

Rome conference on Lebanon

Appeasement 2006: Europe capitulates to American-Israeli aggression

Editorial Board
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The international conference in Rome held Wednesday to address the crisis precipitated by the Israeli attack on Lebanon ended without a call for a ceasefire. According to numerous press accounts, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stood virtually alone in opposing any language in the conference statement suggesting that the Israeli onslaught, which has already caused close to 500 civilian deaths and destroyed much of the country's infrastructure, should be ended any time soon.

According to the *International Herald Tribune*: "European and Arab governments, as well as Secretary General Kofi Annan of the United Nations and Javier Solana, the European Union foreign policy chief, also had pushed hard for an immediate cease-fire, but lost as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice dug in. She stuck to the position that agreement on an 'enduring peace' had to be in place before the parties were called to stop fighting."

Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, attending the meeting along with senior diplomats from the US, Britain, France, Spain, Germany, Canada, Russia, Turkey, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, as well as United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, delivered an impassioned and eloquent speech to urge an immediate halt to hostilities.

Siniora asked: "Is the value of human life less in Lebanon than that of citizens elsewhere? Are we children of a lesser God? Is an Israeli teardrop worth more than a drop of Lebanese blood?"

Saying his country was being "cut to pieces" by Israel, he vowed to begin legal proceedings against Israel, implying that Israel was guilty of war crimes and saying he would seek war reparations for "the barbaric destruction that [Israel] has inflicted on us." He ended his remarks with a quote from the Roman historian Tacitus, which he said describes what Israel is doing to Lebanon today. "They created a desolation and call it peace."

According to one press report, diplomats said there was visible emotion around the room after Siniora's comments. Rice, however, was not moved. At a press conference following the meeting, she mentioned in passing Siniora's "very impassioned" speech, and went on to reiterate her opposition to a suspension of Israeli attacks on Lebanese cities, towns and villages, as well as her insistence that the purpose of any international force in southern Lebanon would be to disarm Hezbollah.

The Rome conference demonstrated both the lawlessness of the US and the impotence of the European governments. Everyone in the meeting room knew full well what Israel and the US were up to in

Lebanon. Only the day before, Israel had fired a precision missile at a long-standing and plainly marked United Nations post on the Lebanese side of the border, killing four UN monitors.

Rice's role at the conference made crystal clear that the war is being waged by Israel, but the US is the power pulling the strings.

Yet not one of the participants had the principle or courage to stand up to Rice. Why was there no ceasefire resolution? Because the US was against it and the US had the only vote that counted.

The entire European bourgeoisie, and the United Nations as well, once again demonstrated their impotence in the face of US imperialism. Europe is prepared to defy the US when it comes to matters of trade—that is, to haggle over money—but in the face of massive and historic crimes it exhibits complete cowardice. It is, in fact, complicit in these crimes.

This is true of all sides and shades of the official political spectrum—so-called "left" governments and parties no less than their right-wing counterparts. Thus the Italian center-left government of Romano Prodi, which includes in its coalition two parties that arose out of the shambles of the Italian Communist Party—the Democratic Party of the Left and Communist Refoundation—agreed to host the meeting, which was set up at Washington's request to rubberstamp the US-Israeli war policy. Massimo D'Alema, a veteran of the Communist Party and current foreign minister, was particularly obsequious toward the American secretary of state.

Then there was the spectacle of Kofi Annan, who had the day before accused Israel of deliberately targeting his UN monitors, sitting beside Rice and announcing his acceptance of Israel's perfunctory and cynical apology.

The brutal US-backed war against Lebanon, and the unwillingness or inability of the other major powers to oppose it, mark a milestone in the breakup of the post-World War II framework of international law. The world is witnessing once again a descent into the type of untrammelled imperialist lawlessness and violence that characterized the 1930s and culminated in the second world war of the twentieth century.

Siniora's futile plea to the Rome meeting recalls a similar event that occurred almost exactly 70 years ago: the speech of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie before the League of Nations in June of 1936. Selassie appealed to the world body to halt the bloody invasion of his country by fascist Italy, but the League of Nations did nothing.

Whereas in that period it was the drive of Japan for regional dominance in Asia and of Germany for domination over Europe that spearheaded the onset of a global catastrophe, today the role of chief

aggressor is played by the United States, which is bent on establishing hegemony over the entire world. For Washington, the reorganization of the Middle East and Central Asia is a critical component of this quest for global supremacy. The American ruling elite sees Israel's striving for regional dominance as something it can utilize in realizing its own grand, and demented, design.

For decades following the Second World War, the capitulation of the major powers to German imperialism in the 1930s—their refusal to respond to the Nazis' flagrant and violent assaults on international law—was condemned as “appeasement.” But the same pattern has reemerged no less forcefully today, in the form of Europe's appeasement of the United States.

