon. The IDF mainly reacted with precision firepower by artillery and air strikes,<sup>7</sup> combined with limited ground actions. In 1993 Israel had taken Hezbollah off guard with this method, inflicting considerable losses. During the second IDF operation in 1996 Hezbollah had been better prepared and mainly carried out missile barrages on Israel. In spite of the losses and a destroyed Lebanese infrastructure (with much collateral damage and civilian casualties) Hezbollah kept carrying out actions against the IDF and its allies in southern Lebanon and firing missiles against Israel. Eventually, Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah was convinced that in a future conflict Israel would increasingly rely on precision firepower and less on the deployment of ground troops.<sup>8</sup> It thought that Israel would not risk substantial losses during large-scale operations any longer, while also the prevention of collateral damage and civilian casualties would play an important role. From an historic perspective Hezbollah was aware that it should not engage mechanised battalions and brigades in direct combat. Moreover, the organisation was convinced that the Israeli society, as a modern open western society, would be vulnerable and that the mental resilience would greatly decrease as a result of continuous missile barrages.

That is why Hezbollah chose for an approach that would exploit these Israeli vulnerabilities, which was to become the basis for its operational and tactical planning.<sup>9</sup> The *modus operandi* consisted of two elements:

- Maximum degrading of the civilian life and causing casualties and damage by firing missiles at Israel.<sup>10</sup>
- Attrition and disruption of the IDF, by delaying it and inflicting losses in a defence from reinforced positions, whereby the loss of terrain was not essential, and by fighting as a guerrilla force.

Hezbollah used two principles:

- A defence line on the Lebanese-Israeli border and a second line with depth up to the Litani river.
- A deeper area with logistics, training and control and command centres.

The organisation formed large quantities of missile units on the basis of their range, something it did not make a secret of, as with its other military potential, in view of its deterrence strategy towards Israel.<sup>11</sup> In order to make it more difficult for the IDF to attack targets, Hezbollah had dismantled as many possible targets as possible on the strategic and operational level, such as command centres, expecting them to be attacked first. On the tactical level the weapon signature and exposure of the missile systems was decreased by mobility, concealment and dispersion, even if the Israeli Air Force (IAF) destroyed certain amounts of them.

In order to protect the missile systems and to attrit the Israeli ground forces a defence system consisting of two lines was implemented to delay the IDF and to inflict as many losses as possible. The Hezbollah intent was a tenacious defence, completely independent and self-sustained, operating for a longer period of time.

To the south of the Litani river up to the Israeli border a network of bunkers, tunnels, positions, anti-tank obstacles, caches and command, control and communication (C3) centres were established and prepared. All this was spread out, concealed, camouflaged and reinforced in order to be able to withstand heavier weapon systems. There were even hydraulic doors, multiple entrances and exits, store rooms and cameras at the entrances. Houses and entire sections of villages were changed into fortifications. Hezbollah divid-

ed southern Lebanon up into three main areas, each with several sectors, consisting of some 12-15 villages.<sup>12</sup>

It implemented an elaborate deception and security programme with dummy bunkers and the Hezbollah fighters each only knowing about part of the defence positions.<sup>13</sup> The southern Lebanese population was denied access to certain areas where secret bunkers, positions and ambushes had been prepared.<sup>14</sup>

After an extensive terrain analysis, the organisation prepared ambushes for as many IDF approaches as possible. Southern Lebanon is mountainous terrain, canalising because of the many wadis, with little and low growth, offering good possibilities for concealment. In the summer the heat and high humidity make circumstances more difficult for manoeuvring troops. The many villages offer excellent possibilities for fortifications by the concealment and cover, and the many hilltops in front of the villages give good fields of observation and fire, sometimes even deep into Israel. The villages consist of many narrow streets and alleys and all the roads lie within a few hundred metres' distance from the villages and built-up areas. Because of these circumstances southern Lebanon is infantry terrain par excellence, and less suitable for mechanised units, as they lack the room for manoeuvre.<sup>15</sup>

The effect of the positions and ambushes was reinforced by the use of obstacles, anti-tank systems, mortars, mines, IEDs and booby traps. As a result, the IDF units could be canalised, delayed and held up, while they were simultaneously pounded with concentrated fire.

Hezbollah learned the tactics to engage mechanised units with light infantry, anti-tank means and fire support from ambushes and reinforced positions.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the IDF ground troops would be forced to also operate in the rough terrain outside the approaches, which would greatly delay their advance.<sup>17</sup>

At the moment the IDF could push through its attacks and the tactical value of the positions had been degraded, the Hezbollah fighters would be allowed to fall back to deeper positions or to melt away among the population. Thus, Hezbollah could attack the IDF repeatedly. Because of its static positions and the IAF's air superiority, Hezbollah's room for manoeuvre was limited to the movement of small units, which were spread out and organised in such a way that they could shore up and re-supply weak sectors.

Hezbollah groups consisted of seven to ten fighters and the anti-tank teams were made up of two well-trained operators with two or three less well-trained men for sup-

port.<sup>18</sup> Hezbollah opted to fight the battle with a minimum number of fighters. Opinions differed on the uniforms of the Hezbollah fighters. According to Erlich, the fighters wore civilian clothes in order not to be recognisable as combatants and confuse the IDF.<sup>19</sup> Biddle states that regular Hezbollah fighters were uniformed apart from a few exceptions.<sup>20</sup> There were several occasions where the IDF dared not open fire because it was thought they might be own troops. It is reasonable to assume that sympathisers and fighters in the villages were not uniformed. It is estimated that Hezbollah deployed between 1,000 and 3,000 regular fighters,<sup>21</sup> some of whom were part-time fighters, such as villagers who took part in the fighting. Hezbollah was able to call up between 10,000 and 25,000 extra fighters and sympathisers, whose level of training and possible options for deployment were unknown.<sup>22</sup>

Hezbollah's arsenal mainly consisted of simple and cheap arms, ammunition and explosives that could easily be acquired. It also had at its disposal modern and advanced anti-tank systems, necessary to put up an effective fight against the IDF mechanised units. The organisation had technologically advanced means, such as listening devices, computers, night-vision devices and a C3-network with mainly dug-in glass fibre lines,<sup>23</sup> radios with encrypted codes and GSM cell phones. Thus, a network of independent sectors and autonomous cells had been created.<sup>24</sup>

Hezbollah also received external support in its preparation, training and supplies, with Iran and Syria providing most weapon systems, ammunition, know-how and technology.<sup>25</sup> Many Hezbollah fighters had received training in Syria and Iran, in particular for the advanced weapon systems, while the organisation took care of much of its own training in the relatively safe areas in the Bekaa valley in northern Lebanon, making use of its combat experience and tactical insights acquired in earlier conflicts with the IDF.<sup>26</sup> Hezbollah managed to counter the Israeli electronic warfare through its glass fibre communication lines, encryptions, strict communication discipline and by listening in on Israeli communication networks and GSMs.<sup>27</sup>

