

The Crime of Lebanon and Palestine - Are Iran and Syria Next?

Israel's Plan Is to Wage a Scorched-Earth Reign of Terror

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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By any interpretation of international law, Israel today is committing massive and egregious war crimes and crimes against humanity against the defenseless people of Palestine and Lebanon. It's doing it with the full support and encouragement of the US and willful compliance of the West, most of the Arab world, the UN and the dominant corporate media worldwide acting as cheerleaders for the mass killing, crippling destruction, and immiseration of innocent civilians in Lebanon and the Palestinian Occupied Territories. Israel falsely claims its dual assaults are in response to Hamas' capture of an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldier near Kerem Shalom crossing, southeast of Rafah, on June 25 and Hezbollah's cross-border incursion on July 12, killing eight IDF soldiers in the exchange that followed and taking two others prisoner.

The three soldiers were captured, not "kidnapped" as falsely reported. But nearly 10,000 Palestinian and Lebanese civilians were forcibly abducted, are now held in indefinite detention in Israeli prisons, many administratively without charge, and are grievously abused or tortured according to Amnesty International and B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights monitoring group. Amnesty, in fact, reported in 1998: "By Israel's own admission, Lebanese detainees are being held as 'bargaining chips;' they are not detained for their own actions but in exchange for Israeli soldiers missing in action or killed in Lebanon (during the Israeli occupation there). Most have now spent 10 years in secret and isolated detention (and many are still there or have been replaced by other abductees)." The "civilized world" rails about the three IDF prisoners of war, yet is unconcerned about 10,000 Arab victims because they're Muslims, not white enough, and no criticism of Israel is allowed or tolerated publicly for whatever it does. Still, no nation claimed it had a right to declare war on Israel to free its prisoners unjustifiably held nor would the world community tolerate it if one did.

But that's just what Israel did and is getting away with it with the full support of the US and world community. Clearly the events of June 25 and July 12 in no way justify Israel's right to wage all out retaliatory war, and in doing it Israel is grievously violating international laws and norms. Nonetheless, it's known Israel planned to wage them long before it got the pretexts to do it. Both "wars" were planned well in advance, Israel intended to wage them all along and only needed an excuse to do it in each case. Had not Hamas and Hezbollah obliged (insignificant as their provocations were), Israel would have "manufactured" pretexts as it's done in the past to execute the plans it had in mind. The result since has been the mass suffering and death of innocent men, women and children (in numbers far greater than reported as they always are) who always pay the greatest price when conflicts begin.

But that's part of Israel's plan as their strategy is always to deliberately inflict great pain on the civilian population of its targets hoping the people affected will blame their ruling authorities for it and turn against them. In Palestine and Lebanon that means Hamas and Hezbollah that Israel intends making every effort to destroy. The strategy never worked before, and it won't now as evidenced by how events are now unfolding. Instead of turning the people in the Occupied Territories and South Lebanon against Hamas and Hezbollah, both these authorities are gaining support in response to Israel's extreme and unjustifiable reign of terror that eventually will come back to haunt it and its US ally as it always does.

Israel's Plan Is to Wage a Scorched-Earth Reign of Terror Similar to What the US Is Doing in Iraq

Israel responded quickly and overwhelmingly to the Hamas and Hezbollah provocations. It initiated "Operation Summer Rain" against Hamas and the Palestinians and "Operation Change of Direction" against Hezbollah and the people of Lebanon. Both IDF assaults continue unabated so far through intensive attacks from the air and on the ground.

It's not the purpose of this article to document the carnage inflicted thus far in each conflict area. It's been brutal, unrelenting and excessive involving suspected use of illegal weapons including chemical agents, depleted uranium (DU) munitions that will leave deadly irremediable toxic radiation forever over the areas struck and beyond, and white phosphorous bombs and shells, known as Willy Pete, that burn flesh to the bone and can't be extinguished by water that only makes it worse when used. The IDF is also reportedly testing in real time some new terror weapons, possibly for the first time. One of them is a thermobaric bomb reported being used freely across Lebanon. This bomb contains polymer-bonded or solid fuel-air explosives in its payload. It also has a fuse munition unit (FMU) used on the nose of Israeli artillery shells able to penetrate buildings, underground shelters and tunnels creating such a blast pressure that all the oxygen is sucked out from the spaces and the lungs of anyone in the vicinity. The Lebanese, and likely the Palestinians as well, are their lab rats with consequences to them too horrible to imagine.

