

American media unquestioningly defends Israeli violence

David Walsh
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Over the past week, the American mass media has obediently fallen into line in defense of Israeli violence and aggression. As hundreds of civilians have died in Lebanon and an estimated half a million been made homeless by Israeli bombs and shells, the US media has consistently painted the conflict as a defensive action by the Zionist regime against provocations by “terrorists.”

The American public is deliberately being kept ignorant about the history and reality of the situation in the Middle East, as part of the combined effort by Washington and Tel Aviv to impose their brutal will on the people of the region.

The major television networks and cable channels, through which much of the population receives its information about world events, have played an especially foul role in concealing the real political and social questions. To watch the television news channels and network news programs for a single afternoon and evening is largely to bathe in ignorance and reaction.

This begins with the manner in which the Middle East conflict is portrayed. The language and phrases used are carefully calibrated to conform to the arguments of the Israeli government and its sponsors in the US.

The television news programs inevitably present the current conflict as a struggle between Israel and “terrorists.” Right-winger and xenophobe Lou Dobbs of CNN, for example, on Wednesday evening, in the course of a *one-hour program*, repeats this thought no less than eight times: “Israel tonight is stepping up its offensive against terrorists in Gaza,” “Israeli troops tonight are fighting Hezbollah terrorists in one of the biggest ground battles of this conflict,” “Hezbollah terrorists tonight are firing a barrage of rockets at cities and towns in northern Israel,” and so forth (from CNN transcripts).

Without fail, as well, any reference to the fighting must place the blame for its eruption on Hamas and Hezbollah, not long-term Israeli ambitions. Bob Schieffer, on the *CBS Evening News* Wednesday, for example, almost in passing, refers to Hezbollah as the group that “started the trouble in Lebanon.” Tucker Carlson of MSNBC explains that Hezbollah “sparked the conflict.” On CNN, Miles O’Brien comments, “At the same time, Israeli troops have moved into central Gaza. Six Palestinians killed in that offensive. That operation began last month after Palestinian militants kidnapped an Israeli soldier.”

No hint emerges from any of the television news programs that underlying the massive Israeli operation might be geopolitical aims, that what we see unfolding is an operation that has been long in the planning and only waiting for a pretext. Such a possibility is not even suggested.

The news on American television is nothing but propaganda. It has, in fact, a totalitarian character. No effort is made to educate the public. The news is delivered for the most part by ignorant individuals, unaware of history and social reality, simply repeating lines fed to them.

When there is any question about the nature and scope of the current operation in Lebanon and Gaza, the television news programs simply turn to the State Department or the Israeli government itself for clarification.

For example, when is an invasion not an invasion? When the Tel Aviv regime says so. O’Brien of CNN, on the Israeli incursion into Lebanon, July 19: “Israeli troops are on that side. They say it’s not an invasion, they say it’s part of an effort to root-out Hezbollah bunkers, strongholds and those rockets which continue to besiege the northern part of Israel.”

And when is the destruction of a country’s infrastructure no such thing? Also when the Israelis say so. Israel is not responsible for the destruction of bridges, roads, tunnels, apartment complexes, port facilities, factories. The “terrorists” are responsible. Israeli hands could not be cleaner. A parade of Zionist government officials appears on American television: on Wednesday alone, Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres (to borrow a phrase from Philip Roth, speaking with “all the cold authority of that voice dipped in sludge”), former prime ministers Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak, Israeli ambassador to the US, Dan Gillerman.

All the veteran Israeli leaders have blood on their hands. They bandy about the word “terrorist,” but the state of Israel was formed through explicitly terrorist means and the various political figures have personally participated in or presided over deadly military operations against the Palestinian, Lebanese and Jordanian populations.

They are all well-trained practitioners of the Big Lie—that tiny Israel is under siege from its barbarous Arab neighbors. They know the “hot buttons” to push. They interact with their US interviewers like members of the same club. Israel, they seem to suggest, is “America in the Middle East,” practically the 51st state.

Peres appears at least twice on US television Wednesday, on “Hardball with Chris Matthews” on MSNBC and “Larry King Live” on CNN. Both interviewers are deferential to the veteran war criminal. Peres claims to King, “Israel didn’t start the war. Israel didn’t attack anybody. We gave back to Lebanon all the land, all the water.... We were living for six years in total peace. We didn’t hurt anybody.”

