

LEBANON
HEZBOLLAH WINS

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HEZBOLLAH WINS

Israel has made itself the least safe place in the world for a Jew to live, a terrible reflection on the calamity of Zionism for its own people and others. (Tim Llewellyn)

On 11 August 2006, after 30 days of warfare, the Security Council unanimously passed resolution 1701¹, calling for “a full cessation of hostilities” in Lebanon. The cessation eventually occurred on the morning of 14 August 2006. By then, over 1,000 people had been killed, and thousands injured, in Lebanon and Israel, a million Lebanese had been displaced, and billions of dollars worth of damage had been done to civilian infrastructure in Lebanon.

At any time since 12 July 2006 when the hostilities began, the US could have brought the Israel’s military assault on Lebanon to a halt, and prevented this carnage. If it had done so, the Hezbollah retaliation – the firing of rockets into Israel – would also have come to a halt. Hezbollah said so from the outset.

President Bush chose not to do so, and was loyally supported by Prime Minister Blair in not doing so, because both of them were fully behind Israel’s attempt to destroy Hezbollah’s military capacity, and by so doing to weaken its allies, Syria and Iran. They chose to support Israel in this enterprise, despite the death and destruction being visited on Lebanon as a whole by Israel’s military machine, while publicly pretending that they were just supporting Israel’s acting in self-defence – and weeping crocodile tears over the dead and injured, while replenishing Israel’s stock of munitions and aviation fuel to kill and injure more.

No need of resolution

There was no need for a Security Council resolution to bring about a ceasefire, nor for a UN peacekeeping force. All that was necessary at any time was that the US tell Israel to stop its military assault on Lebanon, in which case Hezbollah would have stopped firing rockets into Israel. And, providing the US leaned hard enough on Israel, the ceasefire would have lasted.

The ceasefire finally happened on 14 August 2006. It could have happened a month earlier, if the US had decided to make it happen. It happened on 14 August 2006 because about a fortnight earlier the US decided that the game was no longer worth the candle. Israel had not succeeded in significantly degrading Hezbollah’s military capacity, and there was no realistic prospect of it doing so. As a result, Hezbollah’s prestige had soared in Lebanon and in the Arab world (and the prestige of its allies, Syria and Iran, was growing rather than diminishing). In other words, the assault on Lebanon was having the opposite effect to what was intended when it was launched.

At this point, the US determined that the Israeli assault would have to be called off and signalled that it would allow the Security Council to pass a ceasefire resolution, having used its power as a veto-wielding state to resist any action by the Security Council on the matter since 12 July 2006. The purpose of the resolution was to provide diplomatic cover for the climb down.

Collective punishment

On 12 July 2006, Israel launched a pre-planned assault on Lebanon, using Hezbollah’s capture of two Israeli soldiers as an excuse. The stated aim of the assault was to recover these two soldiers, but it was ended on 14 August 2006 without their recovery, and resolution 1701 doesn’t even order their release. It is a pound to a penny that they will eventually be released through a process of prisoner exchange, which could have been initiated on 12 July 2006 or shortly thereafter.

Israel’s assault was directed, not only at Hezbollah, but at civilian infrastructure all over Lebanon, so that the whole Lebanese population was made suffer. By applying this collective punishment, Israel hoped was that non-Shiites would blame Hezbollah, which would become politically isolated within Lebanon. With luck, the Lebanese Government and Lebanon would fall apart politically, making it an easy prey for yet another Israeli invasion, this time to destroy Hezbollah.

Unfortunately for Israel, and its allies in Washington and London, the Lebanese Government and people didn’t turn upon Hezbollah. Instead, they blamed Israel, and its US sponsor and arms supplier, for the death and destruction being visited upon them and supported Hezbollah’s resistance. A poll by the Beirut Centre for Research and Information² carried out a couple of weeks after Israel’s assault produced the following extraordinary results:

- 1) Asked *Did you support the resistance’s move to capture two Israeli soldiers for a prisoners swap?* Overall 70% said YES, with a majority in all sects (Sunni 73%, Shiite 96%, Christian 55%) except Druze (40%).
- 2) Asked *Do you support the confrontations carried out by the resistance against the Israeli aggression against Lebanon?* Overall 87% said YES, with a large majority in favour in all sects (Sunni 89%, Shiite 96%, Druze 80%, Christian 80%).

