

**The coup attempt that started a war**  
Israel's invasion of Lebanon, its causes and consequences  
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As Israeli planes pound the Lebanese infrastructure to sunder, as the Palestinians spend their days and nights in inhumane conditions and under siege, as people in 20 Israeli towns sleep in bomb shelters, Israel threatened to widen the conflict by attacking Syria. According to Baztab.com, an Iranian online newspaper [1], the Israeli government has given Syria 72 hours to handover the two Israeli soldiers captured by Hezbollah or face the consequences. Iran already has declared that any attack on Syria will be considered an attack on the Muslim world (i.e. Iran and others). If Israel attacks Syria, Iran will enter the fray, which will bring in the US, which will involve Iraq and the Persian Gulf countries. In other words any attack on Syria may start a regional war that may engulf the whole region, sending the price of the crude oil to unimaginable levels. Is it possible that a small border skirmish turn into a regional war? The answer is yes.

The First World War started by Gavrilo Princip a Bosnian Serb who assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne. But as historians tell us now, the assassination was an excuse to start a war. The political/military situation was such that if the assassination hadn't occurred the opposing countries would have found another excuse to start the war. Similarly, the situation in the Middle East has been developing in such a way that even if Hamas hadn't captured the Israeli soldier, Israel would have invaded Gaza anyway.

This article deals with the reasons behind Israel's invasion of Gaza and Lebanon.

### **Fatah and coup d'etat**

Fatah or "Palestinian National Liberation Movement" is a major Palestinian political party and part of the PLO. Fatah was founded by Yasser Arafat and a few others in 1958. After many decades of hostility, on 13 September 1993, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo

Accords which called for the implementation of Palestinian self rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip over a five year period (i.e. self rule for Palestinians by 1998). In



1994, Arafat moved to the territories assigned to the Palestinian Authorities in Gaza and the West bank. Soon after in 1995, the Israeli Prime Minister Ytzhak Rabin was assassinated by a right wing Israeli radical opposed to the Oslo Accord. In 1996 Palestinians held their first election and Yasser Arafat was elected president of the PA, with an overwhelming 88.2 percent majority. Israelis had their own elections in 1996 and elected the right wing Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister of Israel. From then on the Oslo Accord was dead.

In 1996 the newly elected prime minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu commissioned a study group called "Study Group on a New Israeli Strategy Toward 2000" to craft a strategy for Israel in the coming decades. The Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies' which included Richard Perle, James Colbert, Charles Fairbanks, Douglas Feith, Robert Loewenberg, David Wurmser, and Meyrav Wurmser, created the Israel's strategy paper titled: "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm"[2] .



The paper contains six pages of recommendations for Benjamin Netanyahu and some of the more relevant suggestions are presented below:

- We have for four years pursued peace based on a New Middle East. We in Israel cannot play innocents abroad in a world that is not innocent. Peace depends on the character and behaviour of our foes. We live in a dangerous neighbourhood, with fragile states and bitter rivalries. Displaying moral ambivalence between the effort to build a Jewish state and the desire to annihilate it by trading "land for peace" will not secure "peace now." Our claim to the land —to which we have clung for hope for 2000 years--is legitimate and noble. It is not within our own power, no matter how much we concede, to make peace unilaterally. **Only the unconditional acceptance by Arabs of our rights, especially in their territorial dimension, "peace for peace," is a solid basis for the future.**
- Syria challenges Israel on Lebanese soil. An effective approach, and one with which American can sympathize, would be if Israel seized the strategic

initiative along its northern borders by engaging Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran, as the principal agents of aggression in Lebanon, including by:

- paralleling Syria's behaviour by establishing the precedent that Syrian territory is not immune to attacks emanating from Lebanon by Israeli proxy forces.
- striking Syrian military targets in Lebanon, and should that prove insufficient, striking at select targets in Syria proper.
  
- Work closely with Turkey and Jordan to contain, destabilize, and roll-back some of its most dangerous threats. This implies clean break from the slogan, "comprehensive peace" to a traditional concept of strategy based on balance of power.
  
