

“Carpenters are running out of wood for coffins. Bodies are stacked three or four high in a truck at the local hospital morgue. The stench is spreading in the rubble.”

Israel's terror in Lebanon



Victims of an Israeli airstrike in Lebanon

By Eric Ruder

ISRAEL'S MASSIVE military offensive against Lebanon has created a humanitarian crisis and threatens to plunge the entire region into war.

Hundreds and hundreds of Israeli air strikes and volleys of heavy artillery have flattened homes and apartment buildings and destroyed roads, bridges and airports, making it difficult or impossible for people to flee or get essential supplies such as food and fuel in to the people who remain.

Roberto Laurenti, the United Nations Children's Fund representative in Beirut, described the situation as “both alarming and catastrophic. There are about 500,000 people displaced already. The situation is extreme.”

In Tyre, a city in southern Lebanon and the country's fourth-largest urban area, the main hospital has run out of room in its morgue. The dead are being buried in mass graves.

“Carpenters are running out of wood for coffins,” reported the *New York Times*. “Bodies are stacked three or four high in a truck at the local hospital morgue. The stench is spreading in the rubble.”

“The morbid reality of Israel's bombing campaign of the south is reaching almost every corner of this city...[W]ild dogs gnawed at the charred remains of a family bombed as they were trying to escape the village of Hosh, officials said.”

“Officials at the Tyre Government Hospital inside a local Palestinian refugee camp said they counted the bodies of 50 children among the 115 in the refrigerated truck in the morgue.”

Tyre resident Therese Khairallah was distraught as she talked to a *Washington Post* reporter while sitting in an alley near the sea with friends.

“They evacuate the foreigners, bring them to safety, and they leave us like dogs

in the street,” she said.

On day 10 of Israel's assault, the official death toll in Lebanon exceeded 350. But it is likely far higher because many bodies still lie buried and uncounted underneath the rubble. More than 1,000 Lebanese have been injured.

Israel also began massing troops just south of Lebanon's border, in preparation for a likely ground offensive. It called up reserve soldiers in anticipation of a prolonged confrontation.

Israeli officials say they need up to two more weeks to “eliminate” Hezbollah's positions in southern Lebanon, but the conflict could easily last longer.

Israel is using a strategy similar to the one it has employed in its siege of Gaza, imposing an air, land and sea blockade against Lebanon.

Israel also bombed power facilities, densely populated areas in Beirut's southern suburbs, large trucks carrying foodstuffs and buses in transit, ambulances, gas stations and factories that produce milk, pharmaceuticals and other essential goods.

“Nothing is safe,” Dan Halutz, chief of staff of the Israel Defense Force (IDF), warned on July 13. “As simple as that.” A few days later, he added that Israel plans to “turn Lebanon's clock back 20 years.”

U.S. OFFICIALS actively encouraged the onslaught against Lebanon, asserting that “Israel has a right to defend herself,” in the words of George W. Bush.

Leading Democrats rushed to outdo Republicans in showing support for the war. “Israel has not only a right but also a responsibility to respond to the Hezbollah attack,” said liberal Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.).

Israel's “right of self-defense,” according to U.S. officials, flows from a raid mounted by the military wing of the Lebanese Islamist party Hezbollah, which killed seven Israeli soldiers and led to the capture of two others.

Hezbollah, which had been planning the operation for months, according to leader Hassan Nasrallah, took the Israeli soldiers prisoner in the hopes of freeing Hezbollah fighters held in Israeli jails.

But coming on the heels of Israel's assault on Gaza, which began after Hamas' June 25 capture of an Israeli soldier, Hezbollah's action also became a political show of support for Palestinians suffering for weeks under Israel's intense attack.

Hezbollah fired dozens of rockets into towns in northern Israel, including a few that reached some 40 miles inside Israel to Haifa, Israel's third-largest city.

U.S. and Israeli officials and their media mouthpieces insist that Israel's actions are warranted because Hezbollah struck first,

and they blame Syria and Iran for orchestrating the Hezbollah attack.

