



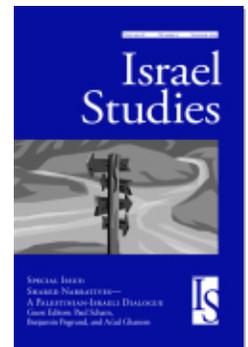
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Israeli Crisis Decision-Making in the Lebanon War: Group Madness or Individual Ambition?

Madness is the exception in individuals but the rule in groups. —(Friedrich Nietzsche)

ON 6 JUNE 1982 THE Israel Defense Forces crossed the northern border and invaded Lebanon. “Operation Peace for Galilee” was announced to the public as a limited, 48-hour operation to remove Palestinian *Fedayeen* bases. Four months later, however, Israel was still in Lebanon. The objectives of the operation were to destroy the PLO’s military and political infrastructure, to strike a serious blow against Syria, and to install a Christian regime that would sign a peace treaty with Israel. Accordingly, Israeli troops advanced beyond Beirut, engaging Palestinians, Lebanese Muslims, and Syrians in battle. Yet the achievement of their objectives remained elusive as Israel became embroiled in Lebanon’s on-going civil war and became incapable of extracting itself for the next three years. What was supposed have been a brief operation with a quick victory ended up as Israel’s worst war in its short history. Lebanon had become Israel’s Vietnam.

The conventional explanation of why Israel had gone to war focuses on the personal ambitions of Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. Zeev Schiff and Ehud Ya’ari’s book *Israel’s Lebanon War*, for example, describes Sharon as a “cynical, headstrong executor who regarded the IDF as his personal tool for obtaining sweeping achievements—and not necessarily defensive ones—and a minister prepared to stake the national interest on his struggle for power.”¹ The argument advanced by Schiff and Ya’ari is that it was not until Sharon took up his post in 1981 that a large-scale military operation

Rafael Eitan, the Cabinet, and members of the Mossad and Military Intelligence—was a victim of “groupthink.” Accordingly, the decision to invade Lebanon in 1982 was the result of pressure for group cohesiveness, stereotyped images, selective bias, and wishful thinking. “Operation Peace for Galilee” should thus be added to the list of foreign policy fiascoes caused by group dynamics. Similar to the decision-making responsible for the US Navy’s lack of preparedness at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the pursuit of the defeated North Korean army on its home territory, the Bay of Pigs invasion, the escalation of the Vietnam War, and the Watergate cover-up, Israel’s Lebanon War was the reflection of excessive risk-taking at the group-level rather than one man’s personal ambition.

DECISION-MAKING MODELS AND GROUPTHINK

Much has been written on group behavior, decision-making, and risk-taking in an effort to ascertain influences and motives as well as to construct models. Two broad categories emerge within the scholarship: the empirical approach, and the social psychology approach. The empirical approach has often focused on an experimental methodology and theory. The numerical composition of decision-making groups, and in particular the power of larger factions versus smaller factions,³ as well as majority and plurality,⁴ have been at the center of many empirical models. Indeed, it has been argued⁵ that a two-thirds majority favoring a particular outcome generally predicts the group verdict.

The empirical approach has been considered especially useful for decision-making on issues that have objectively correct and incorrect alternatives. Yet, it has been shown that, in cases of correct answers, majority processes do not necessarily determine the decision; rather, small factions can influence much larger factions. While these empirical models explain some aspects of group dynamics, they falter on the value-complexity of Israeli decision-making in Lebanon, making it more suitable for social psychology analysis.

At the center of many social psychology models on decision-making is the phenomenon of “groupthink.” Groupthink is a term coined by Yale psychologist Irving L. Janis to describe “a model of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members’ strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action.”⁶ It describes an almost excessive

form of concurrence-seeking among members of tightly knit policy-making groups, with the result that they aim for a quick and painless unanimity on the issues at hand. According to Janis's theory of groupthink, causes for concurrence-seeking can be found in the high cohesiveness of the decision-making group, structural faults of the group, and stressful internal and external situations. Prominent structural faults include insulation of the group, lack of tradition of impartial leadership, lack of norms requiring methodical procedures, and homogeneity of members' social background and ideology. A stressful situational context may stem from recent failures, moral dilemmas, excessive difficulties on current decision-making tasks that lower each member's sense of self-efficacy, or temporarily induce low self-esteem. Symptoms of groupthink range from the illusion of invulnerability, the belief in the inherent morality of the group, collective rationalization, and stereotypes of out-groups, to self-censorship, the illusion of unanimity, direct pressure on dissenters, and self-appointed mind-guards.

