

English Summary of the Winograd Commission Report

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GOOD EVENING

1. About an hour ago we submitted the Final Report of the Commission to Investigate the Lebanon Campaign in 2006 to the Prime minister, Mr. Ehud Olmert, and to the Minister of Defense, Mr. Ehud Barak.
 2. The task given to us was difficult and complex. It involved the examination of events in 34 days of fighting, and the scrutiny of events before the war, since the IDF had left Lebanon in 2000. This covered extensive, charged and complex facts, unprecedented in any previous Commission of Inquiry.
 3. The fact that the Government of Israel opted for such an examination, and that the army conducted a large number of inquiries of a variety of military events, are a sign of strength, and an indication that the political and military leaders of Israel are willing to expose themselves to critical review and to painful but required mending.
 4. We have included in the classified version of the Report all the relevant facts we have found concerning the 2nd Lebanon war, systematically and in a chronological order. This presentation of the factual basis was an important part of our work. It is reasonable to assume that no single decision maker had access to a similar factual basis. In this task we had a unique advantage over others who have written about this war, since we had access to a lot of primary and comprehensive material, and the opportunity to clarify the facts by questioning many witnesses, commanders and soldiers, including bereaved families.
 5. For obvious reasons, the unclassified Report does not include the many facts that cannot be revealed for reasons of protecting the state's security and foreign affairs. We tried, nonetheless, to balance between the wish to present the public with a meaningful picture of the events and the needs of security. We should note that we did not take the mere fact that some data has already been published in the media as a reason for including it in our unclassified Report.
 6. We, the members of the Commission, acted according to the main objectives for which the Commission was established ˆ to respond to the bad feelings of the Israeli public of a crisis and disappointment caused by the results of the 2nd Lebanon war, and from the way it was managed by the political and military echelons; and the wish to draw lessons from the failings of the war and its flaws, and to repair what is required, quickly and resolutely. We regarded as most important to investigate deeply what had happened, as a key to drawing lessons for the future, and their implementation.
 7. This conception of our role was one of the main reasons for our decision not to include in the Final Report personal conclusions and recommendations. We believe that the primary need for improvements applies to the structural and systemic malfunctioning revealed in the war ˆ on all levels.
- Nonetheless, it should be stressed that the fact we refrained from imposing personal responsibility does not imply that no such responsibility exists. We also wish to repeat our statement from the Interim Report: We will not impose different standards of responsibility to the political and the military echelons, or to persons of different ranks within them.
8. Let us emphasize: when we imposed responsibility on a system, an echelon or a unit, we did not imply that the responsibility was only or mainly of those who headed it at the time of the war. Often, such responsibility stemmed from a variety of factors outside the control of those at the head. In addition, a significant part of the responsibility for the failures and flaws we have found lies with those who had been in charge of preparedness and readiness in the years before the war.
 9. The purpose of this press release is not to sum up the Final Report. Rather, it is to present its highlights. The Report itself includes discussions of many important issues, which are an inseparable part of the Report, its conclusions and recommendations.
 10. In the Final Report we dealt mainly with the events of the period after the initial decision to go to war, which we had discussed in the Interim Report. Yet the events of the period covered by the Final Report took place under the shadow of the constraints created by the decision to go to war, with all its failings and flaws.

We want to stress that we stand behind everything we said in the Interim Report, and the two parts of the Report

complement each other.

11. Overall, we regard the 2nd Lebanon war as a serious missed opportunity. Israel initiated a long war, which ended without its clear military victory. A semi-military organization of a few thousand men resisted, for a few weeks, the strongest army in the Middle East, which enjoyed full air superiority and size and technology advantages. The barrage of rockets aimed at Israel's civilian population lasted throughout the war, and the IDF did not provide an effective response to it. The fabric of life under fire was seriously disrupted, and many civilians either left their home temporarily or spent their time in shelters. After a long period of using only standoff fire power and limited ground activities, Israel initiated a large scale ground offensive, very close to the Security Council resolution imposing a cease fire. This offensive did not result in military gains and was not completed. These facts had far-reaching implications for us, as well as for our enemies, our neighbors, and our friends in the region and around the world.

12. In the period we examined in the Final Report - from July 18, 2006, to August 14, 2006- again troubling findings were revealed, some of which had already been mentioned in the Interim Report:

- We found serious failings and shortcomings in the decision-making processes and staff-work in the political and the military echelons and their interface.
- We found serious failings and flaws in the quality of preparedness, decision-making and performance in the IDF high command, especially in the Army.
- We found serious failings and flaws in the lack of strategic thinking and planning, in both the political and the military echelons.
- We found severe failings and flaws in the defence of the civilian population and in coping with its being attacked by rockets.
- These weaknesses resulted in part from inadequacies of preparedness and strategic and operative planning which go back long before the 2nd Lebanon war.