But in truth, Israel has had a long-term plan, years in the making, to exact revenge on Hezbollah for forcing Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000—and take aim at the Iranian government.

“For Israel, the goal is to eliminate Hezbollah as a security threat—or altogether,” the *Washington Post* reported.

“A senior Israeli official confirmed that Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah is a target, on the calculation that the Shiite movement would be far less dynamic without him.

“For the United States, the broader goal is to strangle the axis of Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria and Iran, which the Bush administration believes is pooling resources to change the strategic playing field in the Middle East, U.S. officials say.”

The assault on Lebanon is also an extension of Israel's war against Palestinians that over the decades has repeatedly spilled into Lebanon.

After the 1948 war to drive Palestinians from their land and found the state of Israel, about 100,000 Palestinians fled to Lebanon, but were denied citizenship and were forced into squalid refugee campus.

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon in an attempt to destroy the remnants of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which had been forced out of Jordan in 1970.

Israel's invasion failed to deliver the fatal blow to the PLO, but the assault killed some 20,000 people, mostly civilians.

Israeli forces under the command of then-Defense Minister Ariel Sharon also bear direct responsibility for the cold-blooded massacre of more than 2,000 Palestinian men, women and children in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps near Beirut—IDF soldiers looked on as far-right Lebanese militias carried out the mass murder.

ISRAEL SAYS that it must defend itself from Hezbollah, whose attacks are used to justify all violence that Israel deems necessary for its “self-defense.”

But like in Israel's latest assault on Gaza, the question of “who started it” is meant to evade the central issue, wrote Gideon Levy, a columnist for Israel's *Ha'aretz* newspaper.

“Israel is causing electricity blackouts, laying sieges, bombing and shelling, assassinating and imprisoning, killing and wounding civilians, including children and babies, in horrifying numbers, but ‘they started,’” wrote Levy.

“They are also ‘breaking the rules’ laid down by Israel: We are allowed to bomb anything we want, and they are not allowed to launch [rockets].

“When they fire a Qassam at Ashkelon,

that's an ‘escalation of the conflict,’ and when we bomb a university and a school, it's perfectly alright. Why? Because they started...”

“Nobody would have given any thought to the fate of the people of Gaza if they did not behave violently. That is a very bitter truth, but the first 20 years of the occupation passed quietly, and we did not lift a finger to end it...”

“We started. We started with the occupation, and we are duty-bound to end it, a real and complete ending. We started with the violence.

“There is no violence worse than the violence of the occupier, using force on an entire nation, so the question about who fired first is therefore an evasion meant to distort the picture.”

In a statement to reporters, Bush did say he hoped hope Israel's actions wouldn't “weaken” Lebanon's fragile “democracy.”

But after the U.S. military intervention in Lebanon throughout the 1980s and U.S. support for Israel's two-decade occupation before 2000, the idea that the U.S. cares about “democracy” in Lebanon rings hollow.

In truth, the U.S. is concerned about nothing more than protecting the pro-U.S. government of Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.

It doesn't care about the deaths of civilians, the bombing of the civilian infrastructure or the flexing of Israel's deadly military might—a fact underlined by the U.S. veto of a UN Security Council resolution charging Israel with “disproportionate use of force” and demanding that it withdraw its troops from Gaza.

In fact, eight of the last nine vetoes of UN resolutions have been cast by the U.S.—and seven of those dealt with Israel's war on Palestine.

Now, with both Israel and the U.S. pointing the finger at Iran and Syria, the prospects for a wider war in the Middle East are frighteningly real.

This is a critical time to stand up to Israeli and U.S. aggression.

Antiwar activists and supporters of Palestinian rights have been organizing emergency protests against the assault on Gaza, and plans are in the works for demonstrations against Israel's expansion of its war to Lebanon.

These protests are important for exposing the truth about Israel's murderous assault on Lebanon and Gaza—and demanding that the U.S. end its support for Israel. ■



Author and antiwar activist Gilbert Achcar on the background to the war “Israel is holding a whole population hostage”

SWONLINE

Read an expanded version of this interview at www.socialistworker.org.

