

Why Israel Is Pounding Lebanon

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There is no rational military purpose for most of the day and night aerial bombardment of Lebanon, in particular, the civilian Shiite neighborhoods in Beirut, non-military industrial plants, roads and bridges. It appears that Israel has adopted the US preference for bombing the hell out of a city or country instead of doing the important surgical military work on the ground-rooting out terrorists house to house and from their military bunkers.

UPI outside commentator Alon Ben-Meir claims that Hezbollah grossly miscalculated Israel's resolve when it started its latest missile barrage against northern Israeli towns. I disagree. Hezbollah, has not failed to notice how Israel has always been held in check by international powers after every attack, and had every reason to believe this precedent would continue: a quick retaliation and then a cease fire. Something different is going on this time, and even Hezbollah could not have anticipated it.

Nevertheless, Hezbollah will not be easy to bring down. As Asia Times correspondent Pepe Escobar writes, "Hezbollah may be writing the book - at least for now - of fourth-generation war. Hezbollah had a reputation as an extremely disciplined, mobile guerrilla force. Now Hezbollah has fully revealed itself as a more than competent asymmetrical actor. Hezbollah controls a great deal of territory - Beirut's southern suburbs, vast areas in southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley, which is sandwiched between two mountain ranges along the Syrian border. Hezbollah enjoys staunch popular support running to probably one and a half million people, almost half the population of Lebanon. And Hezbollah has been capable of unleashing some relatively sophisticated military operations against Israel using both conventional and unorthodox weapons."

Debka.com offers additional analysis on the current situation: "The air force's hammer blows are hitting Lebanon harder than they are hitting Hezbollah. At least two-thirds of Nasrallah's [Hezbollah's leader] war machine remains intact. The achievements in curbing the Katyusha fire are insufficient. There is no chance of dismantling the guerrilla army in a matter of days ... Israeli leaders will soon discover the disadvantages

and limitations of the aerial offensive. Then they will be faced with a tough dilemma: Should they finish off the aerial operation with a diplomatic process or should they finish it off with a ground operation that could involve heavy losses and entanglement in Lebanon?"

Hezbollah operates in traditional guerrilla warfare mode: integrating itself among an accommodating civilian population, within a state (Lebanon) that tolerates its presence—mostly out of the personal fear of retribution local politicians may be subject to if they challenged Hezbollah's gunmen. Radical Arabs with a gun can be very nasty. Hezbollah, like all other insurgencies, must have an outside source of supplies and weapons, so they need a neighboring country or a covert supply line to service those needs. Syria and Iran are the suppliers, as well as Russia and China, further back up the line.

All of the missiles supplied to Hezbollah, including the C-802 allegedly used to target the Israeli patrol boat are of Chinese design, are being manufactured in Iran and Syria. While the US and Israel are eager to go after Syria and Iran for facilitating terror, they are hypocritically silent about Russia and China's military transfers to these surrogate nations.

Militarily, you can't bomb guerrilla fighters to death within their civilian hideouts without killing an inordinate number of innocent civilians. The US does this all over Iraq, supposedly in an effort to avoid too many combat casualties for its troops on the ground. It doesn't seem to care that the resistance keeps growing out of these seeds of hatred sown into the families who are victims of US air tactics. Air power is simply too convenient and avoids the political complication of military casualties. However, even precision delivery of aerial bombs and rockets can't help but cause collateral damage in a tight urban environment. The explosives in bombs are just too powerful to confine to any single house or apartment, even when right on target.

How innocent are those that live in and around insurgent strongholds? Studies show that only a small percentage are willing collaborators. Most people in all cultures are politically apathetic and just want to be left alone. When they go along with guerrilla demands, it's mostly out of fear of reprisals, or hopelessness about there being any other choice when local government doesn't have the will or means to counter guerrilla influence. Insurgents use verbal propaganda to whip up and maintain local support among lowly educated people, but they also use enough fear and intimidation to make sure everyone stays receptive or silent. They actively hunt down people who are resistant or who feed information to the enemy. Lebanon is no different.

There are all kinds of superficial reasons being given for Israel's bombing attacks. I will analyze each one in turn.

1) Israel states that it has no quarrel with the government or people of Lebanon. Then why bomb so many non-military targets? The damage

count is now up to 300 civilian dead, over 1,000 wounded and 500,000 displaced persons. The entire economy of Lebanon has ground to a halt. Shops are shut down, whole towns deserted, people are streaming anywhere to find refuge, and there is little fuel, no fresh food and little public water.