- Change the nature of its relations with the Palestinians, including upholding the right of hot pursuit for self defence into all Palestinian areas and nurturing alternatives to Arafat's exclusive grip on Palestinian society.
  
- **Given the nature of the regime in Damascus, it is both natural and moral that Israel abandon the slogan "comprehensive peace" and move to contain Syria, drawing attention to its weapons of mass destruction program, and rejecting "land for peace" deals on the Golan Heights.**
  
- Israel can shape its strategic environment, in cooperation with Turkey and Jordan, by weakening, containing, and even rolling back Syria. This effort can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq — an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right — as a means of foiling Syria's regional ambitions. Jordan has challenged Syria's regional ambitions recently by suggesting the restoration of the Hashemites in Iraq. This has triggered a Jordanian-Syrian rivalry to which Assad has responded by stepping up efforts to destabilize the Hashemite Kingdom, including using infiltrations. Syria recently signalled that it and Iran might prefer a weak, but barely surviving Saddam, if only to undermine and humiliate Jordan in its efforts to remove Saddam.

The new Israeli strategy effectively killed all chances for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

According to the Oslo Accord the Palestinians were supposed to have complete possession of their territory by 1998. But by 2006, not only that had not happened but the territory that was promised to the Palestinians was getting smaller and smaller by the Israel's defence barrier (wall) and increase in the settlements' size. The strategy of Peace-for-Peace had taken a tremendous toll on the Palestinians. By 2006, the Palestinian economy was in ruin, Arafat was dead and a group of corrupt Fatah officials were running the territories.

Fatah, had dominated the legislature since early 1990s with only one election in 1996. During most of this time the Palestinian people had seen their living standard deteriorate. Years of negotiations with Israel had resulted in much pain and no gain. In the eyes of the people, the ruling Fatah had lost all credibility. The presidential election of 2005, where Mahmoud Abbas was running for president, showed just how little support Fatah had among the Palestinian people. The presidential election was a sham. Hamas and the East Jerusalem Palestinians boycotted the elections. Of the 1,120,000 registered voters only 775,142 voted. Of these 62% or 483,039 people "voted" for Mahmoud Abbas. Even with this low turn-out, Fatah had to resort to cheating in-order to win.

The Jewish Virtual Library reported that "Immediately after the election, 46 officials from the PA Central Election Committee resigned, confirming suspicions of voting irregularities and fraud. The Committee had come under pressure from Abbas' staff to extend the vote by an additional two hours and to allow non-registered voters to cast ballots to guarantee a larger turnout and improve Abbas' chance of a "landslide" victory. The day of the election, gunmen stormed the Committee offices to demand that Palestinians who were not registered be allowed to vote. The deputy chairman of the Committee, Ammar Dwaik, said he "was personally threatened and pressured" and confirmed that some voters were able to remove from their thumbs the ink that was supposed to prevent double voting". [3]

But Mahmoud Abbas was someone that both the US and Israel could work with. According to CNN, "the White House said President Bush called Abbas to congratulate him on his "strong victory" and invite him to Washington -- something he

refused to do for Arafat, who died in November. In the 10-minute phone call, Bush "recalled their previous visits very fondly," said White House press secretary Scott McClellan. Bush extended an open invitation to Abbas to visit Washington "when he felt it was a good time to come," and McClellan said the Palestinian leader "indicated he looked forward to coming back at some point." Bush never invited Arafat to Washington because he considered him an obstacle to peace. [4]

## **Hamas Victory**

During all this time the Israeli settlements continued to expand and the construction of the Israel's so called defence barrier (wall) was creating de facto new borders for the Palestinians. So by January 2006 (legislative elections) Palestinians were very frustrated with the Fatah and Mahmoud Abbas' government. This time Hamas participated in the elections and won by a large majority. Suddenly Fatah lost control of the Palestinian parliament and the premiership.



