

Stopping the Fire, Ignoring the Smoke: a look at the effectiveness of conflict management in the 2006 Lebanese War

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INTRODUCTION

The case of the 2006 Lebanon War illustrates the complexities of modern interstate conflict and the difficulty of forming productive cease-fire agreements in the inter-connected 21st century. The month-long conflict in South Lebanon between Israeli and Hezbollah forces were particularly complex due to the fact that Hezbollah is a non-state actor; instead of being simply bilateral, the conflict absorbed the interests of the Lebanese government, the United Nations, and numerous outside states in addition to the main parties. An analysis of the conflict provides numerous insights into the potential success of cease-fire agreements, and raises an equal number of questions regarding the feasibility of truly successful conflict management in the current sociopolitical climate of the Middle East. In this essay, I will argue that the UN Resolution 1701 that prompted the cease-fire only provided superficial relief. Tensions in the area are still high, and related conflict has broken out in the region. As such, I believe the main lesson of this conflict (which has multiple related factors) is that the greater political climate of a region should be taken into account when crafting a peace agreement in order to preserve a lasting peace. In terms of policy, I encourage the United States both to strive to eliminate bias from its identity as a peacekeeper in the Middle East, and to actively help facilitate peace talks between political leaders and leaders minority groups in the region. Only by taking these steps can the resolution of such conflicts be fully successful.

BACKGROUND

I. History of the Conflict

Tension in Israel and Lebanon has been salient for several decades due to persistent religious and ethnic disputes. Hezbollah, a Shi'a Muslim militant group considered radical by many, was founded in the early 1980's in Lebanon in order to create a forum for underrepresented Shi'a population. The 1982 Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon targeted and specifically oppressed this group, prompting the creation and apparent legitimization of the Hezbollah guerilla warfare organization. The Lebanese government attempted to quell discontent within the ethnically and religiously heterogeneous country with the 1989 Taif Agreement, which provided for a system of equal power sharing between the Christian President and Sunni Muslim Prime Minister. However, this simply intensified the alienation of the Shia Muslim population. Their goals, as outlined by their leader, are "the elimination of the influence of any imperialist power" in Lebanon, Israel's "obliteration from existence and the liberation of venerable Jerusalem," and the establishment of an Islamic regime in Lebanon.¹ As Hezbollah has accumulated resources and power, its influence has expanded throughout nearby countries. Their political and religious ideals, being categorically opposed to Israel's, have created extensive tension and numerous skirmishes along the Israeli-Lebanon border. Despite the fact that the Lebanese government does not officially support Hezbollah, they cannot do anything to prevent its actions because Hezbollah has grown larger and more powerful than the Lebanese Armed Forces. When the war between Israeli and Hezbollah forces broke out in the summer of 2006, it was the Lebanese government, infrastructure, and civilians that suffered the consequences.

II. Details of the Conflict

¹ Johnson, David E. *Hard Fighting: Israel in Lebanon and Gaza*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2011. Print. p. 11.

When Hezbollah forces attacked an Israeli border town on July 12, 2006, they killed eight Israeli soldiers and took two captive. This prompted Israel's unrelenting airstrikes on Lebanon, which mostly targeted civilians and infrastructure.² Despite the conflict only lasting a month, the civilian death toll was high and the damage severe. Thirty-nine Israeli civilians were killed, and 16,000 buildings in Northern Israel sustained damage.³ The Lebanese government reports that 1,183 Lebanese civilians were killed and 4,054 were left wounded, while 262,174 civilians were permanently displaced, and 1,000,000 (or, a quarter of the population of Lebanon) were temporarily displaced.⁴ In addition to the civilian deaths, the damage to housing units, schools, bridges, and commercial enterprises was estimated to cost Lebanon \$3.6 billion.⁵ Said damage led to immense international pressure for a ceasefire. Said Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, "while Israel has stated its military objective is to hit Hezbollah's infrastructure and physical strength, it has, in the words of the Lebanese Prime Minister, torn the country to shreds."⁶ The unprecedented scope of the conflict spurred a divisive international debate. Because the United States has political interests in Israel, and the Bush administration was wary of militant Islamic groups in the aftermath of September 11, US leaders prompted a general Western condemnation of Hezbollah's actions. In some ways, this reality prevented an earlier cessation of conflict: Cathy Sultan reports that "On July 14 Lebanon asked for an emergency meeting at the UN Security Council to discuss the possibility of a UN-mandated comprehensive cease-fire and the lifting of the Israeli air and sea blockades of Lebanon. US Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton refused to urge restraint from

² Rubin, Barry M. *Conflict and Insurgency in the Contemporary Middle East*. London: Routledge, 2009. Print. 145.