2) The foremost excuse is that Israel is defending itself. Let me state clearly that I have no problem with that. I'm a staunch supporter not only of Israel's right to exist but its right to all of its Biblical homeland-except property actually owned by existing Arab landowners. However, I clearly distinguish between the Jew's natural rights to a homeland, and the Israeli government itself-which has secretly attempted to undermine the very nation it claims to protect, as I outlined last week. Certainly, Israel has been under attack, but that isn't the whole story.

The government of Israel is in large part responsible for allowing this build up of thousands of lethal rockets across the border in Lebanon, and for those being launched from Gaza. Israel unilaterally pulled out of the buffer zone they had created in Lebanon. They pulled out of Gaza knowing that it would become a safe haven for terrorists launching rockets and mortars.

Israel betrayed its base of support in Lebanon-the Lebanese Christian community and their Israeli-armed militia. The existing Lebanese army is mostly composed of Shiites who would be largely unwilling to attack Hezbollah or disarm it. Israel betrayed its base of support in Gaza when they uprooted by force the Israeli settlers whose communities and access roads kept Gaza semi partitioned for security, making it more difficult to move rockets and mortars northward for launching. Israel's unilateral withdrawal and unwise military statements about how it would honor the border sovereignty of Gaza and Lebanon, kept it from acting pre-emptively, to interdict the supply of rockets before they were fired.

3) Israel claims to be attacking only military targets. This is clearly untrue, unless Israel is prepping the country for a full scale invasion and occupation-which is clearly not justified. Israel has been bombing and shelling all southern Lebanese towns, in most cases giving warning for the people to flee. But whole neighborhoods are being hit, hardly a show of discriminate bombing. In one case, after heeding a warning to flee, a column of Lebanese people and vehicles were attacked by Israeli jets.

As CNN's Nic Roberson reported, "For the Lebanese, the only way for them to really get out of the country is to drive. And for many of them, even that is not an option because they would have to drive through Syria. The only roads open are out through Syria, and there are many Lebanese who oppose the Syrian involvement in Lebanon and they don't feel comfortable going to that country. Also, they're very afraid of being bombed and targeted on the roads as they drive around."

3) Israeli is hitting only Hezbollah concentrations. Not so. Even with the unwise toleration of an enemy "safe zone" in southern Lebanon, Israel could have limited its response to counter-attacking the missile firing sites in several ways that would have avoided civilian casualties. Israel has the radar technology to backtrack and pinpoint the location of artillery, mortar and missile launches. While its Patriot and Arrow anti-missile batteries are ineffective against low flying Katusha rockets, Israel can and does use artillery to counter attack launching sites. Israel also has access to US satellites overhead that can also pinpoint missile launch sites within 5 feet of accuracy-though the coordination currently is not timely enough to be very useful. Israel has hit back at many of these sites and claims to have destroyed up to 30% of Hezbollah stockpiles of missiles (estimated at 11,000-14,000 missiles). The indiscriminate shelling of whole villages seems unjustified.

The only way to root out guerrillas is to send in paratroopers and armored columns to surround the area and go in, search every house, using high tech metal detectors, and root out the weapons, being careful to harm no civilians. Barry Chamish, Israel's top commentator on the right agrees: "If Israel really wanted to get rid of the missiles, they are fighting the wrong war. Only ground troops can capture the enemy's weapons. So why fight an air war?" He's right, you can target the visible launch sites before the fact, and the hidden ones after launch, but you can't root out the stockpiles without an invasion.

4) Israel says Lebanon must pay for harboring Hezbollah. Frankly, I see a difference between harboring insurgents and Lebanon's tolerating a presence that it has little power to remove, given that Hezbollah is stronger than the Lebanese Army and also a surrogate of regional powers Syria and Iran. Lebanon's Prime Minister Siniora said, "The whole world must help us disarm Hezbollah. But we must first obtain a cease-fire. We can't do anything while the bombardments continue and the situation will just get worse,...Hezbollah has become a state within a state. We are well aware of this and it is a serious problem. It's no secret that Hezbollah follows the political agendas of Damascus and Tehran...But the criminal Israeli bombardments must stop immediately. Israelis are bombing civilians and this increases Hezbollah's popularity, even among people who would not normally support it." PM Seniora added. One might rightly ask, however, why he didn't make this plea for help before the crisis?