Immediately, Israel declared that it will have nothing to do with the new Palestinian government. A former Israeli diplomat, Zvi Mazel, explained Israel's strategy in dealing with the new government as such: "This victory means a drawback to the moderate forces in the Middle East ... especially Egypt and Jordan and a booster to the extremist front." That being the case, he said, now the Western world must not cave in. "The only response should be ... boycott, siege and pressure till they will have to go away," Mazel told a meeting of diplomats and journalists at the Institute for Contemporary Affairs in Jerusalem on Thursday. [5]

By February 2006, Americans, Israelis and part of Fatah were in agreement that Hamas led government; the democratically elected government of Palestinian Authority had to go. On 14 February Debka Files citing New York Times reported the following:

"The United States and Israel are working on ways to destabilize the Hamas-led Palestinian government, the New York Times reported Tuesday, Feb. 14. The plan is

said to center largely on money and on Mahmoud Abbas playing his part. The Palestinian Authority payroll amounts to \$100 m per month. Israel will withhold its regular \$50-55 million a month in collected revenues and place the money in escrow, creating a large cash deficit. The US and Europe will follow suit. In other words, the US, Europe and Israel propose to impose economic sanctions against the Palestinian Authority, even before putting them in place against Iran. This strategy is intended to starve the new PA of money for basics, such as food and medicines, and deny it international connections. Mahmoud Abbas will then be compelled by a Palestinian population, which The New York Times says will be unhappy with the new regime and disappointed in its expectation of a better life, to dissolve the new legislature and call a new election. The electorate will then return his Fatah to power.”[6]

US and the EU followed Israel in boycotting the Hamas led government. Since the Palestinian economy runs on aid, the economy came to a halt. The whole idea of a boycott was to force the government to resign, but it seemed that Hamas was not about to oblige. Hamas started asking Islamic countries for financial help, and received pledges from Iran, Syria and others. For Israel and US this was not good at all. The plans were put in motion to arm the Mahmoud Abbas’s Fatah in case it was necessary to remove Hamas by force.

According to various sources, including Guardian, Israel’s government supplied arms and ammunition to the 2 000-strong Force 17 presidential guards charged with protecting Abbas [7]. An Israeli government official justified the transfer of arms to an anti-Israel group (in the past Israel had labeled the Force 17 a terrorist group) on the grounds that the Israeli government wanted to strengthen the head of Fatah (and thereby the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades), Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, in the rivalry between Abbas's factions and Hamas. Similarly, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert explained that the arms shipment was meant to "bolster security forces loyal to Abbas amid an increasingly violent power struggle between the PA chairman's Fatah party and Hamas.”[8]

Meanwhile the various factions not associated with Hamas fired home made rockets at Israel. Israel started shelling the outskirts of Gaza.

In an interview for Democracy Now, Norman Finkelstein, Professor of Political Science at DePaul University in Chicago, compared the lethality of Israeli and Palestinian weapons: "Since Israel withdrew from Gaza in September 2005 'til today, the estimates run between 7,000 and 9,000 heavy artillery shells have been shot and fired into Gaza. On the Palestinian side, the estimates are approximately 1,000 Kassam missiles, crude missiles, have been fired into Israel. So we have a ratio of between seven and nine to one. Let's look at casualties. In the last six months, approximately 80 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza due to Israel artillery firing. Now, on the Israeli side, we hear all of these terrible things about these Kassams. Even Shlomo Ben-Ami, yesterday on your program, who I respect, he said what's Israel to do about these Kassams? What does the record show? I mentioned a moment ago, 80 Palestinians killed in six months. There have been exactly eight Israelis killed in the last five years from the Kassam missiles. Again, we have a huge disproportion, a huge discrepancy. Now, Josh says Israel has a responsibility to protect its citizens. I totally agree with that. But Hamas is the elected government of the Palestinians. They have a responsibility to protect their citizens. They have a responsibility to get back their 9,000 hostages. They have a responsibility to protect their Palestinian civilians, who are being daily attacked by Israel" [9].

To pressurise Hamas to react and give Israel an excuse for an invasion, Israel continued its attacks on those it claimed of belonging to terrorist organisations; and since Israel claimed Hamas to be a terrorist organisation, all its members were targets. On June 8, the Israeli army assassinated the recently appointed Palestinian head of the security forces of the Interior Ministry, Jamal Abu Samhadana, and three others. On June 13, an Israeli plane fired a missile into a busy Gaza City street, killing 11 people, including two children and two medics. On June 20, the Israeli army killed three Palestinian children and injured 15 others in Gaza with a missile attack. On June 21, the Israelis killed a 35-year old pregnant woman, her brother, and injured 11 others, including 6 children. Then came the Israeli capture of two Palestinians [10].

