

Israel's next war

by Cal_Thomas

There are consequences to losing a war, or being perceived not to have won. Israel's ability to win wars has been based on its capacity to pound its many enemies into submission whenever they have dared attack. Depending on how you count them, Israel has been the target of at least four wars started by one or more of her neighbors, as well as numerous terrorist attacks. It had won all of them until 2006. Israel's new ambassador to the US, Sallai Meridor, says there could be another war by this summer. Last summer, in response to repeated guerrilla assaults by Hezbollah - or Party of God - a militant Lebanese Shia political party, Israel invaded Lebanon, but failed to drive out the terrorist organization, or free two captured Israel soldiers. A committee, appointed to study why Israeli forces were not victorious, blamed Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Hezbollah quickly regrouped and has restocked its armaments. Israel's new ambassador to the United States, Sallai Meridor, tells me there could be another war by this summer, probably launched from terrorist positions in Gaza, Lebanon and possibly Syria, which has not directly attacked Israel since it was bloodied in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Meridor says that while Hezbollah is bad, Hamas, the largest and most influential Palestinian militant group, which is entrenched in Gaza, is even worse. That's because Hamas, he says, has more armed terrorists and is stockpiling missiles and explosives. It is also supported by Iran. Hezbollah, which Israel estimates had thousands of short-range missiles when its positions in Lebanon were attacked last summer, is supported by Iran, as well. All share the same objective: the eradication of Israel. The Winograd Committee report on last summer's war is an indictment of Israel's top leadership, including the prime minister, the minister of defense, Amir Peretz, who has announced he's leaving by the end of the month, and the chief of staff, who also submitted his resignation. "All three made a decisive personal contribution to these decisions and the way in which they were made, (but) there are many others who share responsibility for the mistakes we found in these decisions," the report says. After specifying the many reasons the government failed to achieve victory, the committee concluded, "All of these add up to a serious failure in exercising judgment, responsibility and prudence." Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni called upon Olmert to resign. He has refused and in a mark of his weakness, Olmert declined to fire Livni, saying they could continue to work together. One is left to wonder how. Polls in Israel show Olmert's approval numbers are worse than those of President Bush. More than 60 percent of Israelis want Olmert to resign. He survived three "no confidence" votes in the Knesset last week. Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is three times as popular as any potential rival. Last week, Netanyahu delivered a powerful speech to Israel's Parliament in which he said, "The state of Israel needs better leadership. . Peace can never be achieved by unilateral steps. . The time for a reassessment of our policy has come. We should look at the situation without any illusion and restore to the state of Israel its might, deterrent power and above all our self-respect." When Israelis feel threatened they have always looked to the right and this time they appear eager to again turn rightward. The London Sunday Times quoted a Tel Aviv lawyer: "We're fed up with the Arabs and the chances of reaching peace with them. We gave them too many chances. They don't want us here, period. That's why I think Netanyahu and his political approach is the right one." If there is to be another war and so soon, Israelis are asking themselves who they would rather have leading their nation: a wishful thinker like Ehud Olmert, who, according to the government report on the Lebanon war, "made up his mind hastily, despite the fact that no detailed military plan was submitted to him and without asking for one," or Benjamin Netanyahu, who understands better than most that Israel won't get a second chance in an all-out war. It's a good bet that Olmert's days are numbered and Netanyahu's return as prime minister is drawing near. It had better come quickly, because if Ambassador Meridor's worst-case scenario comes true, not only summer is just around the corner; the next war may be as well. (c) 2007 Tribune Media Services, Inc.