

Another bloodbath in Lebanon?

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"The Lebanese government has nearly doubled the size of its security forces in recent months by adding about 11,000 mostly Sunnis and Christian troops, and has armed them with weapons and vehicles donated by the UAE, a Sunni state." -Lebanon Builds Up Security Forces, Megan Stack, LA Times

"The army's conclusion is that a war in the near future is a reasonable possibility . . . the IDF's operative assumption is that during the coming summer months, a war will break out against Hezbollah and perhaps against Syria as well." -Ha'aretz editorial

When Hezbollah puts a million people on the streets of Beirut, it doesn't appear on the front page of The New York Times. That spot is reserved for Bush's "made-in-Washington" extravaganzas like the Cedar, Orange or Rose revolutions. Those bogus revolutions were cooked up in American think tanks and engineered by US non-governmental organizations (NGOs); that's why they got headline coverage in the Times. The Beirut demonstrations don't promote the political agenda of the America's ruling elite, so they're stuck on page 8 where they'll be ignored.

Some things never change.

But the demonstrations are an important part of the drama which is currently unfolding in the region. They signal the shifting of power away from Washington and Tel Aviv to a new Shiite-dominated Middle East. The American-backed government of Fouad Siniora is the next domino on the list which could fall in a matter of weeks. Time appears to be running out for Siniora and there's nothing Bush or Olmert can do about it.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah is moving Lebanon towards "democratization" by demanding greater representation for the country's majority, the Shiites. So far, he's decided to take the peaceful route, but the massive protests are an impressive "show of force" that could be a sign of things to come. If the situation deteriorates, Hezbollah will do what is necessary to defend its people and its interests. Siniora knows that Nasrallah has the power to bring down the government or to plunge the country into civil war. So, it's all a matter of who blinks first.

Ironically, Nasrallah's tactics mirror those that were used during the so-called Cedar Revolution which put Siniora in office and forced the Syrian troops out of Lebanon. Now, the situation has reversed itself and tens of thousands of mostly poor Shi'ites have set up camp in Beirut's main square, the Riad el Soloh, and are hunkering-down for the long haul. There defiance is as much an indication of class struggle as it is a rejection of the Siniora

government.

Megan Stack of the LA Times clarifies this point: "Some of the poorest and most marginalized people in the country, Shiite Muslims, have abandoned their homes in suburban slums to camp out on the nation's priciest bit of real estate. Though they often have trudged through Lebanese history as war refugees, now they have managed to displace Lebanon's wealthiest shop owners. They also have surrounded Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, barricaded in his office."

"Class struggle" is a big part of the present confrontation. The media has tried to emphasize the religious differences to promote their theory of a "clash of civilizations"; the ongoing struggle between modernity and Arab reactionaries. It's all the same gibberish Americans read every day in op-ed columns by Tom Friedman, David Brooks or the other neocon scribes.

The "clash of civilizations" theory is a great boon to those who would like see war in the Middle East continue into perpetuity or at least until every Arab country is broken up into little defenseless statelets.

But the truth is that the Shiites are mostly poor and underrepresented and are entitled to a bigger place at the political table. Does that mean they would have the right to "veto" legislation? (which seems to be the main bone of contention)

Yes, of course, if they are in the majority, but that doesn't imply that Lebanon is destined to become an Islamic theocracy. Nasrallah has already dismissed the idea of an Iranian-type "Mullahocracy," run by ayatollahs who strictly apply Sharia law. Nasrallah is fiercely nationalistic despite his clerical robes. His main objective is to remove the US-Israeli agents, like Siniora, from the government and reestablish Lebanese sovereignty. Remember, Siniora refused to even deploy the Lebanese army to fight the Israelis when they invaded his country and killed 1,300 Lebanese nationals. For the hundreds of thousands of victims in the south, there's no doubt as to where Siniora's true loyalties lie.

Siniora is Washington's man. In fact, he even kept the lines of communication open with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice while his country was being bombed with American ordinance dropped from Israeli planes. After the war he quickly reopened the US embassy even though his country's infrastructure was still in ruins from Israel's 34-day rampage. He has been a great asset to US-Israeli plans to create a "New Middle East," but utterly useless for the great body of poverty-stricken and homeless Lebanese civilians.

Michel Chossudovsky summarized the administration's goals in Lebanon this way: "Washington's objective is to transform Lebanon into a US protectorate. The Lebanese people are demanding the resignation of a government which is acting on behalf of the US and Israeli invaders of their country. They are demanding the formation of a national unity government which will defend the Lebanese homeland against US-Israeli aggression."

