

One-sided UN Security Council resolution drafted “with close Israeli involvement”

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NAZARETH: 7 AUGUST 2006. If there were any remaining illusions about the purpose of Israel’s war against Lebanon, the draft United Nations Security Council resolution calling for a “cessation of major hostilities” published at the weekend should finally dispel them. This entirely one-sided document was drafted, noted the Hebrew-language media, with close Israeli involvement. The top adviser to the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, talked through the resolution with the US and French teams, while the Israeli Foreign Ministry had its man alongside John Bolton at the UN building in New York.

The only thing preventing Israeli officials from jumping up and down with glee, according Aluf Benn of the daily Haaretz newspaper, was the fear that “demonstrated Israeli enthusiasm for the draft could influence support among Security Council members, who could demand a change in wording that may adversely affect Israel.” So no celebration parties till the resolution is passed.

Instead, in a cynical ploy familiar from previous negotiating processes, Israel submitted to the US a list of requests for amendments to the resolution. When Israel agrees to forgo these amendments, it will, of course, be able to take credit for its flexibility and desire to compromise; Lebanon and Hizbullah, on the other hand, will be cast as villains, rejecting international peace-making efforts.

The reason for Israel’s barely concealed pleasure is that Hizbullah now faces an international diplomatic and public relations assault in place of the unsuccessful Israeli military one. Israel, and the United States, are trying to set a series of traps for Hizbullah — and Lebanon too — that will justify Israel’s reoccupation of south Lebanon, the further ethnic cleansing of the country, and a widening of the war to include Iran, and possibly Syria.

The clues were not hard to decode. The US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, characterised the aim of the resolution as clarifying who is acting in good faith. “We’re going to know who really did want to stop the violence and who didn’t,” she said. Or, in other words, we are going to be able to blame Hizbullah for the hostilities because we have offered them terms of surrender we know they will never agree to.

The main sticking point for Hizbullah is to be found in the resolution’s requirement that it must stop fighting and begin a process of disarmament at a time when Israeli forces are still occupying Lebanese territory and when there may be a lengthy, if not interminable, wait for their replacement by international peacekeepers. Not only that, but the resolution allows Israel to continue its military operations for defensive purposes: Hizbullah only has to look to Gaza or the West Bank to see what Israel is likely to consider falling under the rubric of

“defensive”.

Hizbullah has been stockpiling weapons since Israel’s withdrawal in May 2000 precisely to create a “balance of deterrence”, to make Israel more cautious about sating its demonstrated appetite for occupying its neighbours’ lands, particularly when the neighbour is a small country like Lebanon without a proper army and divided into many sectarian groups, some of which, for a price, may be willing to collaborate with Israel.

This time, however, as Israeli troops struggle back towards the Litani River and their initial goal of creating a “buffer zone” similar to the one they held on to for nearly two decades, the Lebanese are rallying behind Hizbullah, convinced that the Shiite militia is their only protection against Western machinations for a “new Middle East”.

Israel and Washington, however, may hope that, given time, they can break that national solidarity by provoking a civil war in Lebanon to deplete local energies, similar to Israel’s attempts at engineering feuds between Hamas and Fatah in the occupied Palestinian territories. Certainly, it is difficult to make sense otherwise of Israel’s bombing for the first time of Christian neighbourhoods in Beirut and what looks like the intended ethnic cleansing of Sunni Muslims from Sidon, which was leafletted by Israeli war planes at the weekend.

On the US-Israeli view, a nation of refugees living in an open-air prison cut off from the outside world and deprived of food and aid — a more ambitious version of the Gaza model — may eventually be persuaded to take their wrath out on their Shiite defenders.

Hizbullah understands that the proposal to bring in a force of international peacekeepers is another trap. Either the foreign troops will never arrive, because on these Israeli-imposed terms there can be no ceasefire, or, if they do arrive, they will quickly become a proxy occupation army. Israel will have its new South Lebanon Army, supplied direct this time from the UN and subsidised by the West. If Hizbullah fights, it will be killing *foreign peacekeepers not Israeli soldiers.

But Israel knows the international force is almost certainly a non-starter, which seems to be the main reason it has now, belatedly, become so enthusiastic for it. Senior Israeli government officials were saying as much in the Hebrew-language media on Sunday.

Israel’s Justice Minister, the increasingly hawkish Haim Ramon, summed up the view from Tel Aviv: “Even if it is passed, it is doubtful that Hezbollah will honor the resolution and halt its fire. Therefore we have to continue fighting, continue hitting anyone we can hit in Hezbollah, and I assume that as long as that goes on, Israel’s standing, diplomatically and militarily, will improve.”

Israel hopes it will be able to keep hitting Hizbullah harder — at less cost to its troops and civilians, and with improved diplomatic standing — because in the next phase, after the resolution is passed, the Shiite militia will find that one arm has been tied, figuratively speaking, behind its back.

Not only will Washington and Israel blame Hizbullah for refusing to agree to the ceasefire but they will seek to use any retaliation against Israeli “defensive” aggression — including, presumably, further invasion — as a pretext for widening the war and dragging in the real target of their belligerence: Iran.

This subterfuge was voiced at the weekend by Israel's ambassador to the UN, Dan Gillerman, who told the BBC that if Hizbullah fired at Tel Aviv — which it has threatened to do if Israel continues attacking Beirut — this would be tantamount to an “act of war” that could only have been ordered by Iran. In other words, at some point soon Israel may stop blaming Hizbullah and turn its fire — defensively, of course — on Iran.

This linkage is being carefully prepared by Olmert. On Monday, according to the Hebrew-language press, he told some 50 government spokespeople what message to deliver to the foreign media: “Our enemy is not Hezbollah, but Iran, which employs Hezbollah as its agent.” According to Haaretz, he urged the spokespeople “not to be ashamed to express emotion and appeal to feelings”.

So in the coming days, in the wake of this US-Israeli concoction of an impossible peace, we are going to be hearing a lot more nonsense from Israel and the White House about Iran's role in supposedly initiating and expanding this war, its desire to “wipe Israel off the map” and the nuclear weapons it is developing so that it can achieve its aim.

The capture of two Israeli soldiers on 12 July will be decoupled from Hizbullah's domestic objectives. No one will talk of those soldiers as bargaining chips in the prisoner swap Hizbullah has been demanding; or as an attempt by Hizbullah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, to deflect US-inspired political pressure on him to disarm his militia and leave Lebanon defenceless to Israel's long-planned invasion; or as a populist show of solidarity by Hizbullah with the oppressed Palestinians of Gaza.

Those real causes of hostilities will be ignored as more, mostly Lebanese, civilians die, and Israel and the US expand the theatre of war. Instead we will hear much of the rockets that are still landing in northern Israel and how they have been supplied by Iran. The fact that Hizbullah attacks followed rather precipitated Israel's massive bombardment of Lebanon will be forgotten. Rockets fired by Hizbullah to stop Israeli aggression against Lebanon will be retold as an Iranian-inspired war to destroy the Jewish state. The nuclear-armed Goliath of Israel will, once again, be transformed into a plucky little David. Or at least such is the Israeli and US scenario.

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