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Terrorism in the 21st Century: Are There Lessons To Be Learned from the Israeli Withdrawal from Southern Lebanon?

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Abstract. This article analyzes the recent Israeli military withdrawal from southern Lebanon in the context of the efficacy of terrorism in the 21st century.

Many Israelis would claim that Hezbollah is and has been a political group, a political group dedicated to driving Israel out of Southern Lebanon, and a political group that has employed terrorism to drive Israel out. Many Israelis would go further and claim that Hezbollah is also dedicated to destroying the Israeli state by any means necessary--including terrorism. Thus, Hezbollah may still remain a terrorist threat to the Israeli people.

One aspect of worrying about future terrorism is whether past terrorism has been successful. So, has it in the case of Hezbollah terrorism targeting Israel? An easy answer is yes it has. Hezbollah publicly declared that it would continue its attacks against Israel until the latter withdrew from southern Lebanon. And the latter did withdraw.

From Hezbollah's publicly stated viewpoint, the attacks induced the withdrawal. And the Hezbollah rank and file, leadership, and state and non-state sponsors may believe in this public view. But there is another view point. Many foreign policy experts claim that the Israeli government withdrew because it finally arrived at the realization that occupying southern Lebanon was no longer in its interests--as defined by some combination of strategic, ethical/moral, and domestic political considerations. To this viewpoint, Hezbollah terrorist acts were irrelevant, redundant, and even self-defeating to the goal of Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

Although splitting the difference often yields muddled or simplistic assessments, clarity and complexity seem to apply to splitting differences in the case at hand. Specifically, another viewpoint is that Hezbollah unwittingly helped Israel reach the correct viewpoint that occupation was not in Israeli interests. Certainly, one can posit that the Israeli occupation could easily be construed as incompatible with Israeli professed ethical and moral interests, as divisive in its domestic politics, and of questionable strategic benefit--militarily, economically, socioculturally, and so on. Yet a decision for occupation had been made and once made and effected took on a life of its own and significant resistance and inertia to moving from some status quo. Given that Hezbollah terrorism induced an ending to the occupation policy, one can assert that terrorism achieved a political objective that was positive for the target and perpetrator. (The positive in the latter case seems to comprise the political clout that Hezbollah now may have in Lebanon, even as the withdrawal leaves some tactical and strategic difficulties for leaders in Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and, yes, of Hezbollah.)

The lesson learned for other enemies of Israel may, then, be a bittersweet one. Yes, terrorism can achieve a political objective, a change in behavior of an adversary. But one must be careful about what one desires, because a terrorist success may concurrently beget a terrorist failure. (See Byman, D. (1998). The logic of ethnic terrorism. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 21, 149-169; Hutchinson, M.C. (1972). The concept of revolutionary terrorism. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 16, 383-396; Merari, A., &

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Friedland, N. (1985). Social psychological aspects of political terrorism. *Applied Social Psychology Annual*, 6, 185-205; Saper, B. (1988). On learning terrorism. *Terrorism*, 11, 13-27; Telhami, S. (May 30, 2000). Does terrorism work? *The New York Times*, p. A27.) (Keywords: Hezbollah, Israel, Terrorism.)