

Winograd Commission Report

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Official English summary of the Winograd's panel interim report

Press Release

1. On September 17th 2006 The Government of Israel decided, under section 8A of The Government Act 2001, to appoint a governmental commission of examination "To look into the preparation and conduct of the political and the security levels concerning all the dimensions of the Northern Campaign which started on July 12th 2006". Today we have submitted to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence the classified interim report, and we are now presenting the inclassified report to the public.

2. The Commission was appointed due to a strong sense of a crisis and deep disappointment with the consequences of the campaign and the way it was conducted. We regarded accepted this difficult task both as a duty and a privilege. It is our belief that the larger the event and the deeper the feeling of crisis – the greater the opportunity to change and improve matters which are essential for the security and the flourishing of state and society in Israel. We believe Israeli society has great strength and resilience, with a robust sense of the justice of its being and of its achievements. These, too, were expressed during the war in Lebanon and after it. At the same time, we must not underrated deep failures among us.

3. This conception of our role affected the way we operated. No one underestimates the need to study what happened in the past, including the imposition of personal responsibility. The past is the key for learning lessons for the future. Nonetheless, learning these lessons and actually implementing them are the most implication of the conclusions of the Commission.

4. This emphasis on learning lessons does not only follow from our conception of the role of a public Commission. It also follows from our belief that one Israeli society greatest sources of strength is its being a free, open and creative. Together with great achievements, the challenges facing it are existential. To cope with them, Israel must be a learning society – a society which examines its achievements and, in particular, its failures, in order to improve its ability to face the future.

5. Initially we hoped that the appointment of the Commission will serve as an incentive to accelerate learning processes in the relevant systems, while we are working, so that we could devote our time to study all of the materials in depth, and present the public with a comprehensive picture. However, learning processes have been limited. In some ways an opposite, and worrying, process emerged – a process of "waiting" for the Commission's Report before energetic and determined action is taken to redress failures which have been revealed.

6. Therefore we decided to publish initially an Interim Report, focusing on the decisions related to starting the war. We do this in the hope that the relevant bodies will act urgently to change and correct all that it implies. We would like to reiterate and emphasize that we hope that this Partial Report, which concentrates on the functioning of the highest political and military echelons in their decision to move into the war will not divert attention from the overall troubling complete picture revealed by the war as a whole.

7. The interim report includes a number of chapters dealing with the following subjects:

a. The Commission's conception of its role, and its attitude to recommendations in general and to recommendations dealing with specific persons in particular. (chapter 2): We see as the main task of a public commission of inquiry (or investigation) to determine findings and conclusions, and present them - with its recommendations - before the public and decision makers so that they can take action. A public commission should not - in most cases - replace the usual political decision-making processes and determine who should serve as a minister or senior military commander. Accordingly, we include personal conclusions in the interim report, without personal recommendations. However, we will reconsider this matter towards our Final Report in view of the depiction of the war as a whole.

b. The way we balanced our desire to engage in a speedy and efficient investigation with the rights of those who may be negatively affected to "natural justice" (chapter 3): The special stipulations of the Commission of Inquiry Act in this regard do not apply to a governmental commission of Examination, but we regard ourselves, naturally, as working under the general principles of natural justice. The commission notified those who may be affected by its investigation, in detailed letters of invitation, of the ways in which they may be negatively affected, and enabled them to respond to allegations against them, without sending "notices of warning" and holding a quasi-judicial hearing before reaching out conclusions. We believe that in this way we provided all who may be negatively affected by our report with a full opportunity to answer all allegations against them.

c. The processes and developments in the period between the withdrawal of the IDF from Lebanon until July 11, 2006 which contributed to the background of the Lebanon War (Chapter 4): These processes created much of the factual background against which the decision-makers had to operate on July 12th, and they are thus essential to both the understanding and the evaluation of the events of the war. Understanding them is also essential for drawing lessons from the events, whose significance is often broader than that of the war itself.