Much of this is being well covered daily with graphic pictures of destroyed bodies (including of young children) in the alternative media online, in print, on Aljazeera and in other independent media sources uncorrupted by their governments or corporate affiliations. Sadly, as usual, it's impossible to have any understanding of what's going on or why through the US corporate media, so-called US National Public Radio and TV that have sunk as low as Fox News in their corrupted one-sidedness, and the "vaunted" and "venerable" BBC that's about as bad. As it always is, especially in time of war, the first casualty is truth that's being suppressed in the mainstream and replaced with Israel and US-friendly propaganda.

Nonetheless, those seeking alternative sources of news and information to learn and understand the truth know that Israel's response to two minor incursions against it has been disproportionate in the extreme. But it's part of Israel's long-standing strategy to provoke conflict deliberately, to get the PLO in the past and Hamas and Hezbollah today to respond, falsely label them "terrorists" for doing it, and then claim a justifiable right to strike back with brute force in "self-defense" that's, in fact, an act of aggression. It's always done to avoid a political solution with them which Israel has no intention of accommodating ever. In executing its current plan, the IDF has now maliciously and willfully attacked innocent civilians in Palestine and Lebanon and created a humanitarian disaster in both countries. The world response to these atrocities has been tepid, shameless and disgraceful, and hundreds of thousands of defenseless people are paying a dreadful price as a consequence.

Israel is being allowed and even encouraged to get away with murder and mass destruction, and most world governments through their acquiescence are, de facto, willing co-conspirators. As a result, nothing is being done to help the innocent victims whose suffering continues daily with no letup.

Israel's assaults on the Occupied Territories and Lebanon were planned well in advance with the full knowledge and approval of the US. It was reported earlier this year in Israel's Maariv daily that the events now underway in Gaza and the West Bank were in the works for months. It was explained in an interview the paper did with IDF Southern Command General Yoav Galant, responsible for Gaza, who said that "we (Israel) have a plan to (re) occupy the Strip" (and) "We are in advanced states of preparing forces for readiness" to do it in response to "increased (Palestinian) attacks." Another IDF official confirmed what the general said and added that the IDF completed its training to reenter Gaza and informed its soldiers to prepare and be ready for orders to move in. Neither the general or other IDF official explained, however, that the Palestinian "attacks" were with crude weapons and only in response to Israel's daily assaults against them with the most sophisticated weapons the IDF has other than its nuclear ones.

The story in Lebanon is very similar and the predictable outcome from Hezbollah's justifiable responses to Israeli instigated intermittent conflict, cross-border incursions, freewheeling abductions, and repeated violations of the country's airspace. It's brought us to where we are now and Israel's plan and intent to destroy Hezbollah as a political entity as well as the military strength it's built up since the IDF withdrew from South Lebanon six years ago.

Hezbollah publicly admitted receiving military aid from Iran and Syria in the Arab press, and the Syrian defense minister confirmed his country helped supply some of it. This was just reported on July 21 by Matthew Kallman of the San Francisco Chronicle Foreign Service - a most unexpected venue. Kallman quotes Israeli professor Gerald Steinberg of Bar-Ilan University who said: "In a sense, the preparation (for the Lebanon assault) began in May, 2000, immediately after the Israeli withdrawal, when it became clear the international community was not going to prevent Hezbollah from stockpiling missiles and attacking Israel. By 2004, the military campaign scheduled to last about three weeks that we're seeing now had already been blocked out and, in the last year or two, it's been simulated and rehearsed across the board." The professor forgot to mention that Hezbollah attacks were justifiable and in response to frequent Israeli cross-border ones against them, the Lebanese people and the Palestinians, as explained above. It's called self-defense, but not by the Western media or this Israeli professor.

Kallman reported further that over a year ago a senior Israeli IDF officer (unidentified) began giving "PowerPoint presentations" off the record to US and other officials and unnamed journalists and think tanks explaining the plan now underway "in revealing detail." The officer described a three week campaign to destroy Hezbollah's "long-range missiles," rocket launchers and weapons stores, its command and control centers, and disrupt transportation and communication in the country. He said IDF ground forces in large numbers would then invade Southern Lebanon in the third week of the campaign to destroy targets identified through reconnaissance but not to remain on a long-term basis. It turned out the IDF did it after 10 days and are now in the south of the country.

