

KeyOpinion



Unintended Consequences

Richard L. Hershatter
Contributing Columnist

*"Good fences make good neighbors,"
Or so the experts say;
That works with swords and sabers,
Not weapons of today,
For rockets know no borders,
And planes fly very high,
So death can take its orders
To rain down from the sky.*

Western civilization can now relax.

The "volcanic eruptions" afflicting the border between Israel and Lebanon have been pacified. United Nations peace-keeping forces are arriving daily, joining elements of the Lebanese Army to form a land-based buffer zone between Hezbollah and the Jewish Defense Force.

Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasrallah has issued a statement claiming that he would never have authorized the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers if he had thought it would lead to hostilities. As of this writing, however, he has made no move to repatriate them.

Israeli Intelligence, for its part, announced that it knew all along that Hezbollah had thousands of rockets, but "never expected them to be used." (Surprisingly, President Bush has not wired congratulations for doing "a heckuva job.")

Hundreds of lives have been lost, thousands of livelihoods disrupted, and billions of dollars of damage has been done. As is customary concerning the area, talking heads all over the world are busy analyzing the situation and assigning blame.

Israel is accused of over-reacting at the taking of two of its young men by a terrorist organization and criticized for bombing target areas where rockets were being launched into its northern cities. Nothing is said about Hezbollah's practice of locating its launchers in the midst of civilian populations or storing its weapons in the basements of mosques and hospitals.

Charges are leveled over Israeli use of cluster bombs to clean out nests of terrorists, but the Hezbollah practice of raining ball-bearing-loaded rockets indiscriminately on civilian population centers is unmentioned and condoned.

As General W.T. Sherman so famously observed in 1864, war is hell, and continues so down to the present day, wherever and whenever waged.

And now peace, presumably, will reign in the region, with a 15,000-man buffer force led by 200 or 1,000 French soldiers, the number depending on what day of the week questions are put to French Premier Jacques Chirac. Regardless of numbers, peace is assured, because hostilities and the French Army are incompatible.

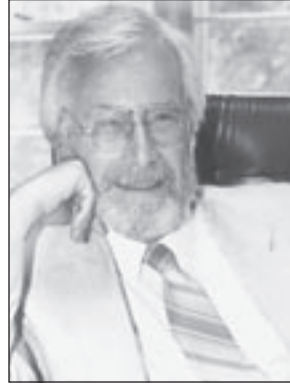
So who won, and what lessons are to be learned from the fracas?

Shiite-dominated Hezbollah had six years to dig in and train its forces with modern weapons provided by Syria and Iran. Examination of unexploded and captured weapons proved beyond peradventure that Shiite Iran was behind the venture, engaging in warfare by proxy, with everything to gain and nothing to lose.

Iran was never previously able to prevail in all the battles with Sunni Iraq when Saddam Hussein was in charge, but with him out of the picture, the way seems clear to eventual domination of the region, particularly if it succeeds in developing nuclear capability.

While the world's attention was distracted by the flare-up in southern Lebanon, Iran managed to stall the U.N.'s implementation of action calling on Iran to discontinue steps toward nuclear weapon capability, on pain of economic sanctions.

Unfortunately, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert proved to



be Israel's equivalent of ex-President Jimmy Carter. With the advent of hostilities, his leadership was hesitant and inept. Army officers complained of receiving as many as eight contradictory orders in a single day.

Too much reliance was initially placed on air power, which is never completely effective against well dug in bunkers on the ground. Nor was any effort made to direct attention to the principal powers behind the conflict, namely Iran and its compliant confederate, Syria, both of which, unlike Hezbollah, are completely unscathed.

However, the "law of unintended consequences" may now effect a situation that the Shiites cannot have contemplated.

Thanks to Hezbollah's actions, Prime Minister Olmert's popularity in Israel has plummeted to the point where his approval rating is even less than that of President Bush in this country.

Unlike the U.S., however, the citizens do not have to wait until a term expires to rid themselves of ineffective leadership. A vote of no confidence in the Knesset could result in new elections, and the most likely winner would be Israel's equivalent of Dick Cheney, former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu is a notorious hawk and would have no compunction in unleashing the full might of the Jewish Defense Forces to protect Israel's beleaguered civilian population.

Germany defeated the French in World War II by sending its forces around the fortified Maginot line.

If rockets are again launched, it will be from far behind the Lebanese border and over the heads of the U.N. buffer troops. If that happens, neither 200 nor 1,000 Frenchmen are going to prevent a swift and terrible retribution.

