

Behind Bush's "truce" plan: the drive towards a wider Middle East war

By Bill Van Auken
8 August 2006

US President George W. Bush on Monday declared his full support for a US-French United Nations resolution that dictates Israel's terms to the Lebanese people while allowing the Israeli military to indefinitely continue its occupation and devastation of Lebanon.

This document, far from an agreement for peace, represents one more step in widening the war initiated by the Bush administration in 2003 with the invasion of Iraq into a regional conflagration that poses an immense threat to working people not only in the Middle East, but in the US and all over the world.

Speaking at his Crawford, Texas ranch, Bush made it clear that his administration intended to accept no substantive changes in the UN resolution, and that it was particularly opposed to an amendment, advanced by the Lebanese government and supported by the entire Arab world, specifying that any settlement require the invading army of 10,000 Israeli troops to immediately withdraw from Lebanon.

Standing by his side, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who worked systematically over the past month to block a ceasefire and ensure that the killing in Lebanon be allowed to continue, belittled the objections of the Lebanese. "We understand how emotional this is for the Lebanese," she declared. "They've been through a very difficult war."

The UN document makes no condemnation whatsoever of Israel's blitzkrieg against Lebanon—supposedly in response to the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers—resulting in the deaths of over a thousand Lebanese civilians, the wounding of thousands more, the expulsion of one million Lebanese from their homes and the decimation of the country's infrastructure.

Nor does it call upon Israel to relinquish its control of Lebanon's Shebaa Farms territory, an occupation that, under international law, makes Hezbollah's armed resistance a legitimate form of struggle.

The UN resolution amounts to the kind of victor's peace traditionally imposed on a nation decisively defeated in war. In fact, despite the carnage Israel has wreaked upon Lebanon, largely through the use of missiles, shells and cluster bombs supplied by the US, Israel has failed to achieve its military objectives or secure its grip on any Lebanese territory. Israel's military setbacks on the ground are the result of fierce opposition by Hezbollah fighters.

Nor has Israel been able to stop Hezbollah rocket attacks, the most deadly of which occurred Sunday, killing 12 Israeli soldiers preparing to join the invasion of Lebanon.

The demands set forth in the draft resolution—that Hezbollah disarm and cease all military operations while Israel continues occupying Lebanese territory and carrying out "defensive" air strikes against defenseless civilians—are completely unacceptable not only to Hezbollah, but also to the Lebanese people and the Lebanese government, as well as the governments of Syria and Iran.

After stonewalling efforts to bring about an immediate ceasefire so as to allow its Israeli ally to continue its offensive,

Washington is now brushing aside all objections by the Lebanese—in the name of "peace." Thus, at his Monday press conference, Bush declared hypocritically, "Everyone wants the violence to stop."

This is a lie. Washington no more wants an end to the violence now than it did a month ago.

Nabih Berri, the speaker of the Lebanese parliament, drew the correct assessment of the UN draft resolution, declaring that by legitimizing Israel's occupation it would "open the door to never-ending war." There is every indication that "never-ending war" is precisely the strategy of the Bush administration in the Middle East.

This is the real meaning of Bush's statement Monday that the UN resolution was designed to get at "the root causes of the conflict." By this he did not mean addressing the grievances, stretching back nearly six decades, of the Palestinian people, who were expelled from their homeland with the creation of the Israeli state in 1948, and then subjected to nearly four decades of illegal and brutal occupation after Israel seized the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967.

Nor do the "root causes" Bush has in mind include the century-old domination of the region by Western imperialism—first British and then American—maintained with the single-minded objective of installing pliant Arab regimes that would insure a steady flow of oil at profitable rates, while suppressing the aspirations of their own people.

For Bush and the right-wing layers directing the affairs of the American government, the "root" problem is popular resistance to both Israel's land grabs and the drive by the US to establish undisputed hegemony over this strategic area of the globe.

The perverse and fraudulent character of the UN resolution is epitomized by the fact that what purports to be a truce agreement has been negotiated essentially between one of the combatants—Israel—and its principal backer, the US.

The terms of the resolution, which the Bush administration cooked up with the French government, are intended to be unacceptable to both Hezbollah and the Lebanese government. The aim is to place the onus on them for the policy being carried out by Israel and the US—a continuation and escalation of the war against the Lebanese people.

The reaction of the Israeli government makes transparent the bogus character of the supposed truce effort. Israeli Defense Minister Amir Peretz told a parliamentary committee Monday, "I gave an order that if within the coming days the diplomatic process does not reach a conclusion, Israeli forces will carry out the operations necessary to take control of Katyusha rocket launching sites in every location." The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), he added, "will operate anywhere in Lebanon."

This is a clear signal that the IDF will be sent to clear out the population and occupy Lebanese territory up to the Litani River and perhaps beyond. The logic of this military campaign is yet another annexation of territory to Israel.

"No limits" on Israeli attacks

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared that he would

place “no limits” on the IDF’s use of force.

The Israeli daily *Haaretz* quoted an unnamed senior military officer as saying that Israel now plans to “attack strategic infrastructure targets and symbols of the Lebanese government.” Another officer told the newspaper, “It could be that at the end of the story, Lebanon will be dark for a few years.”