In his revised model of groupthink, Paul t'Hart⁷ adds an element of compliance, obedience, and conformity to cohesiveness, as well as elaborating upon the theory as a whole by including de-individuation, group polarization, risk-negligence, commitment, and entrapment as further causes of groupthink. The issue of risk-negligence has attracted considerable research, raising the question under what circumstances groups are more likely to take riskier decisions than individuals. D.G. Myers and H. Lamm,⁸ and A. Vinocur and E. Burnstein,⁹ addressed this question in their work on group polarization and the risk preferences of groups and individuals. This research revealed a tendency for groups to support not only high-risk decisions, but also concluded that groups are more prone to make errors than individuals. Such errors are often the result of the cognitive process itself. Patrick R. Laughlin asserts that small groups, in particular, engage in collective induction, which he defines as "the cooperative search for descriptive, predictive, and explanatory generalizations, rules and principles."¹⁰ Such a process of induction, in many cases, results in what R. Scott Tindale, Christine M. Smith, Linda S. Thomas, Joseph Filkins, and Susan Sheffey termed "shared representation." This shared knowledge or belief system lends credence to and enables the promotion of a particular alternative.¹¹

There has been much debate on the definitions of groupthink,¹² the concepts of cohesiveness, conformity,¹³ collective induction, shared representation, and compliance. This debate on decision-making fiascoes, resulting to some extent, if not completely, from groupthink, has suggested a number of symptoms of groupthink, which include the overestimation of the group, closed-mindedness, stereotypes, collective rationalization, and

pressures toward uniformity. Israeli decision-making on Lebanon, as will be argued here, exhibited all of these.

PLANNING AND RISK PROPENSITY

Decision-making in crisis situations is particularly prone to under- or inadequately estimate risk. One factor influencing the propensity for high-risk decisions is the process of planning. Risky policies are often preceded by extensive planning, which involves a broad guiding framework for individual decisions, based on premises, beliefs, action directives and expectations. This framework removes uncertainty while, at the same time, introducing its own biases.¹⁴ Indeed, it has been argued that, in many cases, “the plan becomes an anchoring point that rigidly tends to resist adjustment to changing realities, and instead imposes reinterpretation of reality to fit biased perceptions of the effectiveness of the plan itself.”¹⁵

Sharon’s “grand plan” underlying the invasion of Lebanon is an interesting example of reinterpreting reality. Sharon envisaged a war whose prime purpose was the establishment of “a new order” in Lebanon and in the Middle East.¹⁶ This “grand plan” called for invading Lebanon in order to eliminate all Palestinian presence and influence, evict Syrian troops, install a friendly Christian regime that would sign peace with Israel, destroy Palestinian nationalism in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and free Israel from past national traumas such as the 1973 war.¹⁷ This plan served as a framework for its architects, providing the decision-makers with a sense of confidence in its success, which, in turn, reduced their sensitivity to risks, or, in Yaacov Vertzberger’s words, the plan acted as a risk absorber.¹⁸

While Sharon, Eitan, and, to some degree, Begin engineered the environment to fit the plan, those members in the Cabinet who had not been fully briefed were drawn into making riskier decisions on a step-by-step basis, such as extending the invasion beyond the approved 40 kilometers. In the framework of such piecemeal commitment, risks are generally not considered comprehensively, but tend to be either ignored or, at best, incorporated incrementally.¹⁹ This leads to losing sight of the comprehensive risk on the one hand, while providing the illusion of control on the other hand. Decisions such as engaging Syrian troops or entering West Beirut thus appeared to be less risky.

Increased risk-taking by groups can also be explained through the tendency of individuals to shift responsibility to the group. This is compounded by the phenomenon that risky positions are often easier to defend,

since risk-takers tend to be more persuasive personalities.²⁰ Persuasive personalities in turn, increase the propensity for risk-taking, since groups often rely on strong leadership personalities—in this case, Sharon—whose authority for a riskier option is based upon the so-called “idiosyncrasy credit” derived from previous military and political leadership positions.²¹

The combination of planning, incremental decision-making, reliance on strong leadership personalities, and the tendency to shift responsibility all biased the decision-making process in favor of high-risk options. As a result, the “logic” of the “grand plan” was able to stand up to criticism, as well as to create the perception that contingency plans were unnecessary.

OVERESTIMATION OF THE GROUP

Overestimation of the group, as another symptom of groupthink, is based on two aspects: the illusion of invulnerability and the belief in the inherent morality of the group. The perception of invulnerability in the Israeli case was based on the decision-makers’ belief that military force could successfully achieve long-term political gains, on one hand, and that the Maronites, upon whose cooperation the grand strategy was constructed, were a reliable junior ally. Both proved wrong.

