

# SEP candidate for US Senate from New York: “The war in Lebanon is a world historic crime”

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*The following is a report given by the Socialist Equality Party candidate for US Senate from New York, Bill Van Auken, to a meeting held July 30 at the SEP election headquarters in New York City. The meeting marked the halfway point in the campaign to gain the necessary signatures to place the party on the New York ballot.*

*SEP campaigners have thus far gathered the signatures of 10,000 New York voters, who have responded powerfully to the party's demand for an immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and its fight for the independent political mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist program.*

Today marks the 19th straight day of Israeli's one-sided war against the Lebanese people. This war, which has already claimed the lives of some 600 civilians and left thousands more wounded, is a joint project undertaken by the United States and Israel. Its aim is to widen and escalate the so-called “war on terrorism”—the all-purpose euphemism for US imperialism's drive to seize control of the Middle East and its vast oil wealth as a means of asserting global hegemony.

This morning has brought yet another Israeli war crime, the worst since the attacks began. A pre-dawn Israeli bombing raid against the southern Lebanese town of Qana demolished several homes, including a four-story building that was sheltering families who had fled earlier bombings in the region. At least 57 people were killed as they slept, more than 30 of them children, with others still trapped beneath the rubble. Rescue workers said it was nearly impossible to evacuate the wounded because Israeli warplanes have bombed nearby highways and bridges.

The Israeli military issued a perfunctory statement declaring the deaths the responsibility of the victims themselves, saying that Israel had warned all Lebanese south of the Litani River to get out, and that those who stayed would be regarded as terrorists. It appears that the Zionist regime now claims a license to act on this assumption, unleashing a bloodbath that will dwarf what has taken place over the past three weeks.

The rationale for this massacre was spelled out in advance by Israel's justice minister, Haim Ramon, who declared the following:

“What we should do in southern Lebanon is employ huge firepower before a ground force goes in. Everyone in southern Lebanon is a terrorist and is connected to Hizbollah. Our great advantage vis-a-vis Hizbollah is our firepower, not in face-to-face combat.”

The truth of this last point had been proven in the severe losses suffered by Israeli ground troops during their limited incursion into Lebanon last week. It now appears that the “huge firepower” option is to be unleashed in a vastly intensified form before a more extensive Israeli invasion is launched.

This latest bombing has disrupted US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's diplomatic charade in the Middle East. Her trip was designed as a macabre form of shuttle diplomacy between Jerusalem and Beirut,

designed to give the appearance of working toward a cease-fire and expressing phony sympathy for the Lebanese, while Washington is rushing deliveries of bombs for Israel to kill more of them. In reality, Rice is working to stonewall any cessation of the bombing and give the Israelis the time they need to carry out wholesale slaughter.

The Lebanese government cancelled her trip to Lebanon. The country's prime minister, Fouad Siniora, said he would not talk to Rice until a cease-fire is declared. “There is no place on this sad morning for any discussion other than an immediate and unconditional cease-fire as well as an international investigation into the Israeli massacres in Lebanon now,” he announced at a Beirut news conference. He referred to the Israeli regime as “war criminals.”

There may have been some concern by the Lebanese leaders that they could not guarantee the US secretary of state's safety. News of the massacre in the south touched off rioting in Beirut. Thousands of protesters stormed the United Nations headquarters in the city, smashing offices and setting the building on fire in an expression of fury over the unwillingness and inability of the world's governments to do anything to stop the US-Israeli aggression.

What is unfolding in Lebanon is a world historic crime and tragedy. In addition to the dead and wounded, more than three-quarters of a million people have been displaced, turned into homeless refugees. This constitutes close to one-quarter of the country's population, and a growing humanitarian crisis threatens to claim even more lives from starvation and disease. A principal tactic of the Israeli offensive has been to use this wave of internal refugees to exert pressure on the Lebanese government and even bring about “regime change” in Beirut. This is truly terrorism on the most massive scale.

Meanwhile, the Israeli version of “shock and awe” has demolished Lebanon's infrastructure, destroying its airports, seaports, highways and bridges as well as factories and even a dairy farm. The impoverished neighborhoods of southern Beirut have been bombed into rubble, more or less the equivalent of pulverizing large sections of the Bronx. Aid and refugee convoys flying white flags along with ambulances bearing prominent red crosses have also been targeted.

The scale and brazenness of the destruction that is being unleashed against Lebanon has little historic parallel outside of the aggression conducted by the fascist regimes of Hitler and Mussolini at the height of their power and insanity in the 1930s. The present conflict recalls in many ways fascist Italy's 1935 invasion of Ethiopia, also justified as a response to a border incident. Likewise, the pathetic appeals of Lebanon's Siniora for the world community to stop the dismemberment of his country resembles the futile pleas of Ethiopia's Hailie Selassie to the League of Nations 70 years ago.

The war in Lebanon is an imperialist war. Its principal aim is to impose

unrestricted US-Israeli domination over Lebanon and to create the conditions for an even wider war in the region, directed in the first instance at both Syria and Iran.

