

G8 powers sanction Israeli aggression in Lebanon

Statement of the Editorial Board

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The summit of the Group of Eight adjourned Monday on the sixth day of brutal Israeli air strikes on Lebanon, with the leaders of the major imperialist regimes effectively endorsing the pulverizing of a small nation by a US client state, armed to the teeth by Washington. As US-supplied bombs and missiles, fired by US-supplied warplanes, rained down on Lebanese cities and towns, the Bush administration took the lead in blocking even a token call for a ceasefire.

While the US media seeks to present the current crisis in terms of equal suffering—Israeli civilians hit by Hezbollah rockets, Lebanese civilians hit by Israeli bombs—the reality is far different. More than 200 Lebanese have been killed and a billion dollars worth of damage inflicted on their country, compared to 24 Israelis killed, nearly half of them soldiers killed in combat against Hezbollah fighters.

Hezbollah rockets are relatively crude and inaccurate, and far less powerful than the 500-pound laser-guided bombs which are destroying roads, public buildings, power plants, port facilities—the entire infrastructure of modern life in Lebanon. Israeli officials have publicly vowed to push Lebanon back 20 years—i.e., to the depths of the civil war which nearly destroyed the country.

The resolution adopted by the G8 summit Sunday placed the blame for the current Mideast crisis on Hamas and Hezbollah, for kidnapping three Israeli soldiers and firing rockets into Israel from Gaza and south Lebanon. This claim of provocation is rubbish. Israel has been preparing and rehearsing for another massive intervention into Lebanon for years, and simply utilized the Hezbollah attack as a pretext for carrying out its long-held plans.

There are two interconnected goals—one specific to the Israeli ruling elite, the other in conjunction with its American patrons.

As always, the Israeli ruling elite justifies its military actions by claiming that it is acting purely in self-defense and in response to dire threats to its security. But what Israel means by “security” is the complete prostration of every other state in the Middle East, not to mention the subjugated Palestinians, whose economic and/or military development might in any way impose restraints on Zionist regional ambitions.

Because Hezbollah stands in the way of Lebanon’s de facto conversion into a pliant tool of Israeli policy, it has

been targeted for destruction. Hence the rejection by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of the proposed introduction of UN peacekeeping forces along the Lebanon-Israel border.

As Olmert spelled out in a speech to the Knesset Monday, his goal is to push Hezbollah back from the border, a task which can be accomplished only through the use of Israeli troops, perhaps with the assistance of token units of the Christian-dominated Lebanese army, deployed by the US-backed regime which came to power in Beirut last year. This would reproduce the conditions before 2000, when the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army, a remnant of the fascistic Phalangist militia, served as Israel’s police force in the border area.

On a more strategic level, the defeat of Hezbollah is part and parcel of the American-Israeli project for the subjugation of the entire Middle East. The Bush administration is openly preparing for war with Iran, using the International Atomic Energy Agency and a referral of Iran’s nuclear program to the UN Security Council in the same way that it pursued the bogus claims of “weapons of mass destruction” against the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

Washington regards Iran as the principal obstacle to consolidating its conquest of Iraq and establishing a stable stooge regime in Baghdad. In advance of any military action against Iran, whether it consists of air strikes against alleged Iranian nuclear facilities or an outright ground assault, it is imperative to eliminate pockets of support for Iran elsewhere in the region. Hence the onslaught against Hezbollah, which has longstanding ties with Iran, and the threat that military action could be extended to Syria, which has been allied with Iran militarily since the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s.

These preparations for war were behind the campaign last year to eject Syrian troops from Lebanon, in which the assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri—by forces which still remain unidentified—was used as a convenient pretext. At the time, the Bush administration joined with French President Jacques Chirac to declare their solidarity in a crusade to restore Lebanese sovereignty by forcing the withdrawal of Syrian troops.

The cynicism of that campaign is shown by the position of Bush and Chirac today, at the St. Petersburg summit, where they rejected pleas from the Lebanese government to demand a halt to the Israeli onslaught that has caused far more devastation than decades of Syrian occupation.