³ Sultan, Cathy. *Tragedy in South Lebanon: The Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006*. Minneapolis: Scarletta, 2008. *Ebrary.com*. Web. 12 Dec. 2013. 46.

⁴ Al-Harithy, Howayda. *Lessons in Post-war Reconstruction: Case Studies from Lebanon in the Aftermath of the 2006 War*. London: Routledge, 2010. Print. 3.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Crisis in the Middle East." CNN Live Today. 20 July 2006. Web. 13 December 2013. Transcript.

Israel and instead blamed Syria and Iran for the current crisis.”⁷ Conversely, many predominantly Muslim countries demonstrated their support for Hezbollah in the face of Israeli hostility. Says scholar Uzi Rabi, “a Hezbollah victory, even a partial victory, would have served as a source of inspiration.”⁸

III. End of the Conflict

Whether or not Hezbollah actually achieved this victory is a source of debate. Ultimately, after much international discussion, the United Nations Security Council drafted Resolution 1701, which went into effect August 11, 2006 and provided for a ceasefire. In addition, it included provisions for the withdrawal of Israeli forces and the disarmament of Hezbollah. In many ways this agreement was in Israel’s favor: it “changed the situation in southern Lebanon to Israel’s advantage, in that it ended the de facto Hizballah domination of the southern border area which had pertained since the unilateral Israeli withdrawal in 2001.”⁹ However, because Hezbollah managed to prevent Israel from achieving an explicit victory, its supporters largely viewed the conflict as a partial victory. Essentially, the conflict’s conclusion was relatively uncertain and tenuous, which can be largely attributed to the peacekeeping itself.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

I. Technique

The UN Resolution 1701 providing for a cease-fire is an example of UN peacekeeping. Although both the international community and Lebanon’s own government were pushing for a cease-fire for the conflict’s duration, disagreements among UN actors about the specifics of the resolution delayed its

⁷ Sultan, Cathy. *Tragedy in South Lebanon: The Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006*. Minneapolis: Scarletta, 2008. *Ebrary.com*. Web. 12 Dec. 2013. 35.

⁸ Rabi, Uzi. *International Intervention in Local Conflicts: Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution since the Cold War*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2010. Print. 194.

⁹ Rubin, Barry M. *Conflict and Insurgency in the Contemporary Middle East*. London: Routledge, 2009. Print. 149.

creation. When the resolution was finally drafted August 12, 2006, it was relatively promptly signed by both of the warring parties. Ultimately, the cease-fire, as mentioned above, provided for the cessation of violence and disarmament of Hezbollah, but had very few other provisions for the futures of the two parties. A small UNIFIL force was stationed in Southern Lebanon in order to monitor the fragile peace there, but no one was put in place to specifically guarantee the full and successful disarmament of Hezbollah. Considering the state of the violence and urgency of the agreement, the small scale of Resolution 1701 was understandable, but ultimately problematic.

II. Analysis of Technique

According to Virginia Page Fortna, “For reciprocity and deterrence to work, several things must be true; the cost of reinitiating conflict must outweigh the incentives to attack; it must be easy to distinguish compliance from noncompliance; both sides must be reassured about each other’s intentions, especially if there is a military advantage to striking first; and accidents must be prevented from triggering another war.”¹⁰ The presence of UNIFIL acted almost as a police force because they ensured a level of transparency: the fear of the UN potentially working to impose international costs likely discouraged either side from obviously reinitiating conflict. In addition, the UNIFIL forces on the ground mitigated accidental border skirmishes, preventing another full-scale conflict. However, according to Fortna’s definition of a successful agreement, Resolution 1701 is otherwise problematic. Evidence of compliance and noncompliance, in the case of Hezbollah’s disarmament, clearly were not particularly obvious. The disarmament aspect of the agreement was largely ignored; while the Israeli-Lebanon border has remained relatively peaceful, Hezbollah has managed to rearm with help from Syria’s exportation of weaponry. In addition, there was virtually no discussion between the two sides, making

¹⁰ Fortna, Virginia Page. “Scraps of Paper? Agreements and the Durability of Peace.” *International Organization* 57.02 (2003): 337-72. Print.

mutual “reassurance about each other’s intentions” unrealistic. Today, Hezbollah is stronger and more regionally influential than ever, and the peace with Israel is quite fragile.