It also succeeded in applying Human Intelligence, with much information coming from Israeli Arabs and Druze. Money and drugs were used to buy informants in Israel, and by working together with the Lebanese intelligence officers an Israeli spy network was uncovered and a number of Israeli agents were persuaded to defect.<sup>28</sup> Fake information was played into the hands of the Israelis and Hezbollah had its own agents operate in northern Israel and observed IDF activities along the border.<sup>29</sup>

As a continuous missile barrage on military and civilian targets in Israel was crucial, Hezbollah commanders held strict operational control over the missile units, while they

gave more freedom to their ground troops,<sup>30</sup> which gave the more junior commanders flexibility and room for initiative in their fight against the IDF. This tactical freedom for the ground troops can be seen as a form of mission command.

Hezbollah estimated that, in spite of its modern C3 means, it would not be capable of controlling the number of small units in case of large-scale IDF ground operations. The decentralised manner of operating and the establishment of fortifications had brought along the disadvantage of a more static defence,<sup>31</sup> which meant that Hezbollah could not react faster than the Israeli decision making cycle, but it forced the IDF to fight on its terms by waiting for it, carrying out infiltrations, choosing the moments of opening fire and carrying out ambushes. The lack of room for manoeuvre was compensated for by sacrifice and resilience, attrition and having fighters operate as stay-behinds behind the IDF lines.<sup>32</sup> Besides, the bulk of the southern Lebanese population and many local companies supported Hezbollah by solving its logistical problems, such as electricity, water, vehicles and medicines.

Hezbollah ignored and intentionally abused international treaties and the humanitarian war law by firing at civilian targets in Israel and in executing its operations.<sup>33</sup> The Lebanese population was held as a shield against the IDF firepower, especially in the Shiite villages. In the north-eastern part of southern Lebanon Hezbollah left the Christian and Druze villages relatively alone, as it lacked support there and because of the estimation that these villages would fall outside the main effort of the IDF attack. Hezbollah spread out as much as possible between the villages of southern Lebanon, often in locations where it was sure Israel would not dare attack immediately, such as hospitals, centres of population and mosques. The Shiite majority of the southern Lebanon mainly cooperated voluntarily, but Hezbollah also sometimes paid rent, exerted pressure or kept people in the dark. Farmers were even paid to fire missiles from their orchards.<sup>34</sup> Besides, Hezbollah abused ambulances, Red Cross vehicles, humanitarian convoys and civilian vehicles by transporting materiel and fighters in them or by driving behind them at an extremely short distance. The organisation realised that it would work to their advantage from a media perspective if Israel attacked these targets,<sup>35</sup> which then could be exploited for propaganda purposes.

Hezbollah knew that time would be on its side because protracted military campaigns lead to many losses and are very expensive, as the Israelis experienced between 1982 and 2000. Moreover, Hezbollah stood to gain much public support, especially within the Arabic world, if it showed that Israel could not bring it to heel.



The organisation created a situation in which Israel would have to choose between two undesirable options, should a conflict arise: avoiding ground operations, which would leave Israel's vulnerability (to missile attacks) clearly apparent, or invading southern Lebanon and engaging in a war of attrition with a (semi) guerrilla movement, in which substantial losses were to be expected.<sup>36</sup>

### **The run-up to the conflict: Israel**

After the withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 Israel was forced to react immediately to the Palestinian insurgencies (Intifada) in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The IDF directed its attention on training for and carrying out counter-insurgency (COIN) operations.

This emphasis came at the expense of the build-up of experience, education and training for regular combat actions. With regard to Hezbollah, Israel opted for the method of deterrence. Besides, it was convinced that an inter-state war was a thing of the past because of its effect of deterrence and the superiority of the Israeli military might. The future for the IDF would be one of mainly low-intensity asymmetric conflicts.

After its withdrawal from Lebanon the IDF had embarked on the development of a new doctrine for the operational level, embracing theories of new developments mainly originating in the United States. The ideas ensued from technological developments, future expectations of having to operate mainly against irregular opponents and the maximum aversion of own losses.<sup>37</sup> Precision firepower, Effects Based Operations (EBO) and Systematic Operational Design (SOD) became the foundations upon which the new doctrine was to be built.

EBO encompasses the neutralising of key capacities, such as command posts, logistic installations, radar systems, et cetera, with precision weapons, so that an opponent can no longer deploy his military capability, and consequently is unable to reach his military objectives. It is all about attacking his "cognitive domain" and systems, rather than destroying his troops. Important advantages are the containing of collateral damage and military casualties, and the limitation of elaborate ground operations.<sup>38</sup> After the withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 conducting a large-scale ground offensive had become unpopular because of the high costs it brought along, the many losses and the limited results.<sup>39</sup> EBO created a sort of short cut to attaining strategic targets, by considering the opponent as a system and taking out his essential elements, where formerly successes on the tactical and operational levels, mainly through ground operations, were required.<sup>40</sup>



The successes of the air campaigns in the Gulf War (1991) and Kosovo (1999) fuelled this idea. On top of that, the development of high-tech means and the technological advantage over any possible opponents played a role.<sup>41</sup> Ground forces had to transform into small high-quality units, which, instead of seeking traditional control of terrain (physical retention or conquest), were to cooperate with the air force.<sup>42</sup> Henceforth, they were to monitor an area, and then create “effects” in a sort of joint network, by finding targets for the Israeli Air Force (IAF), protecting the Israeli borders against intrusions and fighting any possible opponents who could not be targeted from the air.

The formation level of the army corps was abolished and the IDF was in the process of abolishing the division level when the war broke out.<sup>43</sup> There was to be a role for the brigade at best to keep an area under control. These brigades were not any longer organic units, but composed mainly of special forces, light infantry and other expertises.<sup>44</sup>

This Israeli composition was different from the globally accepted ideas on firepower having to be in balance with classic ground troops and their operations.<sup>45</sup>

Another theory for the new doctrine was SOD, an instrument developed to help commanders with campaign planning (operational level) by thinking critically, systematically and methodologically about warfare. The SOD focuses on “the concept of an enemy” and gives operational commanders the tools to conceptualise the enemy as well as his own troops in order to design feasible campaigns. The terminology and methodology of the new doctrine was also disseminated to the lower tactical and technical levels, which was to lead to great problems.

