

Top IDF general warns that “nothing is safe”

Israel expands its war of terror into Lebanon

By Eric Ruder

ISRAEL HAS launched a massive military offensive against Lebanon that threatens to plunge the entire region into war.

The first day of relentless bombing runs killed more than 50 Lebanese civilians, including 15 children, and wounded more than 100 more. One family of 10 and another of seven were killed in their homes in southern Lebanon by Israeli air strikes.

Israel is using a strategy similar to the one it has employed in its siege of Gaza, imposing an air, land and sea blockade against Lebanon.

Israeli jets destroyed all three runways at the Beirut International Airport and bombed the main highway linking the Lebanese capital to the rest of the Middle East. Israeli warships blocked Lebanese ports. “People have fewer and fewer options when it comes to leaving,” a *Socialist Worker* reader who is visiting Lebanon wrote in an e-mail message.

Israel also bombed power facilities, densely populated areas in Beirut’s southern suburbs, countless towns and villages throughout the country, and major roads linking the northern and southern regions of the country.

“Nothing is safe,” Dan Halutz, chief of staff of the Israel Defense Force (IDF), warned. “As simple as that.”

There was international condemnation of Israel’s assault, but unsurprisingly, U.S. officials refused to join in, asserting that “Israel has a right to defend herself,” in the words of George W. Bush.

Israel’s “right of self-defense,” according to the U.S. government, flows from a raid mounted by the military wing of the Lebanese Islamist party Hezbollah, which killed seven Israeli soldiers and led to the capture of two others.

Hezbollah took the Israeli soldiers prisoner in the hopes of freeing Hezbollah fighters held in Israeli jails—in a 2004 prisoner swap, Israel released about 400 Palestinians, 23 Lebanese and a dozen others held in its jails in exchange for



Israeli missile strike hits a highway in Lebanon

Hezbollah’s release of an Israeli businessman. Hezbollah also took action to show its support for Palestinians suffering for more than two weeks under Israel’s intense assault on Gaza.

Hezbollah fired dozens of rockets into towns in northern Israel, including a few that reached some 40 miles inside Israel to Haifa, Israel’s third-largest city.

“There were noisy celebrations in some areas after the two Israeli soldiers were captured, and although people have mostly stayed near their homes since then, they remain confident,” said another *SW* reader writing from Lebanon.

“Probably, many feel that since the Lebanese army has not put up much of a fight against the Israelis, the need for an independent resistance organization like Hezbollah has been proven. Certainly, the defeats that the IDF has had at their hands will make them think twice about sending ground troops to Lebanon.”

The backdrop of Gaza

U.S. and Israeli officials and their media mouthpieces insist Israel’s actions are warranted be-

cause Hezbollah struck first, and they blame Syria and Iran for orchestrating the Hezbollah attack.

“This suits Iran’s broader strategy—as it finds itself pressed by the United States and our allies to negotiate over its nuclear program—to create a side issue,” said Martin Indyk, former U.S. ambassador to Israel under Bill Clinton.

But to the rest of the world, it’s obvious that Israel’s rampage in Gaza—which claimed the lives of another 25 Palestinians in the day before the attack on Lebanon, including a pre-dawn air strike that killed an entire family, including seven children between the ages of 4 and 16—is directly connected.

For decades, Israel’s war against the Palestinians has spilled into Lebanon. After the 1948 war to drive Palestinians from their land and found the state of Israel, about 100,000 Palestinians fled to Lebanon, but were denied citizenship and forced into squalid refugee camps.

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon in an attempt to destroy the remnants of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which had been forced out of Jordan in 1970. Israel’s invasion failed to deliver the fatal blow to the PLO, but the assault killed some 20,000 people, mostly civilians.

Israeli forces under the command of then-Defense Minister Ariel Sharon also bear direct responsibility for the cold-blooded massacre of more than 2,000 Palestinian men, women and children in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps—IDF soldiers looked on as far-right Lebanese militias carried out the mass murder.

Continued on the back



Israel expands its war

Continued from the front

Israeli forces were only driven from their last foothold in Lebanon, in the southern part of the country, in 2000 after a years-long guerrilla struggle waged by Hezbollah and other resistance organizations.

Israel says that it must defend itself from Hezbollah, whose attacks are used to justify all violence that Israel deems necessary for its “self-defense.” But like in Israel’s latest assault on Gaza, the question of “who started it” is meant to evade the central issue, wrote Gideon Levy, a columnist for Israel’s *Ha’aretz* newspaper.

“Israel is causing electricity blackouts, laying sieges, bombing and shelling, assassinating and imprisoning, killing and wounding civilians, including children and babies, in horrifying numbers, but ‘they started,’” wrote Levy.

“They are also ‘breaking the rules’ laid down by Israel: We are allowed to bomb anything we want, and they are not allowed to launch [rockets]. When they fire a Qassam at Ashkelon, that’s an ‘escalation of the conflict,’ and when we bomb a university and a school, it’s perfectly alright. Why? Because they started...”

“If the Gazans were sitting quietly, as Israel expects them to do, their case would disappear from the agenda—here and around the world... Nobody would have given any thought to the fate of the people of Gaza if they did not behave violently. That is a very bitter truth, but the first 20 years of the occupation passed quietly, and we did not lift a finger to end it...”

“We started. We started with the occupation, and we are duty-bound to end it, a real and complete ending. We started with the violence.

There is no violence worse than the violence of the occupier, using force on an entire nation, so the question about who fired first is therefore an evasion meant to distort the picture.”

The threat of a wider war?

In a statement to reporters, Bush did say he hoped Israel’s actions wouldn’t “weaken” Lebanon’s fragile “democracy.”

But after the U.S. military intervention in Lebanon throughout the 1980s and U.S. support for Israel’s two-decade occupation before 2000, the idea that the U.S. cares about “democracy” in Lebanon rings hollow.

In truth, the U.S. is concerned about nothing more than protecting the pro-U.S. government of Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.

It doesn’t care about the deaths of civilians, the bombing of the civilian infrastructure or the flexing of Israel’s deadly military might—a fact underlined by the U.S. veto of a United Nations (UN) Security Council resolution charging Israel with “disproportionate use of force” and demanding that it withdraw its troops from Gaza.

In fact, eight of the last nine vetoes of UN resolutions have been cast by the U.S.—and seven of those dealt with Israel’s war on Palestine.

Now, with both Israel and the U.S. pointing the finger at Iran and Syria, the prospects for a wider war in the Middle East are frighteningly real. A week before the invasion of Lebanon had begun, Israeli jets penetrated Syrian airspace and flew over the house of the Syrian president.

CNN’s Wolf Blitzer reported that the U.S. military was preparing contingency plans for evacuating 25,000 U.S. citizens in Lebanon



Lebanese civil defense worker wounded in the wake of the Israeli assault

given the destruction of the Beirut airport. Needless to say, such “evacuations” have often served as the pretext for U.S. military intervention.

This is a critical time to stand up to Israeli and U.S. aggression. Antiwar activists and supporters of Palestinian rights have been organizing emergency protests against the assault on Gaza, and plans are in the works for demonstrations against Israel’s expansion of its war to Lebanon.

These protests are important for exposing the truth about Israel’s murderous assault on Gaza and Lebanon—and demanding that the U.S. end its support for Israel. ■