Israeli & Hezbollah conflict:
International perspectives on the future of peace in the Middle East

Dr. Anie Kalayjian
With
Luke Anable

There are some remedies worse than the disease.
--Publilius Syrus
Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it
-- Winston Churchill

In a war, which justifies itself historically, where ammunition to fuel the present comes only from the past, the cyclical nature of a traumatized national psyche becomes apparent. As Israeli military personnel launch attacks from fighter jets and Hezbollah militants fire rockets under the cover of civilian roofs and village outposts, it is clear that civilians will bare the heaviest burden of this war. This particular type of violent conflict which holds the innocent responsible for the actions of the few (as if it were a natural tactic when faced with an elusive enemy, be it the governing Israeli party or the Hezbollah military wing) represents a new struggle for the public consciousness.

Recently Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora reported that over 900 Lebanese have been killed since the July 12th abduction of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah guerrillas, one third of whom were children. Israel reports 62 deaths, including 24 civilians. The UN estimates that over 800,000 have been displaced in Lebanon.[1] Already facing a self-perpetuating conflict of reaction and retribution, the international community is struggling to reconcile seemingly incompatible conditions for a cease-fire made by both parties. A new resolution promising the intervention of 15,000 UN peace keeping troops into southern Lebanon which would replace the Israeli presence there and hopefully put a temporary end to hostilities comes on the same day that a Lebanese convoy made up of nearly 3,000 civilians, 350 Lebanese soldiers and policemen was attacked by Israeli missiles killing 15 and wounding many more.[2]

Lt-Gen Dan Halutz has made good on his July 12th promise to "turn Lebanon's clock back 20 years,"[3] in response to the kidnappings. Lebanon's only international airport has been disabled, major supply routes and bridges bombed to ruble, and environmentalists are qualifying the mass oil spills and wide spread forest fires as

---

[1] "Lebanon death toll 'reaches 900" BBC News,
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5242732.stm>
Thursday, 3 August 2006, 15:37 GMT 16:37 UK
[2] "15 Civilians Die in Israeli Airstrikes" San Francisco Chronicle by Zeina Karam - AP
<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2006/08/12/international/i004108D67.DTL&type=politics>
Saturday, August 12, 2006
[3] "Israel authorizes 'severe' response to abductions", CNN World News,
<http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/12/mideast/>
Wednesday, July 12, 2006; Posted: 10:27 p.m. EDT (02:27 GMT)

cataclysmic, part of "the worst environmental disaster in Lebanon's history."[4] Justifying its attacks on power stations and transit routes as possible avenues for Hezbollah armament, Israeli military tactics have isolated a growingly terrified population of Lebanese refugees, cut off from the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations unable to transport much needed fuel and supplies into Lebanon due to the Israeli air, land, and sea blockade. As Israel warns of future attacks in select areas, refugees are uncertain of where else they can go, if in fact traveling isn't more dangerous than staying.

During a layover in Frankfurt, Germany, Dr. Anie Kalayjian, president and founder of meaningfulworld.com and The Association for Trauma Outreach and Prevention, interviewed randomly selected individuals in an attempt to gauge the public's emotional and psychological response to the war. With only minor variation, the general theme of the interviews was overwhelmingly clear: the public felt sad, hopeless, helpless, fearful and confused. For the majority, the psychological struggle was to express the unique mixture of these emotions; a difficult task as interviewees attempted to articulate and reconcile on one hand the poignant grief they felt at the loss of innocent life and on the other a degree of withdrawal and resignation to the self-perpetuating, unsolvable nature of Middle Eastern conflicts.

Few felt there was hope for a lasting peace in the Middle East. While some qualified this response as 'cynical' others felt there was no need, assuming that the impossibility of peace for Israel and her neighbors was common knowledge. "This is a 2,000 year old conflict," said a 43-year-old man making his way home to Norway, "I can't care about it, it would not make a difference. There is no solution, only fantasy…" A 15-year-old polish boy didn't hesitate to confirm this sentiment, answering unwaveringly "This isn't anything new, the area will never be in peace." He continued, "I feel sad but am not surprised…there are two things that could happen to achieve peace, either they annihilate each other, or there is *miracle*. It is all part of a larger economic plan and a power struggle."