Many IDF officers thought this SOD perspective an elitist programme, at odds with the familiar IDF manner of conducting war and executing command and control, or that the new doctrine was way above their heads. The tactical and technical levels would have wanted the old system of intention, mission, et cetera, to continue. Ron Tira, an IAF officer, who has researched the new doctrine, indicates that especially field commanders did not know what to do or when their mission had been achieved.

The Chief of the General Staff of the IDF, Lieutenant General Halutz, with his faith in Air Power and precision weapons, already went to the point in 2001 where he stated that the IDF would have to say farewell to the concept of the ground war, and declared in April 2006 the new doctrine (called Vulture and Snake, whereby the IAF was the Vulture engaging the localised guerrillas, the Snake) had gone into effect.<sup>46</sup>

The reasonably successful COIN operations against the Palestinian Intifida seemed to vindicate the new doctrine. The over-reliance on EBO, SOD, precision fire power and the application of the new doctrine on the wrong levels in the end were contributing factors to the problems the IDF experienced during the conflict. Nevertheless, Halutz was confident that with this doctrine Israel could defeat any opponent bold enough to attack it.<sup>47</sup>

As a result of the new ways of thinking, but also the budget cuts that had been going on for years, the IDF went through a number of reorganisations. With budgets mainly reserved for the IAF and other technological means, the cuts impacted innovation, education and training, maintenance and supply management of the ground forces, which, as a consequence, lost some of their technological advantage with regard to Hezbollah.<sup>48</sup>

The IDF is composed of standing units with regular and conscript personnel (20 per cent) and reserve units with reservists (80 per cent), who are sometimes called up for operational tasks. As Israel did not need to carry out large-scale ground operations anymore, the IDF had to become “smaller and smarter”.<sup>49</sup> In order to monitor areas, rather than control them, fewer troops were needed. Especially the reserve units and the reserve pools were reduced, also because of the high costs of maintaining these units.

The cuts were mainly felt in the education and training of units and the maintenance of materiel. For this reason and the continuing Palestinian insurgency the ground forces were barely able to carry out their tasks. In particular the reserve units were badly hit and in fact two armies began to evolve: a standing army and a reserve army, which was less well trained, less professional and less equipped. There were many logistical problems for newly-called up reserve units, with essential materials and supplies lacking.

Personnel with specific capacities, such as tank crews, were used to patrol in the Palestinian areas, often even for years on end, without exercising and training with their own materiel. Regular as well as reserve personnel at brigade level and up lacked the tactical and technical skills, adequate individual and formation training.<sup>50</sup> Reserve units had not exercised in large formations for years, and in 2003 there had been no exercise at all for reserve units, nor were any tactical staff exercises held. Also, the new doctrine and the abolition of the formation levels contributed to this lack of know-how and experience.

The budget cuts also had an impact on the military intelligence service (AMAN) for the supply of tactical information. Intelligence, aerial photography and maps related to Hezbollah had not been up-to-date for a long time due to lack of finances, and, besides,

they had no priority anyway.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, intelligence was not passed on from the strategic level to the lower levels, which had to do with strict classification, bureaucracy and compartmentalisation. Thus, Hezbollah's development was known, but the exact locations of bunkers, positions, caches and weapon systems were not. Apart from that, AMAN over-relied on technological means for the gathering of information, while its HUMINT unit had failed to infiltrate Hezbollah or to obtain information from the close-knit Shiite community in southern Lebanon.<sup>52</sup>

The logistics were reorganised drastically, too. As fire power became more important than manoeuvre,<sup>53</sup> a modular logistic system was established with centralised logistic areas. In accordance with the operational planning and the developments on the battlefield, a modular structure could be set up, which ensured availability, flexibility and efficiency. Thus, units were deprived of their own support units, which generated a considerable economy.

The IDF had a number of operational theatres: Northern, Central and Southern Command and the Home Front, each with its own joint staff, which controlled the units of the various Services.<sup>54</sup> Northern Command was responsible for the border area with Lebanon and Syria. The ground forces were responsible for southern Lebanon up to the Litani river. For air operations, particular Close Air Support (CAS) south of the Litani river, a special IAF section had been accommodated in Northern Command HQ. In Northern Command, prior to the start of the conflict, Division 91 was responsible for the border area of Israel and Lebanon. During the conflict more (reserve) units were assigned to Northern Command and Division 91, including units from other operational theatres.

## **The course of the battle**

### *10-17 July*

On 12 July 2006 Hezbollah unexpectedly succeeded in abducting two Israeli soldiers.<sup>55</sup> A patrol of a reserve battalion (Brigade 300, Division 91) was ambushed near border post 105. It was to have been the last patrol of this unit and on completion of their task they were to go straight home. The patrol did not follow a number of SOPs (Standing Operating Procedures) in their preparation and instead of approaching the wadi near border post 105 tactically, both Humvees drove on bumper to bumper.<sup>56</sup>

At 09:00 hrs an IED exploded next to the two vehicles. One Humvee was destroyed by a guided anti-tank missiles and the other was hit by several RPG rockets. Three men

were killed and four wounded. Hezbollah fighters captured two wounded Israeli soldiers and quickly crossed the border again. In order to mask their attack and to create confusion, there was simultaneous firing on IDF locations and Israeli villages in the environment of border post 105. The battalion commander responsible for this sector sent the codeword 'Hannibal' (abduction IDF soldiers) to all units in Northern Command. The codeword should have led to a number of emergency procedures and retaliatory actions. The battalion commander should immediately have sent units into Lebanon in order to cut off the retreat of the Hezbollah fighters, but refrained from doing so, out of fear of mine and IED threats. The IDF reacted with some elements from Hannibal, like targeting Hezbollah positions with artillery fire and air strikes.

At 11:00 hrs, finally, one Merkava IV tank and an armoured infantry platoon were sent into Lebanon, after all, to attack the abductors and liberate their hostages. When they were approaching a possible escape route of Hezbollah, a heavy IED exploded under the tank, destroying it and killing its crew.<sup>57</sup> Hezbollah had planned a solid retreat with mines and IEDs in order to get its fighters (and the hostages) into a safe area and to anticipate any Israeli counter-attacks and liberation attempts.<sup>58</sup> In the mean time, the IAF partially executed operation Hannibal and bombed a number of bridges in southern Lebanon in an attempt to seal off any escape routes of Hezbollah to the north.

