

# On eve of Lebanon ceasefire deadline: US, Israel face political debacle

By the Editorial Board  
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A UN-mandated ceasefire in Lebanon is due to take effect today at 7 a.m. local time. The resolution was approved by the Security Council on Friday evening, after the US and Israel accepted revisions to an earlier draft proposed by the Bush administration. It is by no means clear what the immediate consequences of the cessation of hostilities will be, and whether the ceasefire, if implemented, will hold. There is no doubt, however, that the political outcome is a major debacle for both Israel and the US.

Only hours before the UN vote, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) launched a massive offensive, in an effort to capture territory south of the Litani River and wreak further destruction throughout Lebanon. The military has tripled the number of occupying troops in the south to 30,000, and has bombed targets throughout the country, including in Beirut. But, as throughout the month-long war, the IDF is encountering fierce resistance from Hezbollah. Saturday was the bloodiest single day of fighting for the Israeli military, with 30 dead, many more wounded and a combat helicopter downed for the first time.

Israel's ongoing aggression, carried out with open US support, leaves no doubt that any ceasefire will only be a pause in the US-Israeli drive to destroy Hezbollah, reduce Lebanon to the status of a protectorate and thereby create the conditions for a wider war against Syria and Iran.

This is despite the fact that the attack on Lebanon has resulted in a setback to US-Israeli war aims, and has further isolated both countries, fuelling popular opposition to their governments in the Middle East and around the world.

The US and Israel have spent much of the last month arguing that any ceasefire could only come after the IDF destroyed Hezbollah. Now, however, it is clear that Israeli expectations of a short and decisive campaign have come to nothing. The Israeli military has proven unable to secure significant Lebanese territory, despite a ferocious month-long offensive that has seen more than a thousand civilians killed and a million turned into refugees.

For weeks, Israeli forces have failed to capture key towns and areas on the border between Israel and Lebanon. While the military now claims to occupy Lebanese territory south of the Litani, key towns remain battlefields between Israeli and Hezbollah fighters. Israeli claims to have captured urban centres such as Bint Jbeil have proven shortlived as its troops have withdrawn in the face of determined resistance. Hezbollah continues to fire rockets from southern Lebanon; on Sunday at least 250 were fired—the highest number of Hezbollah rockets to hit Israel in a single day.

This situation has forced the Bush administration to abandon its previous opposition to any ceasefire. As the *New York Times* reported on Saturday: "A senior administration official in Crawford, Tex., where Mr. Bush is on vacation, said that it increasingly seemed that Israel would not be able to achieve a military victory, a realisation that led the Americans to get behind a cease-fire."

The terms of the UN resolution fell short of previous Israel and US demands. A combined force of 15,000 Lebanese army soldiers and 15,000 multinational personnel is to be deployed in southern Lebanon under the banner of UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon). The Olmert government had previously insisted that any multinational force be formed under the auspices of NATO, independently of UNIFIL, which has drawn the ire of successive Israeli governments for failing to suppress Hezbollah.

Moreover, the French-led international forces will not be deployed with authority under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, which would allow the forcible disarmament of Hezbollah and the enforcement of the ceasefire by military means. Instead, the less coercive terms of Chapter 6 have been chosen. In another revision, Israeli troops are to be withdrawn "in parallel" with the introduction of the multinational force. The US and Israel previously insisted that no demand for troop withdrawals be included in the resolution.

However, the ceasefire resolution in no way establishes the basis for any genuine peace. It does not restore Lebanese sovereignty nor does it condemn Israel's war crimes. The IDF will be permitted to maintain its occupation of the south until the multinational force is assembled, a process that may take weeks.

In the most striking demonstration of the UN's contemptible accommodation to Israeli aggression, the resolution demands that Hezbollah cease all attacks, while only calling for an end to Israel's "offensive military operations". This effectively gives the IDF a free hand to continue its operations, which have always been justified in the name of "national defence".

The ceasefire resolution has exacerbated the bitter divisions that exist within the Olmert government and the IDF. There is no confidence within the Israeli ruling elite that a joint Lebanese-UN force will be either willing or able to disarm Hezbollah and prevent its re-emergence in southern Lebanon. Everyone is conscious that an Israeli withdrawal in the present conditions would be understood in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East as a defeat for the Zionist state.

