

Rice's Middle East tour: "Diplomacy" in furtherance of war

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One day before US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was due to arrive in Tel Aviv to discuss the conflict in Lebanon and Gaza, the *New York Times* reported that the Bush administration was rushing through a delivery of satellite- and laser-guided bombs requested by Israel. The move epitomises the reality of Washington's "diplomacy"—throwing American power behind its Israeli client state in furtherance of plans to secure its own hegemony over the Middle East by force of arms.

According to the *Times*, the Israeli request was made "around the time" Israel began pounding Lebanon by air and sea on July 12. The pro-Israeli newspaper does not say whether this was before or after hostilities officially began because it wishes to maintain the pretence that the war launched by Israel was a defensive operation in response to the capture of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah.

Speaking of the *Times* report on the expedited US arms shipment to Israel, a US State Department official said: "We are not making any comment on this at all."

No comment is needed. The arms shipment is further evidence that Israel is acting on behalf of and in direct consultation with Washington in its attack on the Palestinian Authority and Lebanon.

Tel Aviv requested the weapons under a \$1 billion arms package approved in 2005 that authorises Israel to purchase as many as 100 GBU-28s—the 2,268 kilogram laser-guided "bunker-buster" bombs. No one knows how many are being shipped, but some analysts have pointed out that it indicates the bombardment of Lebanon will continue for some time. It is by no means certain, moreover, that Lebanon will be the only target.

When the arms deal was agreed last year, then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was forced to issue a public denial that the bunker busters were intended for an Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear reactors. The bombs were to be fitted on US-supplied F-15 fighter jets, putting Iran within range. Washington was already indicating that it was prepared in principle to support such an action, but refrained from giving the go-ahead because it was seeking to win the agreement of the European powers for action against Tehran.

Following discussions on Iran with President Bush, Sharon had told CNN that if Iran solved "technical problems" in the building of nuclear weapons, that would be "the point of no return."

The bunker bombs are only one part of a vast arsenal of weapons being deployed by Israel that are made in the US. Israel receives over \$2 billion a year in aid from America, of which two-thirds is military assistance. Its air force is made up F-16 Falcon fighters,

F-15 Eagle fighters and AH-64 Apache attack helicopters, all produced by the US.

The Pentagon notified Congress on Friday that it planned to sell Israel JP-8 aviation fuel valued at up to \$210 million to help its aircraft "keep peace and security in the region."

In advance of Rice's arrival in Israel, the Bush administration has made clear that it will continue giving free rein to the assault on Lebanon while issuing repeated threats against Syria and Iran. In his Saturday radio address previewing Rice's trip, Bush said she would "make it clear that resolving the crisis demands confronting the terrorist group that launched the attacks and the nations that support it."

The previous day, Rice once again rejected calls for a cease-fire, saying an end to Israel's onslaught on civilian targets and infrastructure in Lebanon would be a "false promise if it simply returns us to the status quo." She added, "Syria knows what it needs to do and Hezbollah is the source of the problem."

In one of the more obscene statements on the conflict, she described the plight of Lebanon as the "birth pangs of a new Middle East." The comment is instructive. It makes clear that the Bush administration is the driving force behind the assault on Lebanon and that this is only the beginning of a campaign to reorder the entire region.

The Israeli Kadima-Labour coalition government has its own reasons for attacking Gaza and Lebanon. It wants to crush all resistance amongst the Arab masses to its plan for a Greater Israel, incorporating the whole of Jerusalem and much of the West Bank. But it is not an independent actor and cannot realise its aims without the full political, military and financial support of Washington, up to and including direct US military intervention.

Israel cannot continue to attack Lebanon while leaving Lebanon's more powerful neighbour Syria untouched. More important still, its assumption of the role of regional policeman on behalf of Washington ultimately demands the military defeat of Iran, which Prime Minister Ehud Olmert described in May as an "existential threat" to Israel.

Reports are emerging confirming that Israel cynically utilised the capture of its soldiers to implement a military offensive planned well in advance, in consultation with the Bush administration.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has previously drawn attention to the July 21 report in the *San Francisco Chronicle* stating: "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 *Chronicle* went on to note: “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.”