Israeli military sources claim they are trying to hit back at Hezbollah as hard as they can since they only have about "a week left before international pressure forces them to withdraw." In fact, one of the main goals Israel claims is to completely remove Hezbollah as a threat to northern Israel. The problem with this statement is that, a) you can't root them out by air power alone, and the damage they are inflicting has done very little to the military abilities of Hezbollah; b) It will take

a land invasion to clean out Hezbollah, and that will take months of hard searching and fighting; and c) the land invasion should have taken place by surprise, at the beginning of the campaign. Now, Hezbollah has had time to hide or scatter northward back to Syria-on the only roads left intact, strangely

SO WHAT IS ISRAEL UP TO? Let's examine the possible reasons for Israel setting itself up for a wave of international criticism.

1) [The official version:] That Israel really is intent on rooting out Hezbollah. I don't believe it, even if it were possible. Israel has had Hezbollah in retreat before and failed to eradicate it militarily. Later, Israeli politicians gave Hezbollah a safe haven by withdrawing-hardly showing intent to root out terror for good. In reality, destroying a guerrilla organization for good is no more possible than the US killing all the insurgents in Iraq. The occupation breeds them faster than you can kill them, especially when occupation forces never pacify the rest of the populace by solving their day to day problems (jobs, security, hospitals, electricity and water). It will never happen when you keep enraging the population with arbitrary arrest, and by killing civilians (speaking of the US occupation). Israeli troops are much more careful (on the ground) at avoiding civilian casualties, but not with air power-especially now that they seem to be adopting the US air power dictum of "make 'em pay."

2) Setting Lebanon up to force the fall of the current government and replacing it with a puppet government. If Israel has bought into the US pattern of occupying countries, not for peace and Democracy, but for provocation and antagonism, this is a distinct possibility. But to have sufficient power to force a puppet government upon Lebanon, as the US did in Iraq, they will have to occupy the country. Only an occupier, with a stranglehold on the supply of electricity, food and water, with access to daily arm-twisting sessions with local powers is capable of forcing a nation into the charade of independence when none exists.

The longer this air attack goes on, the more likely it is that Israel will invade and occupy. If they simply stop right now, they've accomplished nothing but sting Hezbollah and make them really mad, as well as all of Lebanon. Israel is more hated now in Lebanon than ever before. Even the Lebanese Christians have stopped verbalizing any support for Israel-which is bad for Israel in the long run. It's also likely that if Israel makes the country ungovernable, the government will quit in disgust, or be removed by Hezbollah. Pro-Syrian forces will surely fill in the vacuum if Israel fails to occupy. This is what the US forced upon Serbia in the Kosovo bombings-they kept destroying civilian infrastructure (and a few military targets for legitimacy) until Milosovich was forced to yield to save the country further damage.

3) Israel making itself an international pariah (bombing civilians) to induce calls for an international peacekeeping force in Southern Lebanon. The preliminary suggestions have already been publicized.

The AP reported that, "British Prime Minister Tony Blair and U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan called Monday for the deployment of international forces to stop Hezbollah from bombing Israel" and that, "[the] European Union in Brussels announced it is considering deploying a peacekeeping force in Lebanon."

This is one of the major objectives of the international community of globalists-to get a foot-hold of control in Israel through "peacekeeping" forces. Israel has always resisted international control since the days of Menachem Begin, knowing that once installed it is difficult to regain national sovereignty. Now that Israel has its own globalist leaders, the government may allow it as long as it stays in Lebanon, and not in Israel proper. It might be a way of getting Israelis to become more accommodating of the idea.

4) Israel, in collusion with the US, may have decided to antagonize Lebanon, in order to incite Syria and Iran into some overt act that will finally justify a joint US/Israeli attack on Iran and/or Syria. Webster G. Tarpley

Online Journal Guest Writer agrees: "The escalating Israeli assault on Lebanon clearly represents a conscious bid to provoke a general war in the Middle East. The captured Israeli soldiers are only the pretext for the present massive military operations.

"Israeli spokesmen are making constant allegations that Hezbollah missiles being fired at Israel have been manufactured or delivered by Iran. At the same time, the Israelis accuse Hezbollah of wanting to transfer the two captured Israeli soldiers to Syria or Iran. These statements are an attempt to build a case for an Israeli sneak attack on Syria and/or Iran. US spokesmen, including... John Bolton, constantly repeat the litany that Syria and Iran are the supporters of Hezbollah."