What is more, Israel didn’t come close to destroying Hezbollah as a military force. It lost men and materiel but, after 34 days of pounding by Israel, its ability to launch rockets into northern Israel was undiminished. And on 12 and 13 August 2006, the 2 days between the passing of resolution 1701 and the ceasefire, Hezbollah killed 33 Israeli military personnel in southern Lebanon, over a quarter of the total (117) Israeli military killed between 12 July 2006 and 14 August 2006. For an account of this, see *Three terrible days* by Nehemia Shtrasler (*Haaretz*, 18 August 2006)³.

(All Israeli deaths, civilian and military, are listed on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website,⁴ together with some information about how they met their deaths. 43 Israeli civilians were killed, including 4 who died of heart attacks during rocket attacks. A striking feature about the military casualties on the ground is the number killed in their tanks by anti-tank missiles.)

Lessons for Israel

The first lesson of this war for Israel is that Hezbollah cannot be destroyed as a military force without a full-scale ground invasion of Lebanon (which was continually threatened but never happened). The second lesson is that Hezbollah retains the capability to make such an invasion costly for Israel in terms of military casualties – and retains the ability to fire rockets into northern Israel.

Israel has laid waste to large areas of Lebanon and killed over a thousand civilians, but the Hezbollah's military capability hasn't been diminished substantially and its prestige in Lebanon and throughout the Arab world has rocketed. For the first time in its history Israel has attempted to destroy an Arab military force on its borders, and failed to do so. What is worse, although this force isn't capable of threatening Israel's existence as a state, or of flattening its towns and villages as it has done to Lebanon, this force has the capacity to make life unbearable in northern Israel. This has never happened before in Israel's history.

As Tim Llewellyn wrote for *Counterpunch* on 8 August 2006:⁵

“Israel has made itself the least safe place in the world for a Jew to live, a terrible reflection on the calamity of Zionism for its own people and others.”

Will the ceasefire hold?

Will the ceasefire hold? This depends on whether the US has told Israel to maintain it. Famously, resolution 1701 forbids **offensive** action by Israel, but not defensive action. Since Israel has never fought a war yet that it didn't characterise as defensive, the possibilities for defensive action by Israel are limitless and, if the US allows it to indulge itself, after a time Hezbollah will understandably feel obliged to respond by firing a few rockets into Israel – in which case all bets are off.

As this is being written, the media are fixated on whether peacekeeping troops will arrive in south Lebanon sufficiently quickly and in sufficient numbers to reinforce UNIFIL and save the ceasefire. It seems to be forgotten that since it was first deployed in south Lebanon in 1978, UNIFIL has been no impediment to umpteen Israeli invasions of Lebanon, and innumerable other Israeli violations of Lebanon's sovereignty. Israel isn't going to be restrained by UNIFIL – even by a greatly enhanced UNIFIL – from engaging in any “defensive” actions it decides to engage in. Only the White House is capable of restraining it.

Condi struggles

Condoleezza Rice was interviewed by Susan Page of *USA Today* on 15 August 2006,⁶ the day after the ceasefire came into effect. If you are seeking confirmation that the US has suffered a political reverse in Lebanon, read this interview.

Poor Condi had great difficulty finding something positive to say about the outcome. The best she could come up with is that Hezbollah is subject to an arms embargo under resolution 1701 (which is true unless it becomes a Lebanese state force). Her other causes for rejoicing are pathetic: first, that Hezbollah was branded “by the international community, by a 15-0 vote of the Security Council as the aggressors”, and, second, that “the Lebanese army is moving south to displace” Hezbollah.

On the first point, she is exaggerating: in a resolution that is heavily biased towards Israel, the hostilities are described reasonably accurately in the preamble, where the Security Council expresses:¹

“its utmost concern at the continuing escalation of hostilities in Lebanon and in Israel since Hezbollah's attack on Israel on 12 July 2006, which has already caused hundreds of deaths and injuries on both sides, extensive damage to civilian

infrastructure and hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons”.