Kallman also quoted Eran Lerman, a former colonel in IDF intelligence who said the Israeli military debated how to accomplish what it's now undertaken. There were two sides. "One is

the air power school of thought, the other is the land-borne option.....the air force concept is very methodical....and slower to get results. A ground invasion that sweeps Hezbollah in front of you is quicker, but at a much higher cost in human life and requiring the creation of a presence on the ground.” Moshe Marzuk, former head of the Lebanon desk for Israeli Military Intelligence, added “Israel has learned from past conflicts in Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza.....that a traditional military campaign (on the ground) would be counter-effective. A big invasion is not suitable here. We are not fighting an army, but guerrillas.....If we are to be on the ground at all, we need to use commandos and special forces.” So far, the script outlined above is playing out about as planned. But Kallman was also told what any military observer knows well. The best of plans don’t always work out as intended which the daily Haaretz military analyst, Daniel Ben-Simon, indicated when he said: “I have no idea how this movie is going to end.”

No one does, but it’s the purpose of this article to address why these operations were undertaken, what Israel and its US ally hope to achieve by them, and what may follow next, hard as that may be to know. Still, it’s important to try as the danger of an expanded conflict is possible with untold consequences should it happen.

Israel’s Intent and Goals and Those of Its US Ally

The US is always fully aware well in advance of any significant operation Israel intends to undertake. As that small but powerful nation’s paymaster and benefactor, Israel wouldn’t dare under most circumstances not keep its most valued ally fully in the loop and most concerned about having its full compliance. That’s rarely ever a problem though as both nations share a common interest in the Middle East. For Israel it’s primarily security against potentially hostile neighbors, its intent to assure pro-Israeli regimes in the region, and its ability to expand its undeclared borders beyond where they now are to wherever it’s able to do it and get away with it. Israel already controls the choicest parts of the West Bank, the Syrian Golan Heights it captured in the 1967 war and never returned, and the 25 square kilometer Shebaa Farms area of South Lebanon it never relinquished after seizing it as well in the 1967 war. It’s maintained its occupation of both areas after the end of hostilities with Syria nearly 40 years ago and its withdrawal from Lebanon in May, 2000, 22 years after it first invaded this defenseless country.

Like Israel, the US also has a clear interest in the Middle East that’s elementary to a grade schooler with any intelligence. The region has about half the world’s acknowledged oil reserves and for over half a century has been viewed by US officials as a treasure of almost unimaginable strategic and economic value. That view has prevailed at least since the historic meeting on the USS Quincy in early 1945 near the end of WW II between Franklin Roosevelt and Saudi King ibn Saud to begin a relationship that would later assure US access to Saudi oil and the beginning of its dominance in the region in return for this country’s agreeing to provide security for the monarchy.

Ever since, the US has pursued a policy to establish and support client states in the region and to conduct hostile covert actions or wage war to install them in nations important enough like Iraq where they didn’t exist. Despite our rhetoric concerning the Middle East or anywhere else, this country has no interest whatever in removing dictators or establishing democracies. It’s only interest everywhere, but especially in countries with great strategic importance, is to have in place client states run by leaders subservient to US wishes and aims. Independent-minded leaders like Saddam, the Iranian Mullahs and President Mahmoud Armadinejad, Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, and three-time democratically elected

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, beloved by the great majority of his people, are prime targets for regime-changing removal by force if necessary – only because they chose to run their countries independently of US authority. Imperial powers like the US never tolerate that.

Israel's well-planned actions against Hamas and the Palestinians and Hezbollah and the people of Lebanon are part of the same regime-changing strategy. In the Occupied Territories it's to destroy Hamas as an independent-minded political entity and replace it with a compliant one like Fatah and Mahmoud Abbas willing to serve Israel's interests and not those of the Palestinian people. In South Lebanon, it's essentially the same thing – to destroy Hezbollah as a political and resistance force, remove its resilient threat to Israeli hegemony in the region, and replace it with an Israel-friendly Lebanese government in full control of the country.