The outcome of the Rome conference underscores the fact that the United States is seeking to settle the crisis in Lebanon on the basis of the military destruction of Hezbollah. This is part of a deliberate and long-standing plan worked out between the US and Israel to destroy all popular resistance in Lebanon to US domination of that country, to be effected by turning it into a virtual protectorate of Israel.

The suppression of Hezbollah, considered by Washington to be allied with Syria and Iran, is, in turn, seen as critical to American imperialism's goal of eliminating those two regimes, which are deemed obstacles to US domination of the oil-rich Middle East and Central Asia.

Hezbollah's July 12 border raid, in which two Israeli soldiers were captured, was merely the pretext for setting this imperialist operation into motion.

These facts are being systematically and deliberately obscured by a media propaganda blitz which aims to turn reality on its head, presenting the aggressors as the victims and the victims as the warmongers. Terms are stripped of their real meaning and used to confuse and conceal, rather than inform.

Thus, “diplomacy” is applied to the US government's policy of issuing ultimatums and demanding that Hezbollah and Lebanon accede to the war aims of Washington and Jerusalem, under threat of annihilation. Rice's mission to the Middle East and Europe, whose first and foremost purpose was to keep the war going and give Israel as much time as possible to wipe out the Lebanese resistance—as well as the Palestinian resistance in Gaza—is described as a “peace” mission.

The ubiquitous term “terrorist” is applied to all those who resist US and Israeli domination. What else, however, is Israel doing with its military onslaught but terrorizing the Lebanese people?

It is by now increasingly obvious that the term “terrorist” is flung against whomever the United States chooses at any given point to target for political subversion or military attack. Once the label has been applied, all further discussion of the history, policies or social makeup of the country or group so branded is treated as illegitimate. The US government can always rely on a supine and compliant media to demonize the latest “terrorist threat,” even when the targeted organization or country was not so long before one of the “good guys.”

In the current case, the absurdity of this all-purpose propaganda gambit is underscored by the fact that Hezbollah is a bitter political opponent of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda.

All of this is designed to prevent the American people from grasping the lawless and bloody character of US foreign policy—a policy that is supported by the entire political establishment, the Democrats no less than the Republicans. It is difficult for broad masses of people to grasp fully the scale of American and Israeli violence, and the brazen

character of their aggression.

For decades the US postured as the defender of international law. In the post-World War II period, it generally supported ceasefires in regional conflicts, something that was considered the basic precondition for a negotiated political settlement.

That period is over. What increasingly predominates is the unrestrained assertion of imperialist ambitions, in which the United States plays the leading role. That is the essential significance of the Bush administration's doctrine of preemptive war. As the current slaughter in Lebanon demonstrates, for the American ruling elite war is not only a legitimate tool of foreign policy, it is the preferred means of asserting its interests.

The problem that the US and Israel face in their current offensive is that they underestimated the depth of resistance in Lebanon. The Israeli military, armed to the teeth by the US, has suffered considerable casualties in its ground operations in southern Lebanon, where it faces a determined and disciplined opponent in Hezbollah, one, moreover, that enjoys mass popular support.

The plans of the US and Israel for a short, bloody war have evaporated. However, that only increases the likelihood that Israel, at the urging of the US, will carry out a colossal intensification of violence in Lebanon. This has already been signaled by Israel's deliberate bombing of the UN monitoring post.

Neither the US nor Israel can afford a military quagmire that punctures the myth of Israeli invincibility. Such a development would encourage the popular resistance in Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the Middle East and Central Asia, placing in doubt not only Israel's regional supremacy, but the existence of the Arab bourgeois regimes in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt upon which both the US and Israel rely.

It would have no less explosive consequences within Israel itself. The effort of the Israeli ruling elite to hold the working masses in thrall with the supposedly omnipresent threat of annihilation by the Arabs is complemented by the depiction of the Israeli military as the only guarantee of survival. A serious crack in that image could provide an outlet for social tensions that are simmering just beneath the surface of one of the most economically polarized societies in the world.

There are already signs of mounting opposition within Israel to the current war, and that opposition will grow not only as a result of the rising toll of Israeli military and civilian deaths, but also as Israeli workers and youth begin to comprehend the scale of the havoc, chaos and death being inflicted on the Lebanese people in their name.

The great and tragic lesson of the 1930s was that the catastrophe of war could not be averted by appealing to one or another imperialist power, or allying with the bourgeoisie of any nation, but only through the revolutionary mobilization of the working people against militarism and the capitalist system that breeds it.

The only force that can prevent another global catastrophe is the international working class. Today, once again, this lesson comes to the fore, and it must become the basis for the building of a new international socialist movement of the working class.



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