13. The decision made in the night of July 12th ˆ to react (to the kidnapping) with immediate and substantive military action, and to set for it ambitious goals - limited Israel's range of options. In fact, after the initial decision had been made, Israel had only two main options, each with its coherent internal logic, and its set of costs and disadvantages. The first was a short, painful, strong and unexpected blow on Hezbollah, primarily through standoff fire-power. The second option was to bring about a significant change of the reality in the South of Lebanon with a large ground operation, including a temporary occupation of the South of Lebanon and 'cleaning' it of Hezbollah military infrastructure.

14. The choice between these options was within the exclusive political discretion of the government; however, the way the original decision to go to war had been made; the fact Israel went to war before it decided which option to select, and without an exit strategy ˆ all these constituted serious failures, which affected the whole war. Responsibility for these failures lay, as we had stressed in the Interim Report, on both the political and the military echelons.

15. After the initial decision to use military force, and to the very end of the war, this period of 'equivocation' continued, with both the political and the military echelon not deciding between the two options: amplifying the military achievement by a broad military ground offensive, or abstaining from such a move and seeking to end the war quickly. This 'equivocation' did hurt Israel. Despite awareness of this fact, long weeks passed without a serious discussion of these options, and without a decision ˆ one way or the other ˆ between them.

16. In addition to avoiding a decision about the trajectory of the military action, there was a very long delay in the deployment necessary for an extensive ground offensive, which was another factor limiting Israel's freedom of action and political flexibility: Till the first week of August, Israel did not prepare the military capacity to start a massive ground operation.

17. As a result, Israel did not stop after its early military achievements, and was 'dragged' into a ground operation only after the political and diplomatic timetable prevented its effective completion. The responsibility for this basic failure in conducting the war lies at the doorstep of both the political and the military echelons.

18. The overall image of the war was a result of a mixture of flawed conduct of the political and the military echelons and the interface between them, of flawed performance by the IDF, and especially the ground forces, and of deficient Israeli preparedness. Israel did not use its military force well and effectively, despite the fact that it was a limited war initiated by Israel itself. At the end of the day, Israel did not gain a political achievement because of military successes; rather, it relied on a political agreement, which included positive elements for Israel, which permitted it to stop a war which it had failed to win.

19. This outcome was primarily caused by the fact that, from the very beginning, the war has not been conducted on the

basis of deep understanding of the theatre of operations, of the IDF's readiness and preparedness, and of basic principles of using military power to achieve a political and diplomatic goal.

20. All in all, the IDF failed, especially because of the conduct of the high command and the ground forces, to provide an effective military response to the challenge posed to it by the war in Lebanon, and thus failed to provide the political echelon with a military achievement that could have served as the basis for political and diplomatic action. Responsibility for this outcomes lies mainly with the IDF, but the misfit between the mode of action and the goals determined by the political echelon share responsibility.

21. We should note that, alongside the failures in the IDF performance, there were also important military achievements. Special mention should go to the great willingness of the soldiers, especially reserve soldiers, to serve and fight in the war, as well as the many instances of heroism, courage, self-sacrifice and devotion of many commanders and soldiers.

22. The air force should be congratulated on very impressive achievements in this war. However, there were those in the IDF high command, joined by some in the political echelon, who entertained a baseless hope that the capabilities of the air force could prove decisive in the war. In fact, the impressive achievements of the air force were necessarily limited, and were eroded by the weaknesses in the overall performance of the IDF.

23. The "Hannit" episode colored to a large extent the whole performance of the Navy, despite the fact that it made a critical contribution to the naval blockade, and provided the Northern Command with varied effective support of its fighting.

24. We should also note that the war had significant diplomatic achievements. SC resolution 1701, and the fact it was adopted unanimously, were an achievement for Israel. This conclusion stands even if it turns out that only a part of the stipulations of the resolution were implemented or will be implemented, and even if it could have been foreseen that some of them would not be implemented. This conclusion also does not depend on the intentions or goals of the powers that supported the resolution.

25. We note, however, that we have seen no serious staff work on Israeli positions in the negotiations. This situation improved in part when the team headed by the prime minister's head of staff was established. The team worked efficiently and with dedication, professionalism and coordination. This could not compensate, however, for the absence of preparatory staff work and discussions in the senior political echelon.

26. This fact may have much significance to the way Israel conducts negotiations, and to the actual content of the arrangements reached. In such negotiations, decisions are often made that may have far-reaching implications on Israel's interests, including the setting of precedents.

27. The staff work done in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the adoption of a favorable resolution in the Security Council was, in the main, quick, systematic and efficient. At the same time, for a variety of reasons, it did not reflect clear awareness of the essential need to maintain an effective relationship between military achievements and diplomatic activities.

28. We now turn to the political and military activity concerning the ground operation at the end of the war. This is one of the central foci of public debate.

29. True, in hindsight, the large ground operation did not achieve its goals of limiting the rocket fire and changing the picture of the war. It is not clear what the ground operation contributed to speeding up the diplomatic achievement or improving it. It is also unclear to what extent starting the ground offensive affected the reactions of the government of Lebanon and Hezbollah to the ceasefire.

30. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that the evaluation of these decisions should not be made with hindsight. It cannot depend on the achievements or the costs these decisions in fact had. The evaluation must be based only on the reasons for the operation, and its risks and prospects as they were known - or as they should have been known - when it was decided upon. Moreover, it is impossible to evaluate the ground operation at the end of the war without recalling the developments that preceded it and the repeated delays in the adoption of the Security Council resolution; and as a part of the overall conduct of the war.

31. Against this background, we make the following findings on the main decisions:

- The cabinet decision of August 9th ˆ to approve in principle the IDF plan, but to authorize the PM and the MOD to decide if and when it should be activated, according to the diplomatic timetable - was almost inevitable, giving the Israeli government necessary military and political flexibility.
- The decision to start in fact the ground operation was within the political and professional discretion of its makers, on

the basis of the facts before them. The goals of the ground operation were legitimate, and were not exhausted by the wish to hasten or improve the diplomatic achievement. There was no failure in that decision in itself, despite its limited achievements and its painful costs.

- Both the position of the Prime minister ˆ who had preferred to avoid the ground operation ˆ and the position of the Minister of Defense ˆ who had thought it would have served Israel's interest to go for it ˆ had been taken on the merits and on the basis of evidence. Both enjoyed serious support among the members of the general staff of the IDF and others. Even if both statesmen took into account political and public concerns ˆ a fact we cannot ascertain - we believe that they both acted out of a strong and sincere perception of what they thought at the time was Israel's interest.

32. We want to stress: The duty to make these difficult decisions was the political leaders'. The sole test of these decisions is public and political.

33. At the same time, we also note that:

- We have not found within either the political or the military echelons a serious consideration of the question whether it was reasonable to expect military achievements in 60 hours that could have contributed meaningfully to any of the goals of the operation;

- We have not found that the political echelon was aware of the details of the fighting in real time, and we have not seen a discussion, in either the political or the military echelons, of the issue of stopping the military operation after the Security Council resolution was adopted;

- We have not seen an explanation of the tension between the great effort to get additional time to conclude the first stage of the planned ground operation and the decisions not to go on fighting until the ceasefire itself.

34. A description of failures in the conduct of war may be regarded as harming Israel. There will be those who may use our findings to hurt Israel and its army. We nonetheless point out these failures and shortcomings because we are certain that only in this way Israel may come out of this ordeal strengthened. We are pleased that processes of repair have already started. We recommend a deep and systematic continuation of such processes. It is exclusively in the hands of Israeli leaders and public to determine whether, when facing challenges in the future, we will come to them more prepared and ready, and whether we shall cope with them in a more serious and responsible way than the way the decision-makers had acted ˆ in the political and the military echelons -- in the 2nd Lebanon war.

35. Our recommendations contain suggestions for systemic and deep changes in the modalities of thinking and acting of the political and military echelons and their interface, in both routine and emergency, including war. These are deep and critical processes. Their significance should not be obscured by current affairs, local successes or initial repairs. A persistent and prolonged effort, on many levels, will be needed in order to bring about the essential improvements in the ways of thinking and acting of the political-military systems.

36. For these reasons we would like to caution against dangers which might upset plans and delay required change processes, and thus produce dangerous results:

- Fear of criticism in case of failure may lead to defensive reactions, working by the book, and abstention from making resolute decisions and preferring non-action. Such behavior is undesirable and also dangerous.

- In a dynamic complex reality, one should not prepare better for the last war. It is also essential not to limit oneself to superficial action, designed to create an appearance that flaws had been corrected.

- It is also essential not to focus exclusively on coping with dangers, but to combine readiness for threat scenarios with an active seeking of opportunities.

- When speaking on learning, one should take into account that enemies, too, are learning their lessons.

37. The 2nd Lebanon War has brought again to the foreground for thought and discussion issues that some parts of Israeli society had preferred to suppress: Israel cannot survive in this region, and cannot live in it in peace or at least non-war, unless people in Israel itself and in its surroundings believe that Israel has the political and military leadership, military capabilities, and social robustness that will allow her to deter those of its neighbors who wish to harm her, and to prevent them - if necessary through the use of military force - from achieving their goal.

38. These truths do not depend on one's partisan or political views. Israel must - politically and morally - seek peace with its neighbors and make necessary compromises. At the same time, seeking peace or managing the conflict must come from a position of social, political and military strength, and through the ability and willingness to fight for the state, its values and the security of its population even in the absence of peace.

39. These truths have profound and far-reaching implications for many dimensions of life in Israel and the ways its challenges are managed. Beyond examining the way the Lebanon War was planned and conducted; beyond the examination of flaws in decision-making and performance that had been revealed in it - important as they may be; these are the central questions that the Lebanon war has raised. These are issues that lie at the very essence of our existence here as a Jewish and democratic state. These are the questions we need to concentrate on.

40. We hope that our findings and conclusions in the Interim and the Final Reports will bring about not only a redress of failings and flaws, but help Israeli society, its leaders and thinkers, to advance the long-term goals of Israel, and develop the appropriate ways to address the challenges and respond to them.

41. We are grateful for the trust put in us when this difficult task was given to us. If we succeed in facilitating rectification of the failings we have identified - this will be our best reward.

Thank you.