The pretext for the war—the capture of two Israeli soldiers—has been forgotten long ago by virtually everyone outside their families. They are watching along with the rest of the world in horror at the wanton devastation that is being wreaked against the Lebanese, with an absolute lack of concern over its implications for the fate of these two young men.

The Bush administration has suggested, obscenely, that the war is really about spreading “democracy” throughout the Middle East. Condoleezza Rice has spoken of the carnage in Lebanon as the “birth pangs of a new Middle East.” Bush, for his part, called the killing “a moment of opportunity and a chance for broader change in the region.”

Whether the befuddled occupant of the White House comprehends the meaning of the words he mouths—or, for that matter, the extent to which he is even informed of the real policies being pursued by Dick Cheney and others who run his government—is an open question.

As is known, thanks to a microphone inadvertently left on at the G-8 Summit in St. Petersburg, he gave his servile ally Tony Blair his own solution to the Lebanese problem: “What they need to do is get Syria to get Hezbollah to stop doing that shit, and it’s over.”

This is the same Bush who, it should be recalled, only a few short months ago was championing the Lebanese people’s “right to decide their own destiny, free of Syrian control and domination,” and who hailed the withdrawal of Syrian troops from the country as a triumph for democracy.

As for “democracy’s” supposed role in the present conflict, Washington has sought, with increasingly less success, to win the support of police state regimes and monarchies in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Gulf for the extermination of Hezbollah, a movement that has broad popular support among the impoverished Lebanese Shiites reflected in the election of its members to parliament.

And finally, as is now well known, Israel’s war on Lebanon is not the reaction to an immediate provocation on the part of Hezbollah, but rather the product of joint US-Israeli strategic planning that has been going on for several years.

The present war is in many ways the execution of the doctrine laid out in a document entitled “Clean Break: a New Strategy for Securing the Realm,” written in 1996 for the incoming Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Its authors included Douglas Feith, who became the Pentagon’s policy director in the Bush administration, Richard Perle, a top Pentagon adviser, and David Wurmser, Cheney’s Middle East adviser.

The document states, in part: “An effective approach, and one with which America can sympathize, would be if Israel seized the strategic initiative along its northern borders by engaging Hizballah, Syria, and Iran as the principal agents of aggression in Lebanon.”

We have always separated ourselves from those elements of the petty bourgeois left—as well as those on the extreme right—who cast the policies of the present administration as the outcome of the White House and Pentagon having been hijacked by a cabal of pro-Israeli neo-conservatives.

The heart of this thesis, which in some cases draws inspiration from the putrid well of anti-Semitism, is the conception that the government in Washington represents some malignant cancer on an otherwise healthy body politic. Or that Israeli influence has somehow diverted US foreign policy. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It is undeniable that the presence of such prominent right-wing Zionists at the heart of the US national security establishment is significant. But this is not a case of the Israeli tail wagging the American dog. In the current war, there is every indication that Washington is prodding Israel to continue and intensify its attacks.

The US-backed and US-financed war in Lebanon, like the US war in

Iraq and the growing threats of military aggression against Iran and Syria, is the product, in the final analysis, not of the twisted ideology of the neo-conservatives—who apparently see high explosives as an all-purpose device for social engineering—but rather the profound contradictions of American capitalism and the predatory strivings of the US ruling oligarchy as a whole.

The clearest proof of this is the fact that the Bush administration’s doctrine of “preemptive wars” to reshape the Middle East has been embraced not just by the Republican right, but by the entire American political establishment, including the US media and the Democratic Party. This includes, most prominently, my opponent, Hillary Clinton.

The Democrats are going into the 2006 midterm elections, to be held in just 100 days, attempting to ignore the war in Iraq entirely. While the Iraq war is the most burning political issue confronting the American people, it does not even feature in the Democrats’ campaign program, which promises beefed up national security and tax cuts for the middle class. This peculiar silence is to be explained by the fact that the Democratic leadership—Clinton included—supports the continued occupation of Iraq and the waging of a war against its people until US domination of the country and its oil resources is assured.

The same relative silence is reflected in the media. In his column today, Frank Rich of the *New York Times* cites a recent survey that shows coverage of Iraq by the major network news outlets has declined by 60 percent over the past three years. His conclusion, reflecting the demoralization gripping layers of “left” Democrats, is that things have gone so badly for the US imperialist enterprise that the American people no longer have the stomach to watch.

This, of course, can be said only of the comfortable middle class, for whom the war is a matter of television coverage. As we have all seen in the course of our petitioning campaign in New York, outrage over the war within the working class—whose sons and daughters are suffering the consequences—has grown exponentially. And, as Rich himself points out, this outrage has been directed at the media for its failure to tell the truth about what is going on in Iraq.

No such silence or reticence, it should be said, applies to Israel’s war against the people of Lebanon. Democrats have sought to attack the Bush administration from the right over its alleged failure to defend Israeli interests with sufficient enthusiasm.

This reached the level of the absurd with the boycott staged by some Democrats of the speech to the joint session of Congress given by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. His offense was having joined with the entire Arab world in branding Israel’s bombing of Lebanon as criminal—a definition that fits the strictest interpretation of the Geneva Conventions. The Democrats demanded that al-Maliki declare his support for Israel and denounce Hezbollah, and suggested that the Bush White House was failing to control its puppet.

Meanwhile, as we noted, Hillary Clinton has issued statements and delivered speeches approving in advance any and all military actions Israel might take in Lebanon. In massacring women and children from the air, Israel is “standing up for American values,” Clinton declared, as well as “sending a message” to Iran and Syria.

Clinton has carved out her position as the most unconditional and slavish supporter of Israel in the US Congress. As a result, she is also the recipient of the greatest amount of campaign contributions from the Israel lobby of any US legislator.

But her position is hardly unique. Not a single voice has been raised by a prominent figure in either party to condemn the war crimes against the Lebanese people. Much less has there been any suggestion that the US should stop supplying the \$3 billion in annual US funding that underpins the Israeli military machine.

This enormous expenditure of US funds to arm Israel has the same aim as the illegal war and occupation of Iraq. It is not to “defend democracy”

or “defeat terrorism,” but rather to secure US domination of the Middle East and project American economic and military power throughout the world.

In the end, these policies are setting the stage for a far wider war. In Iraq itself a massive increase in violence is being prepared. The sending of an additional 4,000 US troops this week into Baghdad is both an admission of the abject failure of the occupation to pacify the Iraqi population and a preparation for a full-scale confrontation with the Shiite population in the slums of Sadr City, under conditions in which the Iraqi Shiites have grown increasingly restive over the slaughter of their co-religionists in Lebanon.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Security Council is preparing to pass a resolution delivering an ultimatum to Iran to cease its uranium enrichment activities by next month. While the measure does not include the threat of sanctions demanded by the US, there is little question that Washington will utilize it as a justification for escalating its own provocations against the Iranian regime, much as it employed the UN’s resolutions in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq.

Underlying what appears to be the insanity of the US policy of global militarism is the increasingly desperate position of American capitalism, confronted with growing economic challenges from both Europe and China. Washington is determined to secure its position as the world’s preeminent imperialist power by means of military force. Its strategy is to establish unchallenged control over the world’s principal oil resources, both to assure its own needs and to have the ability to place its rivals and potential rivals on energy rations. This is a path that leads ultimately to world war.

On a more fundamental level, US militarism is a reflection of the deep-going and malignant social contradictions within US society itself. The dominant layer within the ruling elite has enriched itself enormously over the past two decades through what amounts to the looting of the economy and the systematic transfer of wealth from the masses of working people to the top 1 percent. It has become dependent for its ballooning personal fortunes upon cheap wages at home and the importation of cheap raw materials. It is prepared to utilize violence to preserve both.

This is why we have insisted that the struggle against war is inseparable from the struggle to mobilize the working class independently through the building of a new mass political movement, based on a socialist program and perspective.

This is the very heart of our election campaign and it is on this basis that we have already won the support of some 10,000 New Yorkers who have signed our nominating petitions.

The label of “shock and awe” chosen by the Pentagon to describe its campaign against Iraq is now being used in relation to the Israeli campaign in Lebanon as well. This method of warfare has a dual significance. It was meant not only to suppress any Iraqi resistance, but also to “shock and awe” the American public and demoralize opponents of the war.

In the face of the new crimes in Lebanon, we cannot allow ourselves to be either shocked or awed. We cannot forget that the US president currently enjoys the support of less than one-third of the American population. Nor can one lose sight of the mass disaffection of the great majority of working people from both big business parties.

Finally, the economic underpinnings of American militarism are becoming ever more rotten. This fact has found its latest expression in the report of the US Commerce Department disclosing that the growth rate of the American economy over the last quarter fell to less than half the rate recorded over the previous period. At the same time, inflation is growing once again, far outstripping the anemic growth in wages.

There is growing fear that the onset of a new period of “stagflation” in the US could spell a catastrophic crisis for the world economy, which has grown dangerously dependent on an ever-expanding US market. The economic house of cards characterized by a ballooning US trade deficit

financed by the inflow of funds from the rest of the world—to the tune of \$2 billion a day—may soon come crashing down.

This is the sharp political situation in which we are now intervening. We have a powerful program that establishes the objective unity of the struggles against US militarism and social inequality, as well as the defense of democratic rights.

Only our program, which advances the fight for the political independence and international unity of the working class, offers a way forward for working people, both in the US and the Middle East.

Despite the formidable difficulties we face in getting on the ballot as a result of the absurdly high demands set by the Democrats and Republicans who write the New York State election laws, we should have the greatest confidence that our campaign is serving to further the political education of working people and laying the foundations for a powerful growth of the international socialist movement.



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