While the participants' backgrounds varied, the small majority European, and their ages ran the gambit from 15 to 65, these demographic variations didn't correlate strongly to any specific differentiation in response. Unsurprisingly, Israelis were more prone to defend their state, but even this population focused on the seeming impossibility of the situation and the hopelessness of the future which loomed ahead, "I feel uncomfortable, I don't know what will happen and I fear for my friends who are fighting this war…I never thought it would come to this degree of war," lamented a 17 year old Israeli Women.

Almost three quarters of those interviewed said they felt hopeless or that there was little to no hope for the future, the majority of this group feeling cynical, pessimistic, or disempowered. Though this resigned and yet overwhelmed and upset emotion was difficult to articulate, it also seemed unavoidable faced with the rising death rate of the innocent and uninvolved, "There is nothing new here, it is the same old struggle between
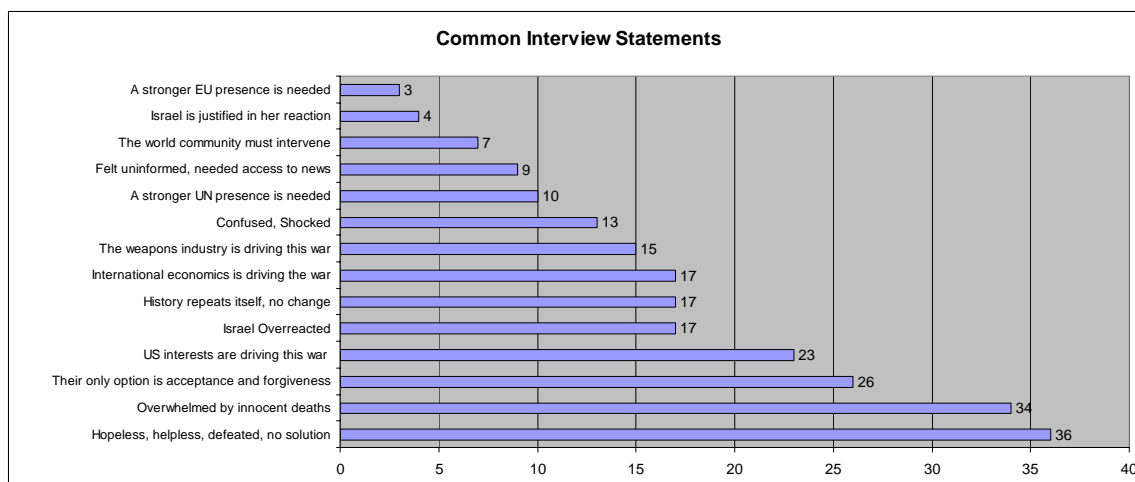
---

[4] "Casualties of War: Lebanon's Trees, Air and Sea" by Hassan M. Fattah, The New York Times (July 29, 2006)

two countries that do not recognize each other, accept each other, or respect each other and want the other destroyed so they can live there alone.   No peace can happen if they don't want to change their mentality of being a chosen nation. I am sorry, I am so bitter and hopeless since I feel so powerless," said a Greek man who went on to speak about Greece's past dark relationship with Turkey and the slow but necessary process of forgiveness taking place there and absent from the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Few were interested in entering the political debate, which the situation by nature encouraged. Instead the interviewees struggled to express their sadness in the face of such widespread loss of life: at times this provoked anger but more frequently expressions of confusion; "I don't understand", "Why?" and "how can this be happening in 2006?" were frequent interjections. Some claimed to need better access to news sources before they could 'understand' the situation enough to speak about it, others blamed the same media for sitting idly by for too long, while still others claimed that the politics of the Middle East simply defy understanding "I don't know much about the conflict or what each side contributed to it, but it is not *just* to kill innocent people in such numbers. So far forty-two from Israel and 442 from Lebanon, 175 Lebanese children are killed? Why? Israel has good intelligence, I am shocked," said vacationing 23-year-old Korean women. Shortly after a 35 year old Korean man ended his interview, "I have no respect to governments that use power to oppress people…A real government will be part of peace not a part of war. I pray for their salvation as I have no other hope…I simply feel sad and hopeless."

