

Death, destruction and unimaginable human suffering: “Stop that shit!” says George W. Bush

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Global Research, July 19, 2006

19 July 2006

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE, THE WAR ON LEBANON](#)

A *WOMAN*, an immigrant from Russia, throws herself on the ground in total despair in front of her home that has been hit by a missile, crying in broken Hebrew: “My son! My son!” believing him dead. In fact he was only wounded and sent to the hospital.

Lebanese children, covered with wounds, in Beirut hospitals. The funeral of the victims of a missile in Haifa. The ruins of a whole devastated quarter in Beirut. Inhabitants of the north of Israel fleeing south from the Katyushas. Inhabitants of the south of Lebanon fleeing north from the Israeli Air Force.

Death, destruction. Unimaginable human suffering.

And the most disgusting sight: George Bush in a playful mood sitting on his chair in St. Petersburg, with his loyal servant Tony Blair leaning over him, and solving the problem: “See? What they need to do is get Syria to get Hizbullah to stop doing that shit, and it’s over.”

Thus spake the leader of the world, and the seven dwarfs – “the great of the world” – say Amen.

SYRIA? BUT only a few months ago it was Bush – yes, the same Bush – who induced the Lebanese to drive the Syrians out of their country. Now he wants them to intervene in Lebanon and impose order?

31 years ago, when the Lebanese civil war was at its height, the Syrians sent their army into Lebanon (invited, of all people, by the Christians). At the time, the then Minister of Defense Shimon Peres and his associates created hysteria in Israel. They demanded that Israel deliver an ultimatum to the Syrians, to prevent them from reaching the Israeli border. Yitzhak Rabin, the Prime Minister, told me then that that was sheer nonsense, because the best that could happen to Israel was for the Syrian army to spread out along the border. Only thus could calm be assured, the same calm that reigned along our border with Syria.

However, Rabin gave in to the hysteria of the media and stopped the Syrians far from the border. The vacuum thus created was filled by the PLO. In 1982, Ariel Sharon pushed the PLO out, and the vacuum was filled by Hizbullah.

All that has happened there since then would not have happened if we had allowed the Syrians to occupy the border from the beginning. The Syrians are cautious, they do not act recklessly.

WHAT WAS Hassan Nasrallah thinking of, when he decided to cross the border and carry out the guerilla action that started the current Witches' Sabbath? Why did he do it? And why at this time?

Everybody agrees that Nasrallah is a clever person. He is also prudent. For years he has been assembling a huge stockpile of missiles of all kinds to establish a balance of terror. He knew that the Israeli army was only waiting for an opportunity to destroy them. In spite of that, he carried out a provocation that provided the Israeli government with a perfect pretext to attack Lebanon with the full approval of the world. Why?

Possibly he was asked by Iran and Syria, who had supplied him with the missiles, to do something to divert American pressure from them. And indeed, the sudden crisis has shifted attention away the Iranian nuclear effort, and it seems that Bush's attitude towards Syria has also changed.

But Nasrallah is far from being a marionette of Iran or Syria. He heads an authentic Lebanese movement, and calculates his own balance sheet of pros and cons. If he had been asked by Iran and/or Syria to do something – for which there is no proof – and he saw that it was contrary to the aims of his movement, he would not have done it.

Perhaps he acted because of domestic Lebanese concerns. The Lebanese political system was becoming more stable and it was becoming more difficult to justify the military wing of Hizbullah. A new armed incident could have helped. (Such considerations are not alien to us either, especially before budget debates.)

But all this does not explain the timing. After all, Nasrallah could have acted a month before or a month later, a year before or a year later. There must have been a much stronger reason to convince him to enter upon such an adventure at precisely this time.

And indeed there was: Palestine.

TWO WEEKS before, the Israeli army had started a war against the population of the Gaza Strip. There, too, the pretext was provided by a guerrilla action, in which an Israeli soldier was captured. The Israeli government used the opportunity to carry out a plan prepared long before: to break the Palestinians' will to resist and to destroy the newly elected Palestinian government, dominated by Hamas. And, of course, to stop the Qassams.