Chossudovsky adds: "The Beirut government is taking orders directly from the US embassy. The Siniora government has allowed the deployment of NATO forces on Lebanese territory under the pretext of a UN-sponsored peace-keeping operation. NATO warships under German command are stationed off the country's eastern Mediterranean coastline. NATO has a military cooperation agreement with Israel." ("[Mass Demonstrations against the US-backed Lebanese Government](#)," Michel Chossudovsky; Global Research)

The US and Israel are working feverishly behind the scenes to destabilize Lebanon as part of their broader plans for the entire region. The assassination of Lebanese Industry Minister Pierre Gemayel can only be understood in this larger context. The assassination strengthened the US-Israel position vis-a-vis Syria and increased the likelihood of a confrontation between Hezbollah and government forces. This is precisely what Israel wants. It allows Tel Aviv to stay uninvolved while their 34-Day War resumes via their Lebanese proxies.

Megan Stack of the LA Times reports, "The Lebanese government has nearly DOUBLED the size of its security forces in recent months by adding about 11,000 mostly Sunnis and Christian troops, and has armed them with weapons and vehicles donated by the UAE, a Sunni state." ("Lebanon Builds Up Security Forces, LA Times)

The dramatic increase in the Interior Ministry troops, including the creation of a controversial intelligence unit and the expansion of a commando force, is meant to counter the growing influence of Iran and Hezbollah, its Shiite ally in Lebanon. . . . The quiet, speedy buildup indicates that Lebanon's anti-Syria ruling majority has been bracing for armed sectarian conflict since the withdrawal of Syrian forces in the spring of 2005. It also reflects growing tensions across the region between US-allied Sunnis Muslims who hold power in most Arab nations and the increasingly Shiite-ruled Iran and Hezbollah." (LA Times)

The Siniora government has actually moved troops out of the army into the Internal Security Forces (ISF). The implication is clear. Siniora has no interest in defending his country from foreign (Israeli) invasion; he's simply getting ready to fight his own people. Clearly, the weapons from the United Arab Emirates are being provided under Bush's authority to help Siniora in a future confrontation with Hezbollah.

Mark Mackinnon of the Globe and Mail confirms much of what appeared in the LA Times. Mackinnon says, "Since the Syrian army's departure from Lebanon in early 2005, the US and France have been providing money and training to the Internal Security Forces (ISF). With the political situation souring further in recent weeks, the UAE stepped in to provide the unit with an emergency 'gift' of thousands of rifles and dozens of police vehicles." ("West helps Lebanon build Militia to fight Hezbollah"; Globe and Mail)

Even though Siniora's troops have been armed and trained by Western powers, Israel is still not confident that they can prevail. In fact, Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz reported, "The mounting crisis threatening the Siniora government in Lebanon, and the specter of a Hezbollah takeover, have spurred senior Israeli government officials in Jerusalem to raise several proposals in recent days aimed at strengthening Siniora. . . . (They are) increasingly concerned that Siniora's government will fall, resulting in a Hezbollah takeover that would turn the country into what an Israeli government official source termed 'the first Arab state to become an Iranian protectorate.'"

But Israeli fears may be unwarranted. While Hezbollah receives military assistance from Iran, it certainly does not compare to the high-tech weaponry and foreign aid that Israel gets from the US. Nor is there any indication that Hezbollah is merely a puppet of the Iranian Mullahs. This is just more baseless scare-mongering. In fact, a strong nationalist government in Beirut could serve to stabilize the region by developing a more credible deterrent to Israeli aggression. (Israel has invaded Lebanon four times in 25 years) That might undermine Israel's regional ambitions but, it would be infinitely better for the Israeli citizens who simply want peace and security.

Nevertheless, Israel is preparing for any eventuality; especially since it is unlikely that Bush will be able to commit any American troops if war breaks out. Ha'aretz summarized the somber mood of the Israeli high-command in an editorial earlier in the week: "The army's conclusion is that a war in the near future is a reasonable possibility. As Amir Oren reported several weeks ago, the IDF's operative assumption is that during the coming summer months, a war will break out against Hezbollah and perhaps against Syria as well."

But there is room for optimism. By summer, the Bush administration should be winding down in Iraq. This is bound to have a profound effect on the entire region. Israel will be less likely to restart its war with Lebanon if the administration is engaged in fragile negotiations with the neighboring states. And, who knows, a phased withdrawal of troops in Iraq might force a compromise in the Israel-Palestine standoff. (Olmert has already begun talking to Saudi Arabia about a comprehensive peace plan modeled on the Road Map)

So far, only one thing seems certain: that US-Israeli influence will steadily decline just as Shiite power continues to rise. Another bloodbath in Lebanon won't change that reality.

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