The escalation of the Israeli aggression was already evident on Monday, with the bombing of a crowded shopping area in a southern suburb of Beirut located on the edge of the city’s predominantly Christian district. The death toll was put at 20 by the official Lebanese news agency, though more victims were believed buried in the rubble. The air strike demolished a residential building close to a shopping mall where many refugees had taken shelter.

Meanwhile, in south Lebanon, the IDF announced a 10 p.m. curfew, warning that anyone on the streets after that hour would be considered a terrorist and shot.

Washington has made it a point of principle that it will have no contact with either Hezbollah or the two nations with the strongest ties to Lebanon and its Shiite population—Syria and Iran. Instead, it has sought to demonize all three, laying the ideological groundwork for further wars of aggression.

Thus, Bush spoke of the UN resolution serving to “prevent armed militias like Hezbollah and its Iranian and Syrian sponsors from sparking another crisis.”

Asked by a reporter why Washington refused to talk to either Syria or Iran, he replied, “I appreciate people focusing on Syria and Iran, and we should, because Syria and Iran sponsor and promote Hezbollah activities—all aimed at creating chaos, all aimed at using terror to stop the advance of democracies.” He added, for good measure, “The actions of Hezbollah through its sponsors of Iran and Syria are trying to stop that advance of democracy. Hezbollah launched this attack. Hezbollah is trying to create the chaos necessary to stop the advance of peace.”

There is no reason to believe that Bush knows anything more about Lebanon than he did about Iraq. (According to one recently published account, he did not know before the war that there were two branches of Islam—Shiite and Sunni). But the reality is that Hezbollah is not some cat’s-paw of either Syria or Iran, and neither government can control its actions.

It is a movement that grew out of the Lebanese Shiite population’s resistance to the 18-year Israeli occupation of their land. It gained immense prestige by succeeding in expelling Israeli troops from Lebanese territory, and emerged as a powerful movement that appealed to the aspirations of the Lebanese Shiite population, historically the country’s most impoverished and most politically disenfranchised layer.

In the most chilling section of Bush’s remarks on Monday, he related the events in Lebanon to his administration’s broader policy in the Middle East and the so-called “global war on terrorism.”

He declared: “...[W]hat the American people need to know is we’ve got a strategy—a strategy for freedom in the Middle East which protects the American people in the long run. And we’ve got a strategy to deal with the situations that arise in the Middle East—first Lebanon; of course, the Iranian nuclear weapon issue.”

He continued: “The challenge in the 21st century is to remind people about the stakes, and remind people that in moments of

quiet, there’s still an Islamic fascist group plotting, planning and trying to spread their ideology. And one of the things that—one of the things that came out of this unfortunate incident in the Middle East is a stark reminder that there are those who want to stop the advance of liberty..”

Bush’s “strategy” is to widen the wars for “regime change” in the Middle East that began with the toppling of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. When the American president—whose closest allies in the region are the police state regimes and absolutist monarchies of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan—uses the words “freedom” and “liberty,” he is talking about the freedom of American banks and corporations to exercise exclusive domination over Middle East and its oil wealth.

Facing a catastrophe in its occupation of Iraq (with thousands of US forces now being sent back into Baghdad to resecure the capital and confront its restive Shiite population), the Bush administration has decided that the solution is not to withdraw, but rather to launch new wars, not only in Lebanon, but ultimately against Syria and Iran.

There is undoubtedly an element of madness in this strategy of escalating militarism, but this is not merely the lunacy of America’s dim-witted president and his advisors. Rather, it reflects an irrational social system based on private ownership of the planet’s productive forces and vital resources and the division of a globally integrated world economy into rival nation states.

US policy is essentially to utilize its military power to assert domination over the oil resources of the Middle East and Central Asia, and thereby assure American capitalism both a secure energy supply and the ability to dictate terms to its economic rivals.

The turn to escalating militarism is also driven by the profound internal contradictions of American society, dominated by an unprecedented polarization between a wealthy elite and the masses of working people, and faced with a growing prospect of economic slump combined with rising inflation—a recipe for social explosions.

A military attack on Syria and Iran has the gravest implications. With US military forces already stretched to the limit by the failing imperialist adventure in Iraq, a new war will inevitably bring with it the reinstatement of the draft, forcing American young people to serve as cannon fodder for the conquest of Iranian oil fields.

Moreover, a war against Iran has the most deadly implications. A US attack would provoke an Iranian response against Israel, and, in turn, a possible nuclear retaliation by Israel. The path now being taken by US imperialism leads to the death of millions.

The carnage in Lebanon has demonstrated that there exists no genuine political opposition to this turn towards global warfare within the US political establishment, with the ostensible opposition party, the Democrats, seeking to outdo the Republicans in their support for Israel. At the same time, the draft resolution produced by the US and France makes it clear, once again, that the European bourgeoisie is incapable of mounting any opposition to US militarism, and that the UN itself serves only as a tool for imperialist policy.

The threat of a far wider and more devastating war can be countered only through the independent mobilization of the working class, in the US and internationally, based on a common socialist program.