

## **The War in Lebanon**

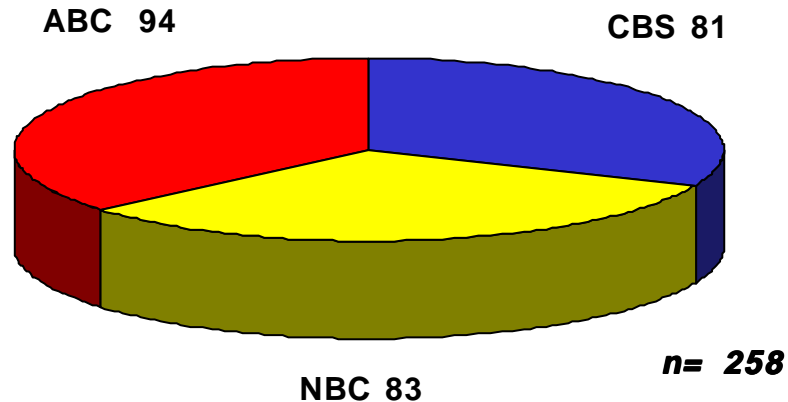
### **TV News Coverage of the Armed Conflict Between Israel and Hezbollah**

How did network news cover the recent armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon? What were the opinions of sources quoted in the stories? This issue of *Media Monitor* examines the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts' coverage during the first two weeks of the conflict. Who was held responsible? What solutions were proposed? And how did the coverage compare to the networks' treatment of the armed conflict between Israel and the Palestinians during 2002?

#### ***Major Findings:***

- \***No Good Guys** Israel, Hezbollah, and the USA all got mostly bad press. *Page 4*
- \***Best of a Bad Lot** But Hezbollah fared worst and Israel best. *Page 4*
- \***Forceful Defense** Israel's use of force was justified more often than Hezbollah's. *Page 5*
- \***The Blame Game** Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran were all blamed more often than Israel. *Page 6*
- \***Room for Improvement** Israel's coverage was much improved from the 2002 Intifada. *Page 5*