GILBERT ACHCAR grew up in Lebanon, before moving to France, where he teaches political science at the University of Paris-VIII. His most recent book is the second edition of *The Clash of Barbarisms: September 11 and the Making of the New World Disorder*. Here we print excerpts of an interview he did with *Socialist Worker* on the causes and background of the Israeli assault on Lebanon.

THE U.S. media place the blame for Israel’s attack on Hezbollah, for “starting” the violence? How do you view the situation?

WHATEVER ONE thinks about Hezbollah or the operation mounted by Hezbollah—and I do have my own reservations about its appropriateness with regard to its foreseeable consequences—this cannot by any logic justify what Israel is doing.

The killing of the seven Israeli soldiers and the kidnapping of two soldiers was an act of war, and Lebanon and Israel are two countries that are still at war.

Israel regularly encroaches on Lebanon’s sovereignty: It has aggressed the country innumerable times, especially after 1967 (the first Israeli devastating attack on Beirut’s airport took place in 1968); it invaded a small piece of Lebanese territory in 1967 (the Shebaa farms), a big chunk of southern Lebanon in 1978, half of Lebanon in 1982; it then occupied a big part of the country until 1985, its southern part until 2000, and it still holds the stretch of Lebanese territory that it seized in 1967.

Since 2000, there has been an ongoing low-intensity war between Hezbollah and Israel: cross-border skirmishes, covert Israeli action in Lebanon, including assassination of Hezbollah leaders, etc.

But what Israel is carrying out now in Lebanon is massive retaliation against a whole population.

It is holding a whole population and country hostage and trying to impose its conditions.

This brutality is most cowardly, because whatever military means Hezbollah—or the whole of the Lebanese state, for that matter—possess are dwarfed by the military power of the state of Israel.

This isn’t some kind of an equal fight, despite the fact that Hezbollah is retaliating with some rockets.

One of the world’s mightiest military powers is committing a naked aggression against one of the weakest states in the Middle East, and murdering scores of people.

The overwhelming majority, more than 90 percent, of Israel’s victims are uninvolved civilians.

They are neither fighters, nor even militants; just ordinary civilians, families and a considerable number of children appallingly torn to pieces by Israeli bombs.

Israel is destroying the infrastructure of the country.

It is also destroying the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of people—Lebanon is a country



where the summer season is very important to thousands and thousands of people.

If you take all this into consideration and compare it to whatever border operation Hezbollah executed, it is absolutely clear that this has become just a pretext—seized on by Israel, backed by the United States and other countries, to try to impose what they have been attempting to force since 2004.

That year, they had the UN Security Council adopt a resolution calling not only for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, but also for the disarmament of armed groups in the country—meaning, above all, Hezbollah, and secondarily, the Palestinians in their refugee camps.

THE DOUBLE standard of Western media presentations of the situation and the hypocrisy of Israel’s statements are so glaring.

WE KNOW this double standard well. We are now witnessing an appalling new case.

And the fact is that if this hypocrisy can go unnoticed for an average audience in Western countries, you can be sure that in the overwhelming majority of Third World countries—and, of course, in Muslim countries, and, even more so, in Arab countries—the double standard is conspicuously and outrageously obvious.

That’s why people don’t give any credit to the utterances of Western leaders—to the Bush administration’s talk about democracy and other lies.

Instead, what we are seeing right now is that the hatred toward not only Israel but the United States, and all the other Western countries backing Israel and allying with the United States, is reaching heights which are far beyond what existed before September 11, 2001.

In other words, the United States and the state of Israel are preparing for the rest of the world, including their own populations, nightmarish events, compared to which 9/11, I’m afraid, will be

only a foretaste.

People in the West, especially in the United States, have to become aware of the fact that, for very good reason, the Arab and Muslim peoples are coming to perceive that they are considered as sub-human beings, and that their lives have no value in the eyes of Israel, the United States and their allies.

