

The Middle East: Mounting Crisis in escalating Chaos

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The people of this region are being abandoned by the world to escalating chaos. The political crisis in Lebanon is a manifestation of this chaos, linked more broadly to the catastrophe in Iraq, and the butchery in Palestine. Despite empty gestures, fake goodwill and worn out slogans from a parade of prominent visitors to Jericho, Gaza and some regional capitals, there is no reason at all for hope.

Hypocrisy and double standards have reached new levels of shamelessness. Members of the so-called "international community" refused to take any position on the inclusion in October of an openly fascist party in the Israeli government, on the grounds that this is a purely internal matter. The real reason, shall we painfully deduce, is they do not have any objection to ethnic hatred and religious extremism as long as its victims are mere Arabs and Muslims. God forbid.

The current crisis in Lebanon is also a purely internal matter. Nevertheless, countless Western and other officials have rallied to offer support to the cabinet of Lebanese prime minister Fouad Siniora, against peaceful mass demonstrations calling for its resignation. The same forces who condemn the demonstrations against Siniora, and implicitly consider them an attempted coup, hailed the mass demonstrations that brought down the previous government a "Cedar Revolution" and hailed them as a great wave of people power. At the same time, those who view the Siniora government as democratic and demand that it survive at all costs, are often the same people who participate in the starvation and siege of the Palestinian people under occupation to overthrow the Hamas administration they democratically elected last January.

The crisis in Lebanon is a direct outgrowth of Israel's devastating aggression on the country last July. Israel exploited a Hizbullah border raid in a long running war to try to decisively change the political make up of the region. If Israel had truly been troubled by Hizbullah forces crossing its border, as it alleges, it had many lawful means to pursue, including going to the UN Security Council. Instead, it launched an all out attack on Lebanon's civilian population and infrastructure, deliberately sowing death and destruction among the innocent in the hope of turning the people of Lebanon against the movement. It was a move that some forces in the region, other than Israel also thought they would benefit from. In addition to standing in the way of Israel's aggression and colonization, Hizbullah articulates the hopes and demands of Lebanon's poorest, the Shia plurality long marginalized from power by the elite. If Hizbullah had been destroyed on the battlefield, it would have become

a lesser factor in Lebanese politics.

But the opposite happened. Hizbullah defeated Israel, and is now emboldened to demand a unity government in which the party receives a rightful share of power on behalf of the masses it represents. Of course Hizbullah does not stand alone, but with other factions representing a cross section of the country's sects. While the lazy and biased Western media routinely repeat the propaganda that Hizbullah is simply doing Teheran's bidding, and that the opposition demonstrations in Beirut are "pro-Syrian," they forget that among the leaders of this movement is the Christian general Michel Aoun, who fought a bitter war against Syria.

All of this can only really be understood when we step back and look at the big picture. While there are attempts to portray the crisis in Lebanon, the civil war in Iraq, or the tension between Hamas and Fatah in Palestine as local squabbles, or irrational sectarian hatreds, the reality is that these faultlines mark the division between those who have supported and benefitted from Western intervention in the region, and the effort to reshape its politics to suit Israel, and those who have chosen to resist culturally, politically and at times militarily. All those who accept foreign hegemony are labelled "democrats," no matter how narrow their base; everyone else is accused of being a "terrorist" or a puppet of Iran or Syria. Similarly, all those in Iraq who opposed the invasion and occupation of their country were labelled either supporters of Saddam or Al-Qaida, closing the door to dialogue that could have ended that country's agony.

Parties like Hamas and Hizbullah, which are able to mobilize the masses in their countries and inspire millions more across the region, have called the bluff of those who use the language of democracy. Neither has asked for anything more than the fair share of power it won at the ballot box, on behalf of the people it represents.

The approach of slamming the door on all the forces that oppose Western hegemony in the region, can only have the effect of increasing the conflict in all these arenas. In Iraq it seems already beyond control. The dangers in other areas of escalation are clear to all.

The answers seem crystal clear. If, for example, there is opposition to Hizbullah retaining its weapons as a resistance movement, then all international efforts should be aimed at ending the Israeli occupation and constant violations of Lebanese territory. This week Israel talked about unilaterally withdrawing from the Lebanese village of Ghajar in order to prop up the Siniora government by showing that Lebanon can retain its rights by means other than resistance. But the Israeli move only further discredits the Lebanese government and vindicates the widely held view that only resistance works. After all, Resolution 425 of 1978 called on Israel to withdraw from Lebanon "forthwith." Israel did not do so until it was forced by Hizbullah in 2000.

In Palestine too, the Hamas-led Authority is demanding nothing except that election results be respected, and offering Israel a full truce for ten years to allow negotiations. For the first time ever, Israel verbally accepted a truce offer (although continues to murder people on the ground), not because it is strong, but because it failed to stop resistance even after carrying out daily atrocities in the Gaza Strip that briefly shocked even the calloused consciences of European Union officials.

Those who continue to offer advice to the region should understand that unless they are

willing to drop their double standards, apply the principles they proclaim but violate every day, and support the rights of ordinary people to a life free from foreign occupation and colonization, then they have nothing to contribute. And the situation will continue to deteriorate.

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