

The New York Times and the war in Lebanon: A cynical defense of US-Israeli war crimes

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In an editorial published Friday, the *New York Times* weighs in as the liberal voice of American imperialism on the US-backed Israeli war against Lebanon.

Under the headline “More Than a Cease-Fire Needed,” the *Times* repeats the propaganda line of Washington and Jerusalem that Israel is the victim and Hezbollah the aggressor. It lines up with the US and Israel in opposing demands that Israel halt its bombing campaign—an assault so flagrantly in breach of international law and so nakedly directed against civilians that Louise Arbour, the United Nations high commissioner for human rights, was moved to declare on Wednesday that those “in a position of command and control” could be held personally responsible for war crimes.

The editorial begins by declaring that the “international community” needs to “step in and guarantee the security of Israel and Lebanon.”

Behind the demand for “the security of Israel” lies a web of unstated premises and assumptions that the *Times* has no interest in illuminating. As the nearly 60-year history of the Zionist state has demonstrated, Israel proceeds from the premise that its security depends on the prostration of every other state in the Middle East, along with the violent suppression the Palestinians and their permanent status as a stateless and dispersed people.

As the historical record further shows, Israeli security and genuine Lebanese security stand in irreconcilable opposition to one another. The drive by Israel, over the course of decades, to undermine Lebanese sovereignty, either by means of political subversion or military aggression, makes it clear that the only type of “security” Lebanon will be allowed is one that assures that its foreign and domestic policies are aligned with those of Israel.

What, according to the *Times*, is needed to establish security? “That will require not only a cease-fire and peacekeepers but also a guarantee that Hezbollah will be forced to halt its attacks on Israel permanently and disband its militia.”

In other words, international pressure must be brought to bear to secure Israel’s war aims. The disarming and political destruction of Hezbollah, a mass nationalist movement supported by the bulk of Lebanon’s impoverished Shiite population, means the liquidation of all popular resistance to Israeli domination of

Lebanon, as well as to the Zionist state’s repression of the Palestinians.

The *Times* goes on to state, uncritically: “Israeli officials, with strong backing from Washington, are saying privately that it could take days or even weeks more of pounding to destroy Hezbollah’s huge missile stocks, cut off its supply lines from Syria and Iran, and prove to the Lebanese people the high cost of sheltering the terrorist group.”

The grotesque double-standard of the newspaper is highlighted by its use of the adjective “huge” in relation to Hezbollah’s missile stocks. Hezbollah’s “huge” missile stocks are, as everyone knows, dwarfed by the military might of Israel, which is provided by the United States.

None of Hezbollah’s missiles are capable of hitting Israel’s war planes, which are bombing towns and villages in the Shiite south, destroying the southern suburbs of Beirut, and gutting roads, bridges, airports, sea ports, power plants, hospitals and schools throughout the country.

In the first ten days of the war, Israel has carried out 3,000 air strikes, according to most estimates. More than 330 Lebanese have been killed and 1,300 wounded. The Lebanese death toll is higher than the Israeli by a factor of more than ten, and this is in advance of any major incursion by Israeli troops. The discrepancy between the casualties being sustained by the two sides provides only a pale indication of the colossal military supremacy of Israel, armed to the teeth by Washington, over Hezbollah and Lebanon as a whole.

The *Times* objects to Syrian and Iranian support for Hezbollah as support for violence and terrorism. (In calling Hezbollah a “terrorist group,” the newspaper ritualistically accepts the definition of all opposition to Israel as terrorist.) Needless to say, no similar concern is expressed about US financial and military support for Israel, amounting to billions of dollars every year.

Particularly despicable is the talk about proving to the Lebanese “the high cost of sheltering” Hezbollah. This amounts to sanction for collective punishment of the civilian population.

The editorial continues: “It is doubtful that air power will ever be able to achieve those goals, and Israel should not repeat the mistake of occupying Lebanon.”

In other words, it is OK to launch a ground invasion in order to depopulate large parts of southern Lebanon and turn its inhabitants into refugees, but Israel would be advised not to remain in the

region as the sole occupying force.

Further on, the *Times* declares, “Hezbollah, which sparked this crisis, believes mayhem is in its long-term interest, especially if it weakens the Lebanese Army and government.”

Here the newspaper mouths the official line that Hezbollah is to blame for the war. This is a lie, and the *Times* knows it. The border raid last week was the pretext seized on by Israel, with advance approval of Washington, to implement a plan drawn up well in advance.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* published an article Friday that makes this explicit. It states: “Israel’s military response by air, land and sea to what it considered a provocation last week by Hezbollah militants is unfolding according to a plan finalized more than a year ago.”

