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Lebanon War Fallout - I
Rise of a Soon-to-Be Nuclear Power in the Middle East – Iran



There is no doubt that the UN ceasefire of August 14 caught Israel short of achieving the goals it set out for the Lebanon campaign.

Within days, this fact had rippled across the Middle East and touched off a drastic shift in the strategic balance - not only between Israel and the Arab world, but also between the United States and Iran,

and Iran and its neighbors - including the Persian Gulf and the Indian subcontinent.

What Israeli achieved up until the truce consisted of, according to **DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** military summing-up, destroying two of Hizballah's 11 combat sectors in S. Lebanon – three were partially disabled and the remaining 6 suffered only light casualties and minor damage from air strikes. Of Hizballah's three rocket brigades, only the long-range one was completely destroyed, while the medium- and short-range brigades were only partly impaired.

Furthermore, Hizballah's 4,000 highly-trained and well-armed fighters and their large rocket arsenal stood up to 30,000 Israeli troops, 800 tanks, an air force and a navy for 33 days.

They presented Iran's Revolutionary Guards corps, which masterminded the war campaign, its most outstanding feat in 27 years, ever since their seizure in 1979 of the US embassy in Tehran, when they held 52 diplomats hostage for 444 days.

Many of Iran's top officials were peeved with Hizballah for jumping the gun on its plans to open a second front in Lebanon and for the loss of a vast investment in rockets and hardware. (See **HOT POINTS**)

Some also suspected Israel of staging a dress rehearsal for a projected US-Israeli operation against Iran's nuclear facilities scheduled for late 2006 early 2007. But, since the ceasefire took hold, Iranian leaders have been busy drawing up a quick profit-and-loss balance sheet and ended up more than satisfied with the way the Lebanon war has panned out.

Tehran plans a celebratory military exercise

Even if the Americans and Israelis did try and use the conflict as a dress rehearsal, Tehran sees it as a failed performance and plans to celebrate in its own way.

Iran likes to link its military exercises and parades with major political or diplomatic events and provide them with religious motifs. Therefore, Wednesday, Aug. 16, a mere 48 hours after the Lebanese ceasefire went into effect, the acting general commander of the Iranian army, **General Muhammed Reza Ashtyani**, announced a big maneuver was impending in the coming days for 12 ground forces divisions.

There will be combined ground, sea and air practices, together with test-firings of new ordnance and weapons.



This display is designed as a reward for the Revolutionary Guards for their triumph over the United States and Israel in Lebanon and its positive side-effects. As **DEBKA-Net-Weekly** reported over the past month, the Hizballah high command conducted the war out of two centers, both manned by Iranian RC officers, in the basements of the Iranian embassies in Beirut and Damascus.

They presented Iran with its first military victory since the 1730-1740s, when the Persian Nair Shah drove the Russians out and quelled the Afghan revolt. While Ayatollah Ali Khamenei hailed the Hizballah “victory” over Israel as a “victory for Islam,” Tehran is also pleased with a feat that satisfies national pride as much as Islamic honor.

The Revolutionary Guards corps is more than pleased; it is cock-a-hoop, boasting that after besting the Israeli army it is ready to take on any Western military force.

(Articles in this issue will deal with the impact on Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf emirates.)

In the short term, Iran’s biggest gain, in the view of **DEBKA-Net-Weekly**’s Iran and military experts, is its conviction that the failure of Israel’s military backed by an American arms airlift of arms to decisively defeat Hizballah has removed an imminent threat hanging over Iran’s nuclear installations.

The Bush administration, in its last lap, is seen to be in deep distress at home, its troops in Iraq are unable to lift the country out of the flames of civil war (July saw the peak death toll of 3,438 dead, an average of 111 killed per day), and, even with the help of NATO and pro-western Arab nations (like Jordan), America cannot assemble an effective Iraqi army and security services capable of taking over and letting the US army go home.

Iranian Israel-watchers have not missed the process of disintegration and corrosion undermining Israel’s political and military leadership and the blow the IDF suffered to its pride and morale in the Lebanon campaign.

The Bush administration is perceived to have lost the initiative in the Middle East by backing weak leaders like **Fouad Siniora** in Beirut, **Mahmoud Abbas** in Ramallah, and **Nouri Maliki** in Baghdad. The region is therefore laid open to Tehran’s domination through the puissant Hizballah and the Shiite militias of Iraq, as well as the radical Palestinian organizations which Iran is arming for battling Israel.

These perceptions have combined to persuade Tehran that it is sitting pretty and that the prospect of a US and/or Israeli attack on its nuclear projects, while not impossible is remote.

The same applies to UN sanctions.

Tehran has taken aboard the incredible weakness and ineptness of the Security Council in bringing about a cessation of hostilities in Lebanon in more than a month. Its signal inability to get an effective multinational stabilization force off the ground and deployed ready to perform the world body’s will is another piece of good news for Tehran.

Iran’s nuclear program is disencumbered of threats



In a single fateful month, therefore, these two major threats have been whisked away, disencumbering the regime in Tehran of military and economic deterrents and free to drive hard to achieve its goals of a nuclear weapon and a nuclear-capable missile stock ready to go within the next two to three years.

They fully expect the United States, the Arab and Muslim world and Israel to resign themselves to the rise of the new-old-new Middle East Persian power, armed with a nuclear bomb.

The Israeli army’s failure to grapple with rockets and missiles of Iranian manufacture flying against their tanks and their towns and villages has

already pushed Iran up the ladder as a military power to be reckoned with. It means that the Americans have no answer to Iran's rocket tactics when applied in local Middle East conflicts.

Eighty percent of the supplies reaching Hizballah, including ammunition and rockets, came from Iranian sources, brought in either from Iranian stockpiles maintained in Syria or by airlift via Syrian military airfields.

Iran's achievements, the key strategic and military landmark in the Middle East since Israel's 1967 victory over the combined Arab armies, could, in the opinion of **DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** military experts, be reversed by two developments:

1. An Israeli decision to regard the month-long campaign prior to the ceasefire as unfinished business and, within no more than two to three months, send its army back for a decisive round from which it will emerge as clear victor.

In the climate of doom and bitter recriminations in which Israel is sunk at the moment, it is hard to see Israel's armed forces licking their wounds and collecting themselves to mount a daunting military campaign so soon. But this eventuality cannot be dismissed out of hand. The Israeli military has a track record of fast recoveries from setbacks and a proven ability to make up surprise maneuvers for retrieving lost situations. The coming weeks will show whether Israeli war leaders and the IDF have not lost that quality.

2. A Bush administration decision to write a postscript for the Lebanon war in view of the need to repair its damage present and future to American interests. This could come in the form of a direct strike against Iran, targeting its nuclear installations and Revolutionary Guards bases. However, at the present time, this option looks extremely remote.

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Lebanon War Fallout – II

Tehran Downgrades Ties with Syria, Establishes an Islamic “Foreign Legion”



One week after the first round of the Israeli-Hizballah war was terminated by the August 14 UN ceasefire, an interim report was laid before the supreme ruler, **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei**, evaluating its results in relation to Iran's nuclear program and the prospects of another military-diplomatic-religious clash in the Middle East.

The report was put together by a team led by the head of Iran's Institute of Strategic Research **Hassan Abbassi**, secretary of the Supreme Council for National Security, **Mohsen Rezai**, and Khamenei's adviser on international affairs **Ali-Akbar Velayati**, a former foreign minister.

The team's foremost conclusion is that Hizballah came out on top of the first part of the Lebanon war and met all expectations. Hizballah's fighting prowess is viewed as a complete contrast to the performance of the Arab armies fighting Israel in previous wars. Very few combatants surrendered or let themselves be taken prisoner. By and large, they fought to the last bullet to stop Israeli troops conquering their strongholds, such as Bin Jubeil, Debel and Maroun a Ras.

Hizballah fighters managed to score with minimal weaponry – no heavyweight artillery, air or naval support. They are commended in the report for obeying a dictum of Islamic Republic's founder **Ayatollah Ruhollah**

Khomeini. When Iran's president complained at the outset of the Iraq-Iran war of the 'eighties that the army lacked the weapons for fending off the Iraqi invader because of the American arms embargo, Khomeini replied: "The weapon of faith is mightier than any military weapon."

The writers stress that victory belonged largely to Iranian Revolutionary Guards officers who taught Hizballah how to fight like guerrillas, combining religious instruction with maximum reliance on the anti-tank missile and the RPG-rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

Israel may have paved new roads in South Lebanon for their columns to use and avoid the deadly booby-traps, mines and roadside bombs Hizballah had planted in their path, but they nonetheless sustained painful casualties.

Tehran will trumpet further progress in uranium enrichment



DEBKA-Net-Weekly's Iranian sources disclose that, impressed with these findings, the ruling clique resolved to ride the surge of success with four immediate initiatives:

1. Next Tuesday, Aug. 22, Tehran will reveal to the world that it has made important progress in uranium enrichment development following a breakthrough in the activation of P-2 centrifuges.

A loud international outcry is expected to ensue, together with another urgent demand from Washington to impose punitive sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

However, foreign minister **Manouchehr Mottaki** predicts that the Lebanon war's impact will mute Western protests and persuade the Europeans more easily to oppose sanctions for long enough to give Iran more breathing space. The Russians and Chinese and their vetoes are in the bag.

He is sure Europe will now shrink back from any military showdown with Iran and even the United States will reconsider any planned assaults. They will not forget Tehran's threat to "set the world on fire," if attacked, which came close in Lebanon. In Iraq, the Shiite zealots of **Moqtada Sadr's** Mehdi Army were unleashed against American troops in Iraq to show the Bush administration what the Islamic Republic had in store in the battle over its nuclear program.

Hassan Nasrallah is held up as a hero by the masses in Arab and Islamic countries, including the hundreds of millions of Sunni Muslims who traditionally treated Shiites as objects of contempt. His 33-day stand against Israeli might is being held up against the six days in 1967 which were all it took for Israel to defeat the three strongest Arab powers.

Iran's Islamic path is vindicated, the report finds, and adherence to Islam has proved to be the winning weapon.

2. Iran will proclaim the creation of a new Islamic Army, built on the lines of the French Foreign Legion. Nasrallah's image will be used to draw volunteers, including young Sunni Muslims, from around the world, to wage war against the "unbelievers and Zionists. Ignoring the presence of Lebanese army and UN units, Hizballah was told to prepare training camps in the East Lebanese region of northern Baalbek for an intake of volunteers.

Tehran is dumping Syria as its main partner

As soon as Israel's naval and air blockade is lifted, outstanding trainees will be selected at these camps and sent to Iran for advanced training as future commanders.

3. A dramatic policy shift is also afoot in Tehran:



Iran is withdrawing from its close strategic and military relations with Syria. The interim report on the Lebanon war awards Syrian president **Bashar Assad** low marks for his performance during the emergency. He made the wrong decisions, some of them incomprehensible. Should Iran and Hizballah plan to go a second round of warfare in Lebanon, they will set up alternative routes of supply that are not dependent on Syria.

The top-level discussion in Tehran on Syria's wartime performance was highly critical of the speech Assad delivered on Tuesday, Aug. 15 to the press association in Damascus. He presented the Tehran-Damascus-Hizballah bloc as the winning camp in the Arab world. But after sifting through his often muddled sentences, Iranian strategists concluded that he had an ulterior motive in dangling this victory. They interpreted the Syrian leader's subtext as a signal to Israel that he was ready for peace talks and cooperation. Iran's leaders therefore judged him too unreliable to remain an ally of Iran.

DEBKA-Net-Weekly's sources in Lebanon report that the next day, Aug. 16, directives reached Nasrallah from Tehran to fall in line behind the new Iranian posture and downgrade his ties with Damascus.

4. Nasrallah has also been instructed to re-invent Hizballah's face and erase its image as an Iranian military arm operating in Lebanon under Tehran's thumb. The Shiite group has begun posing as a patriotic national Lebanese movement, with something to offer all segments of the Lebanese people.

This shift in tactics was evident in Nasrallah's last speeches, in which "resistance" was replaced with the words "Lebanese motherland."

Hizballah has redesigned its famous yellow flag. It now resembles the national Cedar of Lebanon flag except for a small yellow Hizballah insignia in the upper right corner.

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Lebanon War Fallout – III

Israel is Sunk in Political and Military Crisis



When Israeli chief of staff **Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz** came to Jerusalem to brief the parliamentary foreign affairs and security committee on Wednesday, Aug. 16, some of the officers with him termed the outcome of the Israel-Hizballah war: An achievement – but not a clear one.

Neither the lawmakers nor anyone else was sure what they meant.

The Israeli home front finds equally incomprehensible everything they learn of the war effort, which was justified by a broad consensus and has disintegrated in a welter of bitterness, recriminations and buck-passing.

Day after day, army reservists, who formed some 40 percent of the 30,000 troops committed to Lebanon in the final stage of the war, return home with hair-raising accounts for television audiences of confusion and incompetence. According to some accounts, soldiers were given muddled or contradictory orders; when they asked for clarifications, they were referred by their officers to the next level of command, only to come up against battalion and brigade commanders who shrugged and admitted their own orders were unclear.

Others reported they were sent to the front without essential equipment or spent days without food rations or water.

No one understands how Israel came to be catapulted overnight into a war it did not seek, its army fighting in Lebanon and a million Israelis cowering in bomb shelters or put to flight as refugees by Hizballah's daily barrage of

more than 4,000 rockets.

According to opinion polls conducted since the August 14 ceasefire, 70-80% of all Israelis are certain of three things:

1. The war failed to achieve Israel's goals: recovering the two soldiers Hizballah kidnapped, disarming the terror group and pushing it far from Israel's border.
2. The Israeli Defense Forces, cherished by all as the most effective body in the country, was revealed dismayingly as outdated, ungainly, inefficient and for the first time in Israel's 58-year long independent existence, unable to vanquish an Arab army. This has been a severe shock to a nation, almost every individual of which has done his or her stint of compulsory army and reserve service, and toppled a cornerstone of the national ethos.
3. The three war leaders, prime minister **Ehud Olmert**, defense minister **Amir Peretz** and the chief of staff, were not up to their mission. They are obliged to face their day of reckoning and step down.

A disintegrating political set-up

The Israeli army collapsed at the start of the 1973 Yom Kippur, which is constantly invoked as an analogy for the present debacle, but it recovered sufficiently to turn the tide and defeat the Arab aggressors amid crippling casualties.

It took four years and a political earthquake for the heads of the government responsible to be swept away by the disillusioned electorate. Labor, which had ruled Israel without interruption, and its leaders

Golda Meir and **Moshe Dayan**, the most brilliant general Israel has ever had, were replaced by the Likud party under the leadership of **Menahem Begin**. The chief of staff, **Lt. Gen David Elazar**, was sacked earlier by a judicial inquiry panel.

Thirty-three years on, no one doubts that Israel is in for another earthquake to sweep the board of the political and military incumbents. These days, such processes move much more swiftly than thirty years ago. Most of **DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** political sources estimate that within four to six months all the familiar faces will be gone – and not only because of the war.

First: The war was in fact only the catalyst. The general election held six months ago found Israel's political set-up in a state of advanced disintegration from which it has not recovered. Sleaze has bitten deep into the prime minister Ehud Olmert's Kadima party: several of its notables, including justice minister **Haim Ramon** and chairman of the Knesset foreign affairs and security panel **Tzahi Hanegbi** have been indicted, respectively, for sexual harassment and corruption.

Olmert himself may face the firing line of a police probe.

Second: The Hizballah kidnapping attack of July 12 has retroactively discredited the unilateralist policies to which the ruling Kadima party is committed, first under the former prime minister **Ariel Sharon**, who carried out Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, and now under his successor Olmert, who proposes partial evacuation of Israeli communities from the West Bank.

Today, more than 75% of the public hold that the past unilateral handover of land laid the groundwork that encouraged Hizballah's aggression and produced the Lebanon War. More than 80% of the 120 members of Knesset view the Olmert plan as impracticable and, worse, as placing national security at unacceptable risk.

Third: The conventional wisdom is that the Lebanon war is not over and more fighting lies ahead against Hizballah, Syria and Iran's Revolutionary Guards - together or one by one. The Israeli trio which conducted the first



round is popularly judged unfit to carry on. They are regarded as incapable of correcting the mistakes they made, too inexperienced to rehabilitate the armed forces and too incompetent to properly prepare the sadly neglected home front for another round of hostilities.

One way or another, the day of reckoning awaits all three.

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Lebanon War Fallout – IV

Saudis and Gulf Emirates Turn back to the American Military Umbrella



Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the other Gulf emirates have a lot to contend with from Israel's failure to subdue Hizballah.

The hardest pill for them to swallow is the triumphal self-congratulations of the Lebanese Shiite group and its sponsors in Tehran and Damascus.

In the course of the conflict, it was an open secret that they were all looking forward to Hizballah being thoroughly clobbered, even at the price of an Israeli victory, which they would of course have ritually condemned. There was open talk in the Gulf's corridors of power about the secret messages passing from some of the emirs and their intelligence chiefs to Israel, with requests to step up the military pressure on Hizballah.

A Hizballah rout was sought not only because it represented a blow to Shiite military power – a motive strong enough for the Saudis to back Hamas and other Palestinian organizations in Lebanon from the 1980s – but in the hope of breaking the back of the Tehran-Damascus axis.

The Saudi **King Abdullah**, the ruling Kuwaiti al Sabahs and **King Abdullah** of Jordan were looking forward to a Hizballah defeat for finally pulling the Syrian president **Bashar Assad** away from his close ties with Tehran, Hizballah's main sponsor. This would have finally removed Syria as a perennial threat to Lebanese sovereignty and erased Iranian footsteps in the country.

Stubborn unconfirmed reports maintained that to achieve this objective, certain military and intelligence sources in the Gulf region were prepared to go so far as to hand Israel useful secrets about Hizballah's military set-up in Lebanon.

Now there are signs of bitter disappointment in Riyadh, Qatar, Cairo and Amman over Hizballah's success in standing up to Israel. Their hopes of Hizballah, Syria and Iran being cut down to size have been dashed and their war stance discredited, while the line Iran and Syria took in Lebanon has won the day.

Arab princes lost face by seeking Hizballah's defeat

Assad makes speeches day after day, thumping himself on the chest as the great champion of "Arab resistance" against America and Israel. This is a popular theme on the Arab street - unlike the stand against Hizballah taken by the rulers of Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf emirates, which has cost them loss of face at home.

In their countries, Hizballah's popularity is spreading - and not just among Shiite Muslims. The Shiite minorities scattered around the Gulf, especially in Saudi Arabia and



Kuwait, are especially proud of Nasrallah and his Hizballah and are drawing on them to boost their standing vis-a-vis the Sunni dynasties and governments.

In Bahrain, for instance, Shiites staged victory celebrations in two Shiite villages south of the capital on Aug. 12.

In Saudi Arabia, Shiites of the Eastern Provinces demonstrated in solidarity with Hizballah in the course of the war. Publication of these rallies was banned by the authorities.

DEBKA-Net-Weekly's Gulf sources report that these demonstrations were the biggest Saudi Shiites had ever dared hold. Many of their leaders were taken into custody.

Suddenly, the Shiites of the Arab realms, always treated as second-class citizens, are raising their heads. They are preparing to demand improvements in their status and may even be encouraged to gain them by violence.

At the same time, their Sunni masters are capable of exploiting the Shiite backlash to prove they are not too weak to subdue Shiite minority unrest.

While the general public is gratified by any Arab battlefield successes against Israeli might and its sophisticated Western weaponry, the government-controlled media and pundits are more equivocal.

The Saudi *Al Watan*, for instance, goes along with the street assessment of a Hizballah triumph, but at the same time asserts that Iran and Syria do not deserve a share in this success.

Kuwait's *Arab Times* goes further and maintains Hizballah was defeated in the conflict.

Its editor, **Ahmad al-Jarallah**, ran articles in the last days of combat arguing that Hizballah was not victorious and lambasting Syria and Iran for riding to glory on the back of an illusory victory.

These domestic difficulties and ambiguities are within the competence of the Gulf emirs to handle. The most daunting challenge they face comes from the posture struck by Iran and Syria in the wake of the war.

Tuesday, Aug. 15, President **Bashar Assad** delivered a speech in which he derided the downfall of the American bloc in the Middle East. This was a broad derogatory hint at the pro-Western moderate Arab nations. He then announced the formation of a counter-alliance headed by Iran and his own regime.

A Syrian guerrilla war to gain Golan might infect Arabia's Shiite minorities



In the Gulf, Assad is regarded as immature or even puerile. But now some of its rulers are getting worried. For the first time, they are sitting up when he declares that the war against Israel has just begun and "Syrian hands" will liberate the Golan. Until now, they ignored his bombast as half-baked rantings. But the chance of Damascus trying to mount a guerilla campaign Hizballah-style against Israel on the Golan is a source of anxiety in Riyadh for two good reasons:

1. Saudi rulers understand that the first round of warfare in Lebanon which was cut short by the August 14 ceasefire will almost certainly be followed up at some point with more fighting. Beirut, one of the great centers of Arab finance, might then be rocked by destabilizing forces.

2. The spreading guerrilla war strategy may prove contagious and infect Shiite populations across the kingdom and the Gulf at large.

Iran is a dominant theme of Saudi foreign and security policy.

The Islamic Republic's persistence in developing a military nuclear program is taken as an extreme menace to the regimes along the Persian Gulf and a constant headache for their rulers. They regard the outcome of the Lebanon war as hastening Iran's progress to attaining a nuclear device.

As a nuclear power, the Shiite Islamic Republic will hold the whip hand in the region, be in a position to weigh in on overall regional oil policy and influence the internal affairs of fellow-Gulf regimes.

On the assumption that Iran is unstoppable in its progress toward a nuclear capability, certain steps are deemed unavoidable:

One, Saudi Arabia must step up its own nuclear program

Two, some emirates may think of jumping on the Iranian bandwagon.

Three, Riyadh and some of its Gulf allies may seek friends in new pastures.

For instance, this week, King Abdullah paid a visit to Turkey, the first by a Saudi crowned head in 40 years. He left no doubt that he was ready to start viewing Turkey as a potential ally in the context of Iran's new posture and the possibility of reckless moves by Syria.

Four, notwithstanding the reservations entertained in Riyadh and the emirates about the Bush administration's regional policies, they are unlikely to stray too far from the American orbit.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the rest are still dependent on their ties with America and would rather cooperate with Washington than bow to dictates from Tehran.

While ostensibly keeping their distance from America in deference to popular sentiment, these Arab rulers may unobtrusively and for lack of choice accede to an American military action to abort Iran's drive for a nuclear weapon.

None of them sees any real alternative to the United States as a patron. The prospect of Iran becoming master of the region is viewed as a direct threat to their regimes' survival, in contrast to the United States which stands out as a protector.

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UK Aborts a Terror Plot

And the Winner of this Round of the War on Terror Is... John Reid



Wednesday morning, Aug. 16, the British home secretary **John Reid** assembled in London a small group of European officials: the French, German and Finnish interior ministers, **Nicolas Sarkozy**, **Wolfgang Schaeuble**, and **Kari Rajamamki**, respectively, and the vice president of the European Union commission, **Franco Frattini**.

They agreed to cooperate in measures to fight terrorism, beginning by blocking Internet sites, fingerprinting or iris-scanning airline passengers and training Muslim imams to fight radicalism.

They also allocated the sum of \$235,000 to research the best way to detect liquid-based explosives. This followed last week's discovery of a British-based Muslim terror plot to explode up to 10 airliners over US cities with explosives smuggled aboard American airliners in a bottle of baby food or face lotion.

Twenty-four suspects were arrested, after which all four British international airports were thrown into total chaos by stringent security measures introduced there and then and a ban on hand luggage.

That was when the British home secretary began his daily television and radio appearances. He appealed to the public to stay calm and obey instructions in the quiet, solemn tones not heard in Britain since the last world war. He also raised the British alert level to critical, followed by the United States.

When he talked to the media after the European conference this week, Reid confessed that “some of the suspects would likely not be charged with major criminal offences. But, he added, there was mounting evidence of a “substantial nature” to back the allegations.

It is therefore not surprising, that later in the day, it took the police and security services 12 hours to persuade a district magistrate to keep the suspects in custody and all they got was another 5 to 7 days to question them.

DEBKA-Net-Weekly's al Qaeda experts note that numerous groups across the fundamentalist terrorist world aspire to complete what they regard as **Ramzi Yusuf's** unconsummated “heroic attempt” in 1994 to simultaneously blow up 12 Boeing 747 airliners flying from Far East ports to major American cities.

The attempt was foiled and in 1998, a New York district court sentenced Yusuf to 240 years jail without parole.

Ramzi Yusuf, jihadist superstar

In Islamist circles, Ramzi Yusuf has the glamorous aura of a jihadi Che Guevara.

Many are willing to die to complete his mission, coming up with plans most of which are crazy and unpractical.

It is safe to assume that some of the Muslim group members detained on August 10 spoke of or exchanged e-mail messages on how to go about blowing up half a dozen or more American airliners over US cities. But it is a long way from words to placing the airports of Britain and the United States on high terror alert. The alacrity of British security services to take this long leap can be explained by their failure to chalk up any real progress in defeating terrorist activity since the July 7, 2005 Tube bombs. To this day, they still have no leads to the mystery mastermind and explosives provider for those deadly attacks. Almost every counter-operation undertaken since then has fizzled out.

The most embarrassing was the incident in which **Mohammed Abdul Kahar**, 23, was shot in the shoulder when police raided his East London home on June 2 in search of dangerous substances allegedly designated for use in terrorist attacks. Nothing was found.

This time, on the strength of Pakistani intelligence leads, which **DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** counter-terror and intelligence sources rate as far from credible, British security services decided to use the opportunity to burnish their reputation. Most of our sources agree that there was no sense in putting the airports of Britain and the US on alert and announcing sweeping arrests, because any hard-core terrorist groups or individuals poised to mount further attacks, as claimed by British officials, would have scurried out of sight without delay.

Our political sources in London remark that the only Briton to come out shining from the airline plot episode, which did little to enhance the security services' prestige, is the home secretary.

John Reid already enjoys the reputation of being the only effective minister in **Tony Blair's** government. The terror crisis broke when Blair was away on a Caribbean holiday, his stand-in **John Prescott** was keeping his head down after a series of scandals, and finance minister **Gordon Brown** was on paternity leave. It was left to John Reid to stand in the limelight day after day, a solid, Scottish rock amid the mayhem, the perfect foil for the mercurial Blair whose retirement has long been eagerly awaited.

The much-publicized terror plot was most certainly blown out of proportion, its handling inept enough to be caricatured. But the home secretary was puffed up as a European star, capable of unifying the continent on its most divisive issues such as a balance between respect for civic liberties for all



(translated into a Babel of European tongues and values) and security against terrorists.

The public suffered huge inconvenience without an assurance of safety at the end of its misery – four breaches were recorded in as many days. It all contributed very little to the war on terror - British, European or global, but most certainly gave wings to John Reid's political prospects as government leader.

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HOT POINTS

A Digest of DEBKAFfile Round-the-Clock Exclusives in Week Ending August 17, 2006

Four expanded IDF divisions are pressing forward with wide-scale operation against Hizballah

12 August: It is carried forward by four divisional elements of 11 brigades, about 12,000 fighting men. Head of the Ground Forces Branch Maj.-Gen Benny Gantz is leading the IDF's South Lebanon command. The first stage of the new operation has succeeded in its objective of encircling Hizballah's 1,500-strong force in a large swathe from the Litani River in the north up to Tyre in the southwest. This tactic follows the 1982 Lebanon War stratagem of pushing Palestinian forces out of South Lebanon up to Beirut and then putting them to siege.

Now, Israeli troops are pushing Hizballah into the Tyre enclave in order to contain it there. Hizballah strength will be left intact in central and northern Lebanon, with two of its three rocket brigades: medium and long range. In the last few hours, Hizballah's command and control in the south is showing signs of distress after finding itself cut off from reinforcements and re-supply from the north by the rapid Israeli advances of the last four days. The last northern border road link from Lebanon to Syria cut by Israeli air strikes.

Israeli Air Force builds up presence in Beirut skies Sunday night to pre-empt long-range Iranian-made Zelzal missile launch against Tel Aviv

13 August: Our military sources report that the night before the Monday morning 0800 hours ceasefire deadline, Hizballah crews were sighted preparing to fire one of those heavy missiles which can reach central Israel and the Tel Aviv conurbation. The air force earlier aborted two Hizballah drones packed with explosives en route to Tel Aviv.

Eight Khaibar-1 missiles hit the Beit Shean and Jezreel valleys south of Haifa. The port city and it's the bayside suburbs took a beating. Many buildings and vehicles caught fire.

Lebanese minister Marwan Hamadi accused Hassan Nasrallah Sunday night of reneging on his pledge to abide the UN ceasefire

13 August: Marwan Hamade, Lebanese information minister, a Druze, says Nasrallah has broken his word to order Hizballah fighters south of the Litani to hand in its weapons to Lebanese army troops deployed there.

Israeli troops are waiting for directives on for Monday 0800 when the ceasefire is due to go into effect after its unanimous approval by the Israeli government Sunday.

The UN ceasefire resolution unravels as Lebanese government

backtracks ahead of the Monday, Aug. 14 0800 deadline

13 August: The Lebanese government postponed a meeting Sunday afternoon on disarming Hizballah. Nasrallah reversed his conditional consent to the UN ceasefire which included a veto of an arms embargo and Hizballah's withdrawal from Lebanon.

Then, after the Israeli cabinet approved the UN ceasefire, he told the Siniora government the deal was off. Iran and Syria warned the Lebanese government not to try and disarm Hizballah.

Olmert criticized for accepting premature ceasefire

13 August: DEBKAF file adds Criticism is mounting in the Israeli public and army of the way prime minister Ehud Olmert, defense minister Amir Peretz and the cabinet conducted the Lebanon war now going into its second month. Therefore, Israel must forego the primary goals of the war.

Senior IDF officers blame the high proportion of fallen men at the front in the first two days of the broadened ground offensive to the tight time frame Olmert accepted for meeting an arbitrary ceasefire deadline set for 0800 hours Monday, Aug. 14.

The army was given 60 hours to attain all the tactical goals of its final mission. The result in the last 48 hours has been slapdash improvisations and cut corners. The officers say the time remaining is too short for completing the vital siege of Tyre, Hizballah's main S. Lebanese stronghold. A large stock of rockets and launchers has still to be eliminated there. Neither can the army finish by Monday morning, the clearing out of Hizballah fighters from the south - even from its bases in the more-or-less empty villages close to the Israel border. Hundreds of buildings are therefore being flattened by air or close-range fire.

In Saturday night media interviews, top-ranking generals made their disapproval of the government known. The chief of staff Lt. Gen Dan Halutz and OC northern command Maj Gen Udi Adam, in particular, let it be understood that the wide-scale ground finally permitted to go forward Friday shortly before the Security Council resolution had come two weeks too late and precious time had been lost.

Israeli death toll Sunday, hours before ceasefire went into effect, rises to nine soldiers

14 August: Eight were injured, two seriously in two battles near Qantara and Ayta a-Chaab.

Saturday saw the heaviest Israeli war losses in one day of 24 soldiers killed and 74 injured, 11 seriously.

Israeli ground, air and naval forces ordered to hold fire and stand on the ready at 0800 hours local time Monday, August 14 as the UN ceasefire went into effect

14 August: Ahead of the ceasefire, sirens sounded from west to east of northern Israel ordering civilians to stay in shelters until Sunday night and take no chances on Hizballah holding to the ceasefire. The streets of northern Israel are deserted. A record 250 rockets were fired into Israel Sunday, including 8 heavy Khaibar-1 missiles. Israeli commanders in S. Lebanon ordered to hold their fire except in self-defense or if "hazard identified." All offensive operations halted by land and air.

Two bomb trucks identified on their way to Israeli town of Metula and destroyed on the Lebanese side of the border. S. Beirut was bombed all night up to the last minute of the ceasefire. Five Israeli soldiers died in combat

Sunday. In the five weeks of this round of war, Israel suffered 168 dead, 116 servicemen and 52 civilians. Thousands injured. More than 4,000 Hizballah rockets were launched against northern Israel. Israel reports up to 500 Hizballah fighters and commanders killed in the five-week war.

Tehran Takes Gloomy View of the Lebanon War and Truce

14 August: After UN Security Council resolution 1701 calling for a truce was carried Friday, Aug. 11, the heads of the Iranian regime received two bleak evaluations of the situation in Lebanon: their compilers were concerned that Iran had been manipulatively robbed of its primary deterrent asset ahead of a probable nuclear confrontation with the United States and Israel.

One document complained Hizballah squandered thousands of rockets – either by firing them into Israel or having them destroyed by the Israeli air force – and all for the sake of a conflict with Israel over two kidnapped soldiers.

It took Iran two decades to build up Hizballah's rocket inventory.

DEBKAfile's sources estimate that Hizballah's adventure wiped out most of the vast sum of \$4-6 bn the Iranian treasury sunk into building its military strength. The organization was meant to be strong and effective enough to provide Iran with a formidable deterrent to Israel embarking on a military operation to destroy the Islamic regime's nuclear infrastructure. It was provided with a bunker network and chain of fortified positions containing war rooms equipped with the finest western hi-tech gadgetry, including night vision gear, computers and electronics, as well as protective devices against bacteriological and chemical warfare.

As seen from Tehran, Israel looked as though it was carrying out a warming-up exercise in preparation for its main action against Iran's nuclear program.

The US says it is unacceptable for the UN to take months to deploy an expanded force in Lebanon

15 August: This is urgent, said State Department spokesman Sean McCormack Tuesday after UN Secretary Kofi Annan told Israeli TV Channel 2 it would take weeks or months to beef up UNIFIL.. He said perhaps 3,500 peacekeepers can arrive in up to two weeks provided France consents to lead the force. UNIFIL commander, Maj. Gen. Alain Pellegrini, told Le Monde it would take a year for an expanded force to reach full strength.

Assad: Hizballah defeated the Israeli army

15 August: In a speech, the Syrian ruler Bashar Assad remarked that Israel troops failed to reach the Litani River in a month, whereas in 1982, they were in Beirut within a week.

The Arabs have received nothing or very little for peace, therefore Damascus supports "resistance" because resistance is the way to peace.

Nasrallah Is Already Carving out Lebanon's Future

15 August: President George W. Bush and prime minister Ehud Olmert in speeches on Aug. 13 declared Hizballah would no longer be able to maintain a state within a state.

DEBKAfile's exclusive sources in Beirut report that Nasrallah's machinations represent a reality which is a world away from this kind of rhetoric:

Hizballah forces in the South will not oppose the deployment of Lebanese troops and a strengthened UNIFIL force, so long as they understand who their hosts are, namely Hizballah. This nullifies the injunction to the Beirut

government to assert Lebanese sovereignty in every part of the country. Siniora must stop talking about disarming Hizballah else Hizballah ministers and MPs will topple his government.

Nasrallah's men are out consolidating his "state within a state." Hizballah volunteers are on the spot helping the returning refugees to start reconstruction work as a national mission.

This was a neat device to open the door for Hizballah fighters and cadres to reach their former bases, fortifications and bunkers facing the Israeli border. To rebuild his depleted South Lebanon army, Nasrallah also quietly ordered all Hizballah fighters in the north, the Beqaa Valley and Baalbek, to pack their bags and head south with their families.

Hizballah thus regrouped in the south by a smooth, rapid maneuver.

So, whether or not Hizballah was defeated as the US president claimed matters little: Nasrallah has had the last word in the current round of the war.

Lebanese troops cross into South Lebanon Thursday for the first time since 1975

16 August: DEBKAFfile: This deployment was made possible by the deal prime minister Fouad Siniora struck with Hizballah for their juxtaposition in the south and along the borders with Syria. Hizballah will stay in the south and remain armed provided the weapons are kept out of sight.

DEBKAFfile's Beirut sources disclose the deal's six components;

1. The Lebanese army, which hopes to muster 7,500 men, will move into Hizballah's former positions along the Lebanese border with Israel.
2. Hizballah's fighting force including its rocket and missile launchers will be concentrated in 50 of the 180 villages and towns of South Lebanon.
3. The Lebanese army will help Hizballah gather all its weapons and rockets scattered across the south and transfer them to these Hizballah-controlled strongholds.
4. Hizballah fighters will not wear uniform or display their weapons in public.
5. A Hizballah presence will be permitted in all parts of South Lebanon not occupied by Lebanese troops.
6. Lebanese units will deploy at all the official border crossings into Syria, but not the dozens of unauthorized crossing points, which will remain under Hizballah control.

Peretz criticized for proposing talks with Syria at home and in Washington

16 August: DEBKAFfile reports: The US has asked Israel's Olmert government for clarifications of a statement that conflicts with the US policy which cut Syria out of diplomatic moves on the Lebanon conflict.

Amir Peretz spoke the day after Syrian president Bashar Assad boasted Hizballah had defeated Israel at war, threatened further Arab "resistance" and called the New Middle East an illusion. German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier cancelled his trip to Damascus in protest against Assad's "negative contribution."

Yet Peretz stated Wednesday: "We must hold a dialogue with Lebanon, and we should create the conditions for dialogue also with Syria."

Bush gives the Lebanon multinational force wings, Israel the tacit go-ahead for air strikes against arms trucks from Syria

16 August: Washington took two quiet steps to prop up the Siniora government and retrieve the vanishing multinational force ordered by Resolution 1701.

The Bush administration promised an air surveillance wing for UNIFIL to scan South Lebanon and the border crossings into Syria. This has brought France around to consenting to send troops to the expanded international force.

Condoleezza Rice also gave Shimon Peres a quiet go-ahead for the Israeli air force to destroy trucks suspected of carrying rockets and other arms from Syria into Lebanon. Siniora agreed to turn a blind eye to this continuing Israeli air activity over Lebanon as he has for Hizballah's continued armed presence south of the Litani River.

The first elements of the Lebanese army's 2nd 3rd and 12th Battalions crossed the Qasmiyeh Bridge over the Litani into South Lebanon before midnight Wednesday, August 16.

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