

US-Israeli war aim is to annihilate Lebanon

The Editorial Board
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The sharp escalation of the attacks against Lebanon Friday have made it abundantly clear that the objective of this US-Israeli war of aggression is to demolish Lebanon as an independent and sovereign country.

The war is aimed at transforming the country into an occupied territory controlled by the US and Israel, perhaps through the medium of a NATO “peacekeeping” force. The destruction of Lebanon is being carried out quite deliberately, and with very definite designs. For Israel, it is yet again a matter of annexation of more territory. And for Washington, it is the preparation of new and even bloodier wars, directed in the first instance against Syria and Iran.

The pretense that this war is being waged to defend Israel from terrorism or even to destroy the Shiite Hezbollah movement is belied by the Israeli bombing campaign that is now striking targets and claiming victims far from the Shiite centers of south Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut.

In one of the worst atrocities since the war began, an Israeli air strike claimed the lives of over 33 farm workers, blown to pieces as they loaded plums and peaches onto trucks at a farm warehouse in the far north of the Bekaa Valley, near the Syrian border. At least another 20 people were wounded in the attack. Most of the victims were Syrian Kurds. They were taken across the border to Syrian hospitals, because previous bombing raids had demolished roads leading to hospitals in Lebanon itself.

This massacre of farm workers followed airstrikes that systematically demolished bridges on the main coastal highway linking Beirut and the Lebanese south to the northern half of the country. Marking the first major attacks on the predominantly Christian North, these attacks served to cut the country in two and to cut off the sole remaining lifeline for relief supplies from abroad. At least five people were killed in these bombings, which were conducted during the morning rush hour, including motorists who were crushed to death as the bridges were bombed from beneath them.

In the south of Lebanon, near the Israeli border, yet another horror was reported Friday, after Israeli airstrikes demolished two homes where civilians were apparently seeking refuge from the military offensive. According to Lebanese officials some 57 people were trapped beneath the rubble of the buildings, and it was unknown how many were dead and if there were survivors.

Meanwhile, Israeli warplanes have resumed their bombings of the urban Shiite neighborhoods of southern Beirut, demolishing apartment buildings, roadways and other structures. Planes have dropped leaflets demanding that all residents of the crowded urban districts flee for their lives.

After nearly four weeks of Israeli attacks, Lebanon’s Prime Minister Fouad Siniora declared in a speech broadcast to an emergency session of the Organization of the Islamic Conference convened in Malaysia, that 900 civilians have been killed in Lebanon, 3,000 wounded, and more than one million, a quarter of the Lebanese population, have been turned into internal refugees. A third of the dead, he said, were children under the age of 12.

The Israeli campaign to cut Lebanon off from the outside world while

severing one part of the country from another is threatening to create a humanitarian catastrophe that could cause even more deaths than the bombs and shells being dropped on the country’s civilian population.

Israel has been enforcing a total air and sea blockade of Lebanon since mid-July. As a result, fuel supplies are running critically low, threatening to plunge the country into darkness. Fuel tankers have been turned away by Israeli warships. The most immediate catastrophic impact is that major hospitals, including ones that remained open during the civil war of the 1970s, are being forced to close because of lack of fuel and medicine, as well as the inability of staff to get to work. Medical personnel have warned that critical patients will likely die as a result of the blockade.

Throughout Beirut and the rest of the country, power outages are becoming commonplace, with some areas getting only two hours of electricity a day. Meanwhile, stores are running out of essential foodstuffs.

Lebanon’s President Emile Lahoud issued a statement accusing Israel of waging a “war of starvation” against the Lebanese people. “It is an aggression that has exceeded Israel’s declared objectives. Israel has now decided to destroy Lebanon,” he said.

The effect of Friday’s bombing of the key bridges linking the north and south of the country is to accelerate this destruction by cutting off the last route for aid entering the country.

The deliberate sabotaging of any attempts at relieving the suffering of the Lebanese people threatens to have catastrophic consequences. The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) warned that the contamination of drinking water due to the destruction of infrastructure and the cutoff of fuel supplies threatened south Lebanon and its displaced population in particular with the outbreak of deadly epidemics.

Lahoud’s statement is not merely an emotional denunciation of the savage Israeli attack on Lebanon, but rather an accurate appraisal of the real objectives of this war.

The Bush administration in Washington and the government of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in Israel, have launched a war whose aim it is to smash Lebanon as a country, using mass terror to expel entire populations and to reduce the nation as a whole to the status of a semi-colonial protectorate, wholly subordinated to the interests of Washington and the Zionist regime.

The war aims are emerging out of the barbaric methods that are being employed against the people of Lebanon. For Israel, it appears increasingly likely that the objective is the annexation of a significant portion of Lebanese territory, after it has been emptied of its civilian population through the means of massacres and terror. Israeli Defense Minister Amir Peretz has ordered the military to prepare to drive all the way to the Litani River, 15 miles north of the border. The control of this river has been a strategic objective of the Zionists since before the founding of the Israeli state.

The experience of the last 40 years have demonstrated that Israel is a state without fixed borders. The momentum of each new war expands its control over new territory to meet its supposed security needs. In Lebanon, the Israeli state is pursuing the equivalent of what was referred to under Hitler’s Third Reich as *lebensraum*—the killing or expulsion of populations viewed as inferior in order to repopulate their land.

