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G8 leaders line up behind Israeli aggression in Lebanon and Gaza

By Chris Marsden
17 July 2006

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The Group of Eight leaders have fallen into line behind Washington and Tel Aviv, issuing a statement Sunday blaming Hezbollah and Hamas for the conflict in the Middle East.

“These extremist elements and those that support them cannot be allowed to plunge the Middle East into chaos,” it read, affirming Israel’s right to “defend itself” and only then making a perfunctory appeal for Tel Aviv to exercise “utmost restraint.”

The statement is a rejection of calls for a cease-fire in Lebanon and gives the green light for continued Israeli aggression both there and in Gaza. It reiterates the Israeli claim that its efforts to destroy the Palestinian Authority and crush all resistance in Lebanon is motivated by a desire to secure the release of the three Israeli soldiers captured, one by Hamas and two by Hezbollah.

Only with the soldiers’ release and the cessation of all Hezbollah attacks on Israel would the conflict end, the G8 said.

The statement was issued as Israel was preparing a major escalation of its attack on Lebanon, possibly including a ground invasion. Israeli jets have been targeting Lebanon since Wednesday, killing more than 100 people.

After rockets fired by Hezbollah killed at least 8 people and wounded some 50 others in the coastal Israeli city of Haifa yesterday, the head of Israel’s northern command Major General Udi Adam warned, “In two or three hours we are going to attack the south of Lebanon heavily.”

The Israeli military has advised residents in southern Lebanon to leave immediately, and Defence Minister Amir Peretz has declared martial law throughout the north of Israel.

Peretz had already ordered the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) to step up the attacks on Lebanon Saturday night. Israeli Navy gunships attacked central Beirut for the first time, striking a lighthouse and Beirut seaport—Lebanon’s main commercial port facility. An Israeli airstrike killed at least 15 people fleeing the fighting, 12 of them children.

On Sunday, the air force carried out a wave of bombing raids on the southern suburbs of Beirut, striking Hezbollah’s Al-Manar TV

facilities and a major power plant, plunging much of Beirut into darkness.

Foreign governments were preparing to evacuate their citizens in anticipation of an even bloodier offensive when reports came through that eight Canadian citizens were killed when Israeli aircraft destroyed a house in southern Lebanon.

The US has indicated it intends to fly its citizens to Cyprus, which would mean using Beirut International Airport where only one runway is operational following Israeli air attacks. This would require that Israel create a safe zone on the ground and an air corridor and could provide a pretext for direct US military involvement in Lebanon.

A Marine Expeditionary Force is on manoeuvres in the Red Sea, led by the USS Iwo Jima. There are 2,200 marines on board.

Israel's criminal actions have now proceeded for six days in Lebanon and in Gaza for nearly three weeks without significant opposition from any of the international bodies dominated by the imperialist powers. In this, Washington has played the leading role. The past days have seen a concerted campaign of threats and arm-twisting by the Bush administration, first at the United Nations and then at the G8 summit in Russia.

On Saturday, the US blocked a resolution to the UN Security Council calling for a ceasefire in Lebanon. The Lebanese government had called on the Security Council to adopt such a resolution and the demand was taken up Saturday by Qatar, the council's sole Arab member.

But the Security Council acceded to US demands not to pass a resolution on the pretext that the focus for Middle East diplomacy should be the G8 summit meeting in St Petersburg. Cesar Mayoral, Argentina's UN ambassador, said the US objected to any statement and Britain opposed calling for a ceasefire.

While the Security Council remained silent on a full-scale war against Lebanon, as it did on Israeli collective punishment of the Palestinians in Gaza, it passed a US-backed resolution imposing sanctions on North Korea and demanding the suspension of its ballistic missile programme.

The Arab bourgeois regimes have once again demonstrated their impotence and outright complicity in US-backed Israeli aggression. After an emergency meeting in Cairo, all the Arab League could manage was a call for the UN Security Council to intervene.

US allies Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and the Persian Gulf states are openly blaming Hezbollah for the conflict, with a Saudi spokesman stating, "[I]t is time for those elements to alone shoulder the full responsibility for this irresponsible behaviour and that the burden of ending the crisis falls on them alone."

With the UN and the Arab League having fallen into line, the Bush administration shifted attention to the G8.

Russia and France had made previous calls for a ceasefire, and at a pre-summit meeting with President Bush, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that it was Russia's "impression that aside

from seeking to return the abducted soldiers, Israel is pursuing wider goals.” France’s President Jacques Chirac had declared, “It is necessary to stop all the forces which put at risk, which endanger the security, the stability and the sovereignty of Lebanon.”

Publicly and behind the scenes, the US began a major push to make sure its line dominated. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice issued a public statement opposing a ceasefire.

Washington then turned to Britain’s Prime Minister Tony Blair to back its efforts to place Syria and Iran in the line of fire. Speaking alongside Bush, Blair claimed, “There has been a real hesitation to put the real truth of this situation.” Iran and Syria were backing “extremists” in the region, he claimed, who want to derail efforts to strengthen democracy in Lebanon and peace between Israel and Palestine.

Bush declared confidently of the G8, “I think most leaders are beginning to recognise the root cause of the problem.” The next day, Germany’s Angela Merkel read out precisely the type of resolution Washington had sought.

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