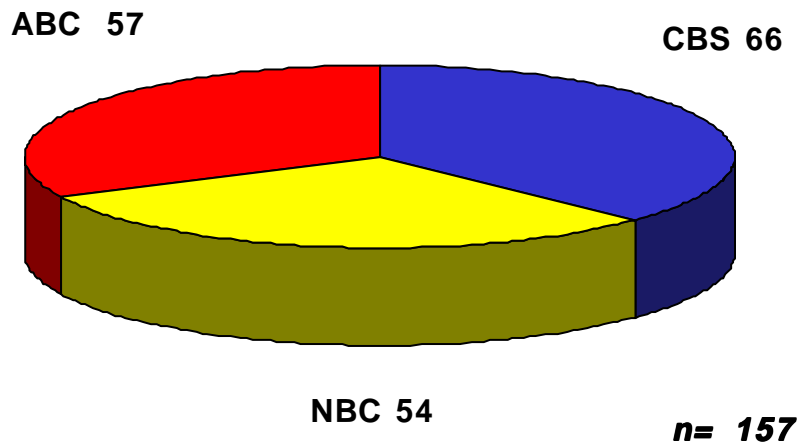
### Number of Stories 2006



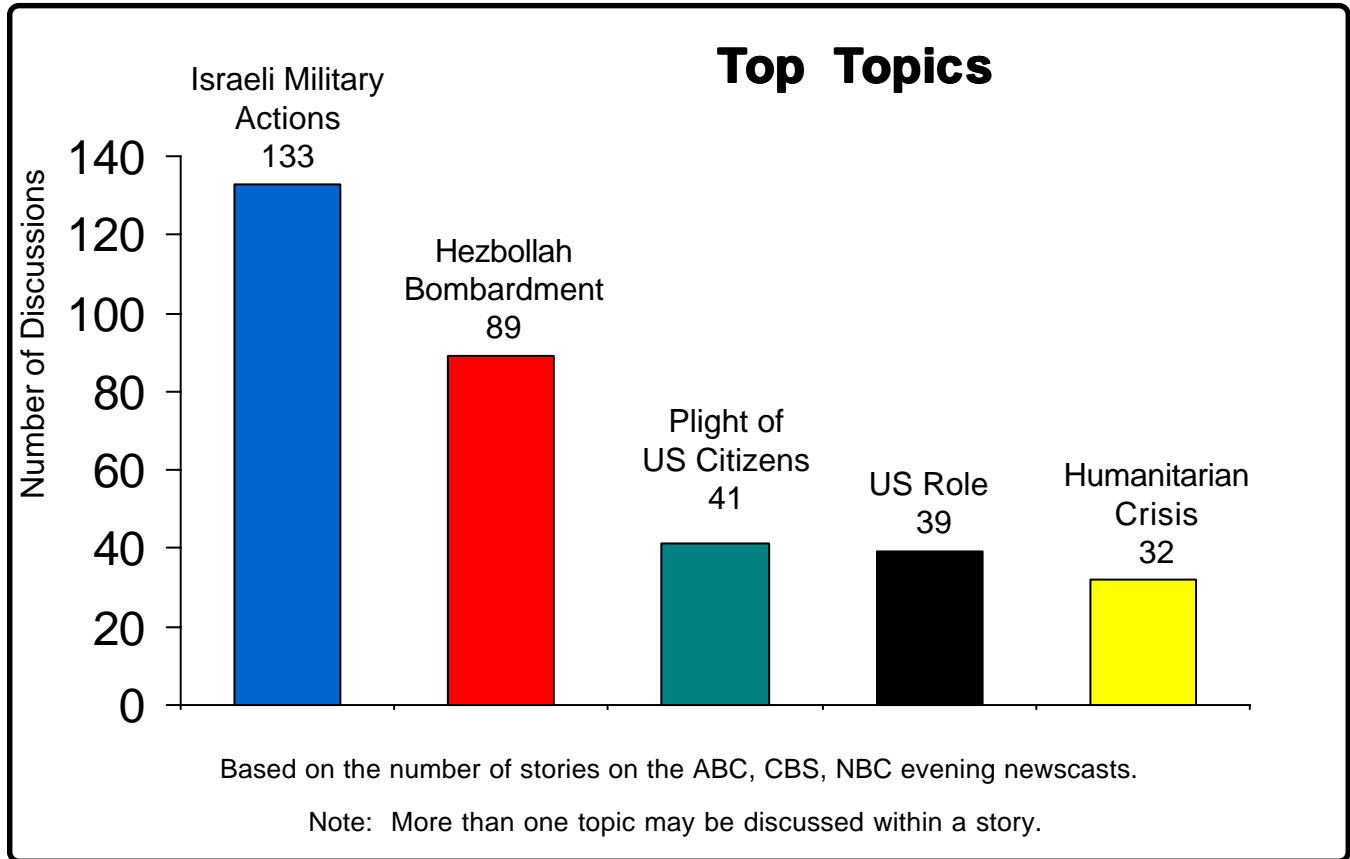
Note: Based on the number of stories on the ABC, CBS, NBC evening newscasts.

During the first two weeks of the armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah (7/12-7/25/06) the network evening news shows aired 258 stories, an average of 18 stories a night, (six per network). This was more than 60 percent heavier than network coverage of the last major armed conflict involving Israel. Israel's crackdown on the Palestinians in early April of 2002 garnered 157 stories during the first two weeks, about 11 per night.

