



Raphael D. Marcus. *Israel's Long War with Hezbollah: Military Innovation and Adaptation under Fire.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018. viii + 330 pp. \$110.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-62616-610-3.

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Raphael D. Marcus's *Israel's Long War with Hezbollah: Military Innovation and Adaptation under Fire* is an interesting and well-researched book. His compelling and accurate analysis explains different aspects of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. This conflict has been part of a bigger conflict, the one between Israel and the Arab states. However, the fight between Israel and Hezbollah is quite different, because Israel faces an organization, not a state. The collision between Israel and Hezbollah is also part of the conflict between Israel and a non-Arab state, Iran. Without the latter's massive aid to Hezbollah, that group would have been much weaker, and maybe it would not have even survived. Hezbollah is part of the Iranian aspiration to be the dominant power in the Middle East. Arab states, mostly those near Iran in the Persian Gulf, fear Iran. Therefore, Arab states that used to be Israel's enemies, such as Saudi Arabia, are supporting Israel against Hezbollah.

Marcus writes that "Israel's deterrent posture was gravely damaged in the eyes of its enemies following the withdrawal from Lebanon. However, it was believed that Israel's strategic position would benefit in the long term because of increased legitimacy gained from its compliance with international demands to withdraw. Israel sought to rebuild its deterrence against Hezbollah

in ensuing years as the 'rules of the game' were adapted, yet the IDF's [Israeli Defense Force] failure to seriously respond to Hezbollah's provocations after the withdrawal inadvertently paved the road to war" (p. 90). At the time, in the years 2000-2005, Israel was busy in a war against Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Israel did not wish to open a second front in Lebanon. Israel could have handled a war in two fronts, as it did before against much more powerful enemies. Nevertheless, Israel focused on Palestinians while basically ignoring Hezbollah, and it made sense. After all, Hezbollah's provocations were quite limited. It was better to contain them. It could be claimed that the same was true with Hezbollah's attack in 2006, which ignited the war, following an escalation that went out of control. It is important to mention here that during its history Israel absorbed many severe terror and guerilla assaults, without getting dragged into a war because of them.

According to Marcus, "the IDF's fundamental strategic mistake throughout its odyssey in Lebanon was the mischaracterization of the nature of the enemy and slow conceptual adaptation. In the early 1980s, the IDF was adept at dealing with the nascent Hezbollah, characterized as a 'routine security' threat on a par with Palestinian militias, which could be dealt with by ongoing,

low-intensity security operations. The low threat perception from Hezbollah exacerbated organizational inertia and hindered strategic adaptation in the political and military establishment” (p. 113). It is correct that it took time for Israel to recognize the problems it has in Lebanon. However, Hezbollah was not much of a threat in the 1980s and also not in the 1990s. It posed a danger mostly to Israeli troops in Lebanon, and even there Hezbollah was never able to conquer any part of an Israeli post, to destroy an Israeli unit, convoy, etc. It is also important to remember that in the 1990s Israel had to prepare above all for a possible war with the Syrian military. It was vital that Israel be ready for such a war, since the risks and the casualties of such a showdown would probably have been much higher than in fighting Hezbollah. A war between Israel and Syria did not happen, but one of the reasons for that is Israeli readiness for it, which deterred Syria.

Failures to handle Hezbollah in Lebanon, mostly when the IDF absorbed heavy casualties in battle, did not help Israel’s image, but there were not many of those clashes. Even then Israel’s casualties were in the single digits. For Israel, it was a high price to pay but not one that broke its will to continue to fight in Lebanon.

Marcus explains that “the theoretical and operational origins of the RMA [revolution in military affairs] in Israel are centrally linked to the IDF’s experiences in Lebanon in the early 1980s. These experiences contributed to the IDF’s attempts to transform into a ‘slimmer and smarter’ military in a process guided from the top down by COS [Chief of Staff] Lt. Gen. Dan Shomron. The innovative processes of change associated with the RMA were slowly and arduously implemented within the IDF throughout the 1980s and 1990s and gained further traction after the US military’s impressive victory during the 1991 Gulf War” (p. 127). That victory was achieved against a large-scale conventional military, the Iraqi one, not against a hybrid organization, such as Hezbollah.

Still, the IDF tried to implement its own version of the RMA against hybrid forces. During its fight against Hezbollah in the 1990s, the IDF carried out two major operations, one in July 1993 and one in April 1996. In those two operations, and again in the 2006 war, the IDF sought to depend on firepower, not on maneuvers. In the rounds against another hybrid force, Hamas in the Gaza Strip, in 2008-9, 2012, and 2014, the IDF again heavily depended on firepower. This could be erased: in all those confrontations, Israel could not have defeated its foes with firepower but only strive to punish and deter them while saving Israeli lives. This Israeli approach brought it quite limited results.

Marcus aims to offer a comprehensive assessment, but he nevertheless could have added more about IDF’s experience before 1985. After all, the IDF has been dealing with Arab groups since 1948 and actually since the 1930s, only then the Jews did not have a state or a military. Overall, the way Israel acted in Lebanon was based on what it learned and did over the years. Examining this background would help explain the Israeli thinking in facing Hezbollah.

“The 1990s can be classified as a period when the IDF operated with ‘one hand tied behind its back’ because of calls for restraint and restrictions imposed by the Israeli political establishment for fear of jeopardizing the sensitive peace process. Political pressure ultimately led the military to limit its responses to Hezbollah’s guerrilla activity” (p. 54). This happened several times during the Arab-Israeli conflict, in various ways, including as part of its fight against Arab guerrilla activity and terror, not only that of Hezbollah. As with the latter there was a need to prove to Israel’s foe that the IDF can strike, hard if it is necessary. Yet at the same time, Israel had to be careful not to cause unwanted escalation, let alone a war.

In the war in Syria, as Marcus writes, Hezbollah enjoyed air support from Russian and Syrian

aircraft. It should be mentioned that in a war against Israel the latter will control the skies so Hezbollah will be vulnerable to massive air strikes. Hezbollah also got used to gathering its forces in Syria in relatively large formations. Repeating this method against the IDF will benefit the latter since it will make it easier for Israeli firepower to find its target, in other words, Hezbollah fighters. Although Israel should not underestimate Hezbollah if that group does not adjust its men to a different combat reality than the one they were accustomed to in Syria, the outcome for Hezbollah might be grim.

Hezbollah together with Iranian officers from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) have been building an Iranian fire base in Lebanon. The 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah ended in a tie. Since then basically both sides deterred each other. If Israel attacks Iran's nuclear sites, Hezbollah might open fire at Israel. A war might occur also because of miscalculations by one or both sides.

There is an asymmetry between Israel and Hezbollah due to the military might of the former. Hezbollah cannot destroy the IDF nor to conquer any part of Israel. Israel could seize areas where Hezbollah is located but not annihilate it completely.

Israel's Long War with Hezbollah is an intriguing and important book for all those who wish to understand the IDF and the military nature of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah.

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