

Report from Beirut: Nation in Jeopardy

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Under the blows of Israeli aerial bombardments, beginning July 11, every major piece of Lebanese infrastructure has been destroyed: the Beirut airport and sea port, other sea ports, railways lines and stations, the Beirut-Damascus highway and other roads, telecommunications, electricity facilities, orphanages, hospitals, and food warehouses. According to Finance Minister Jihad Azour, \$2 billion worth of damage has been done by the Israeli bombings.

Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, speaking to the diplomatic corps in Beirut, stated bluntly: "The country has been torn to shreds. Can the international community stand by while such callous retribution by the state of Israel is inflicted on us?" He went on: "Over half a million people have been displaced . . . hospitals are crippled . . . there are shortages of food and medical supplies. Homes, factories, and warehouses have been completely destroyed, UN facilities shelled, so have army barracks . . . a civil defense unit has

been wiped out and foreigners are being evacuated. . . . You want to support the government of Lebanon? Let me tell you . . . no government can survive on the ruins of a nation. I hope you will not let us down. We, the Lebanese, want life. We have chosen life. We refuse to die."

Referring to U.S. and British statements supporting Israel, he said to the ambassadors, "Is this what the international community calls self defense? Is this the price we pay for aspiring to build our democratic institutions?"

Siniora criticized the lack of concrete action on calls for a ceasefire, saying that all the time taken in such discussions only serves "to give Israel the time to achieve what it believes it can achieve. Israel believes that if given more time, it would be able to break the back of Hezbollah. *I think that this is wrong.* Previous experiences worldwide have proven that such outcomes cannot be achieved this way." (Emphasis added)

What Is Hezbollah?

The only military force mounting a defense against the Israeli aggression is the Hezbollah, the Shi'ite political and social movement, whose military wing has mobilized in the south since 1982, when it was founded. The organization resisted the Israeli invasion of the country then, and continued armed resistance until the Israelis withdraw their occupying troops and proxies in 2000. It currently has 23 seats in the 128-seat parliament, and runs numerous social organizations, charities, schools, orphanages, etc. It maintains a defense capability, with rockets, missiles, and armed fighters, against Israel.

The intention of the Israelis, when they mounted their recent attack, was to drive the local population northwards, depopulating an area destined to become a buffer zone, to prevent Hezbollah from access to border positions, from which it could attack Israel. Some form of occupying military forces, be it the UN, NATO, or another, would then be deployed to secure the zone.

Events have shown that Israel vastly underestimated Hezbollah. First, there are the demographic-political facts: Eighty percent of the population in the south are Shi'ites, and the rest are also sympathetic to the Hezbollah, whom they see as defending the nation from foreign aggression. The only way to clear out the area, therefore, would be to annihilate the population.

Hezbollah can draw on the civilian population for what might be called reservists. As several Lebanese sources have told *EIR*, Hezbollah can mobilize 100,000 armed fighters literally overnight. One Lebanese political figure put it this way: "Hezbollah is your taxi-driver, he's the man who sells you groceries, and so on." By the same token, Israel cannot "eliminate" Hezbollah's infrastructure because it is all over the country. In fact, on July 20, the Israelis dropped bombs weighing 23 tons on a building they believed to be the Hezbollah headquarters, hoping to kill its leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrullah.

lah. It didn't work. Eyewitnesses in Beirut report that the Shi'ite quarter of Beirut, where many of Hezbollah's offices and facilities are located, has been literally razed to the ground. Yet, Hezbollah continues its military operations.

The Israelis also have poor intelligence on Hezbollah's military facilities and strength, as shown by Hezbollah's successful hit on Israel's ship. (See article on Israel). The *New York Times* and the *London Times* on July 19 and 20, reported that Tel Aviv had claimed it had destroyed 50% of Hezbollah's rockets, but "We're not seeing any large-scale destruction of Hezbollah rockets," a senior British official was quoted saying, "and we don't know where they are."

Lebanese sources have told *EIR* also that Hezbollah succeeded in breaking Israeli communications codes, thereby having prior information of military plans.

Several Lebanese, other Arab, and Iranian sources have reported to this news service that no matter what Israel deploys militarily, it will not (short of a nuclear attack, of course) succeed in achieving its declared aims of gaining the release of two Israeli soldiers held by Hezbollah, and disarming the movement. The release of the soldiers will occur only when Israel agrees to a prisoner exchange, to release many of the 2,000 Lebanese prisoners held in Israeli jails (out of a total of 10,000 Palestinian and Arab prisoners), they say.

