



Israel's deadly stupor

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If Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert had been as adroit and resolute in defending his nation from its enemies as he is in defending his grip on power, Hezbollah today would be a disgraced relic of its former self, while Olmert would be esteemed from Dan to Beersheba. Instead, the terrorist organization is hailed throughout the Arab world for its attack on Israel last summer, while Olmert -- despite [surviving no-confidence motions](#) in the Knesset on Monday -- is so reviled by his countrymen that according to [the latest poll](#), 0 percent of Israelis -- that is not a misprint -- would vote for him today.

The poll follows the release of the [interim report of the Winograd Commission](#), a blue-ribbon panel appointed last September to investigate Israel's failings in its second

Lebanon War. The report is scathing. It documents in damning detail the bungling, the willful blindness, and the almost criminal ill-preparedness that pervaded the highest levels of Israel's government during the war and the years leading up to it.

The commission blasts Olmert for making rash and uninformed decisions, and pronounces him guilty of "a serious failure in exercising judgment, responsibility, and prudence." It is equally critical of the inept defense minister, Amir Peretz, whose incompetence crippled Israel's ability to defend itself from Hezbollah's attacks, and of former military chief of staff Dan Halutz, who never warned his clueless superiors that the armed forces were unprepared for a ground offensive in southern Lebanon.

For anyone used to associating Israel with [military brilliance and nerve](#), the Winograd report makes excruciating reading.

The immediate trigger for the war was Hezbollah's July 12 incursion across the Lebanon-Israel border, in which three soldiers were killed and two others kidnapped. But Hezbollah had been openly preparing for war for six years, ever since Israel's unilateral retreat from southern Lebanon in May 2000. Making no attempt to disguise its intentions, Hezbollah swept into the territory Israel had abandoned, creating a network of fortified bunkers and launch sites and deploying thousands of missiles and rockets along the border. All the while Israel looked on, doing nothing about the mounting threat.

"Every alarm bell should have been ringing," Jerusalem Post editor [David Horovitz](#) writes. "But many of the warning systems had, literally or figuratively, long since been disconnected. And those who did try to stress the unmistakable imminent dangers were often ignored."

How could Israel have been so complacent? What accounts for such lethargy in the face of a deadly menace that was growing more dangerous by the day?

The answer, says the Winograd Commission, is that too many of "the political and military elites in Israel have reached the conclusion that Israel is beyond the era of wars." Unlike their forebears, who understood that the Jewish state

would never have peace until its enemies decided to lay down their arms, today's Israeli leadership imagines that it can achieve peace by means of restraint and retreat.

"Since Israel did not intend to initiate a war," the report concludes, senior officials decided that Israel "did not need to be prepared for 'real' war." And that being the case, "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 . . . all its resources -- political, economic, social, military, spiritual, cultural, and scientific -- to address the totality of the challenges it faces."

Fed up with fighting, aching to live normally, Israelis lulled themselves into a stupor. They [shook hands with Yasser Arafat](#) and ran away from Lebanon and [expelled the Jews from Gaza](#). They blamed themselves for their enemies' hatred and turned the other cheek to suicide bombings and Kassam rocket attacks. They tried to be Athens, [one Israeli commentator wrote last year](#). But to survive in the Middle East, even Athens must sometimes act like Sparta.

"We are tired of fighting," Olmert moaned in [a 2005 speech](#). "We are tired of defeating our enemies." Unfortunately, those who grow tired of defeating their enemies generally end up being defeated by them.

As America's beleaguered ally searches for new leadership, one voice worth heeding is that of Hebrew University game theorist

Robert Aumann, a Nobel laureate in economics.

"We are like a mountain climber who gets caught in a snowstorm," [Aumann said at this year's Herzliya Conference](#) in January. "He is cold and tired, and he wants to sleep. If he falls asleep, he will freeze to death. We are in terminal danger because we are tired. I will allow myself to say a few unpopular, unfashionable words: Our panicked lunging for peace is working against

us. It brings us farther away from peace, and endangers our very existence.

"Roadmaps, capitulation, gestures, disengagements, convergences, deportations, and so forth do not bring peace. On the contrary, they bring war, just as we saw last summer."

With enemies like Hezbollah, weariness is a luxury Israel cannot afford. And lest we forget, [Hezbollah is our enemy too](#).