Reliance upon military force as a mechanism of foreign policy dates back to Israel’s first prime minister and defense minister, David Ben-Gurion. He had been convinced that the Arabs only responded to force and that the 1948 War had shown that the military action of a few months had achieved more than the diplomacy of the preceding decades. This view was institutionalized during Ben-Gurion’s premiership and heavily relied upon by his successors as a means of dealing with neighboring states in the absence of direct interstate relations. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, this very view was the foundation for the policies of *faits accomplis* of Prime Minister Menachem Begin, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, and Chief-of-Staff Rafael Eitan. Indeed, Sharon was convinced that military gains during “Operation Peace for Galilee” would have sweeping political results. Had he considered Israel’s past attempts to translate military gains into political ones, he would have realized that Israel had never been very successful.

The defects in Israel’s decision-making evolved around a number of factors: limited information, inadequate expert advice, superficial evaluation of alternatives, and no clear definition of aims. The discussions within the elite were limited to few alternative courses of action. The group failed to re-examine the course of action preferred by the majority and neglected

courses of action initially evaluated as unsatisfactory. Little attempt was made to obtain information from experts who were able to provide sound advice. In fact, the discussion was limited because the decision to launch a ground operation had already been made during 1981. Thus, the debate only revolved around the depth of incursion.

The belief in Maronite reliability, the inherent morality of the war, and military strength deluded the various decision-makers to Israel's vulnerability. The Maronites were regarded as reliable because they came to be perceived as "natural" allies based on the premise that "my enemy's enemy is my friend." Israeli-Maronite relations, however, had less to do with friendship than with expediency—a fact that was often disregarded by Israeli decision-makers, many of whom considered the existence of the relationship itself as proof of Maronite reliability. This view was supported by the Mossad, which was responsible for establishing these relations. Such a perception was most likely due to the over-identification of Mossad field agents with their hosts' plight.

Thus, when the invasion was implemented, it came as a surprise when the Maronites refused to cooperate and Israeli forces got bogged down in Lebanon's confessional war, resulting in a high number of Israeli casualties. The illusion of invulnerability magnified Israel's failure in Lebanon to the extent that the Lebanon War has had a psychological impact on the Israeli nation similar to that of the Vietnam War on the United States.

CLOSED-MINDEDNESS, STEREOTYPES AND COLLECTIVE RATIONALIZATION

Decision-making groups involved with conflict or war scenarios tend to develop stereotypical views of the opposition as weak, stupid, or inhuman, while maintaining their own pure self-image.²² Stereotypes, in turn, lead to a closed ideological system in decision-making. This system is further restricted by the tendency among powerful members of groups to form cliques, or, as Barry E. Collins phrased it: "High power members will like their fellow high power members more than other group members and will initiate more communication to fellow high power individuals."²³ The existence of such systems and the exclusivity of high power cliques make it almost impossible to challenge accepted assumptions. This is best demonstrated by closer analysis of the stereotyped view of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the main out-group, and the mutually reinforced ideological orientation of the key decision-makers Begin, Sharon, Eitan, and Shamir.

STEREOTYPING THE PLO

The stereotype of the PLO amongst decision-makers was almost universally shared. The PLO was seen purely as a terrorist organization that wanted to destroy the State of Israel. It was de-humanized and, at the same time, perceived as militarily incompetent. Eitan's attitude toward the PLO exemplifies this terrorist stereotype. In his book *A Soldier's Story: The Life and Times of an Israeli War Hero*, the classic bi-polarity is evident. His own and Israel's actions are portrayed as morally superior, while the PLO is equated with terrorism and directly blamed for Israel's invasion of Lebanon. Eitan writes:

Contrary to the claims of some academics, the Argov assassination attempt was not used as an excuse to begin the war. In fact, our response was not designed to serve as the opening blow. We bombed the terrorist bases because the government felt that it was time to explain to the PLO that their interpretation of the cease-fire agreement was unacceptable and all such acts were to be considered violations of the agreement. *What brought the war on was the severe response to our raid, during which the terrorists bombarded northern Israel with great intensity.*²⁴ [emphasis added]

Sharon saw the PLO in a similar way. He also believed that the PLO was the main obstacle to Israel's relations with Arabs in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. The expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon was therefore to remove the "sinister effect of the PLO with its assassinations and pervasive threats."²⁵