If this goal is unattainable with the current military methods, Israel may hope to trigger conflict among pro- and anti-Hezbollah elements in the population. This scenario, mooted by one Lebanese political figure, appears unlikely. Although some political figures in the parliamentary majority, such as Telecommunications Minister Marwan Hamadi and others, have reportedly blamed Hezbollah for the conflict, and claimed they had been organized by Syria and Iran, the overwhelming majority of the population has rallied behind Hezbollah, and against the Israeli aggression. This includes Christians. The fact that Israel has started bombing Christian neighborhoods in Beirut, will certainly reinforce this trend.

Sources also recall that leader Nasrullah has been able to mobilize one million Lebanese to demonstrate more than once. Nasrullah, according to Egyptian sources, has become the number one hero in the Arab world today. Support demonstrations have been reported in Cairo, Amman, and other capitals which do not usually host such events.

It is expected that Hezbollah will continue to attack Israeli targets, and will not capitulate. Reports say that the United States "advised" Israel not to attack Syria or Iran, although this is not confirmed. Were Israel to attack Syria, that country would retaliate by opening a new front in the occupied Golan Heights. If Syria were attacked, Iran would express its solidarity, the sources emphasized.

Lebanon's Secret Weapon

Whether coincidentally or not, on July 11, the very day that Israel mounted its attack, diplomatic circles in Beirut made known that Paris and Washington were blocking an initiative which Lebanese security services had prepared in

June, denouncing the Israeli Mossad for conducting assassinations on Lebanese sovereign territory, over a period of years. Beirut intended to present the dossier to the UN Security Council, and to request a resolution, or at least a statement from the body, which would denounce Israeli assassinations of figures in Lebanon, as a violation of international law. On June 17, Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora announced that Lebanon would file a complaint against Israel in that body for "acts of aggression." However, as reported by the Lebanese news outlet *Al-Manar*, and picked up by the German paper *Junge Welt*, the move was blocked by the United States and France.

The dossier which the Lebanese authorities have assembled, reportedly on the suggestion of the United States (!), indicates that the Israelis have had a consistent lack of respect for Lebanese national sovereignty. It says that Mossad chief Meir Dagan, personally recruited teams to conduct car bombings and assassinations in Lebanon. The cases cited by the dossier, according to *Junge Welt*, include the liquidation of Ali Hassan Diebs on Aug. 16, 1999, the killing of Jihad Ahmad Jibril (son of Ahmad Jibril, head of the PFLP), on May 20, 2002, the killing of Hezbollah politician Ali Saleh on Aug. 2, 2003, and the execution of Jihad leader Mahmoud Majzoub on May 26, 2006.

The dossier was backed up by Lebanese police actions which led to the arrest of two suspects. On June 13, a Lebanese Army statement was released which said: "The army arrested a terrorist cell working for Israel's Mossad, and its members admitted responsibility for the the May 26 attack that killed Mahmud al-Majzoub and his brother," and also "admitted taking part in the assassination of Hezbollah official Ali Saleh in 2003 and Ali Hassan Diebs in 1999, as well as the killing of Jihad Jibril in 2002."

According to a Lebanese source, Feltman had pressured the Lebanese government, threatening to "break off the U.S. love affair with Lebanon," and halt military and other financial aid, if Siniora went ahead with the complaint.

In the foreign ministry this was "regretted as the double standard policy of Western powers." The ministry stressed, "Beirut will insist on a meeting of the UNSC." According to Lebanese sources, Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh is committed to pursuing the case. He hopes that the UNSC will also focus on "the repeated non-stop violations of Lebanese air space by Israeli military planes and combat fighter planes, which were used in the planning of the terrorist activities against Lebanon." He referred to Defense Minister Elias Murr, who, based on the latest results of investigations, considers it "very probable" that Israeli military planes have participated in triggering car bombs by laser-detonating devices.

Finally, it is reported that President Lahoud wants to present the results of the investigation to the UN investigator Serge Brammertz, who is on the case of the murder of ex-Prime Minister Hariri. The implication is, of course, that the Israelis may have been behind that assassination, which set off a huge destabilization.

The entire affair of the dossier has been confirmed by authoritative Lebanese sources, who have added that, of the two individuals apprehended by the authorities, one is a Druze, who made the confessions and remains in custody, whereas the other is a Palestinian named al-Khatib, who has “disappeared,” or been made to “disappear.”

The UN Security Council has already capitulated to U.S.-British pressures, *not* to convoke an emergency session to address the Israeli attack, as demanded by the Lebanese. Nouhad Mahmoud, the Lebanese special envoy, protested the blocking. And Cesar Mayoral, Argentina’s UN Ambassador, said that the United States had objected to any statement, and that Britain opposed calling for a ceasefire.

Given this precedent, it would be naive to believe that the UNSC would seriously and officially take up the Lebanese dossier on the Mossad. However, there is no reason why the Lebanese should not act on the issue in another forum, and simply make that material public. Indeed, it could open an important political flank, in the Lebanese struggle “not to die,” but to survive as a people and a nation.