

Assassinating the Peacekeepers

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"People do not forget. They do not forget the death of their fellows, they do not forget torture and mutilation, they do not forget injustice, they do not forget oppression, they do not forget the terrorism of mighty powers. They not only don't forget; they also strike back."
— Harold Pinter, Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech 2005.

On the 17th day of Israel's military offensive, Prime Minister Olmert is no closer to achieving any of his objectives than he was on Day 1. Olmert originally promised that he would "disarm Hezbollah" and create a buffer-zone from Israel's northern border to the Litani River. He has accomplished neither. His violent reaction to the capturing of 2 Israeli soldiers was applauded by the Bush administration, Israeli public, and the America media. At the time, we questioned Olmert's ability to "disarm" Hezbollah ("Its Put up or Shut Time in Lebanon") or his foolish belief that the invasion would be a "cakewalk". Now Israeli forces are bogged down in southern Lebanon fighting a tough-minded, well-disciplined guerilla organization with no end in sight. This has forced the panicky Olmert to call up 3 more divisions and appeal to Bush for more "precision-guided missiles".

Additionally, Olmert has begun to back-away from his promise to "disarm" Hezbollah and now only talks only about "weakening" them. The Israeli PM has decided to step down from his earlier rhetoric and "move the goalposts" to suit the realities on the ground. Olmert will not disarm Hezbollah and he knows it.

Israeli intelligence seriously misjudged Hezbollah's military capabilities and the dedication of its fighters to execute complex and daring operations. Yesterday's attack on an Israeli patrol killed 9 IDF soldiers spreading a palpable sense of unease among the Israeli public. They remember the Vietnam-like quagmire which Sharon drew them into which lasted 18 years, ending only 6 years ago in 2000. The deaths of the soldiers have triggered a fierce debate among politicians, pundits and retired officers about the questionable objectives of the operation and the competence of the leadership. Olmert has shown himself to be a vain and stupid man whose ignorance of military matters has clouded his sense of judgment. He is surrounded by the "untested" Defense Minister Amir Peretz, who excels at killing unarmed women and children in the occupied territories, but cannot seem to adjust to the exigencies of real combat. The final member of the "trinity of bunglers", is Chief of Staff, Dan Halutz, an incompetent braggart whose penchant for destruction has flattened the better part of Lebanon's critical infrastructure, but hasn't produced any tangible rewards. For the most part, Olmert's War has been little more than a massive display of gratuitous violence which has failed to achieve any recognizable strategic goal. (BBC has provided a fairly comprehensive account of Israel's calculated destruction of Lebanese infrastructure. It

includes 3 major airports, 3 major ports, 5,000 civilian homes, 62 bridges, 22 fuel stations, 72 overpasses, 3 Dams, 4 TV and communication facilities, 3 main power-stations, 150 private businesses including a tissue paper factory and a bottle factory)

Israel is now planning to step up its bombing campaign in the vain hope that it will root-out and destroy the resistance. This explains why the United Nations outpost was “deliberately” leveled by an Israeli missile yesterday. Clearly, Israel wants to conceal its orgy of carnage from the watchful eyes of international community. We should expect that more banned weaponry; cluster-bombs, napalm, lasers, bunker busters and chemical weapons will be used in the next major assault on Hezbollah strongholds. Like all desperate men, Olmert believes that he can extract himself from his present dilemma by increasing the level of violence. The upcoming week or two should be extremely perilous for Hezbollah.

The Bush administration has blindly supported Olmert without assessing whether his military objectives are attainable and without considering the damage that the conflict is doing to America’s long-term interests. There’s no chance that the United States will ever be seen as an “honest broker” in the region again. Bush has cast his lot with Israel and is betting that the neoconservative strategy to reconfigure the Middle East will move ahead according to plan. From the very onset, Washington has enthusiastically embraced the war by giving Olmert the “go-ahead” to destroy Lebanon’s infrastructure and by providing Israel with additional ordinance to prosecute the air-war.

The Bush team has repeatedly headed-off efforts at the United Nations for a “cease-fire” and created the sense that Israel’s rampage bears the stamp of international legitimacy. The US State Dept no longer functions as diplomatic agency working out details for political solutions, but as a franchise of the Defense Dept.; skillfully blocking negotiations, subverting treaties, and obstructing any dialogue which may lead to peace. Condoleezza Rice’s performance in Rome only underscores this point.

Neither public opinion, nor the United Nations, nor the Arab League, nor Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, nor even Hezbollah can stop the ongoing conflict if Bush and Olmert want a war; and they clearly want a war. Secretary of State Rice summarized their views when she said to the world press on Wednesday:

“Its time for a ‘New Middle East’. Its time to say to those who do not want a different kind of Middle East that we will prevail. They will not.”

Perhaps; but the growing resistance in Iraq and Lebanon may have a thing-or-two to say about Ms. Rice’s plan.

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