While Eitan and Sharon resorted to dehumanization and overplaying the security threat, Begin literally demonized the PLO. He saw the PLO as "killers of women and children."²⁶ On a visit to New York in 1976, Begin described the PLO as follows:

What do they—the so-called PLO—do? They make the civilian population the target of their bloody attacks on men, women and children. They never regret or sorrow when they have "succeeded" in killing an innocent Jewish man or woman or child. On the contrary, they rejoice in it. And that is the difference between fighters and killers.²⁷

Begin justified the 1978 "Operation Litani" as sending "our boys into southern Lebanon to eradicate the bases of evil, of those who call themselves the PLO."²⁸ Indeed, he "regarded the PLO and its leadership as no less than the successors of Hitler and his Nazi hordes, and used imagery drawn from

another, far darker era in his references to Palestinian leaders. Similarly, he equated the aim of the PLO with Hitler's "Final Solution" and the PLO Covenant with *Mein Kampf*.²⁹ At the end of 1981, during a visit to the United States, Begin told a high-ranking Israeli general who came to see him at the Waldorf-Astoria, "I want Arafat in his bunker!"³⁰ Begin's continuous references to the Second World War has led to assertions that the motive underlying his Lebanon policy and hostility toward the PLO was "mythic" rather than military. Accordingly, Begin supported the 1982 invasion because "he interpreted PLO shelling [of northern Israel] as a sign that the Jews were still threatened by the Holocaust."³¹

COLLECTIVE RATIONALIZATION

Shared stereotypes fed directly into a process of collective rationalization. Indeed, Begin, Sharon, Shamir, and Eitan operated within a closed ideological system that made them disregard the counsel of most experts. Without considering Lebanon's political reality, they had decided to see to it that Lebanon became an independent state that would live in peace with Israel.³² In fact, Sharon explained to his aides that, in his estimation, a successful operation in Lebanon would ensure unchallenged Israeli superiority for thirty years to come, during which time Israel would be free to establish *faits accomplis* in its best interests.³³

Begin, too, had an all-encompassing view of reality that did not concern itself with details; rather, this view altered the context and events.³⁴ His Cabinet Secretary Arye Na'or recalls that Begin had been presented many times with demographic and political data on the Maronites and Lebanon by Military Intelligence, but these did not make a serious impression on him.³⁵ Similarly, it has been claimed that Begin had no understanding of Lebanon at all,³⁶ and that from such a position he approached policy-making toward Lebanon.

Of particular importance was the Mossad's influence upon Begin. His acceptance of the Mossad's advice was not surprising, since its evaluation fit neatly into his ideological worldview. Moreover, Begin's early career as the commander of the underground organization Irgun predisposed him to work closely with the Mossad. In the Irgun, Begin had been engaged in activities that were similar to those of the Mossad agents, and he was thus open to their mode of thinking.³⁷

Begin's *weltanschauung* and his reliance upon the Mossad reinforced Sharon's position of advocating a large-scale military operation. Sharon saw Israel as under constant threat from its Arab neighbors, whose goal was the complete destruction of the country. The only way to combat this threat was

by force. In this, his opinion coincided with that of Chief-of-Staff Eitan, who had often stated that “the only good Arab is a dead Arab.”³⁸

The idea of Lebanon within the decision-making elite was very similar. The Maronites were seen as an ally and were at the core of Israel’s interventionist policies. Maronites and Christians, according to Eitan, were one and the same. He also believed that they were somewhat European, “not really like Arabs, more educated, they spoke French and many other languages and they were European in orientation and outlook.”³⁹ Begin’s views had an added, moral, twist. As his Cabinet Secretary Arye Na’or recalls: “Begin saw the Maronites as Phoenicians. He did not see them as Arabs. . . . He believed that the Maronites were the just ones, the victims of hatred, persecution and killings and therefore he believed it was the duty of the State of Israel to give them a hand.”

Sharon based his assessment on his personal relationship with Bashir Gemayel, and anyone who pointed out the failings of Gemayel was countered with arguments about the new maturity of the Maronite leader. In January 1982, long before Sharon had presented the Cabinet with his plans, he had met with Gemayel and had discussed the idea of linking up Gemayel’s quest for the presidency with a large-scale Israeli operation.⁴⁰

Eitan shared Sharon’s perceptions of Gemayel. Bashir Gemayel had visited him a month later in February 1982, and Eitan had returned this visit in March. At this point, Gemayel laid down the plan. “We expect you to invade Lebanon, and when you do we will denounce you. We expect you to remain here for three months.”⁴¹ Eitan had already prepared such a long-term invasion. Indeed, the announcement that “Operation Peace for Galilee” was to last only 48 hours was made purely for political reasons.⁴² Thus, Israel proceeded to return Lebanon, the second democracy in the Middle East and the land of the Phoenicians, to its rightful place.⁴³

The miscalculations resulting from such joint uncritical views are reflected in the events surrounding the Zahle Missile Crisis in spring 1981. None of the key decision-makers believed that Gemayel had deliberately sought confrontation with the Syrians in order to draw in Israel. No one considered the possibility that some Maronites were convinced that only direct Israeli intervention would help them to free themselves from Syria.⁴⁴ So when this suspicion was voiced, it was rejected outright. Indeed, Foreign Minister Itzhak Shamir, another member of the elite, during the Syrian missile deployment, responded to a press query whether the Lebanese Christians had drawn the Israelis into confrontation with Syria, that this was “a superficial look at the situation in Lebanon.”

With such shared views between the decision-makers, it is easy to

discern that there would be no restraining force when the invasion plan was laid on the table. Nor is it difficult to see how objections to the plan were brushed aside. The invasion of 1982 was not an aberration in foreign policy, but the culmination of it; it was not one person implementing a “crazy idea,” but a foreign policy elite collectively inclined toward interventionism.

PAST EXPERIENCE AND FAMILIARITY

Yuen Foong Khong, in his book *Analogies at War*, poses the question of where policy-makers get their historical lessons. The answer is wars, revolutions, and other crucial political events experienced directly or vicariously by the relevant decision-makers.⁴⁵ Particularly strong is the impact of major events, such as the most recent war or revolution. The key events that shaped the 1982 Israeli decision-making elite, as reflected in stereotypes and collective rationalization, were the Holocaust for Begin, the 1948 War of Independence for Eitan, and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole for Sharon. This leaves one remaining historic experience for discussion: six decades of covert relations with the Lebanese Maronites. Together, these past experiences were transformed into information-processing schema or knowledge structures, through which incoming information was filtered or coded. Moreover, the historical memory of Israeli-Maronite relations and an established pattern of Israeli thinking on Lebanon⁴⁶ provided decision-makers with confidence and assurance that there were no hidden costs.⁴⁷

Israel never had official relations with its northern neighbor. Since the 1920s, however, Zionists, and later Israelis, had unofficial contacts with representatives of the Lebanese Maronite community.⁴⁸ These contacts, which were initiated by some Maronites who sought a minority-alliance against the threat of Islam, developed into an informal relationship during the 1930s and 1940s.⁴⁹ Manifestations of this relationship were the Draft Treaty of 1936,⁵⁰ the Maronite submission to the 1946 Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry,⁵¹ the 1946 secret treaty between the Maronite Church and the Yishuv,⁵² and the petition to the United Nations in 1947 by Maronite Archbishop Ignace Mubarak in support of the creation of a Jewish state.⁵³ This selective contact with Maronite views formed the foundation for Israel's historical experience and perception that the Maronites were friendly and reliable and that their political dominance would ensure that Lebanon would not be a hostile state.

Relations continued in the 1950s with Israeli financial aid to the largest Maronite party in the 1951 parliamentary elections⁵⁴ as well as military aid

during the 1958 Lebanese civil war.⁵⁵ While these actions were limited in scope, the thinking behind them already bears evidence of a distinct pattern of decision-making. The notion of invading Lebanon in order to change the geo-political configuration of the Middle East, similar to the 1982 “grand plan,” can be traced back to those years. It is evident in Ben-Gurion’s 1954 plan for invading Lebanon should Iraq invade Syria, and invading Lebanon as phase two of the 1956 Sinai campaign.⁵⁶ Moshe Dayan’s 1955 plan of recruiting a Lebanese army officer in South Lebanon⁵⁷ also bears remarkable resemblance to Israel’s 1978 establishment of the South Lebanon security zone under Major Saad Haddad.

In 1975, during the second Lebanese civil war, Israel once again supplied Maronites with military aid, including the training of Maronite soldiers in Israel;⁵⁸ the Israeli-Maronite relationship had started to develop into an alliance. As during preceding decades, Israeli decision-makers believed that, by ensuring Maronite hegemony in Lebanon, they could ensure Israeli hegemony in the Levant. Equally, as in preceding decades, the voices challenging the assumptions underlying many decisions remained unheard or were marginalized—a pattern which was repeated in 1982.

Misperceptions also fed into the pattern of Israeli thinking as well as into Israeli intelligence estimates on Lebanon.⁵⁹ The Maronites were approached on the premise that “my enemy’s enemy is my friend.”⁶⁰ The Muslims were disregarded as an insignificant and powerless minority. This assumption of Christian dominance led Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, to believe that Lebanon was the weakest link in the Arab chain and that, with Israeli help, it could be made into an ally. The perception of Lebanon as a Christian country was accepted by most Israeli decision-makers who succeeded Ben-Gurion. A critical analysis of the demographic realities of Lebanon would have shown the opposite to be true as early as the first Lebanese civil war, which should have been a warning light. Israeli decision-makers did not realize until the 1975 civil war that the balance had shifted. Nevertheless, they continued to believe that, with Israeli help and the removal of the Muslim Palestinians, the situation could easily be rectified.

Much of the misconception of the strength of the Christian community in Lebanon was based on the perceived strength of the presidency. The fact that Lebanon’s president was traditionally a Maronite was seen as the reflection of Maronite superiority. It was also generally believed that the Lebanese president was the main foreign-policy decision-maker and that, if he chose to have relations with Israel, practically the whole Republic of Lebanon was part of this relationship. Friendly contacts with President

Emile Eddé in 1936,⁶¹ President Camille Chamoun in 1958, and President-elect Bashir Gemayel in 1982 served to reinforce this belief. Indeed, according to Begin, the Lebanese Constitution gave the Maronites an unchallengeable status in Lebanon.⁶²

Directly related was the assumption that the Maronites as a whole wanted a Christian state. Israeli decision-makers let themselves be deceived by Maronite talk of alliance and planning revolts⁶³ as an expression of longing for a state of their own. Romantic notions of Phoenicianism, which played an important role in Maronite efforts to create an ethnic national identity, strengthened the idea of a minority alliance, which some saw as the revival of an ancient Phoenician-Canaanite partnership.⁶⁴ Yet, Maronite striving for an alliance needs to be seen in the context of Lebanon's political system, which was set up in such a way that no community had an absolute majority. Thus, almost every single Lebanese community made alliances with outside forces in support of their position. Such alliances were not to overthrow the delicately balanced Lebanese system, but to give their own communities sufficient leverage to dominate that system without collapsing it. Accordingly, Israeli support was to be sufficient to assure Maronite dominance, but was not intended to be open cooperation and Israeli presence in Lebanon. Until 1982, Israel served exactly that function for the Maronites. However, based on Israeli stereotypes of the Maronites and Lebanon, lured by Bashir Gemayel, who was sending mixed messages, and propelled by Ariel Sharon, who had greater plans in mind, Israel invaded Lebanon and found that the Maronites were not only unwilling to fight to re-establish their dominance, but were also renegeing on the peace plans and coalescing with the Muslims.

PRESSURES TOWARD UNIFORMITY

Central to the Israeli decision-making process preceding the Lebanon War was pressure for cohesiveness; in short, views on Maronites, Lebanon and the goals of the upcoming military operation needed to be streamlined. Right from the beginning, members of the decision-making group were pressured into accepting the view favored by the key decision-makers: Begin, Sharon, Shamir, and Eitan.

Subtle constraints prevented members of the group from fully exercising their critical powers. Reasons for such conformity or uniformity are rooted in social approval and dependency.⁶⁵ The first factor leading toward conformity in the 1982 Israeli decision-making process was that open ex-

pression of doubts, when most others in the group seemed to have reached a consensus, was discouraged. The second was the group's propensity to accept Sharon's contribution on the basis of his evidence, its internal consistency, and consistency with past experience.⁶⁶ His credibility was further enhanced by his strong leadership personality. As research on decision-making has shown, "intelligent, strong, successful high status persons will induce more conformity than lower status ones."⁶⁷

The third factor influencing conformity was the desire to remain in the inner group. Members of the decision-making elite were thus pressured into supporting decisions of which they were not fully convinced. Indeed, when such extreme group cohesiveness exists or is aimed at, members of the group are more commonly engaged in developing solidarity, mutual liking, and positive feelings about attending meetings than critically discussing and evaluating controversial issues.

The perceived need for conformity is particularly strong in crisis decision-making. Often this induces members who are not in line with the group to downplay their doubts and even to revise their opinions. Such pressure was clearly exerted in June 1982 on the dissenting voices in the Cabinet and Military Intelligence by the key decision-makers. Moreover, dissenters who did not give in to such pressure were then excluded from the group in order to restore its unity. Such exclusionist dynamics led to the marginalization of Deputy Defense Minister Mordechai Zippori, Commander of the Northern Command Amir Drori, and Head of Military Intelligence Yehoshua Saguy.