There is some evidence for this charge:

A) the US has, for the first time, NOT put pressure on Israel to halt its attacks. In the past, it has done so even when Israel was engaged against attacking Arab military forces. Now, when Israel is primarily smashing civilian infrastructure, with little legitimacy, the US keeps pretending it is all self-defense. This is a definite change and may indicate bad intent on the part of both Israel and the US;

B) The US and Israel continually bring up the subject of Iranian and Syrian backing of Hezbollah (which is true). The US is also piggy-backing the North Korean missile threat onto this Middle East crisis. The US conveniently leaked "intelligence" claiming that Iranians were present to observe the launching of the seven missiles in North Korea-putting them on the bad guy list. The US has long known of North Korean missile transfers of both technology and parts to help Iran build its intermediate range Shihab-2 missile. Why then was the US silent when all these missile transfers were going on, and being

tracked by US satellites? I guess they were saving this intelligence for later, when they could provoke a fight.

C) An invasion and occupation of Lebanon may not actually provoke a reaction from Syria or Iran, who are trying to play it a little more careful now. In that case, I would suspect Israel to directly attack some key "Hezbollah" bases in Syria in order to induce a military response.

US Neo-cons are itching for an Iranian invasion. Rush Limbaugh is now saying that this war in the Middle East was "never intended to stop with Iraq....This is finally our chance to go after Iran." As he puts it, there will be no peace until one side finally defeats the other completely. Rush, as usual, is just shilling for the Republican establishment. He probably doesn't have a clue about the real globalist purpose for all this warmongering. But he ranted on about the folly of restraint and ceasefire in the Middle East: "All of this restraint and cessation of hostilities is just a bunch of garbage, folks.... what are we supposed to do then, they're not supposed to avenge what happened in the '72 Olympics?" What does he mean by "we" avenge? It was Israel that was attacked and they already struck back and killed most of the perpetrators. Are we to meet out collective punishment to all?

Religious evangelicals seem to be anxious to jump on this pro-Bush and pro-Israel bandwagon-which will only harm Israel in the long-run. Evangelical "Christians" are putting on a Washington/Israel summit to demand, that the Bush administration show stronger support for Israel. Rev. Hagee claimed, "There's a new Hitler in the Middle East (referring to Iran's President Ahmadinejad). The only way he will be stopped will be by a preemptive military strike in Iran."

However ignorant Rush and pro-Bush Christian leaders may be in their ranting, it's a different story for the original liberal globalists who feigned being "conservative" to drive this agenda. They know what they are promoting and why, I believe. Top Neo-con Irving Kristol of the Weekly Standard, in an essay entitled, "Our War" complained that the Bush administration has done a "poor job of standing up and weakening Syria and Iran" and called on President Bush to leave the "silly (Group of Eight) summit in St. Petersburg...[and fly] to Jerusalem, the capital of a nation that stands with us, and is willing to fight with us, against our common enemies."

Another sign that something longer-term is going on here is the massive evacuation plans for pulling out all foreigners from Lebanon. This is a big and expensive task that wouldn't happen unless the US knows Israel isn't quitting soon. The US is evacuating 25,000, Britain 20,000, and the various European countries another 20,000+. They are discharging their refugees on the poor island nation of Cyprus, which is complaining they can't handle all these refugees. The US could have told Israel to hold off bombing the airport until they got people out, but they didn't. I suspect the US wanted a humanitarian disaster and is complicit in taking down Lebanon as the new "oasis" in the Middle

East. Neo-cons want no oasis of peace anywhere in the Middle East.

Conclusion: I see little probability that Israel will simply quit and go home and return to the status quo, as it has so many times in the past. The blatant way in which Israel has squandered its goodwill after being attacked by Hezbollah, indicates something bigger is afoot. If Israel has joined in the US strategy of purposeful antagonism of the Muslim world, Lebanon is its first target, and it's another sad day for peace and for the Lebanese. A Lebanese American, Mohammed Shami, newly arrived at the government holding center for refugees in Cyprus shook his head and said it all: "I feel embarrassed to be an American. They have given Israel the green light to destroy Lebanon. What they are doing is wrong; it is immoral."

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