

Did Hezbollah Thwart a Bush/Olmert Attack on Beirut?

A Sudden Case of Cold Feet

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Global Research, May 16, 2008

www.counterpunch.com 16 May 2008

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This week Israel's Military Intelligence Chief, Major General Amos Yadlin complained to the Israeli daily Haaretz that 'Hezbollah proved that it was the strongest power in Lebanon... stronger than the Lebanese and it had wanted to take the government it could have done it,' He said Hezbollah, continued to pose a 'significant' threat to Israel as its rockets could reach a large part of Israeli territory.'

Yadlin was putting it mildly.

But what Intelligence Chief Yadlin did not reveal to the Israeli public was just how 'significant' but also 'immediate' the Hezbollah threat was on May 11. Nor was he willing to divulge the fact that he received information via US and French channels that if the planned attack on Lebanon's capitol went forward that Tel Aviv was subject, in the view of the US intelligence community to 'approximately 600 Hezbollah rockets in the first 24 hours in retaliation and at least that number on the following day'.

The Israeli Intel Chief also declined to reveal that despite Israel's recent psyche-war camping about various claimed missile shields 'the State of Israel is perfecting', that this claim is being ridiculed at the Pentagon. 'Israel will not achieve an effective shield against the current generation of rockets, even assuming no technological improvements in the current rockets aimed at it, for another 20 years. And that assumes the US will continue to fund their research and development for the hoped for shields' according to Pentagon, US Senate Intelligence Committee, and very well informed Lebanese sources.

The planned attack on Beirut

According to US Senate Intelligence Committee sources, the Bush administration initially green lighted the intended May 11 Israel 'demonstration of solidarity with the pro-Bush administration militias, some with which Israel has maintained ties since the days of Bashir Gemayal and Ariel Sharon.

In the end, 'the Bush administration got cold feet', a Congressional source revealed. So did Israel.

Israel was not willing to proceed with the original Bush Administration idea which was to have Bush attend the May 15 Israel anniversary celebrations following the Israeli attack meant to hit Hezbollah hard, and give Bush the credit for coming to the dangerous region. The message was to be that Bush comes to the rescue 'on horseback and leads the US Calvary charge straight out of a B western movie where the bugle would sound and flag

would be unfurled and the white hat good guys would show their stuff before riding into the sunset and back to Texas, leaving the results to the likely Obama administration to sort out.

The plan involved Israeli air strikes on South and West Beirut in support of forces it was assured would be able to surprise and resist Hezbollah and sustain a powerful offensive for 48 hours.

Also presumably disturbing to Israel was the report it received that Hezbollah 'had once again in all probability hacked its 'secure' military intelligence communications and the fear that the information would be shared with others.

The Hezbollah rout of the militias in West Beirut plus the fear of retaliation on Tel Aviv, ruining 60th anniversary celebrations, forced cancellation of the supportive attack.

Israel limited its actions to sending two F-15's and two F-16's into as far North as Tyre, one more of literally hundreds of violations of Lebanese airspace, sovereignty and SCR 1701.

Clearly frustrated, Cabinet Minister Meir Sheetrit said Israel should not yet take any action now, but warned 'those things could change if Hezbollah takes over Lebanon.' a few minutes earlier he had declared that Hezbollah had done just that and had treated the Lebanese army as a doormat.

Later in the Sunday cabinet meeting, Minister Ami Ayalon called for an emergency meeting of the political-security cabinet to discuss 'the ongoing crisis in Lebanon and why Israel was not assisting friendly forces.'

Minister Yitzhak Cohen (Shas) said that 'Israel must immediately ask the [United Nations] Security Council to hold renewed discussions over resolution 1701.' The minister was referring to the resolution that stopped the Israeli actions against Lebanon during the 34-day between in 2006, maintaining a fragile cease-fire.

Finally Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert informed Israeli supporters in Lebanon, through the media, and presumably other means that 'Israel was following the violence in Lebanon closely, but would refrain from intervening. Deputy Defense Minister Matan Vilnai told Army Radio Sunday that Israel was prepared for the possibility that the situation in Lebanon will deteriorate into another civil war (meaning future opportunities for Israeli influence and intervention in Lebanon) and that the current fighting could end with a Hezbollah takeover of the government. 'We need to keep our eyes peeled and be especially sensitive regarding all that is happening there,' Vilnai told Army Radio.