On the second point, it is unlikely that Hezbollah is losing sleep at night at the prospect of the Lebanese Army moving south, since there doesn't seem to be any antagonism between them. It is worth noting here that the Lebanese Army website states⁷ that the “resistance [Hezbollah] constitutes a Lebanese strategic interest”, and one doesn't disarm a national strategic interest.

Condi had to admit that the enhanced UNIFIL wasn't going to disarm Hezbollah either. She had lauded the “very robust mandate” given to UNIFIL by resolution 1701 saying, “if by force of arms, some group tries to interfere with the mandate, which is to keep the south clear of arms and armed groups ... it [UNIFIL] has the right to respond to that kind of aggression.” This prompted Susan Page to ask the reasonable question:

“So would the UN forces be expected ... if there are Hezbollah forces, to confront them and to forcibly disarm Hezbollah forces that were in the south?”

She replied: “Susan, I don't think there is an expectation that this force is going to physically disarm Hezbollah.”

So, how according to Condi, is Hezbollah to be disarmed? Her answer continued:

“I think it's a little bit of a misreading of how you disarm a militia. You have to have a plan, first of all, for the disarmament of a militia, and then the hope is that some people lay down their arms voluntarily. You have cantonment areas where heavy arms are — but the disarmament of militias is essentially a political agreement and the Lebanese Government has said that it intends to live up to its obligations under Resolution 1559 ... that they will not have any groups in Lebanon carrying arms that are not a part of the central security forces of Lebanon.”

Does she really expect that a military force that has successfully resisted the might of Israel is going to lay down its arms voluntarily? If she does, she needs her head examined. Does she really believe that the Lebanese Government wants to get rid of the only effective resistance to Israeli invasion and occupation that Lebanon has ever had? Again, if she does, she needs her head examined.

When asked what would happen if Hezbollah refused to disarm, she floundered, eventually coming up with the frightening notion that Hezbollah might be branded a terrorist organisation by European states, as it is now by the US:

“Europe does not, for instance, currently list Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. I would think that a refusal [by Hezbollah] to live up to obligations that were undertaken by the Lebanese Government [that is, disarm], clearly putting Hezbollah outside of the Lebanese Government consensus might trigger, for instance, something like that.”

Having heard that threat, Hezbollah have probably dumped their arms already.

State within a state?

US and Israeli propaganda often describes Hezbollah as “a state within a state”, as if it were an alien wedge acting on behalf of Syria and Iran and contrary to the will of the Lebanese Government and people. If that were an accurate description of Hezbollah's position within Lebanon, then one would have

expected that, when Hezbollah's action on 12 July 2006 triggered a massive Israeli assault, anti-Hezbollah feeling in Lebanon would have been rampant. It wasn't rampant, because, although Hezbollah has a military capability which is not under the control of the Lebanese Government, it has used it solely to resist Israel and is widely admired outside its Shiite base for this resistance, as the opinion poll results quoted above demonstrate.

This is reflected in the Policy Statement on the basis of which the present Lebanese Government was formed, with Hezbollah participation, and endorsed by the Lebanese Parliament, in July 2005. This Statement recognises the role of the "resistance" (aka Hezbollah) in Lebanese life, and contains a commitment to repatriate Lebanese prisoners from Israeli jails. A section entitled *Resistance and Foreign Policy* says the following:⁸

"Protection of the Resistance and recognition that it is a genuine Lebanese manifestation of our right to liberate our lands from any occupation ...

"A belief in the right of return of the Palestinian refugees and the commitment to continue follow-up on all Lebanese prisoners and missing in Israeli jails."

That the Hezbollah military wing is not under the control of the Lebanese Government is a consequence of the way it developed as a resistance movement against Israeli occupation in the Shiite community in southern Lebanon with assistance from Iran. This is an anomaly, but it is an anomaly for the Government and people of Lebanon to sort out, or leave be, as they see fit.

That this is the subject of Security Council resolutions culminating in resolution 1701 is contrary to Article 2.7 of the UN Charter which says that "nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in

matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state".

