I left Israel a week ago after spending 11 days in the North West of the country, a few miles from the Mediterranean to the west and a few miles from Lebanon to the north. I heard the thunder of explosions by Hizballah (HA) on one side and by Israel's Defense Forces (IDF) on the other. I heard air raid sirens in my village during the day and during the night and warnings for people to stay indoors or in shelters. I listened to workers unable to go to work. I watched children play in the streets as they count the number of explosions that pollute the atmosphere. I heard children repeat news of casualties and sites hit, especially inside Israel. I also listened to their parents compare notes of the reported events and the contradictions between Israel's reporting and that of al-Jazeera TV. Many were concerned for relatives and friends in Acre, Haifa, Nazareth, and neighboring villages. Others worried about relatives in Lebanon with whom they had lost all contact because of the destruction of the communication systems. I visited the Nahariya hospital, which seemed deserted during visiting hours, while large sections had been kept ready for war casualties. Many patients had been released early while others had been relocated in the shelters of the hospital. The atmosphere was telling: people were afraid, in part because the HA missiles do kill, and because those missiles seemed poorly aimed and could hit villages and
towns at random. My contacts were primarily with Israeli Arabs, mostly Christians (by default because of my family background), who are fairly well educated, informed, and willing to share their views with me. Here are my impressions:

1. There seems to be little support for Sheikh Nasrallah or HA, mainly because they promote the banner of Islam rather than fight in the name of nationalism or the homeland.

2. Few commentators expected HA to realize any victories, given its limited resources and dependence on outsiders especially for weapons and advanced technology. Hence, they consider HA’s actions as mostly harassment and a source of fear for individuals, rather than a serious threat to the security of the state of Israel.

3. There was a common expression of opposition to HA’s usurpation of power in Lebanon, at the expense of the Lebanese government and the people at large.

4. The people I met considered themselves loyal citizens of Israel. They held government jobs and some have served in the IDR voluntarily (Arabs are not subject to the draft), and they appreciate the quality of life and social services they enjoy.

5. Even so there was an overall criticism of the IDF’s tactics and actions, not only in Lebanon, but also in Gaza and the West Bank. For example, they were critical of the IDF sounding sonic booms in Gaza for hours during the night to deprive people of sleep. They objected to
collective punishment of the Palestinian people by depriving them of energy, water, and other essentials for living. They also question the justification of collateral casualties and doubt that the IDF do actually try to avoid such casualties.

6. The criticism is more evident now that the IDF is destroying utilities in Lebanon, showing little concern for the suffering of the innocent, and causing major dislocation of Lebanese citizens—almost one sixth of the Lebanese population has been dislocated within ten days, which is reminiscent of the forced emigration of Palestinians in 1948/9, resulting in the Palestinian refugee tragedy.

7. Unfortunately few among the people I communicated with seemed optimistic regarding peace and stability in the region in the foreseeable future. A common theme in that regard is that peace and stability will prevail only when the United States becomes more serious about fairness and justice in dealing with the Arab Israeli conflict. One six year old boy wanted me to explain why the United States helps Israel and gives it the planes that were flying over to hit Lebanon!

Reflecting on these impressions, I have come to think of Israel's policy toward Hamas, HA, and the Palestinian Authority (PA) in general as one guided by fear, arrogance, and misjudgment. While Israel may be strong militarily, it has been unable to protect its citizens against Hamas, HA, and other
**jihadist** groups. Hence the Israeli people feel vulnerable and afraid of being hit. Fear is a personal subjective feeling and no state power can relieve it in the face of suicide bombing, or wayward missiles coming in their direction. Therefore when the Israeli authorities speak of security, it is not only security for the state, but also security and peace of mind of the people as individuals.

Unfortunately Israel’s policies are incapable of defending against this fear, especially because they seem to be guided by arrogance, rather than by realism. Israel seems to believe it can do anything it wants in the Middle East. It can grab Palestinian land, uproot Palestinian trees, demolish Palestinian homes, and strangle the Palestinian economy even before it is born unhindered by international resistance in the region or elsewhere. The same kind of arrogance is being displayed in the continuing attacks on Lebanon, not only on HA, but on all the people of Lebanon. Luckily for Israel, the Arab countries seem helpless or indifferent, while the United States is in full concert with Israel’s actions in Lebanon.

However, fear and arrogance have overshadowed Israel’s misjudgment in both the policy of not talking to Hamas and HA, and in using excessive force against its neighbors. For instance, all of Israel power and excessive use of force have not brought security or peace any closer to its people. Such use of force may have added a few square miles of land to Israel’s domain; it may have weakened the Palestinians; but it has not realized security or peace for its people. The only periods of relative security and
peaceful coexistence have come when the Israelis and the Palestinians negotiated and reached some form of agreement—and when Israel withdrew from Lebanon and exchanged prisoners with HA.

Another misjudgment is for Israel to think that force can destroy a movement like Hamas and HA, because they are also ideas, convictions, or doctrines, just like the idea of Zionism, that cannot be destroyed by jet fighters, bombs, or bulldozers. They cannot be silenced by sonic booms, power blackouts, or by assassination of their leaders. The Muslim Brotherhood has been subjected to severe measures in Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia for decades. Yet it survives and in some areas it flourishes. The best way to deal with such ideas, and movements, is through realism and promotion of alternative ideas and movements that would weaken them from within their own environment.

Realism dictates that Israel should remember that it is an occupier of Arab land, and no one wants to live under occupation. Israel has not been a benevolent or humane occupier, and therefore, it has little political capital to use in paving the way for security and peace with the Palestinians, or with Hamas and HA. On the contrary it has been a cruel and heartless occupier as the destruction and poverty inflicted on the Palestinians and now on Lebanon demonstrate. Such cruelty is a major incubator of opposing doctrines such as those of Hamas and HA.

Realism also dictates some recognition of the position of the other party to the conflict, as the members of that party see
it, not only as Israeli policy makers assume it is. To appreciate the position of the other party it is necessary to have direct contact and negotiate with the opponents. Israel tends to insist on vanquishing its opponents, not develop a live and let live approach to deal with them.

Realism, furthermore, dictates that a give and take approach is more viable in dealing with an opponent that is unlikely to vanish, the mighty power of the IDF notwithstanding. For instance, Israel can make a lot of difference in its relations with its neighbors if it were to declare its explicit intention to withdraw from all Arab lands occupied in the 1967 war, as demanded by UN Resolution 242. Israel would make a difference if it were to facilitate and encourage economic recovery in the West Bank and Gaza, rather than destroy all utilities and economic institutions at the least (often fabricated) provocation, as it has done and continues to do in the West Bank and Gaza, and now in Lebanon.

Finally, realism suggests recognition that the PA, including the Hamas government, has little left to offer Israel, except probably total surrender, which is unlikely to happen. Israel would enhance peace and security by being less greedy for Arab land, less arrogant in dealing with its neighbors, and more rational in its judgments and policy making. There is little doubt that the majority of the Palestinians, and I think the majority of the Israelis, crave for a peaceful and just settlement of their conflict, if only the door were open and the road less crowded.
with hurdles that, in the present circumstance, only Israel can remove.

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