The Bush administration, also disappointed, switched tactics and is opting for domination of the narrative of the fairly complicated events of the past week and using their media and confessional allies to launch a media blitz (minus Future TV for a few days} to flood the airways with:

- Hezbollah staged a coup d'état. Even Israel, if not the Bush administration, concedes Hezbollah has no interest in taking over the Government. (One observer, paraphrasing Winston Churchill's comment, deadpanned, 'Some Hezbollah Coup! Some Hezbollah Etat!')
- Hezbollah brought its forces from the South and occupied West Beirut: Hezbollah not only did not bring their forces from the South to Beirut (rather

they remained on alert for an Israel attack down South)

- Hezbollah broke its pledge not to use Resistance arms against Lebanese militias and shot up West Beirut.

The facts are very different when viewed close up on the streets here.

When the Lebanese Resistance took the decision during the early hours of Friday morning to engage in civil disobedience, it delayed its actions so as not to preempt the Labor movement strike for higher wages which it supported. When the marching Strikers were prevented from moving into West Beirut the Opposition extended its civil disobedience manifestation.

Various militias, including the smartly outfitted Hariri 'Secure Plus' with its distinctive maroon tee-shirts and beige trousers, (now known locally by some as 'Secure Minus') a hoped for future Blackwater operation in Lebanon disintegrated surprisingly quickly because many of its green recruits brought down from Tripoli felt misled and betrayed regarding their job description as they were handed weapons and instructed to fight Hezbollah. Snipers from anti-Opposition factions killed civilians from rooftops in Beirut trying to ignite a civil war.

Hezbollah, acting in self defense, according to various officials, quickly clamped down on the trouble makers, took control of the streets, within hours handed them over to the army, and virtually evacuated West Beirut, retaining one position near Bay Rocks manned by unarmed representatives.

Meanwhile the Hariri influence has been greatly weakened in Akkar near the Palestinian Refugee camp of Nahr al Bared and in the Tripoli area. According to some political analysts, including, Fida'a Ittani, a regular columnist for the independent pro-opposition newspaper Al-Akhbar, wrote on May 14, the Future Movement, defeated in Beirut, no longer has any serious influence in the north.

Several Salafi al Qaeda admiring movements are present in Lebanon and like Fatah Islam's declaration this week that they will fight for the Sunnis, they vary in their attitudes from silent opposition to Future leader Saad Al-Hariri to fully supporting him as the leader of the Sunnis. These groups are valued by certain 'leaders' in Lebanon because they are the only ones with coherent structures at the ideological, political, technical, and field levels.

Judging from Saad Hariri's confused statements at his subsequent news conference and statements by other parties, the bitterness of promised but unforthcoming assistance was evident.

For two days following the debacle of his forces imploding the head of the Future Movement said nothing. Finally on the 14th he broke his silence. The Halba massacre, committed by Hariri's Mustakbal militiamen which brutally and barbarically murdered 11 people from the opposition did not seem worthy of discussion as he spoke. In a press conference on Tuesday, Hariri simply ignored what all the Lebanese had seen on TV from weapons, ammunition and alcohol found in Future movement offices, and instead listed a series of delusions. 'We awaited an open war on Israel, and yet here is an open war on Beirut and its people' he stated. Some interpreted this rather odd statement either as a subconscious slip of the tongue on Hariri's part expressing his frustration that the Israelis help did not arrive or that his reported earlier incoherent state persisted.

Hariri's original speech was so confused that the Saudi channel al-Arabiyya stopped broadcasting it and only read excerpts from what he said, without showing his recorded speech.

When American criticism resumed, and Hezbollah fighters withdrew from the alleys surrounding his house, Hariri was urged to stand up and speak again, this time with a stronger tone, saying 'This has been decided by the Iranian and Syrian regimes that wanted to play a political game in Lebanon's streets. For us nothing has changed. We will not negotiate with someone having a pistol pointed to our heads.'

Anger at the Bush administration and Israel by certain warlords in Lebanon must feel much like the frustration of Secure Minus personal who rushed from Tripoli and felt misled, abandoned and cheated.

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