In such circumstances, most Cabinet members did not feel they had any choice except to go along with the majority, which concurred with Begin, Sharon, Eitan, and the Mossad, which resulted in de-individuation. De-individuation increases with cohesiveness and has been described as the transformation from an aware individual into part of a mob.⁶⁸ Its effects upon decision-making are detrimental. "Deindividuation can be death to making considered, intelligent decisions in groups," since de-individuated groups do not carefully weigh alternatives, seek outside opinions, or otherwise critically assess decision alternatives.

In addition, Sharon, after the initiation of the war, advocated the position of "either all of Lebanon or none at all." Even though the Cabinet was well aware of Sharon's political goals, the members' resistance was eroded by the "greater logic" of an all-out war in comparison to a limited incursion. They agreed that just pushing the PLO back would not really solve the problem.⁶⁹ From a military point of view, the Syrians in the Beqa'a could give the PLO sanctuary, from which it would still be able to reach the

Galilee; this sanctuary had to be denied, and consequently a clash with the Syrians was in the cards.

The expansion of war aims, however, was not as well thought-out as it seemed. The premises on which the “grand plan” was based—namely, the cooperation of the Maronites and the capabilities of military force to achieve political aims—had been grossly overestimated. When Sharon unleashed the war in 1982, his calculations of the military balance proved correct. His erroneous interpretation of the Lebanese situation, however, was to make a military victory a political disaster for both Israel and Lebanon.⁷⁰ Indeed, the war mirrored faithfully both Sharon’s personality and his world view.

Considering the behavior of the decision-makers, it becomes clear that the group’s discussions were indeed limited to few alternatives: a limited operation or an all-out invasion. Diplomatic channels, a non-military option, or a postponed military option were never considered; neither was the possibility of an alliance with the Lebanese Druze or Shi’a. Once the key decision-makers Begin, Sharon, and Eitan had decided on the “grand plan,” the course of action was not reexamined, even though debates were still on-going among others involved in decision-making, such as the Cabinet and Military Intelligence. In fact, the opposition of Military Intelligence to an all-out invasion was not raised again, and thus all other options were discarded. Further, little attempt was made to obtain information from experts, especially considering the split between Israel’s two intelligence services regarding the Maronites. Faced with such a split, it would have been logical to consult others, such as the research department of the Foreign Ministry. This was never done.

PRESSURE ON DISSENTERS

The views of members of the intelligence community were least cohesive and are therefore an excellent example of direct pressure on dissenters. The Mossad supported the key decision-makers’ perception of the Maronites as a reliable ally. Military Intelligence, however, raised doubts with regard to this evaluation, which were immediately quashed by the Mossad.

The Mossad, which had been responsible for cultivating the relationship with the Maronites, was Bashir Gemayel’s most consistent supporter. Indeed, Yitzhak Hofi, head of the Mossad, advocated full alliance.⁷¹ The reasons for full support of such an alliance have been speculated about many times. It has been described as a psychological syndrome resulting from the sudden ability to go beyond the border and talk to people who were

formally Arabs, but who were really like Israelis.⁷² Along similar lines, it has been argued that the longer an agent is with his hosts, the more he gets drawn into accepting their way of thinking. Thus, the Mossad presented to Israeli decision-makers exactly the picture the Maronites wanted them to present.⁷³ Others claim it was a natural development resulting from a good working relationship.⁷⁴ On a conceptual level, many in the Mossad did see the Maronites as Phoenicians.⁷⁵ If not going quite as far as that, the belief that “your enemy’s enemy is your friend” served as sufficient basis for an alliance. Thus, it was not until after the missile crisis that Hofi began to suspect that Maronite leaders had received assurances from Israel of which he was unaware.⁷⁶

Military Intelligence officers, by contrast, had warned time and again that the Maronites were not reliable and warned against an alliance of any sort.⁷⁷ Indeed, Yehoshua Saguy, Head of Military Intelligence, opposed the invasion of Lebanon, claiming that the “junior ally was a dubious one.”⁷⁸ General Saguy, during the Zahle crisis, had already suspected a plot to draw in Israel, but Begin had rejected his assessment.⁷⁹ Saguy opposed the air strike against the Syrians recommended by Eitan. Later on, while Sharon lectured at Cabinet meetings about his “grand strategy” and going all the way to Beirut, Saguy countered, “We’d only get bogged down.”⁸⁰ With a clearer and more realistic concept of Lebanon, he commented that, even if Bashir Gemayel was made president, the Maronites would still have to maintain their allegiance to the Arab world. As far as the Maronites were concerned, the Israelis were just a tool for purging Lebanon of an evil. They would not make peace with Israel.⁸¹

