



The World Today

The Israeli Hezbollah War, July 12th - August 8th, 2006

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A former U.S. President once described the Middle East as a tinderbox, with some key players on all sides waiting for every opportunity to destroy their enemies with bullets, bombs and missiles. In another discourse, Mao Tse-Tung noted that “*war is politics with bloodshed.*” The peculiarity, however, in the recent Middle East Crisis, was that while the bloodshed was in Lebanon, the political implications spread far beyond.

Perhaps, it was that detachment from the daily horrors of death and mutilation which allowed George Bush and Tony Blair the luxury of political posturing while hundreds of lives were being lost, and almost 800,000 Lebanese citizens fleeing their homes. Haifa, Qana, Beirut, and many other Lebanese and Israeli towns and villages remained under fire for twenty-eight days, filtering out images of death and destruction.

That refusal to call for immediate cessation deserves to be remembered as an appalling and scandalous abdication of international leadership. This was no accidental omission - it was a deliberate and clear statement of support for Israeli action, confirming a partisan stance.

It is unarguable that Israeli has a right to defend itself against attacks on its citizens, but it was inhumane and counter productive to punish civilian populations in the illogical hope that somehow they would have blamed Hamas and Hezbollah for provoking the devastating response. Instead, there has been broad Arab and international support for these groups, while the condemnation for Israel, the United States and Britain has only intensified. It is true that Hezbollah had developed strongly fortified positions and stockpiled large quantities of missiles in southern Lebanon, but this was in response to Israel’s attitude towards Lebanon, especially since its 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

Although the U.S. government tried to distance itself from the comments of the Israeli Justice Minister, his comments that, “Israel had been authorized by the world to

continue bombing Lebanon,” reveals precisely how that position was interpreted. But why the slavish adherence to the Israeli cause? Why was there a refusal even to call for an immediate ceasefire to allow talks or even humanitarian aid?

For Bush, two things mattered. The first was the continuation of his “*Wild West*” approach to foreign policy. Every nation is either for or against the American world view. Hezbollah, for Bush, was and continues to be an extension of Iran and Syrian militancy. The Israeli action, seen through that prism, was simply an extension of the U.S. ‘*war on terror*’.

Secondly, the Republicans face difficult mid-term elections and alienating the pro-Israeli lobby is a non-starter. By contrast, refocusing, public attention on the wider ‘*war on terror*’, gives Bush a timely poll boost.

For Blair, there was a different dilemma. He is leaving office shortly, and desperately wants to stand astride the world stage looking and sounding like a world leader. Instead, he has been exposed as no more than a fawning accomplice of American foreign policy.

Yet, the question of whom is acting as a proxy for whom and for what, can also be seen from a different perspective. Within Hamas, a fundamental debate had arisen as to whether, in the aftermath of electoral success, the organization should recognize Israel. Agreement was imminent when the Hamas leadership abroad (based in Damascus) ordered the attack on a military post in Israel in which several soldiers were killed and one was abducted.

The resulting massive Israeli military response was clearly anticipated and indeed an integral part of the cold calculations of those who organized the attacks. The emerging Palestinian consensus was torpedoed, and recognition of Israel rendered irrelevant, and the radicals once again proved victorious.

A few days later, Hezbollah followed suit and abducted another two Israeli soldiers on the Lebanese-Israeli border. It was clear that by using the strategy of taking prisoners, Hamas and Hezbollah had coordinated their actions to provoke a large-scale confrontation with Israel.

In July 2006, the stratagem of taking soldiers precipitated the beginning of violence that was to last for twenty eight days, and only ending with an UN Security Council resolution but, still not effectively dealing with the root causes of the problem.

Hezbollah has not responded favourably to the UN Security Council Resolution requiring it to disarm, and one therefore has to wait and see how events will evolve.

Tragically, the truth is that the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict was part of the inevitably repetitive cycle of violence that results from the absence of a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.

There can be no substantive and permanent peace for any people in this troubled region as long as Israel is violating key UN resolutions, official U.S policy and the international 'road map' for peace by occupying Arab lands and oppressing Palestinians. Israel's requisites for peace, which included the now aborted policy of unilateral withdrawal from some occupied territories within her own time-frame was really misguided simply because it satisfied neither of the parties and only further delayed the process.

Failure to address the issues and leaders involved risks the creation of an arc of even greater instability running from Jerusalem, through Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad and Tehran.

The people of the Middle East deserve peace and justice and we in the international community, including Caricom must give them our strong leadership and support. It is hoped that The Council for Foreign and Community Relations of CARICOM (COFCOR), would send a clear message to the parties involved including Israel, the U.S.A, Britain, Lebanon, Iran and Syria, that CARICOM strongly condemns, any element of terrorism, hostage taking and the killing of civilians.