

## The Second Lebanon War 2006

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The so-called “Second Lebanon War” between Israel and the Lebanon-based [Hezbollah](#) was sparked by Hezbollah’s July 12, 2006, cross border raid from Lebanon into Israel. Hezbollah attacked a group of Israeli soldiers patrolling the border, killing eight soldiers and kidnapping two others – Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. Israel responded with precision air strikes specifically aimed at Hezbollah positions and operational assets inside Lebanon; Hezbollah immediately unleashed a barrage of Katyusha rockets targeting civilian population centers in Israel’s northern cities including Kiryat Shemona, Haifa and Safed. The Hezbollah rocket fire continued at an unprecedented pace of more than 100 per day, totaling nearly 4,000 rockets over the duration of the conflict which lasted close to five weeks.

Hezbollah – a U.S.-designated terrorist organization – had occupied the region south of the Litani River since shortly after Israel’s U.N.-certified withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. Following that withdrawal, Hezbollah moved into the vacated area and established themselves in bunkers throughout civilian areas, despite the presence of UNIFIL observer troops stationed there under the terms of Security Council Resolution 1559, occasionally conducting attack on Israel through cross-border raids and Katyusha rocket fire.

During the conflict, Hezbollah indiscriminately fired Katyusha rockets at Israeli population centers with the intent of harming innocent civilians. At least 157 Israelis were killed during the conflict and countless more injured. The rockets also drove nearly 400,000 Israelis from their homes in the north, while those

remaining had to spend long periods in bomb shelters for the duration of the month-long conflict. Damage to northern Israel surpassed \$1.5 billion.

Israel's air strikes targeted known Hezbollah positions including the offices of its leadership, weapons storage sites, bunkers and rocket launch sites. Israel sought to disable infrastructure used by Hezbollah including Beirut's airport and certain roads and bridges through which Iran and Syria supplied weaponry to Hezbollah. Air strikes were supported by limited ground incursions to specific villages in southern Lebanon near Israel's border followed by a broader ground offensive with the goal of expelling as many Hezbollah terrorists as possible from southern Lebanon. In advance of strikes in civilian areas, Israel gave up a certain degree of surprise by dropping fliers and sending radio messages warning civilians to leave specific areas. Israel also employed precise ordnance rather than larger, more effective ordnance to avoid collateral damage. Despite Israel's best efforts, the situation created on the ground by Hezbollah led to the temporary displacement of 800,000 Lebanese civilians and the death of an estimated 1,000 Lebanese. Hezbollah does not report its casualty figures, and many non-uniformed Hezbollah terrorists are suspected of being among the dead.

The conflict subsided with the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, passed unanimously on August 11, 2006 and adopted by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's Cabinet – also unanimously – on August 13, 2006. The resolution called for an immediate cessation of hostilities to be followed by a withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon during a simultaneous takeover of the territory by a 15,000-troop contingent of the Lebanese army and a 15,000-troop beefed-up UNIFIL force comprised of international troops. The resolution required that Lebanon assert its sovereignty over the entire country and forbade the rearming of terrorist militias in Lebanon. Nearly identical to Resolution 1559, which was passed in 2004 but never fully implemented, these stipulations require that Hezbollah be disarmed and not rearmed by any foreign powers, notably Iran and Syria.

Resolution 1701 mandated the “unconditional release” of the two Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hezbollah. In July 2008, the bodies of Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev were released to Israel as part of a prisoner exchange. Until that time, Hezbollah refused to provide information as to their fate.

Following the cessation of the war, there was much criticism within Israel that while the country had no choice but to act against Hezbollah following its attack on Israeli soil, the military and country had been ill-prepared for the conflict, its soldiers ill-equipped, and that the conflict should have been ended days earlier. Prime Minister Olmert ordered a government commission of inquiry into the war. The resulting Winograd Commission issued its findings in April 2007 and January 2008 on the decision-making before and during the war by the Prime Minister, the Defense Minister, the Chief of Staff and others, concluding “we determine that there are very serious failings in these decisions and the way they were made.”