

Ceasefire or Trojan Horse?

By Mike Whitney

“Israel’s strategy is to establish positions as far north as possible to implement a fighting withdrawal, meaning they will try to take on as much of Hezbollah as they can as they work their way south.” **Ha’aretz editorial 8-17-06**

“As long as there is Israeli military movement, Israeli field aggression and Israeli soldiers occupying our land, it is our natural right to fight them and defend our lands, our homes, and ourselves.” **Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, head of the Lebanese armed resistance Hezbollah**

08/14/06 "Information Clearing House" -- -- Israel’s sudden push to the Litani River is a blatant act of political desperation intended to conceal the humiliating defeat the IDF has suffered at the hands of Hezbollah. It comes in the wake of a UN ceasefire agreement worked out by friends of Israel in the Bush administration who were looking for a diplomatic way for Olmert to climb down from Israel’s greatest debacle since the Yom Kippur war.

The so-called ceasefire is tailored to stop the victim of Israeli aggression from defending himself, but provides the IDF with the go-ahead to continue its rampage. Such is the Kafkaesque logic of the United Nations and their puppet-masters in Tel Aviv.

There is no longer any reasonable expectation that Israel will accomplish any of its stated objectives. The mighty IDF has been slapped around by a handful of tough-minded guerillas who kept Israel pinned-down to within a 5 mile radius of the northern border for a full month. It is, without question, one of the greatest triumphs in the history of asymmetrical warfare.

Hezbollah will not be “disarmed” as Ehud Olmert boasted just weeks ago. Instead, their fortunes look to be steadily improving as Israel continues to flail about dropping bombs indiscriminately on critical infrastructure and civilians with impunity. The conflict has simply reinforced widely-held suspicions that the Jewish State is a loose-cannon ready to go berserk at the slightest provocation.

Prime Minister Olmert, Defense Minister Peretz and Chief of Staff Dan Halutz have been the brunt of withering criticism in the Israeli press, and for good reason. They are, without question, the worst collection of bunglers in Israeli history; the political equivalent of the “3 Stooges”. Sharon may have been a war criminal, but he was an astute strategist. Olmert and “wrongway” Halutz are completely clueless. As soon as it was decided that the war could not be won militarily, Halutz charged up to the Litani River backed by thousands ground-troops afraid that his chances for glory were quickly ebbing-away. In the process, another 31 soldiers were killed in a campaign that still has no clearly defined objectives. Meanwhile, Shaul Mofaz, the only Israeli general who could probably transform the current disaster into something resembling “a draw”; is left sitting on the sidelines.

What a fiasco.

Now that the ceasefire has been approved, the politicians and the generals are stumbling over themselves trying to cobble together the victory that has escaped them for the last 4 weeks. Olmert and co. know that as soon as the dust settles they will face an irate Israeli public

looking for someone to hold accountable for the debacle. Ha'aretz op-ed writer Ari Shavit summed up the public mood this way:

“One thing should be clear: If Olmert runs away now from the war he initiated, he will not be able to remain prime minister for even one more day. Chutzpah has its limits. You cannot lead an entire nation to war promising victory, produce humiliating defeat and remain in power. You cannot bury 120 Israelis in cemeteries, keep a million Israelis in shelters for a month, wear down deterrent power, bring the next war very close, and then say, oooops, I made a mistake.”

Columnist Moshe Arens added to Shavit's critique saying, “The task facing Israel now is to restore its deterrent posture and prepare for the attacks that are sure to come. But not with this leadership. They have exhausted whatever little credit they had when they were voted into office.”

The anger that is growing in Israel is narcissistic and self-serving and has nothing to do with the vast devastation the IAF has visited on battered Lebanon.

Lebanon is in ruins. The country's main bridges, roads, industries, ports, canals, telecommunications, oil depots, water facilities and factories have been buried by a steady barrage of Israeli precision guided munitions. George Bush can be credited with a large part of the damage. He rushed an order of high-tech bombs to his friends in Tel Aviv to make sure that the slaughter would continue without interruption. He also blocked the ceasefire resolutions at the UN which allowed Israel to continue its withering bombardment of Lebanon.