The next day (June 25) militants raided the Israeli army post at Kerem Shalom near Gaza and captured an Israeli soldier. They demanded the release of Palestinian women and children in Israeli jails in exchange for the Israeli soldier. Israel refused to

negotiate and responded with an overwhelming show of force, destroying bridges, electric power generators, and generally, heavily damaging the civilian infrastructure of Gaza. Later the army invaded Gaza and cut it into half.

Now the stage was set for a Palestinian coup. Already by July 7<sup>th</sup> the news media were reporting of the Israel's moves to remove Hamas by force. According to Israeli military analysts the move into Gaza and the arrest of Hamas legislators were the first step in an Israeli plan to induce the collapse of the Palestinian government. Among those arrested were eight members of Hamas' 23-member Cabinet and 20 of the 72 Hamas members of the 132-seat parliament [11].

A later report by Jerusalem Post confirmed the cooperation of Mahmoud Abbas with the Israelis in staging a coup. According to Jerusalem Post, on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> July, Mahmoud Abbas had called an emergency meeting of dozens of top Fatah officials to discuss the taking over of the government. The meeting was called in the wake of Israel's military strikes in the Gaza Strip and the massive crackdown on Hamas. Mahmoud Abbas, according to some of the participants, briefed them on the latest political and security developments and asked them to be prepared for taking over the power. "At the meeting, Abbas made it clear that Fatah would soon "resume its role as the defender of the Palestinian national interests" to fill the vacuum created by the Israeli crackdown on the Hamas government and its representatives. When Abbas talks about the "next phase," he is clearly referring to the post-Hamas era. He and his aides are certain that the time is ripe to overthrow the Hamas regime under the pretext that its presence in power is harmful to the Palestinians' national interests. With eight of its members imprisoned in Israel and the rest in hiding, the six-month-old Hamas government of Ismail Haniyeh has effectively been paralyzed" [12].

Seeing an imminent coup by Mahmoud Abbas and the Israeli army, Hamas asked its friend Hezbollah of Lebanon for help.

### **Hezbollah's helping hand**

In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon and captured Beirut. Hezbollah (in Arabic: Party of God) a Lebanese Islamist





group, was founded in the same year (1982) to fight the Israeli occupation. Over the years, Hezbollah has grown from a small group of fighters to a large and well organised political and military force. It has built and runs schools, hospitals and a well organised welfare system. It has currently a number of members in the Lebanese parliament.

Since its inception, Hezbollah has constantly claimed its support for the Palestinians and other Muslims. Whenever it has kidnapped an Israeli, it has always asked for a prisoner swap with Israel, and it always has included Palestinians and other Arab prisoners in its demand. For example, in October 2000 Hezbollah captured three Israeli soldiers in Shaba Farms, a disputed area on Lebanon's border with Syria's Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Later that month, the group captured an Israeli businessman and reserve army colonel Elhanan Tennenbaum. When in April 2002 Israel had surrounded 200 Palestinians, including about 30 armed men who had holed-up in Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity, Hezbollah offered to swap its prisoners for the people in the Church. Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah made the following offer:

"In view of the dangers surrounding the fate of the four brothers who are accused of killing the Zionist tourism minister and who are besieged in Ramallah as well as the fate of the brothers surrounded in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the failure of all efforts proposed to deal with those two cases, Hezbollah declares that it is ready to negotiate through any mediator possible to achieve the release of all those brothers and solve those two cases for good in return for whoever is agreed upon from the prisoners Hezbollah holds,"[13]

Another example of this prisoner swap is from 2004.

