

Israel Threatens Lebanon

The Existential Threat Facing Lebanon Today

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Beirut will be abuzz with diplomatic activity this weekend as Saudi Arabia 's King Abdullah makes his first official visit to Lebanon since assuming the throne. Reports are that President Bashar Assad of Syria will accompany him as the two aim to diffuse mounting tension over the Special Tribunal for Lebanon 's (STL) anticipated indictment of "rogue" Hezbollah elements allegedly involved in the 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.

King Abdullah comes to Lebanon in support of the ruling March 14 Coalition, led by Prime Minister Saad Hariri and his Future Movement. Assad, on the other hand, represents the interests of the opposition March 8 Coalition, led by (Shia) Hezbollah and the (Christian) Free Patriotic Movement of General Michel Aoun.

Together they hope to preempt any sectarian discord that might ensue after the STL issues its report in the coming months.

There could be no worse emissary for such a mission than King Abdullah, however. The Saudi government has been at the forefront of advancing sectarianism both domestically (typified by its abhorrent treatment of Shia citizens) and abroad (in its support for extremist Salafi groups operating in Iraq , Pakistan and Afghanistan).

It has been hinted that the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, will join his Syrian and Saudi colleagues in the Lebanese capital. Unlike King Abdullah, Sheikh Hamad is considered a fair mediator trusted by the rival coalitions.

It was he, after all, who brokered the May 2008 Doha Accord which ended Lebanon 's 18-month political standoff. That crisis came to a head when then Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's cabinet declared Hezbollah's telecommunication network illegal and attempted to dismantle it. Street battles between Hezbollah and Hariri supporters briefly followed. Fears that similar clashes could again erupt prompted the leaders to convene in Beirut .

Well, at least two. Many believe that shoring up Hariri's domestic political standing and twisting Assad's arm to end his support for Hezbollah are equally, if not more important to the King.

It is most unfortunate though, that the real threat facing Lebanon—one that pales in comparison to what may or may not happen after the STL's indictments are issued—will go unaddressed.

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, in a July 23 [interview](#) with *The Washington Post*, spelled it out:

“I think that they’re [the Lebanese government] responsible for what happens and if it happens that Hezbollah will shoot into Tel Aviv, we will not run after each Hezbollah terrorist or launcher of some rocket in all Lebanon. We’ll see the government of Lebanon responsible for what happens, and for what happens within its government, its body politic, and its arsenal of munitions. And we will see it as legitimate to hit any target that belongs to the Lebanese state, not just to the Hezbollah. And somehow, we are not looking for it. I am not threatening.” [emphasis added]

Recent events belie Barak’s last two claims. Indeed, Israel is doing its best to goad, prod and provoke Hezbollah into firing that one rocket that can be used as pretext to wage all-out war and avenge their July 2006 invasion disaster:

- Military surveillance flights over Lebanon violate the country’s airspace and sovereignty daily.
- In mid-July, an Israeli patrol [crossed](#) the border into Lebanon and attempted to abduct a shepherd.
- A week later, an Israeli vessel [fired](#) artillery rounds at a Lebanese fishing boat located within Lebanese territorial waters.
- Israel ’s designs on Lebanon ’s offshore gas reserves and the prospect of using force to secure them has been recently [discussed](#), as has evidence suggesting their [involvement](#) in the Hariri assassination.

Barak clearly intimates that any war Israel wages will not spare civilian lives or infrastructure, as Gaza will testify. In fact, he simply reiterated what has become known as the “Dahiya Doctrine.”

In an October 2008 interview with *Yedioth Ahronoth* , Israel Defense Forces Northern District Commander Major General Gadi Eisenkott [explained](#) it:

“What happened in the Dahiya Quarter of Beirut in 2006 will happen in every village from which shots are fired on Israel . We will use disproportionate force against it and we will cause immense damage and destruction. From our point of view these are not civilian villages but military bases. This is not a recommendation, this is the plan, and it has already been authorized.”

The Dahiya Doctrine: a strategy used to justify collective punishment and the commission of war crimes, and an existential threat to present-day Lebanon .

One wonders whether King Abdullah—busy running interference in Lebanon and Syria on the United States ’ behalf—understands that his March 14 allies would not be spared.

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