Slaughter in Lebanon enters fourth week

What way forward in the struggle against war?

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As the brutal US-Israeli war against the Lebanese people enters its fourth week, there is no sign that the massacre of innocent civilians is about to end. On the contrary, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), backed by air strikes and artillery fire, are pressing deeper into Lebanon, with the apparent aim of advancing 18 miles to the Litani River, either killing or driving out the entire population between it and the Israeli border.

Israeli ground forces have also entered the Bekaa Valley, near Lebanon’s border with Syria.

There is every reason to believe that the horrors of the past three weeks—the bombardments that have reduced much of south Lebanon and southern Beirut to rubble and crippled a large part of the country’s infrastructure, claiming some 700 lives, wounding thousands more and turning over three quarters of a million people into refugees—is only the prelude to an even greater slaughter. The war crime that claimed the lives of more than 60 people—most of them children—in the village of Qana is to be repeated throughout the region in the coming days and weeks.

The Israeli government has already ended the so-called 48-hour bombing moratorium declared in the wake of the Qana massacre—which it largely ignored by continuing to strike targets at will—proceeding on Wednesday morning with the resumption of a full-scale air war against Lebanon. For the first time, Israeli warplanes dropped leaflets even north of the Litani warning villagers that they too could expect to be struck by bombs and missiles if they did not flee their homes.

Witnesses in the Bekaa Valley town of Baalbek have reported that Israeli helicopter gunships bombed a hospital filled with people wounded in earlier attacks.

Israeli Trade Minister Eli Yshai, a member of the government’s security cabinet, told army radio that there was little danger that the United Nations would vote on a ceasefire this week, and even if it did, Israel would ignore it.

“Israel is not obliged to stand at attention and cease its operations if the United Nations decide on a ceasefire,” he declared. He said the Israeli government had no intention of accepting any ceasefire “except on our conditions,” and added that “our American friends will veto in such a case,” referring to Washington’s power as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to veto any resolution. He and other Israeli officials indicated that the war of aggression will continue for at least several more weeks.

The Israeli regime has every reason to be confident that its patron in Washington will continue to back its war against Lebanon. There is every indication that the Bush administration is not merely backing Israel, but prodding it to escalate its offensive until it achieves the stated aim of smashing the Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah movement.

What has shocked world opinion even more than the savage character of Israel’s military offensive is the shameless and unqualified support Washington has provided for a war that has inflicted 30 Lebanese civilian casualties for every one suffered by Israel, and has set Lebanon as country back by decades.

Even prominent former officials of the Bush administration, such as Richard Armitage, the former deputy secretary of state, and Richard Haass, the State Department’s head of policy and planning during Bush’s first term, have expressed dismay at the administration’s failure to maintain even a pretense of even-handed diplomacy.

Again and again, Bush and other top US officials have declared their opposition to an immediate ceasefire in Lebanon, calling instead for a “sustainable peace.” This means that an end to hostilities is acceptable only on the basis of the US and Israel achieving their war aims in full. Similar “ceasefires” were imposed by the Third Reich in Poland, France and elsewhere in the 1930s and 1940s.

It is by now clear to all but the willfully blind that Hezbollah’s capture of two Israeli soldiers July 12 was not the cause of the present war, but merely the pretext for launching a long-planned aggression. Nor was this war simply determined by the government of Israel, with Washington providing its blessing after the fact. On the contrary, it represents an extension and deepening of the US imperialist intervention in the Middle East launched with the invasion of Iraq more than three years ago.

The aims of this war are not merely to secure Israel against Hezbollah, but to further US strategic goals in Central Asia and the Middle East, using the so-called “global war on terrorism” as the justification for a predatory policy directed at establishing Washington’s stranglehold over the oil reserves concentrated in the region. This, in turn, is seen as critical to US imperialism’s goal of achieving global hegemony.

With the Bush administration’s unqualified support for the war against Lebanon, US imperialism has dropped the democratic and pacifist pretensions with which it has historically cloaked its real objectives. War and the slaughter of innocent civilians are once again being legitimized as tools of foreign policy.

All of the talk of Bush and Cheney about “preemptive war” and “the new wars of the twenty-first century” now can be seen in their true light. The invasion of Iraq was only the beginning of a far broader utilization of military violence and terror to secure the global interests of America’s corporate and financial elite.

US support for the Israeli war against Lebanon is merely a stepping stone for future military campaigns aimed at bringing about “regime change” in Syria and Iran. Washington intends to allow no regime that poses even a potential challenge to its global ambitions to remain in power.

In the wake of the Second World War and the horrific crimes carried out by fascism and imperialism in Europe and Asia, the world’s powers formally foreswore military aggression as a means of furthering national interests. The United Nations was established, declaring in its founding charter that it would “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in
our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind,” and vowing that “armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest.”

These lofty words are now a dead letter. War has once again been legitimized by the world’s premier power as an acceptable means of achieving political aims. The slaughter of innocent children is to be duly regretted in hypocritical statements to the press, but dismissed in practice as mere “collateral damage,” an inevitable and acceptable price to be paid for the realization of strategic objectives.

In a very real sense the historic clock has been turned back. The methods of international lawlessness, aggression and militarism that dominated world affairs during the 1930s, in the run-up to the Second World War, have been revived with a vengeance.

This is not merely a matter of Bush, Cheney and a cabal of “neoconservatives” imposing some deviant and reactionary policy upon the US government. The Democrats, the ostensibly party of opposition, have attempted to outdo the administration in their support for Israel’s war, in some cases criticizing the administration from the right. Politicians such as Senator Hillary Clinton of New York declare their unconditional support for Israel’s “right of self-defense,” explicitly endorsing any and all actions by the Zionist regime, even as it is slaughtering women and children.

There is no significant opposition within the American political establishment. Within the media, support for the continuation of the war is nearly unanimous. The Wall Street Journal, reflecting the views of US finance capital and the Bush administration, declared Tuesday: “We hope that, while [Secretary of State] Rice pursues diplomatic options, privately Mr. Bush is telling [Israeli Prime Minister] Olmert that Israel must finish the job he started against Hezbollah—including a ground invasion of southern Lebanon if that’s what it takes.” It added only that Israel must demonstrate “the will to prevail as rapidly as militarily possible.”

The Washington Post, just days after the Qana massacre, lamented the “predictable focus by media outlets around the world on Israel’s mistakes and excesses,” and urged a continuation of a war until victory. “The trick is determining how much of this leads to the outright suspension of democratic rights, the jailing for working people not only in the Middle East, but in the United States and internationally.

We urge all those who oppose the bloodbaths in Iraq and Lebanon and want to take action to bring them to a halt to study the program of the Socialist Equality Party, participate in the campaign to place our candidates on the ballot, and join with our party in the fight to build a new revolutionary leadership in the working class.

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