

Report from Israel: Dangerous Delusions

by Dean Andromidas

It is a dangerous delusion to see the current Israeli-Lebanese conflict as simply a struggle between Israel and the Hezbollah. Israel is now fighting a two-front war that threatens to spread to Syria and Iran, based on a war plan pushed by Vice President Dick Cheney and his agent Benjamin Netanyahu, and brought into the government of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. If not stopped, this war will prove to be far more dangerous and destructive to *both* Israel and Lebanon than the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Unlike in 1982, when the U.S. at least made a pretense of mediating the conflict, the Bush Administration has given Israel full freedom of action to bomb Lebanon into the Stone Age. In effect, Bush promises to wipe out Hezbollah, no matter how many Israelis and Lebanese have to die.

As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated, "This is not the time for a ceasefire." The mass murder of Lebanese, Palestinians, and Israelis continues.

Israel has hit thousands of targets in Lebanon, including roads, bridges, and electricity grids, causing over \$2 billion in damage. Hundreds of Lebanese civilians are being killed. The Israeli military has refused to let up on its military operations even to allow safe passage of foreigners, including European citizens. Some 500,000 Lebanese have become refugees in their own country. Meanwhile, brutal military operations in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank continue.

For the first time in 30 years, cities deep inside Israel have come under attack by hundreds of Katyusha rockets. Haifa, Israel's third largest city, its most important port, and base of the country's petrochemical industry, is under daily rocket attack. One such attack, targetting a strategic railway facility, killed eight workers. The entire northern part of Israel, home to more than two million people, has been all but paralyzed. About 250 factories have been closed down. The war is costing the Israeli economy hundreds of millions of dollars.

Even militarily, Israeli Defense Forces were caught completely by surprise when a state-of-the-art SAAR 5 missile boat was almost sunk by a Chinese-built C-802 anti-ship missile. The ship had its anti-missile defense system turned off at the time because Israeli intelligence had not known that this radar-guided missile was in Hezbollah's inventory.

A Losing Proposition

The official aims of the Israel military operation are to destroy the "terrorist infrastructure" of Hezbollah, and pres-

sure the Lebanese government to disarm Hezbollah and to deploy the Lebanese army along the Israeli-Lebanon border. They are demanding that the Israeli prisoners be released unconditionally. All this is to be done without holding negotiations with Hezbollah or Syria. This is a delusion that much of the Israeli political/military establishment and population have so far accepted.

After a week of asymmetric warfare, Israel is already failing. Despite the thousands of tons of bombs dropped on Lebanon, Hezbollah rockets continue to fall on Israeli cities, and Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrullah's face continues to be seen on TV screens throughout the Middle East over Hezbollah's Al-Manar Television station.

The Israeli Air Force's failure to put a dent into the 10,000 Katyusha rockets Hezbollah has in storage facilities, and failure to knock out the launching sites, presents the Israel Defense Force with the prospect of launching a major ground operation into southern Lebanon, an operation many in the senior echelon of the military would be loathe to carry out. Already Israeli cross-border raids by well-trained commando units are taking casualties, evidence that a broad invasion would be a repeat of the 1982 debacle. It was only six years ago, in May 2000, that the Barak government withdrew from occupying southern Lebanon, on the basis that it was a deadly quagmire.

Leading Reserve General Speaks Out

The first week of the war has seen the sort of war hysteria that was seen just before the 1967 War and the 1982 Lebanon War, with the government having 80% approval rating. Despite censorship, some cracks are starting to show.

Israeli Maj. Gen. (ret) Uri Sagi, in an interview appearing in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, opened the first crack within the military security establishment.

"Whoever says that we have all the time in the world at our disposal, is not telling the truth to himself and to Israel's citizens. How long will we be able to continue in this situation?" Sagi asked his interviewer Akiva Elder. "The Air Force's actions are important, but not enough to eliminate all of Hezbollah's infrastructure. To do that, would require a land operation, to which I strongly object." Sagi, who asserts that Israel will have to start negotiations with Lebanon and others, including Syria, continued, "Hezbollah is patient. They are racking up achievements, such as a strike on a large city such as Haifa and the continuing paralysis of a fifth of Israel's population. . . ." He went on to say that in a few weeks, international public opinion will turn against Israel, since it will be seen as bringing "about the downfall of the weak government there and causing chaos in Lebanon."

Sagi recalled how in 1992, during a similar crisis called "Operation Accountability," he had warned then-Chief of Staff Ehud Barak that an all-out attack on Beirut, which Barak was suggesting at the time, would backfire. The then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin backed Sagi, de-escalated the situa-

tion, and established indirect contact with Hezbollah, which reduced the violence.

"Today the decision-makers think they know everything," Sagi said. "They live in the illusion that Israel can continue attacking as much as it wants, and that nothing will happen in the world. We are approaching the point of fully utilizing military might." He said that the idea of demanding that Lebanon impose its control over the south was also delusional. The involvement of international forces as peace keepers, which he supports, would only function with the cooperation from Arab countries, especially Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.

Pointing to the insanity of exposing the entire northern half of Israel to rocket attacks, Sagi said, "Instead of the army providing security to the public, it expects to get backing from the public. Excuse me, but I was taught that it should be exactly the opposite way around. We are not living in a time when Churchill promised the citizens of Britain blood, sweat, and tears. The people want to eat and enjoy, work and study. Not sit in shelters in reinforced rooms."

Sagi is not just another major general on the reserve list. He is a former ground commander, and was head of military intelligence. After he retired in 1995, he became Israel's secret negotiator with Syria. When Bill Clinton was U.S. President, he told then-U.S. Ambassador to Israel Dan Kurtzer that "hatred is not a policy," and that Israel had to open a channel to Syria. Although Kurtzer promised Sagi the backing of the Clinton Administration, the Syrian track ultimately failed because "the United States did not stand by its word to [Syrian President Hafez] Assad and Barak got cold feet at the last minute."

Sagi believes that coming to an understanding and eventually a peace agreement with Syria, including under the leadership of Bashar Assad, is key to coming to a positive arrangement in Lebanon, and through Lebanon, opening a window to Iran. He noted that Iran backed Syria's decision to attend the 1991 Madrid Peace conference. Opening these negotiations would have a positive impact on the conflict with the Palestinians, as well. He pointed out that under the peace negotiations sabotaged by Clinton and Barak, Syria had promised to close the offices of radical Palestinian organizations in Damascus.

Israelis Refusing To Serve

In another crack, Israeli reserve Staff Sergeant Itzik Shabbat became Israel's first conscientious objector to the new Lebanon war. Shabbat, who is a TV producer and a veteran commander, announced he would not obey emergency call-up orders for reserve duty in the territories, to free up regular troops for the northern front.

"I know people will attack me and ask how could I not take part in this war when Qassams are falling on my hometown and Katyushas on the towns in the north," he told *Ha'aretz*. "In my opinion, only this type of opposition that I've chosen will put an end to the madness that is going on

now, and will shatter the false feeling that the entire home front supports this unnecessary war that is based on deceptive considerations. Someone has to be the first to break the silence and it will be me. It is a shame that my order was signed by another Sderot resident, Defense Minister Amir Peretz."

Shabbat is part of the movement "Courage to Refuse" which is comprised of hundreds of Israeli reserve officers and soldiers who signed the "Combatants letter," refusing to serve in the territories. That movement expanded to air force pilots, including a reserve air force brigadier general.

Shabbat's act of protest was joined by small sporadic peace demonstrations throughout Israel. More than 500 peace activists demonstrated on July 16 in Tel Aviv against the war. Many were blocked by the police from entering the area where the demonstration was planned to take place, and several were arrested.

"We have learned from history that military solutions don't bring anything other than death and destruction," said Abir Kobti, an activist in the Coalition of Women for Peace. "We are calling on the government to regain its composure, come down from the tree, and solve these problems with negotiations to save us from more deaths on both sides."

As the war lengthens, these movements will expand. It should be remembered that the organization Peace Now was founded by Israeli military officers in the aftermath of Ariel Sharon's 1982 Lebanon War. It is a bitter irony that Defense Minister Amir Peretz was one of its founders.

Warhawks in Cuckoo-Land

Even more dangerous delusions are held by Dick Cheney's messenger in Israel, Benjamin 'Bibi' Netanyahu, who sold Olmert the idea of "reasserting Israel's deterrence" vis-a-vis Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria, and above all, Iran. For Bibi and his masters, Syria and Iran are the next targets. As leader of the opposition, Netanyahu is in constant consultation with the Israeli Prime Minister.

During a tour of northern Israel, Bibi blustered that Israel "should act as the United States did during the Cuban missile crisis. . . . Our goal should be to eliminate the source of fire. We don't want to leave Nasrallah with his finger on the trigger. We must continue the operation, even without international support." An expert publicist, Netanyahu knows how to choose his words. The image of the "Cuban missile crisis" is not missiles but the nuclear showdown between Washington and Moscow. For Netanyahu, the showdown will be with Iran whose nuclear ambitions he claims are an "existential" threat to Israel, but which would be folly for Israel to attack.

In the Knesset, Bibi raved in the spirit of warhawk Cheney: "We refuse to take this anymore. We refuse to take the murder of our citizens silently. Israel will win because the nation of Israel is united behind the army and the security wings. We are all looking straight into the eyes of the leader of murderers, head of the Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah, and we're telling him: You sowed the wind, now reap the

storm. . . . Tehran is the inspirational source and chief engine of international Islamic terrorism, Hezbollah is its satellite, and Syria is its way-station.”

Unlike in Israel’s past conflicts, however, there is a growing realization that the power in Washington, the Bush Administration, itself poses a threat to Israel’s security. A senior Israeli military source told *EIR* of frustration at the Middle East policy of the U.S. Administration. The source said, “Listen, unlike the people in the Bush Administration, we have to live in this region.” He went on to say that the Lebanon-Israel situation has to be solved on a regional basis in cooperation with the international community. “Bush’s policy towards Syria doesn’t help, to say the least.”

Another military source, who did not want to be quoted on the record, lamented that with the Bush Administration’s current policy, neither the Hezbollah nor Hamas trust the United States. With its conduct of the Iraq war, it has become discredited.

Although he chose not to agree with LaRouche’s assessment that Vice President Dick Cheney was planning a broader war, and chaos, he said the assessment among many in his circle is that the policies of the Bush Administration have created such a mess that they feel they have no choice but to act militarily in the hope that an international intervention will stabilize the situation. Nonetheless he said, “We agree on one thing: things would have been a lot better if we had a different administration in Washington.”