"At an Israeli Air Force base, the bodies of three soldiers killed on the Lebanese border were ceremonially repatriated. The bodies had been held for three years by Hezbollah (the Party of God), who also freed a rather shady Israeli businessman they had detained in Beirut. In return, the Sharon government released 429 prisoners, Palestinian, Lebanese and others, and returned to Lebanon the bodies of 60 Lebanese militants buried temporarily in Israel." [14]

As can be seen, the kidnappings and prisoner exchanges are fairly normal in the area; and it is not only Hezbollah that carry out kidnappings either. One of the prisoners that were exchanged in 2004 was a Mr. Dirani. Israeli forces burst into his home in Lebanon in 1994, kidnapped him and held him without charges for a decade [15]. This wasn't the first time and certainly, it will not be the last time that Israel engages in this kind of activities.

So when Hezbollah received the call for help from Hamas, it attacked and captured two Israeli soldiers. The idea behind this move was to relieve the pressure on Hamas. Here Israel saw its golden opportunity to once and for all get rid-of Hezbollah.

According to the Israel's strategy document, Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah and Iran (because of their support for the Palestinians) were identified as threats to Israel. It was believed, and is still believed, that by removing these supporters and under extreme economical pressure, the Palestinians will accept whatever Israel puts on the negotiating table. This Peace-for-Peace strategy basically means that if the opposite side is put under enough pressure, it will come asking for peace rather than negotiating for it, in other words unconditional surrender.

United States took care of Iraq. Iraq can never again (or at least in a foreseeable future) threaten Israel. United States has surrounded Iran and is trying very hard to, at the very least, impose comprehensive sanctions on it. Using the Hariri assassination, Syria has been forced out of Lebanon. And now it is the Hezbollah that has to be tackled. If and when these supporters of the Palestinians are neutralised, the Israelis think, the Palestinians will have no choice but to accept whatever is offered to them. This is supported by what the American and Israeli officials told Washington Post. On 16 July, Washington Post described the current Israeli offensive as part of a broader strategic move by US and Israel.

"Israel, with U.S. support, intends to resist calls for a cease-fire and continue a longer-term strategy of punishing Hezbollah, which is likely to include several weeks of precision bombing in Lebanon, according to senior Israeli and U.S. officials. **For Israel, the goal is to eliminate Hezbollah as a security threat -- or altogether**, the sources said. A senior Israeli official confirmed that Hezbollah leader Hasan

Nasrallah is a target, on the calculation that the Shiite movement would be far less dynamic without him. **For the United States, the broader goal is to strangle the axis of Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria and Iran, which the Bush administration believes is pooling resources to change the strategic playing field in the Middle East, U.S. officials say.** Whatever the outrage on the Arab streets, Washington believes **it has strong behind-the-scenes support among key Arab leaders** also nervous about the populist militants -- with a tacit agreement that the timing is right to strike." [16]

The strong key Arab support for the offensive has come in form of condemnation of Hezbollah by Saudi Arabia and Egypt. For example just after Israel started its bombardment of Lebanon, the Saudi Press Agency released a statement condemning Hezbollah. The Saudi press release stated: "viewing with deep concern the bloody, painful events currently taking place in Palestine and Lebanon, the Kingdom would like to clearly announce that a difference should be drawn between legitimate resistance and rash adventures carried out by elements inside the state and those behind them without consultation with the legitimate authority in their state and without consultation or coordination with Arab countries, thus creating a gravely dangerous situation exposing all Arab countries and its achievements to destruction with those countries having no say"[17] .

The problem for Saudi Arabia and others is that they would like the Palestinian problem to go away. They can not explain to their people, the nature of their relationship with United States and Israel. The Arab street that Washington Post mentions is extremely hostile to US and Israel. They are angry with the Palestinian situation, Iraq and Afghanistan. The problem here is that the United States thinks that these governments can keep the lid on the people's frustrations, and US may be correct. However, these frustrations tend to breed a new generation of fighters that will leave their countries to fight US elsewhere. United States, rather than deal with the real underlying cause of much of the problem in the Middle East – the Palestinian problem- focuses in helping Israel to achieve its strategic goal of Peace-for Peace. United States for obvious reasons has tied its credibility and national interest to Israel's, and it seems that nothing can persuade United States to act in any other way

than to further the Israel's interest. Now if this means reducing Iraq or Lebanon to rubble, so be it.