In response to the abduction and attacks of Hezbollah, the Israeli government decided to stage a large-scale operation: Change of Direction, which later was called Just Reward. Halutz informed the Cabinet that a large-scale military operation according to an existing plan, Country's Shield, would last nine to ten weeks. Within a week and a half the IDF would gain control of southern Lebanon from the Litani river southwards (hammer) and from the Lebanese-Israeli border northwards (anvil) with (indirect) precision fire and small units (not conquering and occupying it). Six to eight weeks would then be used to find and neutralise as many Katyusha missile systems as possible. Subsequently, if the objectives had been attained, the IDF would conduct an orderly retreat over a period of two weeks to the border.<sup>59</sup>

Out of fear of many losses and civilian casualties the Cabinet, however, opted for an offensive strategy with precision weapons against strategic and operational Hezbollah targets. The consequence of this decision was that Israel would become less flexible if at some point it was decided to invade after all, because the preparation and the call-up of reserve units would be delayed.<sup>60</sup> In order to prevent Syrian interference, the military operations were to be limited to Lebanese territory.

The intention of crushing Hezbollah with secondary objectives to weaken, reduce or neutralise it, led to some confusion, as clear measures for attaining the objectives, such as duration and result indications, were not specified.<sup>61</sup> The result was that, also in line with the new doctrine, the IDF was less prepared to take risks for the ground operations, with a view to the prevention of own losses. During the afternoon and night of 12 July there was regular exchange of fire between the IDF and Hezbollah.

Apart from the precision fire power, ground forces and special forces were deployed to attack Hezbollah positions on a limited scale, particularly in the first defence line. On 13 July the IAF had destroyed almost all long-range missile installations.<sup>62</sup>

Hezbollah had expected a limited reaction from Israel with artillery bombardments and air strikes, followed by negotiations, but was taken by surprise by the scale and ferocity of the Israeli air campaign.<sup>63</sup> Israel, however, did not succeed in transforming this strategic surprise into a tactical one by launching a ground offensive.<sup>64</sup> The IAF continued attacking tactical targets (*Katyushas*), which became increasingly difficult due to a lack of good intelligence, something<sup>65</sup> the ground troops would be hampered by during the entire conflict. In the night of 13 and 14 July IDF ground troops carried out attacks on villages and positions of Hezbollah along the Israeli-Lebanese border.

The continuing missile barrages on Israel and the failure to liberate the hostages made clear that a ground offensive would probably be necessary if Israel wanted to reach its objectives. The decision not to do so for the time being, however, gave Hezbollah even more time and opportunity to prepare.<sup>66</sup> Alarming reports came in from the units that were carrying out offensive actions on the ridge along the Israeli-Lebanese border. The IDF units were surprised by the ferocity and tenacity of the Hezbollah defence, which unexpectedly kept fighting even under heavy artillery fire and air strikes and also at night. This was something the IDF has not been used to with its former opponents.<sup>67</sup> CAS and fire support were given only sparingly with a view to the danger of fratricide and the faded know-how and skills of air support and fire support procedures. CAS, in particular, was also limited because of an obsolete liaison system between air forces and ground troops, which led to assigned targets not being attacked in time. The IAF air operations control section of Northern Command did not work properly, either. Besides, the IAF decided in an early stage to a limited deployment of combat helicopters out of fear of the anti-air capacity of Hezbollah. The granted CAS flown by combat aircraft was mostly executed in time and accurately. The above-mentioned problems with regard to fire and air support were to continue during the entire conflict.

At the end of day on 15 July IDF units began to carry out temporary incursions of about a kilometre in depth into southern Lebanon along the entire border in order to destroy positions and missile installations of Hezbollah, which was finally achieved with great difficulty. Israel was convinced on the basis of its intelligence that the defence along the border was Hezbollah's main defence line.<sup>68</sup> If this line was broken, the IDF would have access to southern Lebanon, Hezbollah would be blinded and the organisation would have incurred so many losses that the missile barrages on Israel would stop.

#### *17-21 July*

Halutz still had no intention of launching a massive ground offensive and mobilising reserve units on a large-scale, in spite of pressure from the ground forces to do so. Eventually, he gave his ground commanders permission to carry out attacks on Hezbollah targets inside Lebanon on the battalion and brigade levels.<sup>69</sup> These raids, however, had no tactical objectives and time frames, but, in the context of the new doctrine they were intended to create an "awareness of the victory" for Israel and a "cognitive perception of a defeat" for Hezbollah. A great number of IDF officers did not like this approach because the terrain was not under control and the men would die for nothing due to a lack of specific targets.

The IDF warned the Lebanese civilian population with leaflets to leave the combat area, in order to prevent as many civilian casualties as possible, which led to the IDF losing the element of surprise in certain actions.<sup>70</sup> On 17 July the first Israeli offensive on a larger scale began near Maroun-al-Ras intended to get a foothold inside Lebanon that could function as a base for any possible further attacks inside Lebanon.

The first (elite) unit to go in was taken by surprise by the quantity of fire and tenacity of the Hezbollah fighters. Their intelligence proved to be wrong, for instead of light resistance, they met with a well-prepared and equipped network of tunnels and bunkers from which fanatic fighting came. The following morning this unit was surrounded, something Adam and Halutz could hardly believe, and new troops had to be sent in to relieve them.<sup>71</sup> In the night of 18 and 19 July the IDF managed to timely detect and thwart inside Lebanon two infiltration attempts of Hezbollah centrally along the Israeli-Lebanese border. Due to the intensifying of the fighting at Maroun-al-Ras the IDF was forced to deploy more troops.

On 19 July also fire contacts took place along the coast and near the small town of Marwaheen where Israeli tanks and bulldozers crossed the border, only to withdraw again on 21 July. That same day Israeli tanks entered the area south-east of Bint Jbeil and Maroun-al-Ras and the first big major battle ensued. Again, the Israeli were surprised



by the tactical and fanatical actions of Hezbollah.<sup>72</sup> They fought tenaciously, knew the terrain well, defended their positions and managed to outmanoeuvre the IDF locally. The Hezbollah fighters allowed the Israeli troops to come so close in order to create a maximum effect of surprise and to make optimal use of their weapon systems. Fire fights lasted longer and often took place at a closer range than the IDF had expected of a guerrilla organisation. Many tank crews were wounded by anti-tank rockets and because tank commanders were exposed from the turrets.<sup>73</sup> Hezbollah even carried out a conventional counter-attack with a fire base on Israeli troops in houses on a hill near Maroun-al Ras.<sup>74</sup> Only after six days of intensive fighting, mainly in built-up terrain, was most of Maroun-al-Ras under IDF control on 24 July.<sup>75</sup> As Maroun-al-Ras was the only location along the border where the IDF penetrated deeper into Lebanon, Hezbollah concluded that Bent Jbeil, a town to the north of Maroun-al-Ras, would be the next objective and that the IDF was making preparations to that end. Upon this, Hezbollah began to reinforce the town further with dozens of fighters and specialists in sabotage, anti-tank combat and air defence.<sup>76</sup> It was reported that the IDF commanders were operating with exaggerated caution out of concern for the increasing number of casualties. Other reports confirmed that there was too little expertise to conduct the fight with joint arms and that the basic combat skills were at too low a level. Hezbollah commanders found the Israeli soldiers, even the best trained among them, badly organised and disciplined, something which was also observed by IDF commanders. This, however, was even worse in the reserve units and some commanders actually doubted whether they could be committed in combat situations. One brigade commander had an engineer platoon arrested because their commander, a reserve officer, refused an order to clear a road of mines and explosives, as his people were complaining that in that environment already 10 Israeli soldiers had been killed.<sup>77</sup>

