

Point of View No. 46

Military Presence in South Lebanon - Asset or Liability

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Over the past few days, the IDF has been taking over territories in the south of Lebanon in order to create a "security zone" until the arrival of an international force (**Ha'aretz**, 8/3/06).

The Reut Institute forewarns that Israel's military presence in south Lebanon may turn from an asset into a liability. Israel may find itself maintaining a prolonged military presence under Hizbullah's fire, without certainty regarding the arrival of an international force.

What is the Issue?

- The IDF has taken over a security zone in south Lebanon, similar to the one held by Israel until its withdrawal from Lebanon (5/00).
- The objective of the military presence on the ground is to create a zone which is "clean" of Hizbullah forces, and to prepare the ground for the arrival of an international force, following a ceasefire agreement.
- Due to the complexity of deploying such an international force, there may be a substantial "interim period" between a ceasefire and the deployment of the international force. (See: [International Involvement Predicament \(4\) – The Interim Period](#)).
- Israel's objectives are to minimize the length of this interim period, the end of which will be the establishment a new military-political arrangement that would undermine Hizbullah's ability.

Why is this Important? Why Now?

- The interim period may allow Hizbullah to restore its military capabilities, earn renewed support within the internal Lebanese arena and might even obstruct the deployment of the international force.
- Therefore, the IDF may find itself in south Lebanon, constrained by the ceasefire agreement, while exposed to Hizbullah's guerilla attacks and with no certainty regarding the deployment of an international force.

Policy Options

- The longer the interim period is, Israel's military presence will turn from an asset into a liability and it will lose its political leverage. Therefore, Israel should aspire to a ceasefire agreement with a clear timetable regarding the deployment of the international force.
- Israel should question whether a military presence after the ceasefire will serve its objectives.
- Moreover, in light of the political obstacles to an effective international involvement, Israel should examine the alternatives to the deployment of an international force.

For additional sources see the Reut Institute website: www.reut-institute.org

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