In April 1982, high-ranking IDF officers were dispatched to Beirut to coordinate plans. In May, Saguy’s intelligence assessment was extremely pessimistic. He believed that if Israel invaded Lebanon, a clash with Syria would be unavoidable, the Lebanese Christians would not do anything to help, the lack of consensus within the IDF would become a problem, and the PLO infrastructure could not be destroyed.⁸²

The low opinion Military Intelligence had of the Maronites, however, had been overshadowed since 1981 by the fact that the Israeli-Maronite relationship had become a largely personal one between Ariel Sharon and Bashir Gemayel.⁸³ Further, faced with Sharon, Eitan, and the Mossad advocating the reliability of the Maronites, the influence of Military Intelligence declined. Even Begin, who has been described as incapable of forming a realistic assessment on his own, was not inclined to believe Military Intelligence’s evaluation, since it contradicted his own plans.⁸⁴

Additional warnings about the misconceptions underlying the inva-

sion plan were pointed out by Amir Drori, the commander of Israel's Northern Command, who had supervised weapons transfers to the Maronites in the late 1970s. Not only did he raise the possibility of operational problems for both a limited and a full-fledged invasion, he also said that "it was out of the question to depend on the Christians. From a military standpoint, they were in very poor shape. Their capability was limited solely to the defensive desire, and they could not be expected to participate in a mobile war."⁸⁵ Other warnings against close cooperation came as early as the Zahle Missile Crisis from Deputy Defense Minister Mordechai Zippori.⁸⁶ However, Zippori's protests fell upon deaf ears, since he was known to have had long-standing personal differences with Sharon and Eitan dating back to Zippori's support of military spending budget cuts and opposition to the destruction of the Osirak reactor.⁸⁷ Whenever he raised objections, therefore, many interpreted it as purely an expression of this vendetta.⁸⁸

CONCLUSION: VICTIMS OF GROUPTHINK?

Decision-making fiascoes in foreign policy resulting from groupthink are not uncommon occurrences. The more disastrous and more memorable ones on the American side include the Bay of Pigs invasion and the escalation of the wars in Korea and Vietnam. The phenomenon of groupthink in foreign policy is the result of members of a decision-making elite striving for unanimity which overrides their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action.⁸⁹

Israeli decision-making preceding the 1982 war aimed at conducting a large scale ground operation. The informal objective, however, was to pressure toward unanimity. This led to an unrealistic assessment of the situation and a risky strategy for war. In other words, the formal goal of drawing up realistic operational plans was subordinated to the informal goal of achieving consensus and harmony within the decision-making group.

The military plans favored by the key decision-makers had become quite obvious. Information in support of these plans could be openly voiced, and supporters thus became part of the inner group. Dissenting views were kept quiet. This was especially so after attempts at dissent by Saguy, Drori, and Zippori had led to their marginalization. In short, criticism of the favored view would lead to exclusion from the inner group and thus removal from the decision-making process.

Pressure toward uniformity of opinion and the fear of being excluded



About 150,000 Peace Now protesters demonstrating for an immediate pullout from Lebanon and the resignation of the Government at a mass rally in Tel-Aviv, June 1987.

Courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office

subverted the fundamental purpose of the group meetings. Rather than producing a broad forum to explore all avenues, the group quickly moved toward reinforcing the favored plan. Indeed, the more amiability that developed, the greater the danger that independent views were replaced by groupthink. This, in turn, was likely to result in irrational and dehumanizing action directed against out-groups.⁹⁰ The Sabra and Shatilla massacres, undoubtedly, fall into this category.

The concurrence-seeking tendency which developed early on within the group interfered with critical thinking. Objections and challenges to the “grand plan” were ignored, and contingency plans were not seriously considered. Consequently, the decision-makers were ill-prepared when the operation started going wrong from the first week onward.

“Operation Peace for Galilee” did not fail because Sharon, in following his personal ambitions, had overreached himself; rather, it failed because the dynamics of groupthink provided the decision-makers with an illusion of invulnerability. This led to ignoring risks, the reinforcement of stereotyped conceptions of the PLO, the Maronites, and Lebanon, and inadequately evaluated intelligence data, combined with shared rationalizations. The ill-fated decision to launch an all-out Israeli invasion of Lebanon

in 1982 was based on mutually reinforced misperception, poor judgment, and wishful thinking of a group of decision-makers who, as individuals, would not have taken the same risks.

NOTES

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