Having said that, it is worth noting that, if Hezbollah were to become a Lebanese state force, the requirements of resolution 1701 would be fulfilled without it giving up any weapons. Resolution 1701 doesn't specifically require Hezbollah to disarm, merely that there be¹

"no weapons without the consent of the Government of Lebanon and no authority other than that of the Government of Lebanon" (Paragraph 3)

In March 2006, a "national dialogue" began in Lebanon with 14 confessional leaders, including Hezbollah's secretary-general, Hasan Nasrallah, taking part. Addressing the anomaly was one of the items on the agenda. The "national dialogue" was ongoing on 12 July 2006.

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(Not) WHY ISRAEL ATTACKED LEBANON

If we are to believe Israel, and its allies in Washington and London, the reason Israel laid waste to Lebanon for a month was to secure the release of Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, who were captured by Hezbollah on 12 July 2006 in a cross-border raid, in which three other Israeli soldiers were killed.

If their release was Israel's primary objective, this was a nonsensical approach. Hezbollah's motive in taking them prisoner was to exchange them for Lebanese prisoners held by Israel. Such exchanges had taken place at least three times in the past, in July 1996, in June 1998, and the largest in January 2004 (see, for example, *Electronic Intifada* article *History of Israeli-Arab Prisoner Exchanges*¹). The release of the captured soldiers could have been secured without a military assault on Lebanon – and, more than a thousand deaths later, the assault has predictably failed to secure their release.

On 14 August 2006, the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, appointed Ofer Dekel, formerly the deputy head of Israel's Shin Bet security service, as his "Special Representative regarding the return of the three kidnapped Israeli soldiers: Gilad Shalit [held in Gaza], Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev".² Before Ofer Dekel's appointment, negotiations were already going on, with Egypt acting an intermediary, about the release of Gilad Shalit in a prisoner exchange. It is a pound to a penny that Ofer Dekel has already opened negotiations to secure the release of the other two soldiers in another prisoner exchange.

Kidnapping

Israel managed to project a sense of moral outrage about Hezbollah's capture of its two soldiers, outrage that was widely echoed in the West. To assist in this process, the soldiers' capture was referred to as kidnapping and they were referred to as hostages. In the sense that they were captured and were being held in order to put pressure on Israel to do something it wouldn't otherwise do, the use of the word "hostage" is not inappropriate. But, it is a bit rich for Israel to be complaining about such behaviour, since taking Lebanese hostages was a practice that it commonly engaged in. Listen to what Amnesty International had to say in June 1998:³

"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. Most have now spent 10 years in secret and isolated detention. Must the hostages wait in detention for another 10 years before they are released? This is a game that must stop."

Another point: the moral outrage widely expressed in the West about the holding of the three soldiers for a few weeks is in marked contrast to the almost total silence in the West about the over 9,000 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, many for years and most without any kind of trial, including over 100 women and about 400 young people under 18.¹ This list has been added to in recent weeks by the detention of Hamas elected representatives, with barely a whimper of complaint from the outside world.

Unprovoked attack

A factor used by Israel to amplify the moral outrage about the capture of Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev on 12 July 2006 was that it was carried out inside Israel itself. Israeli spokesmen,

and their counterparts in Washington, have asserted over and over again that Israel had subjected to an outrageous unprovoked attack on their territory, to which they had to respond.

Doubt has been expressed about whether the attack did take place in Israel – with some justification since early reports by, for example, Associated Press correspondent, Joseph Panossian, said it took place in Lebanon:

"The militant group Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers during clashes Wednesday across the border in southern Lebanon, prompting a swift reaction from Israel, which sent ground forces into its neighbor to look for them."

Later on 12 July 2006, Panossian changed his reporting twice, ending up with what became the official version:

"Hezbollah militants crossed into Israel on Wednesday and captured two Israeli soldiers. Israel responded in southern Lebanon with warplanes, tanks and gunboats ..."

The reports by Panossian, and from other sources, are reviewed by Trish Schuh here.⁴

It must be emphasised that UN observers from the UNIFIL force concur with the official version that the attack took place within Israel. Since they are on the ground close to the Israeli border in southern Lebanon, they are in the best position to know.

UNIFIL was created by Security Council resolution 425, passed on 19 March 1978, "for the purpose of confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces", in the words of the resolution.⁵ Over 28 years later, the force is still in southern Lebanon. Ironically, UNIFIL stands for the United Nations **Interim** Force in Lebanon – its initial deployment was for 6 months, but every 6 months since then the Security Council has passed a resolution to extend its mandate by another 6 months. About 250 UNIFIL personnel have been killed in the course of their duties, the vast majority as a result of Israeli military action, including 4 on 25 July 2006.

Every 6 months the UN Secretary General presents a detailed report on UNIFIL's observations to the Security Council.⁶ The report (S/2006/560) for the period 21 January 2002 to 18 July 2006 says the following about the events of 12 July 2006:⁷

"The crisis started when, around 9 a.m. local time, Hezbollah launched several rockets from Lebanese territory across the withdrawal line (the so-called

Blue Line) towards Israel Defense Forces (IDF) positions near the coast and in the area of the Israeli town of Zarit. In parallel, Hezbollah fighters crossed the Blue Line into Israel and attacked an IDF patrol. Hezbollah captured two IDF soldiers, killed three others and wounded two more. The captured soldiers were taken into Lebanon.” (paragraph 3)

Until there is evidence to the contrary, this has got to be taken to be the definitive account.

Unprecedented event

So, let's assume for now that Israel's sovereignty was briefly infringed by Hezbollah on 12 July 2006. In recent weeks, the impression has been given by Israel, and generally speaking reported as fact in Britain, that Hezbollah's brief incursion was an unprecedented event and that, since Israel withdrew its ground forces from Lebanon in May 2000 (after 18 years of occupation), there had been few incursions either way across the Blue Line. The message we were meant to get was that Hezbollah's action was the kind of reward that the ungrateful Arabs mete out to Israel when it generously withdraws from Arab territory.

The truth is somewhat different, as George Monbiot pointed out in *The Guardian* on 8 August 2006.⁸ Since May 2000, there have been hundreds of violations of the Blue Line attested to by UNIFIL. Israel may have withdrawn its ground troops but, according to UNIFIL, Israeli aircraft crossed the Blue Line “on an almost daily basis” between 2001 and 2003, and “persistently” until 2006. These incursions “caused great concern to the civilian population, particularly low-altitude flights that break the sound barrier over populated areas”.

In addition to these persistent violations of Lebanese sovereignty by Israel since May 2000, there have been a number of minor outbreaks of hostilities across the Blue Line prior to 12 July 2006, the last at the end of May this year. George Monbiot's account of it is as follows:

“On May 26 this year, two officials of Islamic Jihad – Nidal and Mahmoud Majzoub – were killed by a car bomb in the Lebanese city of Sidon. This was widely assumed in Lebanon and Israel to be the work of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency. In June, a man named Mahmoud Rafeh confessed to the killings and admitted that he had been working for Mossad since 1994. Militants in southern Lebanon responded, on the day of the bombing, by launching eight rockets into Israel. One soldier was lightly wounded. There was a major bust-up on the border, during which one member of Hezbollah was killed and several wounded, and one Israeli soldier wounded. But while the border region ‘remained tense and volatile’, UNIFIL says it was ‘generally quiet’ until July 12.”

Israel's holier than thou attitude to Hezbollah's brief violation of sovereignty across the Blue Line on 12 July 2006 is hypocritical. On a more general note, the history of Israel is the history of violation of other states' sovereignty not just for hours but for decades, including the ultimate violation – the annexation of other states' territory, notably, the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem. For Israel to complain about the infringement of its territory is akin to a persistent drunk complaining about other people sucking a brandy ball.

And don't think that Israel is about to abandon its addiction to violating the sovereignty of other states. Listen to this from Prime Minister Olmert in the Knesset on 14 August 2006:⁹

“Hezbollah leaders went into hiding and are lying.

We will continue to hunt them down anytime, anywhere.”

There, Olmert asserts the right of Israel to violate the sovereignty of any state, anytime. Don't expect any protest from those in the West who were outraged by Hezbollah's brief infringement of Israeli sovereignty on 12 July 2006.

Raining rockets?

The first myth about Israel's assault on Lebanon is that its objective was to secure the release of Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. The second myth is that its objective was to stop Hezbollah raining down rockets on Israeli cities. Prime Minister Blair told a press conference at the G8 on 17 July 2006:¹⁰

“... but the fact of the matter is this began with the kidnap of soldiers. Then there were Israeli soldiers killed and then there have been rocket attacks, as I say perhaps as many as 1,000 or more rocket attacks which have killed innocent people in deliberate acts of terrorism launched from the Lebanon. Now of course it is tragic that in the retaliatory strikes there are also innocent civilians killed in the Lebanon and we express full solidarity with them and their families at a time such as this ...”

So, according to Blair, the Israel's assault on Lebanon was in retaliation for the initial kidnapping of Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev and the killing of other Israeli soldiers, and for rocket attacks on Israel.

It is true that Hezbollah fired a number of rockets into Israel as a diversionary tactic at the same time as it launched its operation to capture Israeli soldiers, but they were not aimed at Israeli cities. But, before 12 July 2006 no rocket had been fired into Israel since late May. Then, Israel made a limited military response. Had Israel made a similar limited response on 12 July 2006, the large-scale rocket attacks on northern Israel would never have happened.

Hezbollah's large-scale rocket attacks on northern Israel cities did not begin until after Israel's much more destructive, and much more lethal, assault on Lebanon got under way and they stopped once Israel's assault on Lebanon stopped, as Hezbollah always said they would. They were in retaliation for Israel's assault on Lebanon and they would not have happened without Israel's assault on Lebanon.

(On the matter of Hezbollah rockets, *Haaretz* ran a story on 18 August 2006 entitled *Peretz: Army did not warn me about missiles*,¹¹ which began:

“When Defense Minister Amir Peretz took office four months ago, Hezbollah and the missile threat were at the bottom of the priority list senior IDF officers presented him, Peretz says. In private conversations over the past few days, Peretz said officers did not tell him there was a strategic threat to Israel, and did not present him with all relevant information about the missile threat.”

Could it be that the assault on Lebanon was launched without the Defense Minister knowing that Hezbollah was capable of retaliating by firing rockets into northern Israel in large numbers? If he didn't know, you would have thought that he would have the wit to draw a veil over his ignorance? Or is he making a crude attempt to avoid responsibility for the attacks on northern Israel?)

Comparatively placid

Israel and its supporters managed to give two different, and rather contradictory, impressions of what had gone on across the

Blue Line, since the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000. On the one hand, that the Hezbollah action of 12 July 2006 was an unprecedented unprovoked attack, which had to be responded to by an unprecedented act of self-defence. On the other hand, that Hezbollah had been constantly raining down rockets into Israeli cities and had therefore been a constant threat to the lives of Israeli civilians – and this was the reason for Israel laying waste to Lebanon.

The truth was that, although there were constant border violations, chiefly by Israel, there were few serious incidents and few people killed, either civilian or military. Here is an account by American academic, Augustus Richard Norton, in *The Boston Globe* on 7 August 2006:¹²

“What most casual observers are not expected to know, but what Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Bush should know, is that the six years between Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 until the momentous Hezbollah attack on July 12 were comparatively placid.

“During that period, one Israeli civilian was killed by Hezbollah weapons (and five more were killed in a Palestinian operation that may have been helped by Hezbollah). Meanwhile, more than a score of Lebanese civilians were killed either by hostile action or by mines left behind by Israel. The dead deserve that we not treat their violent end lightly. Haviv Donon, 16, who was felled by a Hezbollah anti-aircraft round fired at Israeli planes violating Lebanese airspace, and Yusif Rahil, 15, a shepherd killed by an artillery round intended for Hezbollah after an attack in Shebaa Farms, were innocent victims. Thankfully, such victims were far fewer than may be commonly imagined.

“There were serious clashes in the vicinity of the Shebaa Farms, part of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights claimed by Lebanon during that six-year period. Nine Israeli soldiers died in Hezbollah attacks in the contested area, and 16, including eight on July 12, were killed along the international border in seven clashes. Some of the attacks were in retaliation for Israeli-caused deaths in Lebanon. At least 21 Israeli soldiers were also wounded.”

Lebanon asks for ceasefire

Paragraph 4 of the UNIFIL report (S/2006/560) referred to above reads as follows:⁷

“In the afternoon of 12 July local time, the Government of Lebanon requested UNIFIL to broker a ceasefire. Israel responded that a ceasefire would be contingent upon the return of the captured soldiers.”

The same afternoon, US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, spoke to the Lebanese Prime Minister, Fouad Siniora, and to the Israeli Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni. This information is contained in a press statement in the name of the Secretary of State,¹³ which significantly doesn’t mention the Lebanese Government’s request for a ceasefire.

Had the US administration wished to stop the incipient hostilities, this was the time to do it. Instead, Condoleezza Rice rang up Kofi Annan and asked him to send a mission to the Middle East. As she told a press conference in Germany the next day:¹⁴

“I had a conversation with him [Kofi Annan]

yesterday morning, suggested that it might be useful for the U.N. to send a mission, and he is now sending such a mission.”

Could there be a more cynical ploy to give Israel time to lay waste to Lebanon? The UN mission came back from the Middle East and reported to the Security Council on 21 July 2006. This gave Israel over a week.

At this point, the US felt obliged to begin a show of trying to bring hostilities to an end, but it took Condoleezza Rice until 24 July 2006 to get to Beirut. (Her presence had the one advantage that Israel stopped bombing the city, lest the US Secretary of State be killed by a US-supplied bomb dropped from a US-supplied plane by a US ally – perhaps the Lebanese should have kidnapped her and held her until Israel called off its assault).

Then there was the diversion of the international conference in Rome on 26 July 2006, whereupon she had to give an important piano recital in Kuala Lumpur on 28 July 2006. However, she did come back to Israel on 30 July 2006, only to be told that she wasn’t welcome in Beirut because Israel had just killed a large number of Lebanese civilians in Qana – so she had to go back to Washington.

At this point, with Israel having failed to do serious damage to Hezbollah in the time provided for them by the US, a serious attempt began to organise cover for a climb-down in the form of a Security Council resolution. Two weeks later, on 11 August 2006, resolution 1701 was passed and on 14 August 2006 a ceasefire arranged by Kofi Annan took place. The US, backed to the hilt by the UK, had provided Israel with 34 days in all to lay waste to Lebanon.

Condi prays

On 18 July 2006, Condoleezza Rice met the Maronite Patriarch of Lebanon, Nasrallah Sfeir, in Washington, and told him:¹⁵

“And I want you to know that we’re not only working hard, but we’re also praying for the people of Lebanon.”

It will have been of great comfort to the Lebanese people, as the US-supplied bombs rained down upon them, to know that throughout it all the US Secretary of State was praying for them, while supplying Israel with more bombs, and playing diplomatic games to ensure that Israel was given time to make use of them.

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THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT STATEMENT

“... the Government statement, on the basis of which we participated in the Government, talks about the Lebanese Government’s endorsement of resistance and its national right to liberate the land and the prisoners.

“How could a resistance liberate prisoners? Go to George Bush for example?”

(Hezbollah Secretary General, Hasan Nasrallah, Al Jazeera, 20 July 2006)

On 18 April 2006, President Bush received the Lebanese Prime Minister, Fouad Siniora, as an honoured guest at the White House. Bush told his guest that “the United States strongly supports a free and independent and sovereign Lebanon”.¹ He continued:

“We took great joy in seeing the Cedar Revolution. We understand that the hundreds of thousands of people who took to the street to express their desire to be free required courage, and we support the desire of the people to have a government responsive to their needs and a government that is free, truly free.”

A few months later, the US President did not demur when Israel’s Chief of Staff, Dan Halutz, promised to “turn Lebanon’s clock back 20 years”.² He was happy to see the sovereignty of the “free and independent and sovereign Lebanon” with “a government that is free, truly free” violated remorselessly by its neighbour, over a thousand of its citizens killed and a quarter of them driven from their homes – using armament supplied by the US and largely paid for by US tax dollars. It’s as well Lebanon wasn’t the US’s worst enemy.

Hezbollah in government

Bush and Siniora didn’t give a press conference when they met at the White House on 18 April 2006. It is a fair bet that they didn’t do so, because Bush didn’t want to face awkward questions about the fact that the “free, truly free” