

Israel Violates the Cease Fire: “They are here again!”

Report from the Bekaa Valley

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A man walks next to a destroyed residential area in Baalback, 1 August 2006. (Peter Speetjens/[IRIN](#))

“They are here again!”

It took just this one sentence for a gathering of people making burghol in a village to the north of Baalback to scatter in all directions, running to check the news on the TV stations. The “they” being referred were the Israelis, who according the first report at ten last night, were raiding an area to the north of Baalback. The villagers left the wheat and the fire and started to follow the news. At almost ten thirty, Al-Jazeera assured them that the five air raids were “mock raids”. The villagers gathered again around the big boiling pot of wheat but anxiety was still in the air with the uncertainty of whether the mock raids were part of a psychological war so we would not to forget that “they” can come at any time, or if this was indeed a beginning of a new operation. For people who know the Israelis, you count on the fact that anything can happen.

At almost 1:00, the wheat was spread on the roofs of our neighbor’s house waiting to be dried, to then be grounded and made to burghol, as provision for the winter. The neighbor was scared. “Do you think they will let us go on with our lives in peace, or are they coming back?” Her husband responded, “Well if they come before the wheat dries, the pigeons and birds will be happy; they can have their provisions for all the year.” Joking mixed with bitterness and worries over a fate they feel they have no say in. Israel acts with impunity, and one can’t expect that the UN ceasefire can be effective.

Not long after the wheat was spread on the roof, the MKs began roaming again over the whole area, all night long reminding us of the days of a war we haven’t yet forgotten. Anxiety filled the air, and people were again glued to the TV stations wanting to know what was going on. At around 2:00 am, all of the phone lines were cut. The helicopters were roaming more intensely. I started to see people on their verandas trying to guess what was going on. They kept roaming till around five in the morning. It was then when news reported that there was a commando air raid in Budai, in the neighborhood of Baalback, in an attempt to kidnap one of the leaders of Hizbullah, Sheikh Muhammad Yazbek.

The helicopters dropped fighters and two vehicles that were made to look like they were from the Lebanese army. They were dropped in the mountains surrounding Baalback, and as they were coming down to the valley, Hizbullah fighters intercepted them in the fields. Al-Manar TV reported that the commandos responded to the fighters' questions about their identity as being Lebanese army. The fighters would not believe them and a fight started, lasting for an hour, during which some from the commandos' team were injured - as shown from the bandages and blood that was left after a helicopter came to their rescue and pulled them back without achieving their aim of kidnapping any Hizbullah fighters. Israel claimed one dead officer and two wounded soldiers, one of them in critical condition.

The operation was not reported in the Israeli news until almost noon today, when it was claimed that the aim of the operation was to prevent deliveries of arms to Hizbullah from Iran and Syria. The report made even those who are against Hizbullah here laugh. It just takes a little knowledge of geography for someone to debunk this lie. "Where is Syria from Budai. Isn't Budai 60 km away from the Syrian borders?" an old woman asked. And it lies in the valley, while the borders are on the eastern side from up in the mountains. "They do not even have any imagination, in fabricating their lies. They say they achieved victory, and that Hizbullah lost while they are trying hard still to snatch a victory in order to get themselves out of the political quagmire they get themselves in. They are kidnapping people in Gaza, trying to kidnap people in Lebanon, and it's all still legal acts of self-defense! What a world!" The operation took place at 4:00 am and at the time of my writing, 5:00 pm on Saturday, no condemnation of Israel has been made by any world leaders or UN officials. People here are now wondering what would be the case if the situation were reversed, if Hizbullah initiated an attack in Israel. Lebanese Parliament Speaker Berri asked, "If Lebanon had launched a similar act, wouldn't the Security Council have met to impose tough sanctions against it?" There is always a reminder, though, that whatever Israelis do is counted as an act of self-defense, which they are allowed under UN resolution 1701. And even if not allowed, they have a long history of violating UN resolutions anyway.

"Who is going to stand in their way?" "They will pretend now it is an act of self-defense and not a violation of UN resolution 1701." "This is what the US wants." "This is what the UN wants." These were comments I heard all day long about the raid. The comments reflect a feeling amongst the people of the region that the UN is for Arabs a dead organization, acting now in total harmony with US interests in the region and treating Israel as a spoiled child that can get what it wants and more. People are not asking anymore, "Where is the UN?," as we used to hear for decades before. They have given up on any hope from whatever is left of the so called "international community."

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