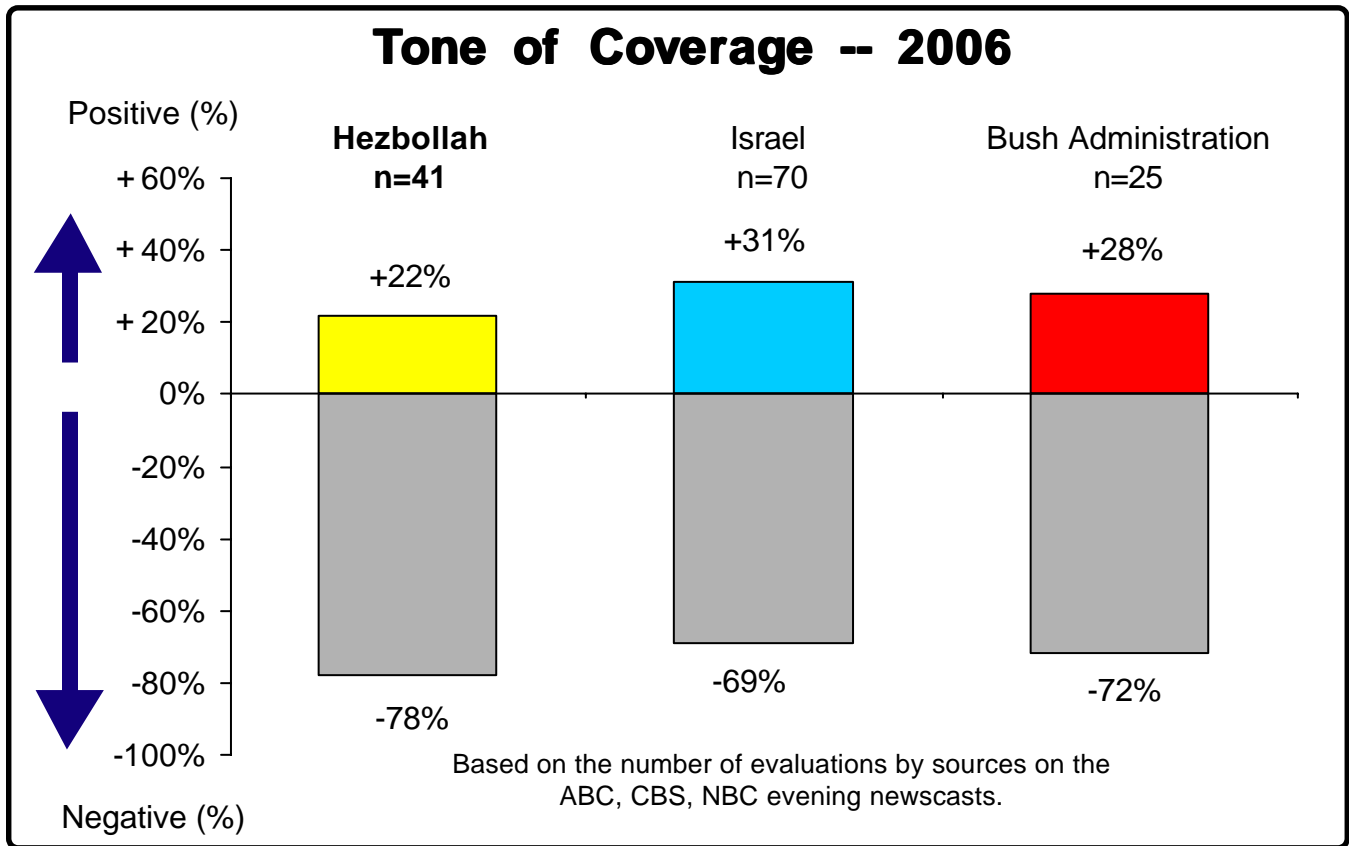
### Number of Stories 2002



Note: Based on the number of stories on the ABC, CBS, NBC evening newscasts.