But the problem is that even if one destroys every building in Lebanon, Hezbollah will survive. No matter what the Fox news or New York Sun says, Hezbollah is not an artificial creation of Iran or Syria. Yes it has been helped by both countries, but it is an independent Lebanese entity with popular grass-root support among a large segment of the Lebanese population. Israel is trying to punish the Lebanese people to such an extent that they get rid-of Hezbollah. But this is not going to happen, as it failed to happen in Palestine.

Also today's Hezbollah is not the Hezbollah of 1992 or even 1998. Today Hezbollah has a very well trained and armed, military wing. It has demonstrated that it is capable of carrying-out complex military operations. It has a large arsenal of small arms, anti-tank weapons, Katyusha launchers, UAVs, short distance ground-to-ground and anti-ship missiles. It has already demonstrated that it is capable of hitting all of the Northern Israel. By all accounts it is capable of hitting as far south as Tel Aviv. Hezbollah's military wing is highly mobile and can regroup north of Lebanon and even take refuge in Syria.

For Israel -now that the war has started- to protect its northern towns, it has to go at least 30 kilometres or more into Southern Lebanon. If it doesn't go all the way to Beirut, it has to face a constant attack from Hezbollah fighters; and if it goes to Beirut it will face the Iraqi style insurgency. In other words, Israel's stay in Lebanon, by necessity, has to be short and bloody. Israel will destroy as much of the Lebanese infrastructure as it reasonably can, before accepting a ceasefire on the condition that Hezbollah does not fire on Israel. This is accomplished by accepting a UN force to be positioned in Southern Lebanon to monitor the border. In this way Israel can claim that it has taught a lesson to those who dared to challenge Israel's might. In the mean time it will try to finish Hamas and install Mahmoud Abbas' cronies in power; paving the way for acceptance of its eventual redrawing of Israel's new international borders. It can then declare that a just settlement has been reached and the Palestinian problem is over. Arab governments can then sigh in relief and get on with their business. But, it all rests on the assumptions that Hezbollah will accept an

international monitoring force in Southern Lebanon, and that Hamas is truly destroyed.

Hamas, like Hezbollah is a popular political and military force in Palestine. Israel can defeat the military wing, but short of permanent occupation, it can not force people to abandon Hamas. So even if Hamas is defeated, it will resurface under another name and pick-up where it left-off. By now Mahmoud Abbas has lost what little credibility he had. Palestinians read Haaretz and Jerusalem Post, and are aware of the cooperation of Fatah and the Israeli Army and the destruction that it has brought. They may tolerate Mahmoud Abbas for a while if Hamas stays in power, but accepting Mahmoud Abbas and co. alone in charge of the whole government, is not very likely.

### **The dangerous game**

So far we have assumed that Israel will not attack Syria.

Although highly unlikely, it is just possible that Israel may see this as its last chance to move before a new American President come along and put a stop to the whole thing. The NeoCons may also see this as their last chance to complete their plans for the Middle East. Israel will not attack Syria unless United States OK it first; and United States will only give its consent if it has plans to militarily engage Iran.



Any attack on Syria will automatically be considered by Iran as an attack on itself. Iran and Syria have a security pact and the Iranian President recently announced that any attack on Syria will be considered an attack on all the Muslim countries, i.e.

Iran. On Sunday 16<sup>th</sup>, Iran repeated the warning: Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi told the reporters that Iran was "standing by the Syrian people" and Israel would face "unimaginable losses" if it attacks Syria [18].



Iranians have for sometime been showing-off their military capabilities in various military manoeuvres; warning the US and Israel that it is capable of defending itself. For example in April Iran conducted a war game in the Persian Gulf, in which it displayed a number of what it called sophisticated, home-grown weapons — flying boats and missiles invisible to radar, torpedoes too fast to elude, etc. Shortly after,

the Western governments and experts dismissed these claims and questioned these weapons' capabilities.