The UN ceasefire agreement was clearly written in close collaboration with Israel. It allows the IDF to continue “defensive operations” while Hezbollah is required to stop fighting. Israel interprets this as a green light for aggressively pursuing Hezbollah.

According to Israeli daily newspaper Ha'aretz, “The army will stop its offensive as soon as it is ordered to do so by the political leadership and later it will begin to retrace its steps to uncover any pockets of resistance that may remain in the area.” With troops presently located at the Litani River that could involve military operations throughout the entire south, which means that hostilities could continue for months.

Israel is at war with itself. It's trying to produce a victory where victory is impossible. With less than 24 hours until the ceasefire goes into effect, they've unleashed a massive aerial assault bombing more than 50 cities and towns north and south of the Litani River. The bombing campaign drew the immediate censure of Kofi Annan who said that the attack was not in keeping with the spirit of the ceasefire.

No matter. Israel will keep firing away; savaging what little is left of Lebanon's tattered infrastructure in the vain hope that they might patch together something that resembles success, but to what affect? Hezbollah may be badly damaged and its supply-lines ruptured, but they merely need to hang on to generate a reliable stream of new recruits and to win plaudits from around the world for standing up to the IDF.

Prime Minister Olmert is ambivalent about the sudden military escalation just prior to the ceasefire. Clearly, the war is controlling Olmert; Olmert does not control the war. The uproar in the media has left him vacillating and hesitant; searching for other solutions besides a quick withdrawal. He looks like a man gabbing at straws, hoping for a decisive event that will prove that Hezbollah is weakening. Meanwhile the IDF casualties continue to mount and the collective angst of the Israeli public becomes more palpable.

As for Sheik Nasrallah, he has resisted the usual inflammatory rhetoric and demonstrated Hezbollah's lethal proficiency on the battlefield where it counts. The guerillas have matched the IDF man-for-man and forced the world's 4th most powerful army into a stalemate.

In the early days of the war, Nasrallah described Hezbollah's abilities in modest terms:

“We are not a classic army extending from the sea to Mt Hermon. We are a popular and serious resistance movement that is present in many areas and axes. Our equation and principles are the following: When the Israelis enter, they must pay dearly in terms of their tanks, officers, and soldiers. That is what we pledge to do and we will honor our pledge, God willing”.

Olmert should study this passage and commit it to memory. Nasrallah has laid out his very limited goals in the war in lucid but powerful language. These are realistic objectives and they are achievable, unlike Israel's. That's why he will probably prevail, if he perseveres. Nasrallah does not entertain the foolish idea that he will overwhelm the IDF or invade Israel. He simply plans to gnaw away day by day, hour by hour, at the occupying army forcing them eventually to retreat. He is a shrewd student of asymmetrical warfare and grasps how to exploit the vulnerabilities of a regular army as well as Israeli public opinion (which is already souring on the conflict)

Nasrallah has said that he will abide by the terms of the ceasefire, but will not disarm until the Lebanese Army and the UN forces are in place and the IDF has left Lebanese soil. In his mind, it is pointless to talk about disarmament now when Hezbollah is the only force capable of defending Lebanon from foreign invasion.

Will Hezbollah willingly disarm after Israel leaves?

That is what Israel wonders, but it is the wrong question. The real question is: What are the chances that the IDF will reinvade sometime in the future as they have 4 times before? And, who will provide the weaponry that will create a viable deterrent to Israeli aggression so that Lebanon can live in peace?

Nasrallah's promises to disarm mean nothing. His primary responsibility is to his own people, to protect their right to live free of Israeli violence and occupation.

If Sheik Nasrallah chooses to disarm and put his faith in Israel's assurances of non aggression, that's his choice. But he should pay close attention to the treatment of the Palestinians in Gaza before he sets his rifle down.

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