

Israel is planning for a “Long War” in Lebanon: Olmert tells Cabinet he expects campaign to ‘take a very long time’

By [Global Research](#)

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BEIRUT: Israeli Premier Ehud Olmert said Sunday that the current Israeli offensive against Lebanon would “last a very long time,” as he addressed a Cabinet meeting Sunday. According to a senior Israeli government official, Olmert said: “The diplomatic process will not come at the expense of destroying infrastructures of terror and this process will take a very long time.”

Later Sunday, Olmert said Israel would be ready to negotiate an end to the conflict with the Lebanese government, but did not elaborate on when that would happen.

“Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora is a partner for negotiations when the time is right for that,” Olmert added.

Meanwhile, Defense Minister Amir Peretz said Israel did not plan on a wide-scale invasion of Lebanon.

“The ground operation is focusing on a limited entry of forces,” Peretz told the Cabinet. He added: “We are not dealing with an invasion of Lebanon.”

Peretz was quoted Sunday by an Israeli Defense Ministry official as saying Israel “supports the deployment of a multinational force” on the southern Lebanese border, because the Lebanese Army “is weak.”

The official said Peretz also told German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier that the force could be “sponsored by the NATO transatlantic military alliance.”

“Israel’s goal is to see the Lebanese Army deployed along the border with Israel, but we understand that we are talking about a weak army and that in the mid-term period Israel will have to accept a multinational force,” Peretz told Steinmeier, adding that “the problem of the kidnapped soldiers is the key question for solving the crisis.”

Israeli Trade and Industry Minister Eli Yishai had said Saturday that “a necessary condition for a multinational force to enter Lebanon is for the Lebanese government to deploy its army in Southern Lebanon.”

Peretz also told the Cabinet Sunday that the army’s current operation was not an invasion, but rather a series of small-scale raids into Southern Lebanon.

“The army’s goal is to create a new reality, mostly that Hizbullah won’t be along the border,” Peretz added, speaking amid a new round of diplomatic activity to resolve the crisis.

Steinmeier is on a two-day regional tour, and had played a leading role in a German-brokered prisoner swap in 2004 between Hizbullah and Israel.

The minister, who was former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder’s chief of staff at the time, helped secure the release of 463 prisoners – including 431 Palestinians and 23 Lebanese – in exchange for an Israeli businessman and the return of the bodies of three Israeli soldiers.

Olmert also addressed the Israeli attacks on Lebanese civilians over the past 12 days, saying: “We are not conducting a war with the Lebanese people; we do not wish to harm them.”

He added: “Nevertheless there is a part of the population that is assisting Hizbullah and is therefore more prone to being hurt. But in this case too they are not a target for the army.”

So far, over 350 Lebanese civilians have died, more than 1,200 have been wounded, and the UN says that over 700,000 have been displaced.

The New York Times reported Saturday that the US was speeding up “bomb delivery for the Israelis.”

Basing its report on US officials, it said: “The Bush administration is rushing a delivery of precision-guided bombs to Israel, which requested the expedited shipment last week after beginning its air campaign,” and added the request for expedited delivery of the satellite- and laser-guided bombs was described as an indication that Israel still had a long list of targets in Lebanon to strike. -

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