#### *21 July-4 August*

The limited tactical effectiveness of the air campaign and the tenacious resistance caused Halutz to call up reserve units on 21 July. This mobilisation was chaotic because key functionaries were taken by surprise by the call up and had not received any warning orders.<sup>78</sup> The logistics of the reserve units lagged behind some 24 to 48 hours with their deployment, with the result that many reservists lacked basic items in their personal equipment. Moreover, there was a shortage of bullet-proof vests, vests for medical personnel, radios, ammunition, thermal optical equipment, food and water. The reserve units needed a week's training before they could be deployed, but many reservists felt this training was too short and inadequate.<sup>79</sup> In contrast to the chaotic mobilisation there was a high turn-out and most IDF personnel were highly motivated to go and teach Hezbollah a lesson.<sup>80</sup> In spite of the possibilities the mobilisation gave Halutz to concentrate troops on the Lebanese border and to deploy them from there, his basic



plan remained unchanged: no determined ground attack in order to drive out Hezbollah north of the Litani river or to systematically destroy its missile installations. A general in Halutz' staff indicated that it was not the intention to eliminate every missile,<sup>81</sup> but to upset the military logic of Hezbollah, entirely along the lines of the SOD of the new doctrine. In spite of the disappointing results, Halutz and his staff continued making efforts to secure the above-mentioned "awareness of the victory" and to give Hezbollah the "cognitive perception of defeat".<sup>82</sup> The battle for Bint Jbeil played a major role in this.

On 23 July the ground offensive against Bint Jbeil started and around 24 July elements of the Golani Brigade and the 7th Tank Brigade had taken up positions on the ridges surrounding Bint Jbeil. On 25 July the 35th Paratrooper Brigade began to cordon off the town from the north-west, so that Hezbollah could not leave or enter. That same day the commander of Division 91 already stated to the press that his troops had Bint Jbeil under control. "We can give precision fire wherever it is required and attack specific targets with offensive actions when they are localised", exactly in line with the new doctrine.

Nevertheless, Halutz considered that it would be necessary to capture Bint Jbeil, after all. It would not be a tactical victory but have symbolic value and create a "victory spectacle", which in turn would influence the "cognitive perception" of Hezbollah.<sup>83</sup> From an historical perspective, Bint Jbeil was considered a Centre of Gravity of Hezbollah.<sup>84</sup> Its fall would be a psychological blow for Hezbollah, while it would mean a boost to Israeli morale. However, the battle was to have more repercussions for the Israeli public opinion on the professionalism and capacity for judgement of the IDF. Halutz ordered Adam to capture the town with only one battalion, which prompted Adam into reminding Halutz that the ancient city alone had more than 5,000 houses.<sup>85</sup> His protest fell on deaf ears and after an intensive artillery barrage the 51st battalion of the Golani Brigade entered the town from the east. Amidst the artillery barrage Hezbollah reinforcements had still been taking up positions inside the town. Two companies of the battalion were ambushed. The Hezbollah fighters were up in the higher stories of the buildings and had a good view on the advancing Israelis. There were fatalities and many wounded. When the fighting intensified, groups of Hezbollah fighters manoeuvred on the Israeli flanks and kept delivering direct and indirect fire on the troops. The two companies continued to beat off the heavy attacks, while other companies tried to evacuate the dead and the wounded. Hirsch informed Halutz and reported that no helicopters could land due to the intensive fighting. Eventually, it took the entire night to evacuate the casualties. By the end of the conflict the IDF had not even secured Bint Jbeil completely.

As the IDF ground units were concentrated in a narrow corridor leading up to Bint Jbeil and had to fight themselves through the Hezbollah defence system, Hezbollah took the opportunity to inflict casualties on the IDF and to bring up more reinforcements. The IDF ground troops continued their offensive actions along the entire border in order to destroy Hezbollah positions, caches and missile installations, without systematically controlling these areas.<sup>86</sup> On 29 July the IDF extended its ground operations to create a security buffer north of the Israeli-Lebanese border. As the operations in Bint Jbeil were mostly completed, the IDF directed its efforts against the small village of Ayta A-Sha'ab in order to open up a central front there; the attack was launched on 30 July. Here, too, the troops were confronted with a stubborn defence, with Hezbollah carrying out 'hit and run' actions, and other fighters laying ambushes in the surrounding hills. The population which had fled or had been moved away left the doors of their houses open, giving Hezbollah the chance to use them. During the air strikes Hezbollah fighters, who even got used to these bombardments, sheltered in the bunkers underneath the houses.<sup>87</sup>

On 30 July a ground offensive was launched in the east with an attack near Kfar Kila, a village that had been identified as a logistic centre on the basis of captured documents. Special units successfully attacked targets deeper inside Lebanon, but appeared to generate too little effect on the strategic level. The special forces were committed too sparingly on the operational and tactical levels, which limited their contribution to the total war effort to a minimum. Their operational effectiveness, moreover, was also impaired by poor tactical intelligence and reconnaissance.<sup>88</sup> Apart from their limited deployment, the expertise and capacity within the Northern Command staffs were insufficient to lead the special operations, let alone simultaneously with the other operations.

The limitations of the new logistic system, too, became apparent. As the units no longer took along their own logistic means and supplies, sustainability was seriously impaired a number of times. One unit was delayed by a shortage of water and food which was not supplied in time, causing the evacuation of 25 dehydrated and exhausted soldiers. As the ground troops did not control any territory in southern Lebanon and they lacked a (safe) rear area, the logistic convoys had to be secured with combat power.<sup>89</sup> Hezbollah regularly attacked these convoys, often hitting the escorting tanks due to their slow speed. Many units were complaining about the poor combat support and the lack of buffer supplies at the moment when they were actually in southern Lebanon.<sup>90</sup> The Logistic Corps of the IDF could not meet the requirements of the IDF ground troops, as the IDF leadership had given them no instructions to make preparations for this kind of conflict.<sup>91</sup>

The ground war dragged along slowly and ineffectively, while expectations among the Israeli public kept rising. The national media heavily criticised the actions of the IDF, but in spite of this negative press, the population remained standing firmly behind the IDF. Due to the alleged excessive Israeli violence and the damage inflicted, in addition to the collateral damage, the international opinion increasingly began to turn against Israel. Halutz remained convinced that the manner of operating was still valid and rejected the advice of higher staff echelons to begin a massive ground offensive.