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Sometimes Wrong, Never in Doubt

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Contributing Columnist

Hubert Humphrey (D-Minn.), who served three decades in the United States Senate, described himself as, "Sometimes wrong, never in doubt." Anyone writing a column in which they express personal opinions about conditions in the Mideast might be well advised to adopt the same motto, therefore I have.

Even if Rumsfeld and Cheney Say It, It May Not Be Wrong

Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld delivered speeches last week that declared the war on terrorism was a clash between two cultures and that radical Muslims cannot be appeased. The Democratic response, according to the Washington Post, was swift. Senator Jack Reed (D-R.I.) told reporters, "It's a calculated political argument to throw people off the real facts, which is a military that's stretched to the breaking point, a strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan that doesn't seem to be working well."

Reed might well be right about the military and the strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan, but it can be argued that the view that radical Islam is at war with West is much more than a calculated political argument

Many prominent international figures agree with Cheney and Rumsfeld. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of Iran, certainly believes that Islam is at war with the West. He seems to believe the time is near when a messianic figure will appear and lead the fight against the powers of evil — meaning the West or Christendom. If Ahmadinejad has his way, the messianic figure will also have nuclear weapons. We are told constantly that Ahmadinejad really isn't serious; that all this is talk to solidify his base. That is what the chattering classes said of Hitler's Mein Kampf when he predicted the European war and his plans to eradicate European Jews. The chattering classes were proved disastrously wrong.

Terrorist leader Abu Musad al-Zarqawi, before American troops sent him to cavort with 72 virgins, said, "A global war is under way between Islam and the unbelievers..."

He later added that the unbelievers were led by America. Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohammed, when discussing plans to destroy the United States, quoted the prophet Mohammed's words to his disciples, "I was ordered to fight all men until they say, 'There is no god but Allah.'" This happens to be exactly the same avowal made by Osama bin Laden during the post-9-11 campaign in Afghanistan. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah once answered calls to negotiate his grievances with the West with, "Why negotiate, we want nothing from you, we want to kill you."

Sunday's New York Times contained an unusually entertaining op-ed piece by Frank Rich. Rich was put off by Rumsfeld's contentions that we are in a war with intractable Islam and we dare not be divided. To counter these statements he spelled out all of Rumsfeld's numerous misdeeds and mistakes. It was a long column. An ardent Sarasota Democrat and former McGovern supporter answered Rich with the rather homely admonition, "Just because Rumsfeld is a horse's ass doesn't mean he isn't right about Islam." That certainly is one way to put it.

Ignoring History

The Democrats seem intent on ignoring history in the rush to forestall any real response to the looming threat from Iran. On Tuesday, the Democrats held a press conference to answer the President's address in which he expanded on the charges made by Cheney and Rumsfeld. The Washington Post reported, "Appearing at the Democratic news conference with Reid and other senators, Wesley K. Clark, a retired general who served as NATO commander and ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004, said,



'What I hear is the beating tom-toms of another military action taking form against Iran. And I think it's time that the American government stepped forward and talked to people we disagree with before we start dropping bombs on them.'

Clark was commander of American forces in Bosnia and he didn't hesitate to bomb Serbia back to the Stone Age without the benefit of polite conversation. Clark also seems to have forgotten the dismal record of negotiations with Iran. In January 1979, about a month before the mullahs seized power in Tehran, President Jimmy Carter established contact with the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who was living in a Paris suburb. According to the Washington Post, the attempts to "talk" to the Iranians didn't end there. Bruce Laingen, the charge d'affair attempted to establish relations with daily visits to the Iranian foreign ministry. Carter raised the stakes when he sent National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski to hold a summit with Mehdi Bazargan, the Iranian prime minister. The purpose here was to establish what the Washington Post described as a "strategic partnership."

The Iranians, impressed — nay, even overwhelmed — with Carter's sincerity and nobleness of purpose, sent a mob to capture the American Embassy in Tehran, took the diplomats hostage and held them for 444 days. Despite this miserable history, most administrations have maintained some level of contact with the Iranians and the record shows that these contacts have done absolutely no good.

Despite 40 years of failed negotiations, the West continues efforts to deal with the Iranian mullahs. Early this week, the Washington Post reported, "President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad wants negotiations on Iran's nuclear program but won't halt uranium enrichment ahead of talks." This information was elicited from U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan last Sunday after meeting with the Iranian leader. Since the West is asking Iran to stop enriching uranium, one has to wonder just what was the subject of the negotiations.

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