8. The core of the interim report is a detailed examination of the decisions of senior political and military decision-makers concerning the decision to go to war at the wake of the abduction of the two soldiers on the morning of July 12th. We start with the decision of the government on the fateful evening of the 12th to authorize a sharp military response, and end with the speech of the Prime Minister in the Knesset on July 17th, when he officially presented the campaign and its goals. These decisions were critical and constitutive, and therefore deserve separate investigation. We should note that these decisions enjoyed broad support within the government, the Knesset and the public throughout this period.

9. Despite this broad support, we determine that there are very serious failings in these decisions and the way they were made. We impose the primary responsibility for these failures on the Prime Minister, the minister of defence and the (outgoing) Chief of Staff. All three made a decisive personal contribution to these decisions and the way in which they were made. However, there are many others who share responsibility for the mistakes we found in these decisions and for their background conditions.

10. The main failures in the decisions made and the decision-making processes can be summed up as follows:

a. The decision to respond with an immediate, intensive military strike

was not based on a detailed, comprehensive and authorized military plan, based on careful study of the complex characteristics of the Lebanon arena. A meticulous examination of these characteristics would have revealed the following: the ability to achieve military gains having significant political-international weight was limited; an Israeli military strike would inevitably lead to missiles fired at the Israeli civilian north; there was not other effective military response to such missile attacks than an extensive and prolonged ground operation to capture the areas from which the missiles were fired — which would have a high “cost”; and which did not enjoy broad support. These difficulties were not explicitly raised with the political leaders before the decision to strike was taken.

b. Consequently, in making the decision to go to war, the government did not consider the whole range of options, including that of continuing the policy of “containment”, or combining political and diplomatic moves with military strikes below the “escalation level”, or military preparations without immediate military action — so as to maintain for Israel the full range of responses to the abduction. This failure reflects weakness in strategic thinking, which derives the response to the event from a more comprehensive and encompassing picture.

c. The support in the cabinet for this move was gained in part through ambiguity in the presentation of goals and modes of operation, so that ministers with different or even contradictory attitudes could support it. The ministers voted for a vague decision, without understanding and knowing its nature and implications. They authorized to commence a military campaign without considering how to exit it.

d. Some of the declared goals of the war were not clear and could not be achieved, and in part were not achievable by the authorized modes of military action.

e. The IDF did not exhibit creativity in proposing alternative action possibilities, did not alert the political decision-makers to the discrepancy between its own scenarios and the authorized modes of action, and did not demand — as was necessary under its own plans — early mobilization of the reserves so they could be equipped and trained in case a ground operation would be required.

f. Even after these facts became known to the political leaders, they failed to adapt the military way of operation and its goals to the reality on the ground. On the contrary, declared goals were too ambitious, and it was publicly stated that fighting will continue till they are achieved. But the authorized military operations did not enable their achievement.

11. The primary responsibility for these serious failings rests with the Prime Minister, the minister of defense and the (outgoing) Chief of Staff. We single out these three because it is likely that had any of them acted better — the decisions in the relevant period and the ways they were made, as well as the outcome of the war, would have been significantly better.

12. Let us start with the Prime Minister.

a. The Prime Minister bears supreme and comprehensive responsibility for the decisions of “his” government and the operations of the army. His responsibility for the failures in the initial decisions concerning the war stem from both his position and from his behavior, as he initiated and led the decisions which were taken.

b. The Prime Minister made up his mind hastily, despite the fact that no detailed military plan was submitted to him and without asking for one. Also, his decision was made without close study of the complex features of the Lebanon front and of the military, political and diplomatic options available to Israel. He made his decision without systematic consultation with others, especially outside the IDF, despite not having experience in external-political and military affairs. In addition, he did not adequately consider political and professional reservations presented to him before the fateful decisions of July 12th.

c. The Prime Minister is responsible for the fact that the goals of the campaign were not set out clearly and carefully, and that there was no serious discussion of the relationships between these goals and the authorized modes of military action. He made a personal contribution to the fact that the declared goals were over-ambitious and not feasible.

d. The Prime Minister did not adapt his plans once it became clear that the assumptions and expectations of Israel's actions were not realistic and were not materializing.

e. All of these add up to a serious failure in exercising judgment, responsibility and prudence.