Israel's inability to smash Hezbollah has destroyed the myth of the invincible IDF, which has played a critical role in Israel's history. Its erosion is sending shockwaves through the ruling elite. According to Israeli media reports, there is now a complete breakdown in trust between the government and the senior IDF command.

Tensions erupted following Olmert's removal of Major General Udi Adam as commander in Lebanon. The dismissal came after

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Adam publicly criticised the government for not allowing him to fight the war which had been prepared for years. According to Israeli reports, the IDF had planned an overwhelming attack on Lebanon, beginning with a short aerial bombardment and ending with a land and sea invasion aimed at splitting the country in two and attacking Hezbollah positions south of the Litani River from the north.

The plans had been worked out long before Hezbollah's capture of two Israeli soldiers on July 12, which the Olmert government seized upon as a pretext for the war. In an article posted today on the *New Yorker* web site, veteran journalist Seymour Hersh has revealed the extent of US involvement.

"The Bush Administration was closely involved in the planning of Israel's retaliatory attacks," he writes. "President Bush and Vice-President Dick Cheney were convinced, current and former intelligence and diplomatic officials told me, that a successful Israeli Air Force bombing campaign against Hezbollah's heavily fortified underground-missile and command-and-control complexes in Lebanon could ease Israel's security concerns and also serve as a prelude to a potential American preemptive attack to destroy Iran's nuclear installations, some of which are also buried deep underground."

Recriminations have led to open conflict within Israel's Kadima-Labour coalition government. *Haaretz* described the situation at last Wednesday's cabinet meeting: "Rifts between Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz. Rifts between Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and IDF Chief of Staff Dan Halutz. And those between the head of the Mossad, Meir Dagan and Head of the Intelligence Corps, Amos Yadlin. And between Peretz and his predecessor, Shaul Mofaz and between Mofaz and Avi Dichter. One of those present summed the situation up by saying, 'everyone was involved in at least one quarrel'."

Public support for the war has wavered as the military situation has deteriorated. According to a *Haaretz* opinion survey, Olmert has a satisfaction rating of just 48 percent, down from 75 percent in the initial stages of the war. Even pro-war liberal Zionist groups such as the Meretz Party and Peace Now have come out in favour of a diplomatic solution to the crisis. Likud and the other right-wing parties have declared that their support for the government will now end with the cessation of hostilities. Sections of the Israeli press have speculated that the ruling coalition could soon

collapse.

Meanwhile, the international image of both Israel and the US has suffered massively. Israel is seen more than ever as a lawless and murderous regime, responsible in Lebanon for carrying out repeated war crimes. The US is seen as the criminal regime pulling the strings. Nothing will erase the image of Rice standing in Beirut proclaiming the birth of a "new Middle East" while US-supplied Israeli bombs and missiles were destroying the country.

There are enormous implications of this failed adventure for Israel, the Middle East, the US, and the world. The most profound consequences will not be felt immediately. But they can only deeply destabilise Israeli society, encourage a growth of anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist resistance, fatally weaken US-allied Arab regimes such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, and further discredit the global militarist policies of the Bush administration and the entire US ruling elite.

This does not mean that the danger of new and wider wars has eased. The US, already facing a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and Iraq, is locked into a quest for global hegemony, and it must be anticipated that its basic aim of removing the regime in Syria and preparing for war against Iran will go forward. Israel, for its part, may respond by intensifying its violence, particularly against the Palestinians.

But a certain turning point has been reached, in which the political and moral bankruptcy of both the Zionist state and US imperialism have been exposed before the eyes of the world.

Those who authored this savage war in Lebanon must be held accountable for their crimes. Such an accounting cannot and will not be carried out by any of the major powers, the UN, or any other imperialist-dominated institution. The US, European Union, Arab League, and the UN have all conspired to justify Israel's aggression and hold off a ceasefire to give Israel time to inflict further death and destruction in Lebanon, thus demonstrating in the most naked manner the brutal essence of imperialist domination in the Middle East.

The only force capable of bringing the war criminals in Tel Aviv and Washington to justice is the international working class. And the only basis for a democratic and peaceful resolution to the crisis in the Middle East is the unified struggle of the working masses for the socialist reorganisation of the region in opposition to the forces of imperialism and Zionism.

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