

Bush, Blair meet to oppose Lebanon ceasefire and back Israel's war aims

Chris Marsden, Julie Hyland
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President Bush summoned British Prime Minister Tony Blair to Washington Friday to perform his usual function of lending US foreign policy an international veneer. Amidst growing international outrage over Israel's bloody assault on the Lebanese people, the two leaders stood by their intransigent defence of Israeli aggression.

Speaking at a White House press conference following their talks, they reiterated their opposition to a ceasefire and once again blamed Hezbollah for the war. The so-called "lasting peace" they advocated was one based on the disarming of the Islamist resistance movement, i.e., the basic demand of the Israeli regime.

To this end, Bush said US diplomatic efforts would concentrate on assembling a multinational military force and the passing of a United Nations Security Council resolution authorising its deployment to southern Lebanon.

Bush made a point of calling for a resolution under chapter seven of the UN charter, which deals with "threats to peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression." The US sought to legitimise its war against Iraq under this chapter of the charter, although in the end it, together with Britain, went to war without such UN authorisation.

Once again, Bush depicted Hezbollah—a political and militia movement with mass support among Lebanon's Shiite population—as a proxy of Syria and Iran. The resolution that the US and Britain intend to bring before the Security Council next Thursday will undoubtedly contain the necessary language to create the pretext for future military action against Damascus and Tehran.

In the days leading up to the Security Council meeting, Washington will be preoccupied with bullying the European powers into promising the military personnel needed. A senior US State Department

official is already in Europe seeking such commitments.

Blair took the lead in advocating a multinational force, which is to serve the dual purpose of securing Israel's aim of suppressing Hezbollah and reducing Lebanon to the status of a de facto client regime, and providing an international cover for Washington's drive to establish American hegemony in the Middle East.

Blair's visit and the joint US-British announcement of an accelerated push for a UN resolution are in large part a response to Israel's failure after two weeks of savage attacks to significantly weaken Hezbollah, and military setbacks it has suffered in the face of unexpectedly fierce resistance from the Hezbollah fighters.

The regime of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and the Israeli military have come under sharp internal criticism and there are obvious divisions within Israeli ruling circles, with most voices within the Israeli establishment demanding an escalation of the violence and a far larger commitment of ground forces in southern Lebanon.

In a remarkably gloomy front-page assessment of the outcome of the fighting and the US role thus far, headlined "Tide of Arab Opinion Turns to Support for Hezbollah," the *New York Times* on Friday wrote that Hezbollah had "already achieved something of a victory by holding out this long."

Under these conditions, the Bush administration is determined to give Israel as much time as possible to attack Hezbollah and terrorise the Lebanese population as a whole, but it has concluded that Israel will need the assistance of a major imperialist military force, sooner rather than later, to seriously weaken the movement, destroy its base of operations in southern Lebanon, and

continue to police the region in behalf of Jerusalem and Washington.

Such an outcome would mean the reduction of the Lebanese government into a direct tool of Israel and the US. For his part, Blair stressed that only such a victor's peace would be acceptable.

Both leaders spoke of the death and destruction being inflicted on Lebanon as an "opportunity" to change the Middle East. "The stakes are larger than just Lebanon," Bush declared. Blair spoke of using "this opportunity to set out and achieve a different strategic direction for the whole of that region."

These are euphemisms for the restructuring of the entire Middle East to establish US domination over the oil-rich region, with Israel serving as Washington's military enforcer and Britain hoping to get a share of the spoils.

Typically, the remarks of both imperialist leaders were a compendium of sophistries and lies. At one point Bush piously proclaimed, "In Lebanon, Hezbollah and its Iranian and Syrian sponsors are willing to kill and use violence to stop the spread of peace and democracy."

This was said as millions throughout the world look on with horror as Israel, using a deadly arsenal provided by the US, wreaks havoc against a largely defenceless population. Over 600 Lebanese, mainly women and children, have lost their lives. In a matter of days, whole areas of the country have been reduced to rubble. Lebanon's economy has been destroyed and every appeal of its government for a ceasefire has been ignored.

This carnage, according to Bush and Blair, is being carried out in order to establish Lebanese sovereignty. And the next step in insuring Lebanese "sovereignty" is the introduction of a massive imperialist military force to destroy a Lebanese political and military movement that has mass support and is currently represented in the Lebanese cabinet!

With respect to Bush and Blair's claim to stand for democratic values, neither have a popular mandate for their policies, whether in regard to the Lebanon or anywhere else. Recent opinion polls in the US and the UK indicate that two-thirds of the population are opposed to the continued occupation of Iraq. But once again, the two war criminals are backing an imperialist military intervention in the Middle East.

In contrast, an opinion poll published in Lebanon Friday found that Hezbollah's resistance to Israel's assault has overwhelming support from all sections of society—Shiite, Sunni and Christian, averaging close to 90 percent.

Particularly cynical is the attempt by Bush and Blair to cite UN resolutions to defend their policies and those of Israel. As the Iraq war proved, Washington will tolerate the UN when it does as it is told.

At Friday's press conference, neither Bush nor Blair saw fit to mention the killing of four UN observers by the Israel Defence Forces on Tuesday. They tacitly sanction the murder of UN officials by Israel even as they seek to use the UN to provide a legal fig leaf for US-Israeli aggression.

One can only imagine the outrage that would have been whipped up by Washington, London and a pliant media had the UN casualties been the result of the actions of Hezbollah. Instead, the American ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, intervened in the Security Council to block any resolution condemning Israel's premeditated attack on the UN outpost.

Israel's targeting of the UN had the desired effect. As Bush and Blair were meeting, the UN withdrew all 50 of its unarmed observers from the Lebanese/Israeli border.

The same day, Jan Egeland, the UN's emergency relief coordinator, asked Israel and Hezbollah to stop fighting for 72 hours to enable relief workers to evacuate the elderly and disabled from southern Lebanon and bring in emergency aid supplies. One will wait in vain for Bush and Blair to solidarise themselves with the authority of the UN in this instance.



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