Nevertheless, the IDF ground troops succeeded in gaining the upper hand with much difficulty and tenacious fighting in direct engagements with Hezbollah. The latter, however, was successful because the missile barrages continued, even from camouflaged and concealed positions behind the Israeli lines and because the IDF never had full control over the many areas and villages.<sup>92</sup>

On 31 July the Israeli government decided that ground operations could be extended further in order to create a safety buffer several kilometres deep into Lebanon. Around 10,000 troops of eight brigades were deployed, with reserve units operating for the first time on a large scale.

In the night of 4 and 5 August in the east near the village of Markabeh units of a tank brigade and a battalion of the Golani Brigade began to advance. Tanks and armoured vehicles were frequently damaged or sometimes destroyed, caused by poor education and training of the crews and a deployment for which they were not suitable, as convoy escort or operations without infantry, which gave the Hezbollah anti-tank teams the opportunity to use their weapon systems even better.

#### *5 August-14 August*

After three weeks the IDF had penetrated some seven kilometres deep and did not seem poised for a large-scale invasion.<sup>93</sup> The IDF divisions were still fighting against the first-line defences, while the border area and the towns of Maroun-al-Ras and Bint Jbeil had still not been secured. Hezbollah did not mobilise any further reinforcements and sympathisers. So far, there was no “spectacle of victory” for the IDF, or any signs of an impending defeat for Hezbollah. Halutz was irritated by the lack of success and on 8 August replaced Adam for his own personal representative. Around 9 August the IDF had penetrated the central part of the border area, up to the village of Debel (4.5 kilometres from the border) and near the village of Qantara (7 kilometres from the border).<sup>94</sup>

Many Israeli soldiers, in the mean time, were convinced they were fighting a lost war. Hezbollah kept firing missiles at Israel, the ground offensive went slowly and the

collateral damage inflicted by the IDF was great, which had the effect of creating more opponents for Israel than neutralising them.<sup>95</sup> Hezbollah was described as a master of deception, as they managed to bind an entire armed force with a few thousand men. Many politicians and former officers wondered what the objectives were in southern Lebanon and why not an old-fashioned IDF plan was executed to advance on the Litani river within 48 hours in a sort of Blitzkrieg of mechanised and air-mobile units, isolate Hezbollah and destroy it by rounding it up from north to south. Now no territory was occupied, which meant that IDF troops had to fight for the same villages and areas several times over. The politicians and former soldiers conveniently neglected to mention that Hezbollah had prepared for this over a period of six years.

The government realised that the IDF was not forcing a decision on the battlefield and that the international pressure to conclude a cease-fire was growing. The only way to take away the missile threat was to occupy the area between the Israeli-Lebanese border and the Litani river. On 9 August the government decided on a large-scale ground offensive to reach the Litani river.<sup>96</sup> The most bizarre thing was that no order was given to attack Hezbollah or the missile installations systematically.<sup>97</sup> The operation had been developed as a “battle for the awareness against Hezbollah”, as some high-ranking IDF officers stated after the war. In this phase the number of Israeli troops in southern Lebanon tripled up to some 30,000.

In the north-east Division 162 of Brigadier General Tzur began a western advance towards Qantara and Ghandouriyeh. Before the advance the division had been positioned on a higher terrain overlooking the Litani river. Tzur considered the village of Ghandouriyeh, 12 kilometres from the border, as a controlling part of the terrain because of its elaborate junction of roads. For a week he had wanted to take the village, but each time his plans were cancelled by the higher echelon. Probably, Tzur’s plans were not in line with the concept of raids and area control and it was not until 10 August that he was given permission for the attack. Hezbollah, in the mean time, had used the opportunity to improve its defences.<sup>98</sup>

Once he had received the go-ahead, Tzur launched elements of his mechanised infantry brigade,<sup>99</sup> the Nahal Brigade, with an air assault onto the higher terrain commanding the Al-Saluki wadi to clear it of enemy and to support the mechanised units advancing on Ghandouriyeh. The infantry troops landed unopposed in the outer areas of Ghandouriyeh and the village of Farun. They probably did not clear the higher end of the wadi any further, but they did inform their commander that they had secured the area. On the basis of this assumption a tank column of Brigade 401 crossed the wadi. The front tanks were stopped at a collapsed building which served as a road obstacle and at

that moment the road behind the column was blown up. At the same time the tank of the column commander was hit by a guided anti-tank missile and pounded with anti-tank rockets. Many tank crews failed to use the smoke canisters as a protection against the anti-tank rockets.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, the men of the Nahal brigade were attacked and were unable to support the tank column. There was hardly any coordination between the tanks and the infantry and requests for air support were denied by Northern Command out of fear of fratricide. Finally, the column managed to make good its escape across the steep slopes of the wadi.<sup>101</sup> When the ambush was over, 11 of the 24 Merkava tanks had been hit, and eight crew members and four infantrymen had been killed.<sup>102</sup> Without the latest version of the Merkava, type IV, tank, with its resilience, high-quality technology, self-defence means and climbing capacity on steep slopes, the losses would have been higher.<sup>103</sup> In the end Division 162 managed to capture Ghandouriyeh with much difficulty, although by that time it had lost much of its tactical value for the IDF.

In spite of the successful combination of mines, mortar fire and anti-tank systems, employed near Maroun-al-Ras, Bint Jbeila and Ghandouriyeh, most of the Hezbollah mortar fire appeared not concentrated enough to inflict much damage on the IDF. Also, most of the minefields were not under constant observation and fire, so that the IDF engineers could easily breach them.<sup>104</sup>

On 11 August the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1701, calling for the implementation of a cease-fire as soon as possible. On the same day the IDF began its advance on the Litani River in consequence of the governmental decision of 9 August. It was already too late by that time to gain a victory of any significance on Hezbollah. The two days of preparation had been too short for such a large-scale operation, but long enough for Hezbollah to prepare for it. In order to move forward the IDF was forced to advance along predictable routes of advance, a fact that was exploited by Hezbollah. The IDF did not plan or execute with this last operation any actions to block the routes of retreat of Hezbollah towards the north either. Because of the short period of time to push through to the Litani river there was not enough time or troops to control the captured areas and to mop up and neutralise any Hezbollah troops that had stayed behind.<sup>105</sup>

The Reserve Paratrooper Division began its advance north on 11 August in the direction of Debel and Qantarah. It suffered a great loss of 9 dead and 31 wounded when a house in Debel was targeted with guided anti-tank missiles. The Division had not progressed beyond 1.5 kilometres north of Debel, when the cease-fire came into effect on 14 August. The quick succession of contradictory orders continued to amaze the officers of this division. Each time when they were ordered to attack, their orders were rescinded at the last possible moment. The reason that was given for this after the war was that

the division commander did not want them to die, be abducted or hit by friendly fire.<sup>106</sup> The mechanised units of Brigades 609 and 188 advanced along the coastal road and on 14 August had not got beyond 1.5 kilometres north of Mansuri. The advance of Division 162 eventually did not go beyond the captured Gandouriyeh.