Some of the armaments displayed were [19]:

- Fajr-3, that is claimed to be invisible to radar and able to strike several targets with multiple warheads.
- The Hoot, a high-speed torpedo, able to move at some 223 mph, up to four times faster than a normal torpedo, and fired by ships cloaked to radar.
- The Kowsar, a surface-to-sea missile, with remote-control and searching systems that cannot be scrambled.
- A "super-modern flying boat," undetectable by radar and able to launch missiles with precise targeting while skimming low over the surface of the water at a top speed of 100 nautical mph.

Iran only showed their latest products. What is surprising is the effectiveness of its older weapons. On July 17<sup>th</sup>, the Israel's state of the art warship, Saar-5 Class Destroyer, INS Spear was hit by a missile off the coast of Lebanon. Hezbollah claimed that it was one of their UAVs packed with explosives that had damaged the ship. But soon after, the Israeli Navy came out with the news that its ship was struck by an Iranian made/supplied anti-ship missile. Apparently Hezbollah doesn't want to show what it has in its arsenal until it is time to use it. But the interesting thing about this incident is that INS Spear is supposed to be the best the Israeli navy has to offer.

"The INS Spear is one of three Saar-5 Class warships, which is larger than a corvette and is one the most advanced warships in Israel's naval arsenal. They were built in Pascagoula, Mississippi, by Northrop-Grumman shipyards, using U.S. military aid funds. The INS Spear entered operational service in 1995. The defence suit of the Saar-5 destroyers is made in its entirety by Israel defence industries. Each vessel displaces approximately 1,300 tons, has a crew of 64, and is capable of independent operations for about 20 days without re-supply. The ships are capable of carrying up to two helicopters, in addition to intelligence and air force personnel." [20]

This particular anti-ship missile was apparently a C-801 (or Kowsar) missile capable of penetrating the most sophisticated electronic counter measure that Israel had to offer. This raises the following question: if Hezbollah (with or without Iranian help) can hit the most modern Israeli destroyer; can't the Iranians do even better in the Persian Gulf and damage the US navy there? This question is going to occupy the minds of war planners in Pentagon and Jerusalem for some time to come. Iranian missiles can cover all of Israel either from Iran or from Syria. The Syrians have also an ample supply of missiles that can reach every part of Israel.

This time, if the hostilities start, one can rest assured that all major parts of Israel will come under fire. This will bring in the US which will force the Iranians to attack US navy in the Persian Gulf and its bases in the Persian Gulf countries. Iranians also have large number of Revolutionary guards close to Iraq which can move-in to attack the American and British armies directly, bringing even more chaos and suffering to Iraq. Occupying Iran will not be easy. It will require at least a million men. The Iranians already have made preparation for such an event by decentralising their command and control. They have also been training both the Revolutionary Guards and the Baseej (home guard) for asymmetric warfare. The Iranian Navy has been training in Swarm tactics, using thousands of fast small boats equipped with anti-ship missiles and other weapons for attacking US navy. Whatever the nature of the war, anything short of a nuclear strike on Iran will result in a prolonged and costly war for the US.

One can only guess about the cost of oil in such a situation, but it would not be an exaggeration to mention \$150 to \$200 per barrel. This would plunge the world economy into a depression. It will also bring in China, Russia and EU into the picture. China and EU will not accept paying for Israeli-American misadventure in the Middle East. So far, the American invasion of Iraq has cost the Europeans Billions of dollars. The oil prices that were supposed to be around \$30 to \$35 cost them nearly \$75 dollars a barrel. Add the cost of lost export earnings and soon it adds-up to a lot of money.

That is why it is highly unlikely for Israel to hit Syria. But considering the coming elections in US, the Neocons power and their unqualified support for Israel, and Israel's strategy of Peace-for-Peace, anything is possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Baztab.com, "[Israel's Ultimatom to Syria](#)", 15 July 2006

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<sup>17</sup> Saudi Press Agency, "[OFFICIAL SOURCE MAKES STATEMENT](#)", July 13, 2006

<sup>18</sup> People's Daily Online, "[Iran warns Israel against attacking Syria](#)", July 16, 2006

<sup>19</sup> The Seattle Times, "[Doubts over Iran's sabre-rattling](#)", April 5, 2006

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