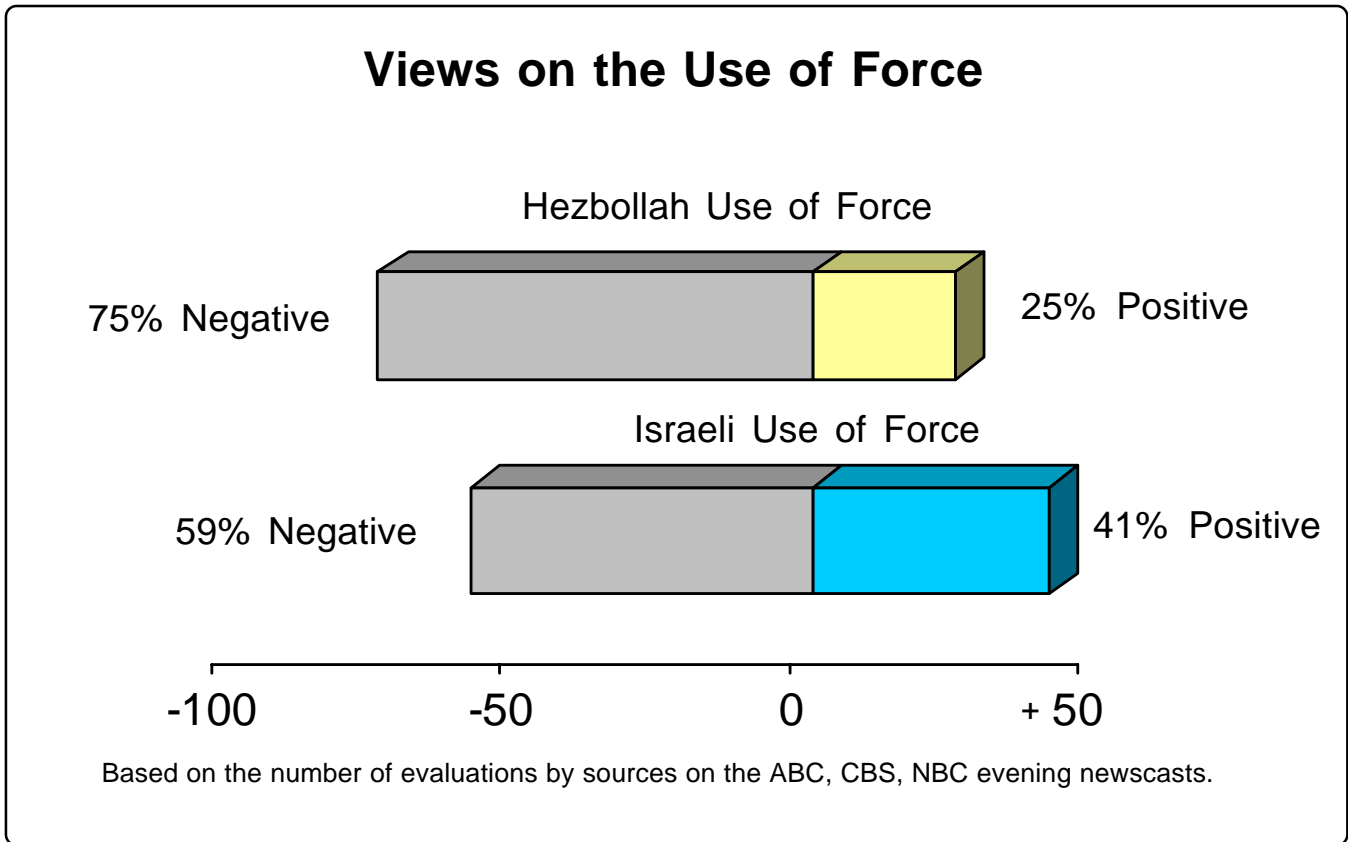


Coverage of this story highlighted the military actions of Israel, which were discussed in 133 stories. Network correspondents reported both from the Israeli/Lebanese border, where troops were massed for cross-border operations, and from Beirut, which was heavily bombed by the Israelis. The second most heavily covered aspect of the story was the daily shelling of northern Israel by Hezbollah (89 stories.) The plight of US citizens in the war zone and attempts to evacuate them drew 41 stories, and the role of the US government in diplomatic efforts to resolve the dispute generated 39 stories. Finally, the humanitarian crisis that was caused by refugees fleeing southern Lebanon, along with the inability to get aid to the area, were the subject of 32 stories.



The coverage was heavily critical toward all the major parties involved. Hezbollah received the most negative assessments (78% negative.) That was worse than the coverage Israel received. But Israel was also criticized by more than two out of three sources (69% negative.) In between the coverage of the two major combatants was the Bush administration, which was panned by nearly three out of four sources (72% negative.)

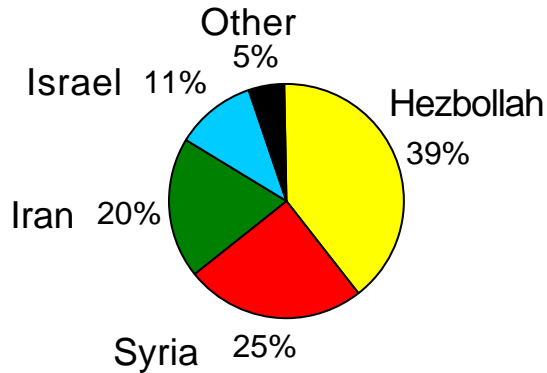
As negative as the coverage was this year, it was even more negative during Israel's last major military action. In late March 2002, the Israelis cracked down on militant Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, following a Passover suicide attack that killed 29. During the first two weeks of that crisis, the Palestinians received 95 percent negative press and the Israeli government 79 percent negative press.



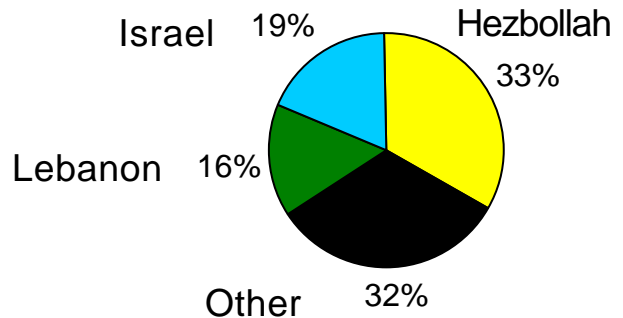
The most frequently evaluated policy by both sides in the conflict was the use of force. This is the area where Israel received its most positive press. Over two out of five sources (41%) commenting on the Israeli use of force in this conflict were supportive, compared to only one out of four sources (25%) assessing Hezbollah's bombing of Israel.