Peres, of course, is lying. Israeli history in relation to Lebanon is one of provocation, violence and criminality. Before Israel’s establishment, Zionist leaders envisioned a greater Israel that would include the southern portion of Lebanon as far as the Litani River (perhaps Israel’s military goal today in any invasion). In the 1950s, the Israeli government considered the fracturing of Lebanon, the establishment of a Christian state and the annexation of the southern part of the country.

Between 1968 and 1974, the Lebanese army recorded more than 3,000 violations of Lebanese territory by Israeli armed forces; 880 Palestinians and Lebanese were killed in the attacks. Some 150 Palestinian camps and villages in southern Lebanon were razed and olive groves and crops destroyed.

In March 1978, Israel invaded Lebanon, killing more than 2,000 people and making some 250,000 homeless. In one of the most gruesome crimes of modern times, the Israelis allowed their allies in the fascist Southern Lebanon Army to enter the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla in September 1982, where the latter carried out the slaughter of an estimated 2,000 men, women and children. An Israeli inquiry later found

that Defense Minister Ariel Sharon bore “personal responsibility” for the massacre. The Israeli military proceeded to occupy southern Lebanon for another 18 years, during which time countless Lebanese and Palestinians suffered at their hands.

For the American television networks, however, history began when Hamas guerrillas seized a single Israeli soldier on June 25.

On Wednesday, Netanyahu, the extreme right-winger beloved of the neo-fascists in the Republican Party, defends the killing of civilians to MSNBC’s Tucker Carlson. In keeping with the Zionist regime’s line (and the line of every imperialist bully), civilian deaths are the fault of the “terrorists,” who insist on mingling with the general population. “If you have to take out a rocket emplacement in a crowded neighborhood, you have to do it,” explains Netanyahu, to which Carlson audibly adds, “That’s right.” Carlson is an empty-headed yuppie, formerly of CNN where he was most famous for his bow tie, who suggested in 2001 that torture “may be the lesser of two evils.”

When Lebanese casualties are mentioned by the television news, they are inevitably balanced by reports of Israeli deaths and wounded, as though the figures were equivalent. On Wednesday afternoon, the *Fox News Channel*’s John Gibson, a fanatical right-winger, intones, “Hezbollah attacked the holy city of Nazareth,” where a rocket killed two Israeli Arabs. The various news commentators are astounded to learn that local residents blame Israel, first, for not providing bomb shelters for the predominantly Arab population, and, second, for launching its attacks on Gaza and Lebanon.

“Hundreds dead, more than a thousand wounded, half a million displaced” proclaim the various anchormen and women, not bothering to explain that the overwhelming majority of those suffering are Lebanese civilians. With a vast military preponderance, the Israelis are targeting a virtually defenseless population. Wednesday witnesses the highest daily toll of civilian casualties yet, with some 70 killed, and this fact is barely mentioned.

If the American television networks had the slightest honesty, they would have begun their news programs Wednesday with the fact that Louise Arbour of the UN High Commission on Human Rights suggested that Israel might be guilty of war crimes. She declared that the obligation to protect civilians during hostilities is entrenched in international law, “which defines war crimes and crimes against humanity.” Moreover, she argued that individual political leaders could find themselves charged with war crimes, adding, “I think one must issue a sobering signal to those who are behind these initiatives to examine very closely their personal exposure,” she told the BBC.

The International Red Cross, the enforcer of the Geneva Conventions on the conduct of war, also declared Wednesday that Israel had violated the principle of proportionality provided for in the Conventions and their protocols.

US television reports none of this on Wednesday.

The fighting is invariably described as “fierce exchanges between Hezbollah guerillas and the Israelis,” again, as though there were some sort of equivalence between the Islamic movement’s Katyusha rockets and mortars, and the Zionist military’s F-16 bombers, Apache helicopter gunships, artillery, tanks and armored personnel carriers.

Almost unavoidably, glimpses of the truth appear on American television news programs. Certain reporters on the spot in Lebanon, obviously affected by the mass suffering, provide some picture of what life is like under the Israeli siege.

Nic Robertson of CNN reports on the bombing of a food distribution warehouse in Beirut, which burns for hours. He warns of a “humanitarian crisis in the making,” with half a million people out of a population of 4 million displaced, “airports bombed, ports blockaded.” Cooking gas is difficult to find, he reports, and food will run out. *CBS News* carries a report from southern Lebanon—a father has lost two children to an Israeli

bomb. Over the bomb crater, the father demands to know, “Do you see Hezbollah fighters here?” David Wright of *ABC News* notes, “Civilians have borne the weight of this war.”

