

Wildly Disproportionate Attack on Lebanon Seems Like Pretext to Confront Iran

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Global Research, July 17, 2006

Toronto Star 17 July 2006

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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As Israeli firepower rained down on Lebanon last week, pundits here in the West wasted no time pinning the blame on — Iran.

“Iran and its radical allies are pushing toward war,” wrote *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius.

Washington defence commentator Edward Luttwak weighed in: “Iran’s leaders have apparently decided to reject the Western offer to peacefully settle the dispute over its weapons-grade uranium-enrichment program.”

In fact, Iran’s leaders haven’t rejected the “Western offer;” they’ve said publicly they will respond to it by Aug. 22. This isn’t fast enough however to satisfy Washington, which considers the “offer” more of an ultimatum.

Is it really Iran that is pushing for war? Think about it. Why would Iran want to provoke a war with Israel and the U.S. — both heavily armed nuclear powers — when it has no nuclear weapons itself?

The U.S. and Israel, on the other hand, are very keen to attack Iran. In a recent series of articles in *New Yorker* magazine, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh has detailed Washington’s plans to attack Iran. Israel has called Iran a “major threat” that “must be stopped” from developing nuclear weapons.

But the U.S. and Israel don’t want to look like aggressors. They insist their intentions are purely defensive. Recall that Washington also claimed its invasion of Iraq was purely defensive — to protect itself from Iraq’s arsenal of deadly weapons, which, it turned out, didn’t exist.

So when Hezbollah militants in southern Lebanon seized two Israeli soldiers last week, a perfect opportunity arose. Since Hezbollah has links to Iran, presto, here was a *prima facie* case that Iran was gunning for confrontation.

Did the Western pundits who quickly embraced this theory ever consider that the Hezbollah militants, as well as the Palestinian militants in Gaza who captured a single Israeli soldier last month, might have had their own motives for striking Israel?

Certainly the Palestinians have endless grievances against Israel. In addition to four decades

of Israeli military occupation of their land, Israel has attempted to destroy the Hamas government, which was democratically elected by Palestinians last January.

Hezbollah's seizure of the two Israeli soldiers was probably an act of support for the Palestinians in Gaza, who have been under Israeli military siege since the capture of the first soldier. Hezbollah also said it seized the soldiers because it wanted to trade them for Lebanese prisoners held in Israeli jails. A similar Israeli-Hezbollah prisoner exchange took place in 2004.

Abandoning Canada's traditional role as an honest broker in the Middle East, Prime Minister Stephen Harper unabashedly supported Israel last week, calling its devastating attacks on Gaza and Lebanon "measured."

If Israel is simply trying to "defend" itself, its actions are wildly disproportionate.

On the other hand, if Israel and the U.S. are looking for an excuse to attack Iran, the capture of the Israeli soldiers is as good as any.

Linda McQuaig is a Toronto-based author and commentator.

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