If particular responses to the war vary in their content and political slant, an underlying sentiment unites a vast majority; hopelessness. With no easy solution to be found, the international public is at a loss as to how to process the situation and find themselves appealing to a history of violence in order to make sense of the situation. In doing so one prescribes a dangerous sense of 'inevitability' and self-justifying logic to the war, which undermines our ability to think about it constructively. Looking to the past for an explanation of the present, when the present fails to yield one, is a dangerous but popular tactic. It is not enough to say that innocent people are dieing today because they were dieing 10 years ago as well, especially since they were dying 20 years ago in Lebanon. Instead, one must take their eyes from the past and train on the present, asking to ourselves 'what lessons have we learned from the traumatic past?' How can we use this lesson to envision our future as a medium through which we can actively cope with current darkness, and in doing so find a lasting hope with which to engage the time.

Common Interview Statements

Statement	Value
A stronger EU presence is needed	3
Israel is justified in her reaction	4
The world community must intervene	7
Felt uninformed, needed access to news	9
A stronger UN presence is needed	10
Confused, Shocked	13
The weapons industry is driving this war	15
International economics is driving the war	17
History repeats itself, no change	17
Israel Overreacted	17
US interests are driving this war	23
Their only option is acceptance and forgiveness	26
Overwhelmed by innocent deaths	34
Hopeless, helpless, defeated, no solution	36

In his article "Retaliation, Retribution and Revenge: He who cast the first stone probably didn't"[5] Harvard University Psychologist Dr. Daniel Gilbert likens the Lebanese and Israeli states to two human subjects in a retributive conflict. Using various studies, Dr. Gilbert argues that the unfolding of the Lebanon war is analogous to the interactions between two human subjects in a situation which requires action and reaction framed by conflict, depicting the troubling and yet natural tendency of a conflict situation to escalate rather than remain balanced. In a study conducted by William Swann and colleagues at the University of Texas, pairs of volunteers played the roles of world leaders deciding whether to initiate a nuclear strike. A troubling asymmetry arose when subjects were shown first their statements and then their opponents; when viewing theirs they remembered what they had responded to, when shown the opponents they remembered how they had responded to it - volunteers remembered the causes of their own statements and the consequences of their partner's statements. Dr. Gilbert says this phenomena is due to the fact that in terms of observing action people can see others but not themselves and in terms of mental processes people can observe themselves but not other people. This suggests, argues Dr. Gilbert, that when we punch someone our motives will be more salient than the act itself but also that the opposite will be true of other peoples' punches.

He cites a second study conducted by Sukhwinder Shergill and colleagues at University College London, in which pairs of volunteers were hooked up to machine, which allowed them to apply pressure to the other's finger. Volunteers were instructed to take turns applying equal amounts of pressure to one another while researchers measured the actual amount of pressure dealt. Although volunteers were attempting to respond with equal force, they typically responded with about 40% more force than they had just experienced. Each volunteer believed that he/she was responding with equal force and that for some reason the other volunteer was the one escalating the pressure. Research teaches us that our reasons and our pains are more palpable, more obvious and real, than are the reasons and pains of others. This leads to the escalation of mutual harm, to the

---

[5] Found in the July 25th issue of the *International Herald Tribune*; Editorials and Commentary.

illusion that others are solely responsible for it and to the belief that our actions are justifiable responses to theirs.

Though his article is not an attempt to erase the very real and consequential roles of hatred, intolerance, and deceit in human conflict, it does suggest that simply relying on one's innate human reactions in times of conflict facilitates an all-too natural, destructive and perpetuative relationship. To overcome these psychological tendencies we must begin to break down the unqualified trust we place in our own minds and begin instead to trust the minds of others.