The article goes on to quote Gerald Steinberg, professor of political science at Bar-Ilan University, who states: “Of all of Israel’s wars since 1948, this was the one for which Israel was most prepared. In a sense, the preparation began in May 2000, immediately after the Israeli withdrawal... By 2004, the military campaign scheduled to last about three weeks that we’re seeing now had been blocked out and, in the last year or two, it’s been simulated and rehearsed across the board.”

The *Chronicle* article continues: “More than a year ago, a senior Israeli army officer began giving PowerPoint presentations, on an off-the-record basis, to US and other diplomats, journalists and think tanks, setting out the plan for the current operation in revealing detail.” The article goes on to say that the officer described a three-week campaign, in which “ground forces in large numbers would be introduced” in the third week.

It is inconceivable that the *Times*, the so-called “newspaper of record” in the US, would not have been aware of this plan.

The *Times* editorial goes on to call for a “robust” UN Security Council resolution as the basis for “robust” diplomacy. It notes sympathetically that “it is not surprising that the Israelis are skeptical that another Security Council resolution will make any difference.” It makes no reference, of course, to the innumerable Security Council resolutions, including those demanding that Israel withdraw from the Occupied Territories, which Israel has ignored.

The resolution must, the newspaper insists, include “clear threats of punishment for all who resist.” It should “order Hezbollah to withdraw from Israel’s borders and begin to disarm—and order Syria and Iran to stop supplying their client.” (No such demand is suggested in relation to US military support for Israel).

This is a formula for the isolation of Syria and Iran—as a prelude to war—if the two countries refuse to accept de facto Israeli control over Lebanon.

The “disarming” of Hezbollah means, in reality, the disarming of internal Lebanese resistance to Israeli and American policies, and the integration of the country into the US-Israeli anti-Syrian, anti-Iranian, anti-Palestinian axis. It would represent the realization of the plans hatched nearly 25 years ago by Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and his defense minister, Ariel Sharon, to install a right-wing Christian Phalange government in Lebanon, with Bashir Gemayel as president.

The “robust” diplomacy of the *Times* is directed exclusively

against the opponents of Israel. No punishment is to be threatened against Israel. Nor are any significant concessions demanded of the Zionist state. What the *New York Times* calls diplomacy is simply the enforcement, under threat of military annihilation, of Israeli demands.

The UN resolution should, the editorial states, “mandate the return of Israel’s kidnapped soldiers [there is no mention of the thousands, including Lebanese nationals, being held in Israeli prisons] and, finally, pledge major international contributions to help Lebanon rebuild from the destruction of the last week [at whose hands, the newspaper omits to say] and bolster its weak democratic government.”

In regard to the destruction caused by Israeli bombing, by rights the cost of rebuilding should be born by the governments that are responsible. The US and Israel should be forced to pay reparations. As for the call to “bolster” Lebanon’s government, this is a euphemism for creating a powerful police force, under US-Israeli control, capable of suppressing internal opposition.

The *Times* goes on: “If the Security Council isn’t willing to issue such explicit demands or link them to clear punishments, the United States, Europe and key Arab allies... will have to bring serious pressure on their own.” In other words, the US should be prepared to flout the United Nations, as it did in its illegal invasion of Iraq, and organize another “coalition of the willing” to prepare for war against Syria and Iran.

The editorial urges US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to include a meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in her impending trip to the Middle East, in order to tell him that “he will be persona non grata if he keeps meddling in Lebanon.” Thus, Syrian involvement in Lebanon (historically part of Syria) is “meddling,” but US and Israeli interference in the internal affairs of Lebanon, which has included invasions and bombings over the last fifty years that have killed and displaced hundreds of thousands of Lebanese, is perfectly justified.

What, moreover, is Israel, if not the product *par excellence* of imperialist “meddling” in the Middle East?

Anxious to establish some difference—in reality, a quibbling at the tactical margins—between itself and the policy of the Bush administration, the *Times* declares that Rice, “who has been dragging her feet to give Israel more time to fight,” needs to “get on a plane and visit Damascus as well as Jerusalem. The longer she delays the more lives will be lost, and the harder it will be to build a lasting peace.”

As the *Times* well knows, Rice’s foot-dragging is in accordance with the political scenario worked out between Israel and the Bush administration over recent months as the current operation was being planned. And the *Times*’ “lasting peace,” achieved through diplomatic blackmail and war, means the smashing of all popular opposition to US-Israeli domination of the Middle East.



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