



Israeli Supreme Court deals blow to government investigation of Lebanon war

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JERUSALEM The Israeli Supreme Court has given the government five days to explain why it has refused to appoint an inquiry with judicial powers to look into heavily criticized decision-making during this summer's war against Lebanon's Hezbollah guerrillas, an attorney said Friday.

The three-judge panel's move during Thursday's hearing was seen as a harsh blow to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's government, which has been blasted for appointing a lower-level inquiry to look into the war despite wide calls for a high level investigation.

The court order came in response to a petition from civil groups angry about what they see as an official attempt to whitewash the failures of the government and the military during the conflict.

Eliad Shraga, head of the Movement for Quality Government in Israel, one of the two organizations that petitioned the court, said the judges' decision to intervene was unprecedented and showed the court's displeasure with the government's handling of the war inquiry.

"The ruling puts the burden of proof on the shoulders of the government," Shraga said.

Olmert has refused to appoint a high-level inquiry with judicial powers, setting up instead a government-appointed team to look into complaints that decision-making during the fighting was deficient.

Two members of the so-called Winograd Commission and its secretary have already been dismissed because of suspected conflicts of interest.

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