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Middle East

Aug 4, 2006



US giving aid - and bombs

By Thalif Deen

NEW YORK - As Israel's bombing of Lebanon continues unabated into its fourth consecutive week, the United States says it stands ready to provide food, medicine and humanitarian assistance to the thousands of internally displaced Lebanese caught in the crossfire.

But Washington has also decided to accelerate the supply of lethal weapons to Israel - "perhaps intended to kill the very Lebanese the United States is planning to feed and shelter", said one Arab diplomat at the United Nations.

"It is US hypocrisy at its worst," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity because his country receives millions of dollars in US economic aid. "The right hand obviously does not know what its left hand is up to. Or does it?"

Irene Khan, secretary general of London-based Amnesty



International, was equally harsh in her reaction. "It is ridiculous to talk about providing humanitarian aid on the one hand and to provide arms on the other. It is imperative that all governments stop the supply of arms and weapons to both sides immediately." Asked whether there is a contradiction between the two, US President George W Bush told reporters last week: "No. I don't see a contradiction in us honoring commitments made prior to Hezbollah attacks into Israeli territory."

Bush also made an obvious slip when he said, "I am concerned about loss of innocent life, and we will do everything we can to help move equipment ... I mean, food and medicines, to help the people who have been displaced and the people who suffer."

Amnesty quoted British media reports relating to two chartered Airbus A310 cargo planes landing at Glasgow's Prestwick airport; they were filled with GBU-28 laser-guided bombs (bunker busters) containing depleted-uranium warheads and destined for the Israeli

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Air Force. The planes landed for refueling and crew rest after flying from the United States.

"Other reports claimed that the USA has requested that two more planes be permitted to land in the UK en route to Israel in the next two weeks," Amnesty said. "The reports said the aircraft will be carrying other weapons, including bombs and missiles."

Khan said, "The UK government should refuse permission for its sea- and airports to be used by planes or ships carrying arms and military equipment destined for Israel or Hezbollah."

Amnesty International has also written to British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett urging the government to suspend any sale or transfer of arms and military equipment to Israel. "We have already let the United States know that this is an issue that appears to be seriously at fault, and we will be making a formal protest if it appears that that is what has happened," Khan said.

Meanwhile, New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) has accused the Israelis of using artillery-fired cluster munitions in populated areas of Lebanon.

"Cluster munitions are unacceptably inaccurate and unreliable weapons when used around civilians," HRW executive director Kenneth Roth said. "They should never be used in populated areas."

Armed mostly with state-of-the-art US-supplied fighter planes and combat helicopters, the Israeli military is capable of matching a combination of all or most of the armies in Middle Eastern countries, including Iran, Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

The annual survey of US arms sales conducted by the Congressional Research Service shows a total of US\$8.4 billion in arms deliveries to Israel between 1997 and 2004, with fully \$7.1 billion or 84.5% coming from a single source: the United States.

A major factor in this trend was the rise in US foreign military financing - outright grants to Israel - which now totals about \$2.3 billion a year paid for by US taxpayers.

Meanwhile, the pattern of attacks and the extent of civilian casualties show a blatant disregard of international humanitarian law by Israel and Hezbollah, Khan said. "Direct targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure and launching indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks amount to war crimes."

Francis A Boyle, professor of international law at the University of Illinois College of Law, said the 192-member United Nations General Assembly must immediately establish an International Criminal Tribunal for Israel (ICTI) as a "subsidiary organ" under UN Charter Article 22.

The ICTI would be organized along the lines of the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY), which was established by the UN Security Council in 1993.

"The purpose of the ICTI would be to investigate and prosecute Israeli war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide against the peoples of Lebanon and Palestine - just as the ICTY did for the victims of international crimes committed by Serbia and the Slobodan Milosevic regime throughout the Balkans," Boyle said.

Furthermore, establishment of an ICTI by the General Assembly would serve as a deterrent on Israeli leaders, including the prime minister, defense minister, the chief of staff and Israel's other top generals in case they will be prosecuted for their further infliction of international crimes upon the Lebanese and the Palestinians, said Boyle, author of *Biowarfare and Terrorism* (Clarity Press: 2005) and *Destroying World Order* (Clarity Press: 2004).

Without such a deterrent, he said, Israel might be emboldened to attack Syria with the full support of the US right-wing neo-

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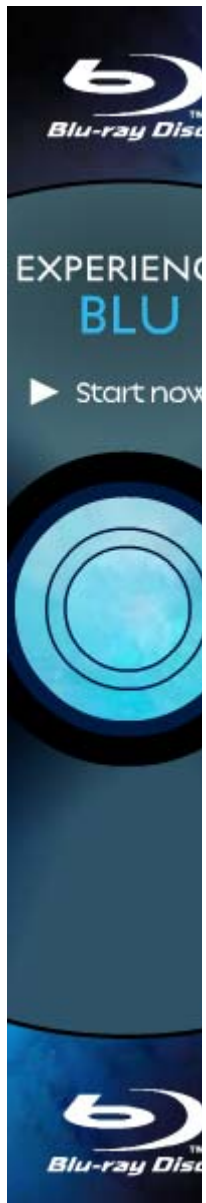
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conservatives, who have always viewed Syria as "low-hanging fruit", ready to be taken out by their joint aggression.

Israeli media have reported that the Bush administration is encouraging Israel to attack Syria. If Israel attacks Syria as it did when it invaded Lebanon in 1982, Iran has vowed to come to Syria's defense.

"This scenario could readily degenerate into World War III," Boyle warned. "For the UN General Assembly to establish ICTI could stop the further development of this momentum towards a regional if not global catastrophe."

(Inter Press Service)

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