One of the most moving encounters appears on ABC, with an Ethiopian woman, who works as a maid in Beirut. The young woman is crying, obviously terrified, cowering in a doorway. The reporter notes, with sympathy, “No ship is coming for *her*.”

The hostility of the Lebanese population to the Israeli war and the backing of the resistance cannot be entirely evaded. *CBS News* notes that Hezbollah is “drawing support from the war meant to destroy it.” Even a *Fox News* report from a park in Beirut, where the homeless are camped out, has to admit that there are “no hard feelings toward Hezbollah.” An aid worker tells the Fox reporter, “the refugees here adore Hezbollah.”

A British ITN report on the devastation of Lebanon, shown on MSNBC, however, is the most forthright piece of reporting to appear on the US television networks Wednesday.

Genuine bloodthirstiness also raises its head. Carlson of MSNBC casually asks the former prime minister Netanyahu if the latter doesn’t think it would be a good idea if Israel were to bomb Syria. Carlson likes the question so much, he asks it twice on his program.

Billionaire reactionary Steve Forbes, who sought the Republican presidential nomination in 2000, appears on *Fox News* to advocate “letting ’em fight” in the Middle East. Crushing Hezbollah will be good for stocks, we learn.

Brit Hume of *Fox News* somewhat mournfully asks his usual panel of Fred Barnes, Mort Kondracke and Mara Liasson “how long can the US hold out” against the pictures of refugees and devastation in Lebanon before it is forced to pressure Israel into considering a ceasefire. Not long, they regretfully reply.

The Israeli embassy, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the entire Zionist lobbying enterprise expend vast amount of time and money to intervene in and manipulate the US media. The lobbying in and of itself would not be successful if its aims did not coincide with American imperialist policy. Apart from that, the pro-Israel operation would simply be considered a criminal conspiracy.

How else to explain certain stories that suddenly appear on each television network and cable channel simultaneously? On Wednesday, for example, the various American news programs, as though on cue, run stories on the supposed threat posed by Hezbollah terrorist attacks in the US.

Each of the networks or channels treats the story with its own particular touch. Rupert Murdoch’s *Fox News* pulls no punches. “Your World with Neil Cavuto,” an afternoon program, asks Wednesday, “Are Hezbollah cells a bigger threat than Al-Qaeda?” Brian Levin, “terror analyst,” and Wayne Simmons, a former CIA operative, unsurprisingly, answer in the affirmative. Simmons suggests, without providing a shred of evidence, that Hezbollah is “much more of a threat than Al-Qaeda.” Fox subsequently runs a headline, “FBI hunts for Hezbollah sleeper cells inside US.”

Not to be outdone, CNN asks its viewers, to most of whom the question has no doubt never occurred before: “How concerned are you about Hezbollah attacks in the US?” The cable channel’s Wolf Blitzer, formerly the *Jerusalem Post* correspondent in Washington, warns of “fears that Hezbollah is going to hit the US.”

The *CBS Evening News* with Bob Schieffer also introduces the allegation with a sensational headline, “Hezbollah in the US,” only later to half-debunk the story by pointing out that Hezbollah supporters in the US have never been charged or suspected of any terrorist attacks.

Another carefully coordinated story appears on CNN and other channels Wednesday: about a group of American Jews emigrating to Israel. CNN reports, “For Jehuda Saar, a father of three, the fighting only strengthened his resolve to pick up his family and leave New Jersey.” Saar comments,

“Without shooting one bullet, without holding a gun, we’re Israel’s best weapon against any detractor, anyone that wants to destroy Israel.” However, 22-year-old Steven Rubin is more than eager to “shoot bullets” and “hold a gun”; he plans to join the Israeli army.

Rubin tells CNN that the current fighting “only makes me want to go there more. And it validates everything I’ve been thinking for the existence of the state of Israel to see how important everything is at this point.” More than a few of Israel’s most fanatical settlers come from Brooklyn, Queens, New Jersey and Long Island.

Conveniently, Arye Mekel, Israeli Consul General is on hand for the departure of the group of émigrés at Kennedy Airport in New York. He tells CNN: “For us, for Israel, it’s a huge boost to our morale, feeling that fellow Jews around the world are not deterred.”

One afternoon, one evening of US television news...



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