The Evolution of Israeli-Hamas Relations

Israel wasn't always hostile to Hamas it now views as an enemy it intends to destroy. In the 1980s, the Israeli government lent it support to check the growing authority and legitimacy of the PLO that had suspended retaliatory attacks and wanted to pursue a political solution with Israel that Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir at the time explained Israelis would never agree to and, in fact, said he went to war with Lebanon in 1982 to prevent. But once established, Hamas rose in prominence largely due to its well organized and effective social service network that provides such essential services as food assistance, health care, education, daycare and other charitable aid to Palestinians in great need of them. But Hamas also has a military or resistance wing that has engaged in attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians in retaliation for Israel's war of attrition against the Palestinian people that's caused decades of immiseration with little relief or outside support to offset it.

Because of that, Israel was horrified when the January, 2006 election didn't turn out the way it thought it had carefully arranged and Hamas won a clear majority of the seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Without the larger than life figure of Yasser Arafat to lead it, the Palestinian people finally rejected the dominant Fatah party and its post-Oslo history of corruption and subservience to Israeli authority. From the start, it was clear Israel had a single aim – to destroy Hamas as a political entity by any means. The Ehud Olmert led Kadima government planned it, the IDF trained in preparation for it, and it just awaited a convenient pretext to initiate what began on June 25.

The Hezbollah Story

The Hezbollah story is quite similar. It was born out of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the oppressive occupation that followed. Hezbollah was formed to resist the occupation, expel the Israelis, and it remained an effective opposition force to Israel ever since. It's major base of support is in the Southern Lebanon Shiite region and Northern Beka'a valley it controls that's up to one-third of the population. It's also likely supported by the estimated 400,000 Palestinian refugees in the country who live in overcrowded camps, struggle to achieve their basic needs, have no legal rights, and get no government aid or protection. Hezbollah is also a major political force and is represented by 11 lawmakers in the Lebanese Parliament and has two government ministers in the country's cabinet. But it also maintains a military wing as a needed deterrent to Israeli oppression that up to now has been the only effective force against it in the region. That's why Israel's aim has always been to eliminate Hezbollah and now initiated on July 12 what looks like all out war, the

reinvasion of Lebanon that followed on July 22, and possible occupation of the country ahead if it decides that's what's needed to achieve it. It never was able to do it before and likely won't succeed now whatever strategy it follows. But Israel is determined and seems intent to follow the strange and doomed to fail policy of "always wrong but never in doubt." It won't be any different this time, but once again Israel appears to be repeating past mistakes and making its victims pay the harsh price for them.

Throughout Israel's occupation of Southern Lebanon in 1980s and 90s that price was severe indeed, but Hezbollah's committed resistance nonetheless finally succeeded in getting the IDF to withdraw from the country in May, 2000. After 22 years of failing to subdue a resilient South Lebanon, it's hard to believe Israel is once again willing to try and in so doing inflict mass death, suffering and destruction on the innocent people throughout this country that are no match for the IDF militarily in a head-on confrontation. But it goes unreported and undiscussed in the mainstream that if Israel really wanted to end retaliatory attacks against its territory and people, the easy sure way to do it is to stop provoking the Palestinians and Hezbollah by attacking them first. The fact that it hasn't done it shows it won't and doesn't want to because in a state of peace and calm it would be unable to avoid the political solution it never intends to negotiate in good faith.

Israel instead prefers to continue the policy it began against Lebanon in 1968 when the IDF conducted terror raids and military aggression against the country that included attacking the Beirut airport and destroying 13 civilian planes on the ground claiming it was in retaliation for an attack by Lebanese trained Palestinians targeting an Israeli airliner in Athens. IDF incursions into Lebanon continued in the 1970s against the PLO including the major invasion into Southern Lebanon, the "Litani River Operation." It was launched in March, 1978 to establish an occupation zone that Israel put the Christian South Lebanon Army (SLA) in place to man when it withdrew its forces weeks later.

But Israel invaded the country in June, 1982 in force with intent to stay, remaining until Hezbollah forced it to withdraw in May, 2000. Before it did, however, the IDF managed to kill about 18,000 mostly innocent civilian Lebanese and Palestinians. Yet, despite the carnage, the IDF was unable to destroy Hezbollah which resisted effectively including against Israel's April, 1996 17 day "Operation Grapes of Wrath" that accomplished nothing but more death and destruction. Today, Hezbollah under its leader, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, is stronger than ever and is gaining support beyond its Shiite base and near autonomy in the South in response to the Israeli inflicted atrocities committed in the current conflict. It now remains to watch and speculate where this conflict is heading.

