

A MATTER OF CONSEQUENCES

Life in the Middle East may never be the same again. American Jewish life may never be the same again.

This has been Israel's sixth war. At one point, it became different than any previous war, creating more controversy *within* Israel.

There was no controversy about the initial invasion. Everyone understood the necessity to chase the marauding PLO from the Israeli border; to establish a 25 mile "quiet zone" which would create "peace for Galilee."

But then the Israeli forces moved north and the government explicitly added some new goals: to destroy the PLO militarily, to get the Syrians and the PLO out of Lebanon, to establish a centralized and friendly Lebanese government. This northward move, these increased goals, created a rift among Israelis which had not previously been seen in wartime.

As early as June 11, when Israel had swept the PLO out of southern Lebanon, the *Jerusalem Post* ran an editorial calling for a cease-fire, and asking "Isn't it time the defence minister was told that enough is enough?" The Israeli newspaper *Ha'Aretz* called for a cease-fire, saying that "the original aim of the operation has in fact been achieved."

Opposition to the northward extension of the war grew. Last week, a group of 86 officers and soldiers met in Tel Aviv to protest the extension of the war "to impose a new order on the ruins of Lebanon...This is not what we joined the IDF for...(The Israeli soldiers) have had enough of killing and being killed without knowing why." Opposition political leaders say that Sharon is trying to find military solutions for some problems for which there are only political solutions.

Earl Raab

"A Matter of Consequences"

page 2

There are of course many Israelis who feel otherwise. A destroyed PLO and a re-established Lebanon, they say, may be the only way we can prevent a seventh, eighth and ninth war. So the debate is joined and there are legitimate points to be made on both sides. Which side is right? Who knows for sure?

Of course, much of the criticism does not come from carefully reasoned political argument; it comes from Israelis who just don't want their lives further interrupted for reasons they are not sure about. Many young Israelis, in the manner of young people, are more concerned about the disruption in their daily lives, than about the possibility that they may lose their lives. They have families and jobs to which they want to return. Abstractions do not weigh heavily against such realities.

But in the midst of this ideological debate they do not, with rare exception, refuse to serve and fight. Nor do they or their parents refuse to pay for the costs of the war, a cruel burden on the most highly taxed people in the world. The Israeli Treasury estimates that it will need at least an additional 25 billion pounds through next April. It will all come from Israelis -- 20 billion from levies on wages and earnings, 5 billion from reduced subsidies to the needy citizenry. Most wage earners will pay a "compulsory loan" of 4 per cent of their gross salaries, in addition to the taxes they now pay!

Why do those who are uncertain about the extended goals of the war, continue to fight and to pay? Partly because of the alternatives, the consequences. A political decision has been made by a democratically elected government. In the case of Israel (unlike, say, the U.S. during Vietnam), a withdrawal of *material* support in the middle of this war would endanger the very existence of the nation.

To put it bluntly: if sections of the army quit, if sections of the Israeli citizenry refused to pay for the war, the consequence would not just be a withdrawal to the borders of Israel. Most of the immediate world in which Israel lives still wants to extinguish it. If Israel now withdrew for calculated political reasons, it would be one thing. But if Israel now withdrew because of internal collapse, the jackals would gather; its future existence would be in doubt again. So, while the political debate continues, even dissenting Israelis do not withdraw their material support.

The same consequences face American Jews. There is the same uncertainty among many American Jews about the wisdom of the northward move. And they will soon be asked to put a further strain on their own personal lives by helping to replace the welfare funds reduced by the exigencies of war. And they are asked to continue to stand fast for American government support to Israel.

The debate about that aspect of Israeli foreign policy will continue in the American Jewish community, more vigorously than before. But the material support (financial and political) will be forthcoming from even the more uncertain American Jews, because of the dire and unthinkable consequences of any alternative behavior.