13. The Minister of Defence is the minister responsible for overseeing the IDF, and he is a senior member in the group of leaders in charge of politicalmilitary affairs.

a. The Minister of Defence did not have knowledge or experience in military, political or governmental matters. He also did not have good knowledge of the basic principles of using military force to achieve political goals.

b. Despite these serious gaps, he made his decisions during this period without systemic consultations with experienced political and professional experts, including outside the security establishment. In addition, he did not give adequate weight to reservations expressed in the meetings he attended.

c. The Minister of Defence did not act within a strategic conception of the systems he oversaw. He did not ask for the IDF's operational plans and did not examine them; he did not check the preparedness and fitness of IDF; and did not examine the fit between the goals set and the modes of action presented and authorized for achieving them. His influence on the decisions made was mainly pointillist and operational. He did not put on the table – and did not demand presentation – of serious strategic options for discussion with the Prime Minister and the IDF.

d. The Minister of Defence did not develop an independent assessment of the implications of the complexity of the front for Israel's proper response, the goals of the campaign, and the relations between military and diplomatic moves within it. His lack of experience and knowledge prevented him from challenging in a competent way both the IDF, over which he was in charge, and the Prime Minister.

e. In all these ways, the Minister of Defence failed in fulfilling his functions. Therefore, his serving as Minister of Defence during the war impaired Israel's ability to respond well to its challenges.

14. The Chief of Staff (COS) is the supreme commander of the IDF, and the main source of information concerning the army, its plans, abilities and recommendations presented to the political echelon. Furthermore, the COS's personal involvement with decision making within the army and in

coordination with the political echelon were dominant.

a. The army and the COS were not prepared for the event of the abduction despite recurring alerts. When the abduction happened, he responded impulsively. He did not alert the political leaders to the complexity of the situation, and did not present information, assessments and plans that were available in the IDF at various levels of planning and approval and which would have enabled a better response to the challenges.

b. Among other things, the COS did not alert the political echelon to the serious shortcomings in the preparedness and the fitness of the armed forces for an extensive ground operation, if that became necessary. In addition, he did not clarify that the military assessments and analyses of the arena were that a military strike against Hezbollah will with a high probability make such a move necessary.

c. The COS's responsibility is aggravated by the fact that he knew well that both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense lacked adequate knowledge and experience in these matters, and by the fact that he had led them to believe that the IDF was ready and prepared and had operational plans fitting the situation.

d. The COS did not provide adequate responses to serious reservation about his recommendations raised by ministers and others during the first days of the campaign, and he did not present to the political leaders the internal debates within the IDF concerning the fit between the stated goals and the authorized modes of actions.

e. In all these the Chief of Staff failed in his duties as commander in chief of the army and as a critical part of the political-military leadership, and exhibited flaws in professionalism, responsibility and judgment.

15. Concomitantly we determine that the failures listed here, and in the outcomes of the war, had many other partners.

a. The complexity of the Lebanon scene is basically outside Israel's control.

b. The ability of Hezbollah to sit 'on the border', its ability to dictate the moment of escalation, and the growth of its military abilities and missile arsenal increased significantly as a result of Israel's unilateral withdrawal in May 2000 (which was not followed, as had been hoped, by The Lebanese Army deploying on the border with Israel).

c. The shortcomings in the preparedness and the training of the army, its operational doctrine, and various flaws in its organizational culture and structure, were all the responsibility of the military commanders and political leaders in charge years before the present Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Chief of Staff took office.