North of Division 162 the Reserve Tank Division of Brigadier General Zuckerman found it hard to implement the so-called “battle of awareness”. The tank units of this division performed badly and there were major problems in the command echelon of this division. An IDF inquiry after the conflict indicated that Zuckerman’s lack of training had led to many mistakes.

Division 91 began an advance north of Bint Jbeil in the direction of the Mediterranean Sea, an action which went as chaotically as earlier fights. An official inquiry after the war indicated that this was caused by a serious lack of professionalism and skills inside the division to even carry out the simplest of tactical assignments. The division commander used methodology and terminology from the new doctrine instead of the standard terms and written formats. Orders also lacked objectives linked to time aspects. The result was that the subordinate commanders did not understand their orders, did not know what their objectives were and within which time frame they had to be carried out.<sup>107</sup>

Another aspect of the chaotic execution by the IDF was that almost all brigade commanders were often absent from their units at crucial moments, while this always used to be a characteristic of the traditional Israeli leadership.<sup>108</sup> With the new C3 systems the commanders tried to follow the battle behind a screen in order to build up their situational awareness. There was a great reliance on technology but the C3 systems as well as other communications systems appeared to be erratic, which resulted in the situational awareness not always being real-time and complete. On 12 August the Lebanese government and Hezbollah agreed on the UN brokered cease-fire, which was to come into effect as of 14 August.

In order to gain control over the areas south of the Litani river the IDF carried out a number of air assault landings, which were immediately surrounded and attacked by Hezbollah fighters. The IDF units advancing on the Litani river, and in particular the reserve units, could not be supplied adequately in these last few days.<sup>109</sup> The Israeli government accepted the UN cease-fire that came into effect on 14 August at 08:00 hrs. The IDF refrained from offensive actions against Hezbollah targets, but still killed several Hezbollah fighters when they fired at IDF troops. On 15 August the IDF began its withdrawal of a part of its ground forces, pending the arrival of the Lebanese armed



forces and the UN troops. Both parties proclaimed themselves the victor, after which soon different accounts, objective or not, established themselves.

The conflict cost the lives of 119 IDF soldiers<sup>110</sup> and approximately 750 Hezbollah fighters.<sup>111</sup> Most of the latter were not regular Hezbollah fighters but villagers and sympathisers. In spite of the losses, many Hezbollah fighters survived the conflict and gained valuable combat experience. The IDF probably destroyed most of the facilities and supplies of Hezbollah in the first defence line and a large part in the second line, which, incidentally were means that could easily be replenished or replaced.<sup>112</sup> Of the around 500 Merkava II, III and IV tanks 6 were destroyed by mines and IEDs and just over 20 penetrated by the approximately 500 fired guided anti-tank missiles.<sup>113</sup> How many of those tanks were to be considered destroyed is not clear. Dozens of tanks and armoured vehicles were damaged and many were redeployed after repairs.

## Analysis

To what extent did both parties give substance to the basic principles laid down in the Dutch doctrine?

### *Morale*

Both parties were motivated before the conflict began. The turn-up of reservists in the IDF was high and there was a strong will to defeat Hezbollah. Discipline within the IDF ground forces, however, was poor and the troop commanders in various cases doubted the combat readiness and willingness of their units, in particular, that of the reservists. Contrary to what Hezbollah had expected, their continuous missile barrages had not eroded Israeli morale. Apart from that, most of the Israeli population kept supporting their IDF throughout the war. Morale in the IDF decreased because of the eroded professionalism, problems in command and control, the chaotic course of the actions, the abuse of the humanitarian war law by Hezbollah, but also because Hezbollah put up such a determined and well-organised fight. Public opinion had become very critical due to the disappointing results and the poor performance of the IDF.

The enormous motivation of Hezbollah manifested itself in frequent fighting to the death and in the support of the southern Lebanese population for Hezbollah. Morale was also boosted by the successful execution of many actions and an increasingly critical international public opinion towards Israel.



### *Security*

It is relatively easy to acquire many data on the IDF, as Israel is a largely transparent society. The ground operations of the IDF were mostly predictable, as is borne out by the elaborate study of the IDF by Hezbollah. The organisation had exploited IDF predictability to the maximum, which became apparent in the prediction of the Israeli intention to capture Bint Jbeil. The cautious manner of operating of the IDF, too, and the preparation for an action, which sometimes lasted for days, in full view of Hezbollah, contributed to this predictability. Hezbollah had taken several measures prior to and during the conflict, such as camouflage, spreading out, abuse of war law, encryption, secrecy, et cetera.

### *Concentration of means*

The IDF began the first three weeks with small-scale operations along the entire border; small actions with special forces and units at the battalion and later brigade levels. No centre of gravity was created in order to attack and neutralise the Katuyshas by invading southern Lebanon and occupying certain areas discriminately. The only actions deeper into Lebanon at that time were the ones near Bint Jbeil. The concentration in the narrow corridor, however, made the IDF units an easier target for Hezbollah, because of the ponderous advance, while Hezbollah could bring in reinforcements. The reserves that had been called up and would have made a concentrated attack possible were only committed at the last moment and had stood deployed idly along the border awaiting their orders. The IDF had at its disposal a large arsenal of fire power but could not exploit it effectively because Hezbollah abused the war law and because the IDF wanted to avoid collateral damage. Hezbollah had only concentrated small groups, temporarily and locally at most, for counter-attacks and ambushes, during which it also concentrated combined weapons systems. Other than that there was no concentration, as this was too risky due to discovery by the IDF, but also out of an inability of Hezbollah to command and control larger concentrations.

### *Effectiveness*

Inside the Israeli ground forces the objectives often were not clear; in fact, they were couched in vague doctrine terminology. Division 91 is a good example of subordinate commanders misunderstanding orders which were then poorly executed. This was also related with the caution of commanders with regard to incurring any losses, as a result of which the orientation on the assignment weakened. Hezbollah commanders had a clear mission: keep firing missiles, defend tenaciously, survive and inflict losses on the IDF.