The Road from Palestine and Lebanon May Lead to Iran and Syria

The US and Israeli plan may be to escalate the current Palestinian and Lebanese conflicts and extend them to Iran and Syria. It's a real possibility and the most serious threat at this time with all its potentially dreadful consequences. Whether it will or won't happen only high-level insiders in both countries know for certain, and even they may be unsure until the current conflicts play out further. If it's undertaken, this added escalation will have unknown hazards for all involved combined with the increasing out-of-control conflict in Iraq and the one in Afghanistan fast heading in the same direction. At this time, whether the Washington neocons in charge of things, the Pentagon and the Likudnik spin-offs in the Olmert Kadima party are willing to risk going further is anyone's guess.

The Threat to Iran

The future is uncertain, but what is known is that a number of reports circulated earlier this year and in 2005 that the Bush administration signed off on a “shock and awe” nuclear attack against Iran to destroy its entirely legal commercial nuclear program based on the unproved claim Iran is using it to develop and produce nuclear weapons. Among other places this was reported by journalist Seymour Hersh in the New Yorker magazine recently. Hersh went further saying Israel has called Iran a “major threat” that “must be stopped” from developing these weapons. In a subsequent article Hersh then reported these plans are off the table because of strong resistance to them inside the Pentagon. But it’s hard to believe this is so given the position of the hard-liners in charge in Washington and Israel determined to pursue regime change in both Iran and Syria and replace the current leaderships there with pro-Western ones who’ll dutifully serve their obedient role of subservient client states.

Israel also has long had designs on Iran that have been known at least since October, 2003, when the German weekly Der Spiegel reported that the Mossad (the country’s intelligence gathering and covert action and counterterrorism agency) had marked six Iranian nuclear facilities as targets for an Israeli pre-emptive air strike. It added that then Israel Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called Iran “the greatest danger to Israel” and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said “Iran calls for Israel’s annihilation (and) We must do our utmost under US guidance to delay or eliminate the prospect of the extremist regime (in Tehran from) securing weapons of this sort.” It went on to report “a special unit of Mossad received an order...to prepare a detailed plan to destroy Iran’s nuclear sites Mossad believes (have) reached an advanced stage.....” The completed Mossad plan was then “delivered to the Israeli Air Force, (to) carry out the strike.”

As far as we know, the US is also making plans and has since 2004 been committing hostile acts against Iran by flying unmanned aerial surveillance drones across its airspace and has infiltrated special forces reconnaissance teams secretly into the country “to collect targeting data and to establish contact with anti-government ethnic minority groups” according to Seymour Hersh in his reporting. The Iranians are well aware of these activities and are likely doing all they can to thwart or counteract them. They also understand quite well what’s at stake for them – that the US and Israel are planning regime change by whatever means they think will work and are using the falsely claimed threat of Iran’s perfectly legal commercial nuclear program as the pretext to pursue it. The rest of the world so far seems willing to go along with this duplicitous scheme as well as the dominant corporate media once again dutifully performing their customary cheerleading role of support for whatever operations the US and Israel intend to conduct, legally justified or not. The public as usual is largely in the dark and has no idea what’s going on or what’s at stake.

Target Syria - Also under Threat

Syria, along with Iran, is also part of the same apparent US – Israeli scheme to escalate the Middle East conflict further. Both countries are Hezbollah allies and, as mentioned above, are known to have provided it arms, something no nation does more of than the US and often to empower unstable, undemocratic regimes that jeopardize global security. But that’s portrayed as perfectly acceptable when it’s done by the world’s only superpower and for whatever reason it has in mind. It’s another story, entirely, however, when a smaller nation does it, especially if that country is not a US client state and the arms it supplies goes to a source the US and its allies wish to keep them from, even if their intended use is only for self-defense.