The G8 summit took on the odor of the 1930s, when the big powers looked out for their own interests at the expense

of small or weak countries, standing by as Japan seized Manchuria, Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, and Hitler seized control of Austria and Czechoslovakia.

The atmospherics are much the same, down to the crude and bullying language employed by today's leading imperialist criminal, George W. Bush, as he barked an obscenity to his main accomplice, Britain's Tony Blair, while criticizing the reluctance of Syria to put pressure on Hezbollah. Evidently Bush thinks that Syria controls Hezbollah the way his own government pulls the strings in the stooge Iraqi regime in Baghdad. The fact that the Israeli regime is guilty of a war crime—imposing collective punishment on the population of a supposedly sovereign state—is being conveniently ignored.

Since the run-up to the Iraq invasion, when there were sharp divisions over the unprecedented campaign of international aggression launched by the Bush administration, the European elite has come to terms with US policy in the Middle East, deciding that its interests will best be served by lining up with Washington against Syria and Iran.

While quibbling with the details of Israeli policy toward the Palestinians, not one of the European powers was prepared to demand a halt to the flagrant violation of international law represented by the saturation bombing of Lebanon. Nor did the UN Security Council take any action against the aggression carried out against a sovereign state and member of the United Nations.

Not even the prospect that citizens of the G8 countries, working or vacationing in Lebanon, could be killed or maimed by Israeli bombs and missiles generated any action by the big powers. Some 25,000 US citizens, and thousands more from France, Italy, Britain and other countries, are now stranded, unable to leave because of Israel's blockade by air and sea and its bombing of the roads leading into Syria.

These people, many of them immigrants of Lebanese descent visiting their families, face death not from terrorists or from Hezbollah gunmen, but from a US-equipped, US-financed war machine deployed with the consent of the Bush administration.

Israeli air attacks expanded Monday far beyond the purported target of Hezbollah positions. Besides Beirut, where the downtown and port districts were hit again, Israeli warplanes bombed the fishing port at Abdeh in northern Lebanon, the northern city of Tripoli, a largely Sunni-populated area that has no conceivable connection to the

Shiite Hezbollah, and the city of Baalbek in the eastern part of the country.

Lebanese officials said at least 43 people were killed Monday, bringing the death toll to at least 209. The latest deaths included 12 civilians killed when the minibus in which they were riding was destroyed by an Israeli missile in the coastal town of Rmeileh, south of Beirut. No one was killed by Hezbollah rockets which fell on several towns in northern Israel, although six Israeli civilians were wounded.

In an address to the Lebanese people Monday, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora—whose appointment was hailed by the Bush administration as a victory for Lebanese independence—denounced the Israeli assault. "Israel accuses others of terrorism at the same time as it carries it out in the harshest forms," he declared.

Israeli ground troops are being mobilized on the Lebanese border and a brief raid into Lebanon was conducted by one Israeli unit. Late Monday, the Israeli Defense Forces called up several thousand reserve soldiers for service on the West Bank, which would allow the transfer of regular army units from the Palestinian territory to the Lebanese border region.

There was at least one press report on the weekend that Israel has given Syrian President Bashar Assad 72 hours notice of military action, including the bombing of installations inside Syria, if he does not intervene to stop the rocket attacks by Hezbollah. The report by the London-based Arabic newspaper *Al-Hayat*, which was cited in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, cited Pentagon sources. Any such attacks would be coordinated with the US forces now occupying Iraq, thousands of whom are deployed in Anbar province near the border with Syria.

There is also a growing possibility of direct US military intervention in Lebanon. Some 2,200 Marines are on board the USS Iwo Jima and accompanying ships, which are traveling from the Gulf of Aqaba, where they were conducting military exercises with Jordanian forces. They will pass through the Suez Canal with the permission of Egypt, and arrive off the coast of Lebanon as early as Tuesday. Helicopters from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit have already landed small numbers of troops at the US embassy in Beirut and on Cyprus.

The inaction of the G8 and the cynical resolution adopted by the great powers will only fuel the aggression of the Israeli regime and clear the way for an even greater catastrophe for the people of Lebanon, Israel, Palestine and the whole Middle East.

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