In 2002, there were not enough evaluations of the use of force during the first two weeks for meaningful analysis. However, over the entire three months of our study (March 27 through June 30), 54 percent of sources supported Israeli use of force against Palestinian militants and 60 percent supported the use of force by the Palestinians. Ironically, the reason for the relatively favorable evaluations of armed force in 2002 appear to stem from concerns for journalistic balance. Each side was given airtime to justify its own use of force and to criticize the other's. (See *Media Monitor* July/August 2002)

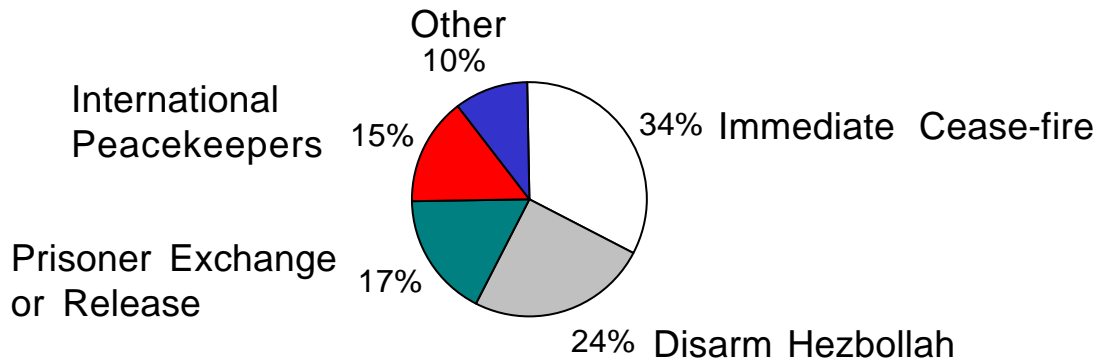
**Who's to Blame?**



**Who Should Resolve?**



**What's the Solution?**



Based on the number of evaluations by sources on the ABC, CBS, NBC evening newscasts.

When responsibility was assigned for the war, 39 percent of sources blamed Hezbollah. Their alleged supporters Syria and Iran were blamed for the hostilities slightly more often, a combined total of 45 percent of sources. Israel was blamed by only eleven percent of all sources.

The major actors, Hezbollah and Israel, were called upon with similar frequency to resolve the dispute (33 and 19 percent of opinions respectively.) Lebanon was the next most often named target of calls to end the dispute (16% of opinions.) The United Nations, Syria, the United States, and the "international community" together were named by the remaining 32 percent of sources who voiced an opinion on this topic.

In the debate over *how* the conflict should be resolved, an immediate cease-fire was the most popular solution. A cease-fire was called for by one out of three (34 percent) sources. The next most frequently offered solution was to disarm Hezbollah; this was suggested by one out of four (24 percent) sources. Seventeen percent of sources believed that releasing prisoners or a prisoner exchange was the solution, while 15 percent believed it would take international peacekeepers in Lebanon to resolve the crisis.

## Examples

Positive evaluations of Israel:

Israel has no other alternative but to defend itself and its citizens. Israel expects also the international community to act. We are fighting back in order to fight for peace. *Ms. Tzipi Livni, Israeli Foreign minister, CBS, 7/12/2006*

Support for the war here remains strong, with more than 80 percent of Israelis in favor of continuing the fight. *Tom Aspell, NBC, 7/22/2006*

Negative evaluations of Israel:

They [Israel] are destroying everything. We do not understand for what? Because they kidnapped two soldiers? It's not a reason. *Man in Lebanon, NBC, 7/21/06*

That kind of destruction is what leads many ordinary Lebanese to view the Israelis as villains. Whether or not they approve of Hezbollah, they hear the bombs raining down. *David Wright, ABC, 7/17/2006*

Negative evaluation of both Israel and Hezbollah:

When the bombs are falling, I'm furious with Israel, and I'm also angry at Hezbollah for taking the executive decision to do this and putting all of our lives in danger. *Lebanese American, CBS, 7/16/2006*

Negative evaluation of Hezbollah:

A young mother, Zana, told us, 'This is impossible. We have sick kids. Why don't they [Hezbollah] just exchange the two soldiers?' *Elizabeth Palmer, CBS 7/15/2006*

Negative evaluation of Bush Administration:

Pressure for a cease-fire is building across the Arab world. Even President Bush's close ally, Tony Blair, signaled some impatience with America's go-slow strategy. *George Stephanopoulos, ABC, 7/24/2006*

Justification for use of force:

You know deep in our heart that if you could you would be sitting here right next to me right now, because you know that we are doing the right thing. And that if we succeed, Lebanon will be the beneficiary. *Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Mr. Danny Gillerman, NBC, 7/14/2006*

Ibrahim Mousawi (Hezbollah) Sometimes when someone points a gun to your head, you have to defend and you have to resist. *Ibrahim Mousawi (Hezbollah), CBS, 7/19/2006*



## The War in Lebanon

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