Thus, while there's a vast world arms trade for legal and nefarious purposes the public generally hears little or nothing about, it's another story when the arms suppliers are Iran and Syria, their transactions or aid are quite proper, but the recipients are Hezbollah and Hamas, sworn enemies of the US and Israel. The US claims Iran and Syria are state sponsors of terrorism and says Hezbollah and Hamas are terrorist entities. It doesn't matter if it's true or not, just that the US says it is to justify whatever action it and its Israeli ally have in mind. There's now a systematic demonization campaign under way to claim both countries have armed Hezbollah to conduct "unprovoked terror attacks" against Israel and thus provide justifiable cause for Israel and the US to retaliate. Again, truth is not the issue, only what the US and Israel say is true.

Also, in March, 2006 the UN Security Council took the unprecedented step, aimed at Syria, of approving a resolution to establish a hybrid tribunal for a political crime. It will consist of 2 Lebanese and three international judges to try the killers of former Lebanese Premier Rafik Hariri that will allow an international judgment to take precedence over Lebanese law. From the start, the finger of guilt was pointed at Syria, but so far there's been no evidence uncovered to prove it.

But by unjustifiably associating Syria with the Hariri killing and accusing it of supplying Hezbollah with arms for claimed "terror" attacks, the US and Israel have now put the mark of Cain on this nation making it easier to attack it. It's never hard finding a pretext to act when there's enough determination to do it. Both the US and Israel have had lots of practice finding them where they exist or inventing or provoking them when they don't. The recent Iraq "now you see 'em, now you don't" WMDs come to mind as an invented one that destroyed a nation. Iran and Syria are quite aware of this and are doing all they can to ward off a similar fate. Still they know full well, if the US and/or Israel act against them forcibly, they and their people will pay a painful price. And the region will as well if the Arab street explodes as one or two more countries in it go up in flames to further the imperial aims of two rogue terrorist states allowed to go unchecked by a complicit world community hoping to benefit from the scraps left for it in the carnage or too timid to stand up for what's right.

What May Lie Ahead - The Potential Danger Is Great

There's much at stake in the Middle East for both the US and Israel including the very real possibility that the dual Israeli offensives with US support and aid may make an already impossible situation even worse. It also seems strange to some that the most extreme elements in the US administration, Congress and among their influential supporters now appear to see a chance to undo or at least ameliorate the political and military disaster the US has suffered in Iraq and likely one ahead in Afghanistan as that country is rapidly descending into a growing out-of-control conflict as well. The alternative and more sensible view unheard in the mainstream is that two or three wrong decisions don't make a right one. But that's a consideration those in charge in the US and Israel probably never thought of, and it's not the role of their corporate media allies to tell them. Their job is only to report what government officials say.

It's clear at this time of great potential danger, a lot more than that is needed. The Arab street in the region and Muslim one around the world may be ready to explode if two more of its states are attacked by the US and/or Israel with support or compliance of the West and its own leaders. It will be even more likely to happen if nuclear weapons are used which is now planned against Iran to destroy targeted facilities below ground. Whatever the perceived gains may be from this aggressive adventure, the potential dangers of

undertaking it seem so daunting and the odds for ultimate success so long, it's hard to understand why any sensible leader would risk taking them. But it's quite possible George Bush and Ehud Olmert intend to try. No one knows how this will play out if they do, but the world now holds its collective breath waiting to find out.

There's no need for breath-holding to know one near-certain outcome of this conflict and another likely one. Just as Hezbollah was born out of the rubble of Lebanon in the 1980s, so too will one or more new resistance groups rise out of Lebanon's carnage today and the daily killing, destruction and intensified immiseration in Palestine. It's a simple law of physics – Newton's Third Law that there's no action without reaction. And it follows that the more extreme the action, the more proportionally similar the reaction. Israel is sure to achieve its goal to incite the continued conflict and violence it needs to avoid the political solution it won't now tolerate. But in the long run, this high risk strategy may prove Israel's undoing as no nation can survive and prosper on conflict and war without end or for just cause. Unless the Jewish state can find a way to coexist peacefully and justly with its Palestinian people and Arab and Persian neighbors and abandon the sure to fail path it's now on, it's very survival is in doubt and so is that of those it targets. Time for more breath-holding. Stay closely tuned.

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago and can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net . Also visit his blog site at www.sjlendman.blogspot.com .

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About the author:

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III." <http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html> Visit his blog site at [sjlendman.blogspot.com](http://www.sjlendman.blogspot.com). Listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network. It airs three times weekly: live on Sundays at 1PM Central time plus two prerecorded archived programs.

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