III. Two Definitions of Success

In this case, conflict management success can be understood in two contexts. Most obviously, did local violence end? Was this end immediate and has the cease-fire hold? In this respect, the agreement was indeed relatively successful. The situation on the border has remained moderately peaceful, largely due to the stationing of UNFIL forces. According to a 2006 U.S. Senate report, “The local population has largely welcomed the LAF and UNIFIL, viewing them as a stabilizing force.”¹¹ However, the peace is fragile, and remains dependent on the cooperation and acquiescence of Hezbollah.¹² Overall, though, the violence has largely ceased in the years since the war. The second definition of success is more complicated: have tensions between the two parties diminished? Has the peace agreement endured? Have both parties held up their respective sides of the peace bargain? In this respect, the 2006 Lebanon War and ultimate peace agreement has had more problematic and tenuous results.

IV. Analysis of Success

The failed endurance of the agreement is due mainly to two factors. The first is one endemic to international conflict management in the Middle East as a whole. The ethnic and religious tensions in the Middle East, particularly as related to Israel, have led to bias. Edward Newman, Roland Paris, and Oliver Richmond, in their analysis of peace building tactics, point out that “By labeling Hezbollah a terrorist organization, Washington has also refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of Shi’a demands for a fairer

¹¹ S. Rep. No. 109-109-74 at 1-6 (2006). Print. Lebanon: Assessing the cease-fire and progress on stabilization and reconstruction. 2.

¹² Ibid. 1.

share in the Lebanese political system.”¹³ This refusal simply feeds Hezbollah’s feeling of alienation, particularly in a post-Taif Lebanese political order. The cease-fire fueled Hezbollah resentment even further because the agreement “implicitly named Hezbollah as the aggressor” and did not mention the differentiation in the scale of violence or name Israel as responsible for the immense damage to Lebanon’s infrastructure and civilians.¹⁴ This clear international bias served to alienate the militant minority group even further, which helped in garnering support from other regional allies, most notably Syria. The international communities unwillingness to recognize Hezbollah demands as legitimate have meant that the engagement with extremist groups has simply led to increased power for those factions. Ultimately, the conflict’s “resolution” simply prompted Hezbollah to grow, and “has served only to transform the Shi’a’s communal sense of identity from emblem to armor.”¹⁵

The second issue is closely related to the first. Basically, it comes down to a simple commitment problem. The UN did not enforce the terms of Hezbollah’s disarmament, which led in turn to Hezbollah’s ignoring these instructions. The Lebanese government has lacked the authority or means to forcibly disarm Hezbollah, and has not seen much international support in pursuing this goal.¹⁶ Syria has continued to send arms shipments while international community stands idly by. The UN Resolution 1701 simply did not go far enough; Hezbollah has been openly receiving aid from Syria for years, but the Resolution did not provide for the deployment of forces to the Syrian border to prevent this support.¹⁷

¹³ Newman, Edward, Roland Paris, and Oliver P. Richmond. *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*. Tokyo: United Nations UP, 2009. *Ebrary.com*. Web. 12 Dec. 2013. 306.

¹⁴ Sultan, Cathy. *Tragedy in South Lebanon: The Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006*. Minneapolis: Scarletta, 2008. *Ebrary.com*. Web. 12 Dec. 2013. 46.

¹⁵ Newman, Edward, Roland Paris, and Oliver P. Richmond. *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*. Tokyo: United Nations UP, 2009. *Ebrary.com*. Web. 12 Dec. 2013. 306.

¹⁶ S. Rep. No. 109-109-74 at 1-6 (2006). Print. Lebanon: Assessing the cease-fire and progress on stabilization and reconstruction. 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 2.

And, due to the above issue of international bias, Hezbollah has been more motivated than ever to expand and seek regional support. Tensions between Israel and Hezbollah are still high and conflict has broken out in other parts of the region where Hezbollah has other factions. In Michael Doyle's lecture on the productivity of peace building, he specifically discussed the UN's ability to successfully carry out a peace agreement, and concludes that multilateralism is a crucial component of "its success in fostering self-sustaining peace."¹⁸ The relatively unilateral nature of the UN's solution for this conflict has been its largest impediment. Essentially, UN Resolution 1701 managed to relatively successfully halt the immediate violence, but failed to take the greater Middle Eastern political climate into account.

LOOKING FORWARD

I. Policy Recommendation for the Future

My policy recommendations for the United States are two-fold. Firstly, it is important to point out that the Western insistence upon supporting Israel, seemingly regardless of the situation, has proven problematic. This is not to say the US should not have allies; the end of the US political relationship with Israel is not likely, feasible, or recommended. However, in situations such as the 2006 Lebanon War, the blatant support for Israel by the US has damaged the US relationship with the supporters of Hezbollah. As a peacekeeper, the US should strive to act in a relatively unbiased manner. If the US were to help facilitate peace talks in the region, this gesture would diffuse Shi'a anger toward Israel and many Western powers, and hopefully set in motion a resolution for lasting peace.¹⁹ Regarding peacekeeping, Fortna says, "Ongoing negotiations and dispute resolution procedures can alleviate [the danger of

¹⁸ Doyle, Michael W. "John W. Holmes Lecture: Building Peace." ACUNS Annual Meeting. Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. 9 June 2006. Lecture.

¹⁹ S. Rep. No. 109-109-74 at 1-6 (2006). Print. Lebanon: Assessing the cease-fire and progress on stabilization and reconstruction. 6.

renewed violence] by preventing misunderstandings and providing a forum for resolving differences before a spiral of retaliation is triggered.”²⁰ Though this recommendation could apply simply within the narrow parameters of the month-long Lebanon War, in order to create genuinely peaceful relations this transparent communication is crucial among all militant parties in the region. It is advisable that the US attempt to cultivate a reputation of diplomatic fairness both for its own position as a world leader, and for its specific political situation in the Middle East.

In addition, it is crucial for the US to assist the Lebanese government in reforming the Lebanese political system and the Taif Agreement. Evidently, dividing political power between the Christian population and the Sunni Muslim population is no longer working. The Shi’a population’s grievances need a forum other than the Hezbollah forces, and until the government is reformed, this will not be a reality. The US and the rest of the UN Security Council need to help facilitate Lebanon’s political transition. As of now, the Lebanese government has attempted to remove itself from Hezbollah’s operations, limiting funds and compensation.²¹ This action has even further alienated the supporters of Hezbollah. The Lebanese government, in order to mitigate future conflict, needs to take steps to create a political system that accurately represents its ethnic and religious heterogeneity. If the US wants to preserve its influence in the region, it has a duty to assist Lebanon with this task.

II. Three Lessons Learned

The course of the 2006 Lebanon War should teach the international community three main lessons. First of all, the tools to avoid commitment problems should be written into peace agreements.

²⁰ Fortna, Virginia Page. “Scraps of Paper? Agreements and the Durability of Peace.” *International Organization* 57.02 (2003): 337-72. Print.

²¹ Al-Harithy, Howayda. *Lessons in Post-war Reconstruction: Case Studies from Lebanon in the Aftermath of the 2006 War*. London: Routledge, 2010. Print. 8.

The UN Resolution 1701 should have provided for the prolonged stationing of troops throughout the country (and specifically along the Syrian border) and outlined specific tactics for those troops to supervise disarmament of Hezbollah. These steps could have ensured compliance with the agreement. In addition, the potential divisiveness of a conflict should not impact the peacekeeping capabilities of the international community. States within the UN will inevitably have political opinions on a conflict, but the UN should strive for neutral peacekeeping. In the case of the 2006 Lebanon War, the political disagreement disrupted the Lebanese government's ability to get assistance with facilitating a peace agreement. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the greater political climate of a region should be taken into account when crafting a peace agreement in order to preserve a lasting peace. This particular conflict ended in a superficial cessation of conflict, but the cessation fueled further expansion of Hezbollah's power, and increased Shi'a Muslim unrest in the greater Middle East. For future reference, contextualizing specific cases of violence is crucial for the implementation of an enduring peace.

CONCLUSION

While the cease-fire halted the physical violence between Israel and Hezbollah, the socio-political situation remains remarkably fragile, and future violence seems inevitable. In order for a cease-fire to be fully successful, it needs to account for the mitigation of the conflict's underlying issues. The UN Resolution 1701 did not do so, and therein lays its greatest fault. Without dramatic diplomatic measures, it is unlikely any peace agreement will successfully end the conflict. In the case of Israeli-Lebanon relations, the wounds are deep and the resentment profound. Managing, via the policy recommendations discussed above, to create a forum for militant groups to negotiate is a crucial jumping-off point for said ethnic and religious disagreements. In addition, while sometimes a biased

peacekeeper can be beneficial, in this situation the Western bias towards Israel has simply fed Hezbollah's desire for rebellion and inevitably limited the staying power of any peace agreement. Newman, Paris, and Richmond accurately analyzed the situation in saying "If stability is a yardstick for success, then Western intervention in Lebanese politics is clearly a failure."²² Ultimately, the conflict management tactics for the 2006 Lebanon War were simply Band-Aids for bullet wounds.

²²Newman, Edward, Roland Paris, and Oliver P. Richmond. *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*. Tokyo: United Nations UP, 2009. *Ebrary.com*. Web. 12 Dec. 2013.

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