For Washington, the Israeli offensive has a far broader significance. The destruction of Lebanon is seen as a stepping stone to the launching of new aggressive wars aimed at achieving “regime change” in Syria and Iran. The unconditional US support for Israel’s criminal war against the Lebanese people is driven most fundamentally by US imperialism’s strategic goal of establishing its undisputed domination of the Middle East and its oil wealth.

This was undoubtedly the same goal that motivated US support for last year’s so-called “Cedar Revolution.” That this event and the elections that followed only served to strengthen Hezbollah’s political influence was seen by Washington as an intolerable impediment to its aims, best remedied through the use of murderous military force.

The naked aims of US imperialism found expression in a column published Friday by Charles Krauthammer of the *Washington Post*, one of the most consistent proponents of the Bush administration’s policy of militarism in the Middle East. “America’s green light for Israel to defend itself is seen as a favor to Israel,” he wrote. “But that is a tendentious, misleadingly partial analysis. The green light—indeed, the encouragement—is also an act of clear self-interest. America wants, America needs, a decisive Hezbollah defeat.”

Krauthammer criticized Israel not for the murderous character of its war against the Lebanese people, but rather for failing to utilize even greater force. Washington, he wrote, had “counted on Israel’s ability to do the job. It has been disappointed. Prime Minister Olmert has provided unsteady and uncertain leadership. Foolishly relying on air power alone, he denied his generals the ground offensive they wanted, only to reverse himself later.”

These are the real sentiments within the Bush administration. It wants Israel to get on with the business of mass killing in Lebanon, bringing the casualties into the tens if not hundreds of thousands to achieve US objectives.

That the brutality of this strategy is provoking massive upheavals throughout the Middle East is beyond dispute. Much of it is directed against the abject hypocrisy and criminality of the American role in planning and supporting this bloody enterprise. It should be recalled that not too many years ago official Washington and the American mass media was waging a massive campaign invoking “ethnic cleansing” in Kosovo as a pretext for war in the Balkans. Now it is rushing bombs and missiles to Israel in order to facilitate the rapid cleansing of south Lebanon of its entire Shiite population through the indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas.

Over 100,000 marched in the predominantly Shiite neighborhood of Sadr City in Baghdad on Friday denouncing Israel and the US for the war in Lebanon and vowing to fight the US occupation. Right-wing Arab regimes such as in Jordan and Egypt have been forced to distance themselves from Washington.

And the Beirut newspaper *Daily Star* warned in an editorial on Friday that the war is exacerbating “the conspicuous disenchantment of large segments—perhaps majorities—of Arab public opinion with their own government policies.” It added, “The consequences are ominous in a region with so much of the world’s energy reserves, and so many governments and ordinary citizens willing to use the most awful kind of violence to achieve their goals. The signs of radicalization that continue to manifest themselves in various Arab countries, as a consequence of the war between Lebanon and Israel, must not be ignored.”

The Bush administration seems oblivious to this apparently sound advice. Having led the country into the disastrous quagmire of Iraq, it is welcoming the possibility of new wars and new terrorist attacks as a means of reinvigorating its flagging “global war on terrorism.”

The growth of mass opposition to the policies of Israel and Washington will be attributed to “terrorism,” and the pretexts will be found for new and even more terrible wars.

The ostensible opposition party in Washington, meanwhile, is vying with the administration over which of them is the most enthusiastic supporter of the Israeli war on Lebanon.

Representative of this party is Hillary Clinton, the Democratic senator from New York and leading candidate for the party’s presidential nomination in 2008.

Speaking in Buffalo, New York on Tuesday, just days after scores of people, the majority of them children, were massacred in the village of Qana, Clinton reiterated her unconditional backing for the Israeli state. The US, she said, “needs to take the lead in protecting Israel. It has to guarantee Israel’s security...whether that means putting troops in or not, I don’t know.”

Not a word of sympathy or concern for the bleeding Lebanese population passed Clinton’s lips. This attitude is not the exception, but the rule, for the entire American political establishment as well as the mass media. Atrocities that recall nothing so much as the crimes of German and Italian fascism in the 1930s—Ethiopia, Guernica, the Blitzkrieg against Poland—are treated as perfectly acceptable and understandable acts of Israeli “self-defense.”

Underlying this utter lack of morality lie the class interests of America’s ruling oligarchy, which has determined that its global interests can best be furthered through the utilization of unrestrained militarism.

In the end, American working people will be forced to pay the price for this seemingly insane policy. The costs of US militarism will be increasingly felt in the destruction of living standards and what little remains of social services for working people at home.

Moreover, the ever-widening war in the Middle East cannot be sustained much longer without the imposition of the military draft. It is highly probable that once the 2006 midterm elections are over, a bipartisan effort will be mounted—no doubt spearheaded by the Democrats—to resurrect the dragooning of American youth into the expeditionary forces that are being prepared to wage the so-called “long war” for US imperialist hegemony.

The struggle against war can be advanced only through the independent political mobilization of working people based upon a socialist program that seeks the international unification of workers in every country in a common struggle against the global financial and corporate interests that dominate the planet. The Socialist Equality Party is intervening in the 2006 elections in order to advance such an alternative.



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