### *Economy of effort*

During and towards the end of the conflict the IDF ground forces were mainly deployed on the high grounds in order to monitor the areas, but they did not control the surrounding terrain and the areas between their positions and the border. The special forces were mainly deployed strategically and hardly operationally or tactically, as a result of which no intelligence became available on those levels or no damage could be inflicted on Hezbollah. The IDF tank units were deployed incorrectly by having them negotiate the canalising terrain slowly, operate without infantry support and carry out convoy escorts. By not carrying out CAS with combat helicopters, the ground troops were denied an asset. The limited artillery support out of fear of fratricide and the bad command of fire support procedures, too, was a limiting factor for the combat power of IDF ground forces. Hezbollah grouped its means and fighters in such a way that they could be used to a maximum, as was the case with the anti-tank assets. With a few exceptions mortar fire was not concentrated, but only served as harassment, and minefields were hardly kept under observation.

### *Unity of effort*

Because of the unclear objectives and vague assignments the soldiers of the IDF did not have a clear goal. Hezbollah's force operation was clear: survive, keep pounding Israel and delaying the IDF and inflict as many losses as possible. All Hezbollah activities were geared to this objective.

### *Simplicity*

Controlling terrain and attaining objectives with precision weapons and raids did not lead to a simple deployment. Division 91 issued its orders according to the principles of the new doctrine, which created confusion rather than simplicity. Hezbollah had organised its defence relatively simply, with sectors in which units could operate autonomously. Because of the somewhat static defence and a limited freedom of movement the Hezbollah operations were not complex.

### *Flexibility*

The wish to limit the number of losses impaired the flexibility of the IDF, as certain risks were not taken. Calling up and deploying the reservists late reduced the IDF's flexibility to carry out different options. The new logistics system robbed the divisions and brigades of their own logistic units, which made them less flexible in their actions. The Israeli strategy of the gradual escalation gave Hezbollah the necessary flexibility and freedom of action to carry out its operations. In many situations Hezbollah fighters got the opportunity to retreat northwards, to fall back on new positions or to abscond from the conflict at the moment when a position became untenable. Yet, the Hezbollah posi-

tions were mainly static, which gave them little flexibility in their own actions, except for small reserves. The IAF superiority made it almost impossible for Hezbollah to operate with large groups of fighters or materiel. By abusing the war law, some of that inflexibility was compensated for.

#### *Initiative*

The IDF was very cautious in its manoeuvring and because of that missed opportunities for taking the initiative. The ground forces mostly had to respond to Hezbollah's actions, rather than the other way around. For the most part Hezbollah wrested the initiative away from the IDF, in spite of having set up a defence with many static strong points. Time and again, Hezbollah surprised the IDF with its ambushes and moments of opening fire.

#### *Offensive operations*

The IDF was on the offensive but did not act accordingly. It operated cautiously without any form of aggressiveness, not creating and maintaining any momentum. There were some offensive actions on a small scale, but without any specific objectives. Hezbollah had offensive actions carried out on a small scale and even counter-attacks, in spite of its conducting a static defence. Only after three weeks did the IDF launch a major offensive aimed at forcing some sort of decision.

#### *Surprise*

The IDF acted predictably and did not create any momentum in its attacks, which made surprise during the ground operations an illusion. The slow build-up, too, along the border and the careful preparations of various offensive actions did not enhance the element of surprise of the IDF. This allowed Hezbollah to impose its will on the IDF relatively simply and carry out surprise actions itself with ambushes and small raids. Moreover, supported by Syria and Iran, Hezbollah had some technological surprises in store, in the guise of very modern means of communication, electronic war assets, counter-measures and anti-tank weapons.<sup>114</sup> The budget cuts, also on investments and technological innovations, had caused the IDF to partially lose its technological advantage.

#### *Sustainability*

The new logistics system, an outcome of the budget costs, and the new doctrine had robbed the IDF forces of their own logistic units and buffer supplies, which was felt as a limitation to an independent action in southern Lebanon. As there was no front line with an own sector, the logistic supply from logistic centres was made difficult. In order to guarantee the logistics, tanks were withdrawn from the battlefield to protect the logistic movements. The mobilisation was late in coming, and, in addition, much equipment

was absent in the depots, the material was old and unsuitable and there were shortages of water and food. Hezbollah had the supplies of arms, ammunition, food and water to hold out for a month. There were central storage sites and civilian vehicles, protected under the humanitarian war law, distributed ammunition. The supply from Syria and Iran was mostly denied by blockades and the destruction of the Lebanese infrastructure. Should Israel have decided not to accept a cease-fire and continue its military operations, it is a question how long Hezbollah would have been able to go on with the fight.

Hezbollah had thought through almost all the basic principles better than the IDF, which is also admitted in Israeli military circles.<sup>115</sup> The question whether it was a 'mission impossible' for the IDF ground forces to defeat Hezbollah can be answered by a qualified 'yes'. Hezbollah had studied the IDF thoroughly and adjusted its operations accordingly. The IDF had developed a doctrine that was not geared to a possible showdown with Hezbollah. Israel had ignored Hezbollah's transformation from a guerrilla organisation into a hybrid one.

The IDF should not have underestimated Hezbollah and should have studied its opponent carefully. By adhering to the basic principles, the ground forces could have performed better. A combination of precision fire power, mechanised units (fire power, mobility, security and observation) and light units (in villages and difficult and mountainous terrain) offers possibilities of fighting an opponent like Hezbollah. The ground troops should conquer and occupy terrain in the classic way to deny the opponent freedom of movement. By isolating positions, supplying and reinforcing them becomes impossible, while a choice can be made to either take them out immediately or to attrit them. This manner of operating would have made it much more difficult for Hezbollah to prepare adequately.

## Notes

1. Major T. (Ted) Jansen BC is a ground operations doctrine lecturer at the Military Operational Arts and Sciences section of the Netherlands Defence Academy.
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  24. Exum (2006), p. 5.
  25. Erlich (2006), p. 27.
  26. Exum (2006), p. 7.
  27. Cordesman (2006), p. 38.
  28. Matthews (2008), p. 21.
  29. Bar-Joseph (2007), p. 595.
  30. Matthews (2008), p. 17.

31. Exum (2006), p. 10.
32. Cordesman (2006), p. 26, and Zagdanski (2007), p. 32, respectively.
33. Erlich (2006), p. 39.
34. Erlich (2006), p. 4.
35. Bar-Joseph (2007), p. 589.
36. Erlich (2006), pp. 7 and 88.
37. Matthews (2008), p. 19.
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