d. On the political-security strategic level, the lack of preparedness was also caused by the failure to update and fully articulate Israel's security strategy doctrine, in the fullest sense of that term, so that it could not serve as a basis for coping comprehensively with all the challenges facing Israel. Responsibility for this lack of an updated national security strategy lies with Israel's governments over the years. This omission made it difficult to devise an immediate proper response to the abduction, because it led to stressing an immediate and sharp military strike. If the

response had been derived from a more comprehensive security strategy, it would have been easier to take into account Israel's overall balance of strengths and vulnerabilities, including the preparedness of the civil population.

e. Another factor which largely contributed to the failures is the weakness of the high staff work available to the political leadership. This weakness existed under all previous Prime Ministers and this continuing failure is the responsibility of these PMs and their cabinets. The current political leadership did not act in a way that could compensate for this lack, and did not rely sufficiently on other bodies within and outside the security system that could have helped it.

f. Israel's government in its plenum failed in its political function of taking full responsibility for its decisions. It did not explore and seek adequate response for various reservations that were raised, and authorized an immediate military strike that was not thought through and suffered from over-reliance on the judgment of the primary decision-makers.

g. Members of the IDF's general staff who were familiar with the assessments and intelligence concerning the Lebanon front, and the serious deficiencies in preparedness and training, did not insist that these should be considered within the army, and did not alert the political leaders concerning the flaws in the decisions and the way they were made.

16. As a result of our investigation, we make a number of structural and institutional recommendations, which require urgent attention:

a. The improvement of the quality of discussions and decision making within the government through strengthening and deepening staff work; strict enforcement of the prohibition of leaks; improving the knowledge base of all members of the government on core issues of Israel's challenges, and orderly procedures for presentation of issues for discussion and resolution.

b. Full incorporation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in security decisions with political and diplomatic aspects.

c. Substantial improvement in the functioning of the National Security Council, the establishment of a national assessment team, and creating a center for crises management in the Prime Minister's Office.

17. We regard it is of great importance to make findings, reach conclusions and present recommendations on the other critical issues which emerged in this war. We will cover them in the final report, which we strive to conclude soon. These subjects include, among others, the direction of the war was led and its management by the political echelon; the conduct of the military campaign by the army; the civil-military relationship in the war; taking care of Israel's civilian population under missile attack; the diplomatic negotiations by the Prime Minister's office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; censorship, the media and secrecy; the effectiveness of Israel's media campaign; and the discussion of various social and political processes which are essential for a comprehensive analysis of the events of the war and their significance.

18. Let us add a few final comments: It took the government till March 2007 to name the events of the summer of 2006 'The Second Lebanon War'. After 25 years without a war, Israel experienced a war of a different kind. The war thus brought back to center stage some critical questions that parts of Israeli society preferred to avoid.

19. The IDF was not ready for this war. Among the many reasons for this we can

mention a few: Some of the political and military elites in Israel have reached the conclusion that Israel is beyond the era of wars. It had enough military might and superiority to deter others from declaring war against her; these would also be sufficient to send a painful reminder to anyone who seemed to be undeterred; since Israel did not intend to initiate a war, the conclusion was that the main challenge facing the land forces would be low intensity asymmetrical conflicts.

20. Given these assumptions, the IDF did not need to be prepared for 'real' war. There was also no urgent need to update in a systematic and sophisticated way Israel's overall security strategy and to consider how to mobilize and combine all its resources and sources of strength – political, economic, social, military, spiritual, cultural and scientific – to address the totality of the challenges it faces.

21. We believe that – beyond the important need to examine the failures of conducting the war and the preparation for it, beyond the need to identify the weaknesses (and strengths) in the decisions made in the war – these are the main questions raised by the Second Lebanon war. These are 10 questions that go far beyond the mandate of this or that commission of inquiry; they are the questions that stand at the center of our existence here as a Jewish and democratic state. It would be a grave mistake to concentrate only on the flaws revealed in the war and not to address these basic issues.

We hope that our findings and conclusions in the interim report and in the final report will not only impel taking care of the serious governmental flaws and failures we examine and expose, but will also lead towards a renewed process in which Israeli society, and its political and spiritual leaders will take up and explore Israel's long-term aspirations and the ways to advance them.