It should also be said that it is in times of rising conflict that states begin to look more like human actors and less like reasonable, pragmatic institutions. Rising nationalism pushes this metamorphosis of the state from an institution into a metaphoric agent still further. Though nationalism can serve beneficial ends, we see that it can also trap us in a destructive collective psyche that disallows mutual understanding. Even if the heads of states do not take action based on an understanding of their state as a psyche, it is apparent that by encouraging a certain type of nationalism, cultural and religious consciousness, these leaders can affect their population in such a way as to conflate the public individual with the state itself. As one young Israeli man said, "I am pro Israel not only because it's my country but because she is defending herself. If you were attacked I am sure you would hit back, it is a natural reaction…Israel is doing what she has to do; they are forced in this position and there is no end to it or getting out of it." It is the 'naturalness' of the reaction that Dr. Gilbert points to as it most dangerous aspect. Indeed, it is not going too far to remind ourselves that the modern state was formed in an effort to transcend the emotional, violent, and instinctive drives of the individual. To metamorphize the state back into a human actor is to do the extreme opposite of this; far from transcending the instincts, it inflates them from the level of a 'punch' to a bomb, a fistfight to a war.

Published by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs on July 30th, Gerald M. Steinberg's article "Is a Sustainable Cease-Fire in Lebanon Realistic? If Not, What is the Alternative?" outlines a conservative Israeli strategy. Steinberg writes concerning weapons shipments and Lebanese reconstruction,

> In the post-war reconstruction phase, the Lebanese government and society will be interested in avoiding attacks by Israel and the associated costs of renewed warfare. Similarly, France and other European governments, as well as the United States, with a strong interest in preventing another round of destructive warfare, can be expected to become actively involved in preventing arms shipments that would lead to such an escalation.

If the first sentiment was a nationalistic one, here we find an equally weighty hyper-realist line. This strategy, effectively saying that if Israel makes it clear that they will respond to an affront with an infinitely larger amount of force, Lebanese who want to keep their homes and country and world citizens who wish not to see innocent lives lost, we take the necessary steps to avoid an attack on Israel. This strategy does not take into account the nationalism, which is on the rise in Lebanon; it ignores the possibility that the sheer force of Israel's attack on Lebanon will provoke sympathy for Hezbollah and anger

at Israel. It does not account for the 'humiliation factor', a factor which Evelin G. Lindner, MD, PhD calls "*the* most significant phenomena to be reckoned with," for contemporary international relations. She continues in her new book, "Humiliation in a Globalizing World: Does Humiliation Become the Most Disruptive Force?"

> Humiliation entails demeaning treatment that transgresses established expectations. It may involve acts of force, including violent force. At its heart is the idea of pinning down, putting down or holding to the ground. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of humiliation as a process is that the victim is forced into passivity, acted upon, made helpless.

Israel is risking the humiliation of Lebanon, just as Hezbollah rockets are humiliating the elite Israeli military. As this cycle gains momentum there is no room for the hyper-realist argument which states that fear of Israeli collective punishment will drive the Lebanese to swear off Hezbollah. It is the hyper-nationalistic movement, which facilitates the act of communal humiliation, and the two together create the nightmarish, self-perpetuating conflict we are seeing surface once again. The public must join the roughly one half of interviewees who claimed that acceptance is the only road to peace, and respect the only path to acceptance. As a spiritual Israeli man commented, "God does not want us to attack others. There is a deeper reason why this is happening; Jews and Palestinians are closer than any other people on the world and share the same traditions, as well as the collective trauma. It is so frightening for me…we need to learn from the past…I was in AA for two years and learned that no matter what happens, I have a choice and it's in me. I can choose peace, and I do. Israel can do the same."