The operation in Gaza is an especially brutal one, and that is how it looks on the world's TV screens. Terrible pictures from Gaza appear daily and hourly in the Arab media. Dead people, wounded people, devastation. Lack of water and medicaments for the wounded and sick. Whole families killed. Children screaming in agony. Mothers weeping. Buildings collapsing.

The Arab regimes, which are all dependent on America, did nothing to help. Since they are also threatened by Islamic opposition movements, they looked at what was happening to Hamas with some Schadenfreude. But tens of millions of Arabs, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf, saw, got excited and angry with their government, crying out for a leader who would bring succor to their besieged, heroic brothers.

Fifty years ago, Gamal Abd-el-Nasser, the new Egyptian leader, wrote that there was a role waiting for a hero. He decided to be that hero himself. For several years, he was the idol of

the Arab world, symbol of Arab unity. But Israel used an opportunity that presented itself and broke him in the Six-day war. After that, the star of Saddam Hussein rose in the firmament. He dared to stand up to mighty America and to launch missiles at Israel, and became the hero of the Arab masses. But he was routed in a humiliating manner by the Americans, spurred on by Israel.

A week ago, Nasrallah faced the same temptation. The Arab world was crying out for a hero, and he said: Here am I! He challenged Israel, and indirectly the United States and the entire West. He started the attack without allies, knowing that neither Iran nor Syria could risk helping him.

Perhaps he got carried away, like Abd-el-Nasser and Saddam before him. Perhaps he misjudged the force of the counter-attack he could expect. Perhaps he really believed that under the weight of his rockets the Israeli rear would collapse. (As the Israeli army believed that the Israeli onslaught would break the Palestinian people in Gaza and the Shiites in Lebanon.)

One thing is clear: Nasrallah would not have started this vicious circle of violence, if the Palestinians had not called for help. Either from cool calculation, or from true moral outrage, or from both - Nasrallah rushed to the rescue of beleaguered Palestine.

THE ISRAELI reaction could have been expected. For years, the army commanders had yearned for an opportunity to eliminate the missile arsenal of Hizbullah and destroy that organization, or at least disarm it and push it far, far from the border. They are trying to do this the only way they know: by causing so much devastation, that the Lebanese population will stand up and compel its government to fulfill Israel's demands.

Will these aims be achieved?

HIZBULLAH IS the authentic representative of the Shiite community, which makes up 40% of the Lebanese population. Together with the other Muslims, they are the majority in the country. The idea that the weakling Lebanese government - which in any case includes Hizbullah - would be able to liquidate the organization is ludicrous.

The Israeli government demands that the Lebanese army be deployed along the border. This has by now become a mantra. It reveals total ignorance. The Shiites occupy important positions in the Lebanese army, and there is no chance at all that it would start a fratricidal war against them.

Abroad, another idea is taking shape: that an international force should be deployed on the border. The Israeli government objects to this strenuously. A real international force - unlike the hapless UNIFIL which has been there for decades - would hinder the Israeli army from doing whatever it wants. Moreover, if it were deployed there without the agreement of Hizbullah, a new guerilla war would start against it. Would such a force, without real motivation, succeed where the mighty Israeli army was routed?

At most, this war, with its hundreds of dead and waves of destruction, will lead to another delicate armistice. The Israeli government will claim victory and argue that it has "changed the rules of the game". Nasrallah (or his successors) will claim that their small organization has stood up to one of the mightiest military machines in the world and written another shining chapter of heroism in the annals of Arab and Muslim history.

No real solution will be achieved, because there is no treatment of the root of the matter: the Palestinian problem.

MANY YEARS ago, I was listening on the radio to one of the speeches of Abd-el-Nasser before a huge crowd in Egypt. He was holding forth on the achievements of the Egyptian revolution, when shouts arose from the crowd: "Filastine, ya Gamal!" ("Palestine, oh Gamal!") Whereupon Nasser forgot what he was talking about and started on Palestine, getting more and more carried away.

Since then, not much has changed. When the Palestinian cause is mentioned, it casts its shadow over everything else. That's what has happened now, too.

Whoever longs for a solution must know: there is no solution without settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And there is no solution to the Palestinian problem without negotiations with their elected leadership, the government headed by Hamas.

If one wants to finish, once and for all, with this shit - as Bush so delicately put it - that is the only way.

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