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After the War, Israel Takes Stock

BY Hadas Ragolsky



An eerie silence fell on south Lebanon and the north of Israel when the first days of the cease-fire came into force. After more than 30 days, people in the northern Israeli towns of Keryat Shmona, Safed and Nahariya walked the streets freely. Shops began to reopen. Israeli and Lebanese refugees filled the roads on their way back to what was left of their homes. Many Lebanese didn't have a home to go back to.

Reservists recently returned from the war in Lebanon set up an anti-government protest camp in Jerusalem.

Over the next four days, both countries buried their dead. Then the first Israeli reservists were released from service. Most of them went straight home. But some, like Ronny Zvigenbaum, 27, and Asaf Davidov, 28, marched to the prime minister's

office, along with other troops from their regiment. They held up signs reading "Citizens of Israel, our brothers, we must get out of the bubble" and "Olmert, Peretz, Halutz -- take responsibility."

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These young reservists were calling on Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Defense Minister Amir Peretz and Chief of Staff Dan Halutz to resign. In their view, the government had failed to achieve the goals it had declared during the first days of fighting - the return of the abducted soldiers, the disarmament of Hezbollah and its removal from Israel's borders, and the installation of an international force to take control of the conflict between the rival states.

"I don't want to be famous or to be a politician. I just want those who are responsible for these failures to go home," said Zvigenbaum to the many reporters who had gathered to cover the march.

The reservists set up tents in front of Olmert's office and called on others to join their protest. Three weeks later, some of them are still there.