The impact of trauma of wars, genocides, and holocaust is multifaceted. One is encouraged to remember and memorialize, erecting signs such as "we remember" "do not forget" as seen post 9/11, post Ottoman Turkish Genocide of the Armenians, and post Nazi Holocaust. In turn, we become hypervigilant as we enter the mode of "fight" in the fight-fright cycle of survival. Hypervigilance and hypersensitivity causes increased nationalism and clan-like, or tribe-like behavior, sometimes to the extent of bullying other nations. This translates into having the trauma or the sickness on one hand and the resolution or 'cure' as in the 'war' on the other.

According to Lifton (1990) and Staub (1989), German citizens were experiencing humiliation, economic chaos, and civil war before embracing Hitler. The defeat suffered in World War I had traumatized the military, which in turn permeated the German psyche. Individual Germans felt humiliated, disparaged, and hopeless **collectively re the future.** Similarly humiliation is said to have caused the Ottoman Empire and the Young Turks to panic and commit the Genocide of the Armenians, Greeks, and other Christian minorities in Asia Minor.

Collective trauma seeks resolution and cure. At times, the key to this process is warped and manifests itself in heightened nationalism and national security. An incessant focus on the trauma, and a collective victimization thereby creates resentment among the rest of the world. Mounting frustration, oppression, and humiliation fuels the creation of terrorist cells and suicide bombers who seek to exorcise these feeling in the

suicide act. One can only imagine the utter frustration which would drive a free citizen to wear an explosive onto a subway car??

It has been scientifically established that unresolved trauma has many effects upon the psyche including the high probability that a traumatized subject will continually reenact their particular trauma in a psychological effort to cope with it. One way this is satisfied is unconsciously traumatizing others, justifying the act by claiming "the other hit me first" as in the case of Israel and Hezbollah. But as the young Orthodox Jewish man said: "This is an opportunity to find out what Jews need to do to create peace within. Israel needs to find out why God is giving her these experiences?" He continued, "What can they (Jews) learn from this? The lesson is not in hitting back harder, stronger, and with intent of destruction, the lesson is finding deeper reasons for real and positive change to happen to embrace peace."

Israel seems to find itself in the mode of "fight" of "bully" for the sake of 'survival'. They must fight "before they kill us" because they often rationalize and bring in intergenerationally transmitted trauma of the Holocaust and assert "everybody hates us". Palestinians and other Arabs find themselves in the same mode of "fight", but in this case for "protection" for "honor" and for "survival." Both are trying to find peace and yet the cure that they have found is only an additional hindrance to their safety and to the process of achieving a lasting peace.

The real peace will come "if Jews become more spiritual and connect with their spiritual past" as a 22 year old Jewish man said who had deep concerns for his country and his people. The same sentiment was echoed from about 20% of the people interviewed "We need a new Martin Luther King, a Nelson Mandela to bring real peace to this world." "This is a disaster for humanity," stated an Egyptian, in tears as she attempted to express her sadness while feeling overwhelmed with the scope of the humanitarian disaster.

These spiritual leaders will guide the people to forgiveness and love. These age-old conflicts around the world will not be disappearing; the revenge and retaliation cycle cannot be stopped. One cannot forget the trauma, even if they wanted to, their bodies will remember. The only healthy and permanent means of resolution for past traumas is through spiritual connections, through love, forgiveness and acceptance of others as they are without trying to change them, be it their religion, language, culture, skin tone, or sexuality. As a 15-year-old Polish boy stated, "Do we need to self-destruct before we get it?"

"The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate…Returning violence for violence multiples violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness;

only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: Only love can do that."   Martin
Luther King, Jr.

References:

Kalayjian, A. (1995). *Disaster & Mass Trauma*. Long Branch, NJ: Vista Publishing
Lifton, J. R. & Markusen E. (1990) *The Genocidal Mentality: Nazi Holocaust and
       Nuclear Threat*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers.
Lindner, E. G. (2006c). *Making enemies: Humiliation and international conflict*.
       Westport, CT, London: Greenwood Press and Praeger Publishers.
Staub, E. (1989). *The Roots of Evil*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

For more information contact Dr. Kalayjian by E-mail: kalayjiana@aol.com or visit
www.meaningfulworld.com.