An article by David Horowitz in the *Jerusalem Post* provides additional evidence that the attack on Lebanon was pre-planned. It notes, “The battle plan the IDF [Israeli Defence Forces] has been following for the past nine days was finalized four or five months ago, around the time the new [Kadima-led] government was taking shape.”

A report in the July 23 *Haaretz*, “Shifting Policy Gears/A New Agenda, a New Order,” by Aluf Benn, also notes: “Last weekend [Prime Minister Ehud] Olmert dispatched Mossad head Meir Dagan to Washington to confer with US officials about stopping the Iranian nuclear threat. After the battles in Lebanon end and some type of order is imposed in the north, Olmert will likely travel to the White House again to discuss the new agenda.”

Secretary of State Rice’s Middle East visit has been coordinated with Israel to provide diplomatic cover and political legitimacy to the Zionist state’s naked aggression and targeting of Lebanese civilians, and allow it to continue. After touching down in Jerusalem for discussions with Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Rice departs for Rome and Malaysia, only returning to Israel on July 30. Senior Israeli officials told *Haaretz* that the US has given its approval for Israel to continue military operations at least until then.

Rice aims to secure the agreement of the other major powers and the Arab bourgeois regimes on US-Israeli plans to reduce Lebanon to a de facto protectorate of Israel and isolate Syria and Iran.

Before Rice left, she and Bush, together with Vice President Cheney and other top administration officials, held discussions in Washington with Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal, the chief of the Saudi National Security Council, Prince Bandar ibn Sultan, and Saudi ambassador to Washington Prince Turki ibn Faisal. The kingdom, which has sided with the US in blaming the current conflict on Hezbollah, is being lined up to back future attacks on Syria and Iran.

In Rome, Rice will meet with members of the “Lebanon Core Group,” which includes Britain, France, Italy, the European Union, Russia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Nations, the World Bank and the Lebanese government, led by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. Egypt and Jordan have, like Saudi Arabia, made clear that they are ready to comply with Washington’s Mideast policy.

Rice has no intention of even speaking to Syria, despite the threats of military action that have been levelled at it every day. When the US ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton was interviewed on Fox News yesterday, he was asked to comment on Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Meqdad’s statement that morning. Meqdad declared, “Syria is ready for dialogue with the United States based on respect and mutual interest.”

Bolton dismissed the Syrian offer, saying, “Syria doesn’t need dialogue to know what they need to do... Syria, along with Iran, is really part of the problem...”

Israel is making use of the opportunity extended to it by Washington to heap maximum destruction on Lebanon. Israeli aircraft have carried out well over 3,000 sorties in Lebanon, destroying its infrastructure. On July 21, the Israeli army called up 3,000 reserve soldiers and began massing troops and armoured vehicles near the Lebanese border in preparation for a likely ground offensive in southern Lebanon.

Over the past 24 hours, the Israeli Air Force has struck more than 120 targets, including the Al-Manar TV station in Beirut, in a move to block out coverage of the carnage. Missiles hit Sidon, a port city that has been receiving thousands of refugees fleeing villages along the border with Israel, and a textile factory in al-Manara, near the border, killing one person. A strike on a village near the port city of Tyre killed a boy, and a missile hit a mini bus carrying people fleeing toward Tyre, killing three people.

Lebanon has already been made to suffer appalling levels of destruction. According to United Nations figures, 600,000 Lebanese, more than 15 percent of the population, have been forced to flee their homes. At least 365 people have been killed, nearly one-third of whom were children, according to the UN’s emergency relief coordinator, Jan Egeland.

While touring Beirut, Egeland censured Israel for not providing safe access for urgently needed aid to the Lebanese people and appealed for an immediate \$100 million to help avert a humanitarian disaster. “We’re particularly worried for this area of Beirut and for the southern part of the country,” he said. “There are wounded who do not get sufficient treatment. There are people who do not have safe drinking water. There are, first and foremost, tens of thousands of people who are now being besieged...”

Surveying a pile of rubble, he accused Israel of breaching international humanitarian law: “It is horrific. I did not know it was block after block of houses. It makes it a violation of humanitarian law. It’s bigger, it’s more extensive than I even could imagine.”



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