THE U.S. government denounces Hezbollah as a band of terrorists. What is the actual role that it plays in Lebanon?

THROUGHOUT THE years, Lebanese politics have had a communal dynamic, so you have some kind of identification of communities with this or that political organization.

Hezbollah managed to become the main force in the Shiite community, which is the largest minority in Lebanon, where no religious community constitutes a majority.

Hezbollah came to play this role for a variety of reasons.

The major one is the role that Hezbollah played in liberating southern Lebanon, where the Shiite community is concentrated, from the Israeli invasion.

But there are other factors.

Generally speaking, the rise of Hezbollah’s influence fits into a framework that we’ve seen at the regional level for the last 30 years, where the failure of the left and the bankruptcy of nationalist leader-

ships create a void in the leadership of the mass movement that has been filled by organizations of an Islamic fundamentalist character.

This was very much propelled by the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

The shock wave of the revolution was tremendous in the area—especially, of course, among Shiites, since Iran is a Shiite country.

The birth of Hezbollah was the result of the conjunction of this shock wave with the conditions created by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

It also managed to translate the clout built through the resistance in political terms, when it entered the elections.

Hezbollah has an important fraction in the Lebanese parliament, and there are even Hezbollah ministers in the Lebanese government.

So it’s not a “terrorist” organization, as Washington’s and Israel’s terrorist governments call it.

It is a mass party fully involved in the political life in Lebanon.

No one in Lebanon, except for a tiny minority of ultra reactionaries, considers what Hezbollah does in confronting Israel to be “terrorism.”

The Lebanese government itself considers it as national resistance.

WHAT ARE Israel’s goals in carrying out this assault?

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING, both Israel and the United States

consider their main enemy in the Middle East to be not bin Laden or al-Qaeda—these are only minor nuisances in their eyes, if conveniently useful nuisances—but Iran.

There is what they call the Shiite axis or crescent, which has its source in Iran, and goes through the pro-Iranian Shiite forces in Iraq, through the Syrian government, which is allied to Iran, and reaches Hezbollah in Lebanon.

This is why they consider Hezbollah a very important enemy—because with their kind of conception of the world, they see everything through their obsession with what they consider to be their main enemy state.

At the time of the Cold War, they used to see everything worldwide in terms of a confrontation with the former Soviet Union. Now, they see everything in the Middle East in terms of a confrontation with Iran.

Besides that, Israel has its own specific reasons for wanting to get rid of Hezbollah, as the organization that played the major role in forcing Israel to withdraw from Lebanon, in 2000.

This is an organization that is permanently defying Israel by its very existence, its very presence.

Ever since Israel left Lebanon, there’s been a determination to take revenge on Hezbollah, and we’re now witnessing Israel in the midst of carrying this out, using the pretext of the border clashes.

With the prevailing replica of the Cold War imperialist mentality, Hezbollah is presented as a mere agency of Iran.

Now, to be sure, it’s no secret to anyone that Hezbollah is closely linked to both Damascus and Tehran.

So what? Unlike those of the Afghan mujahadeen, when they were fighting against the Soviet occupation of their country, the weapons Hezbollah is using are, of course, not U.S.-made or U.S.-provided!

It is absolutely normal for forces confronted with much more powerful enemies to try to find external sources of support. Hezbollah has to get the means from somewhere to be able to resist.

The fact that Hezbollah has links to Syria and Iran doesn’t mean in the least that it is not waging a legitimate national resistance struggle—in the same way that the fact that the Vietnamese were backed by this or that Communist country didn’t mean in the least that they were not fighting for the liberation of their country. ■

**What
else
you
can
read**

www.socialistworker.org

Find *Socialist Worker*’s up-to-date coverage of the war along with featured articles and background.

www.isreview.org

The *International Socialist Review* has extensive analysis of Israel’s war on the Palestinians and U.S. designs in the Middle East.

www.haymarketbooks.org

Browse online and place orders for Haymarket Books publications on Israel, Palestine and the Middle East.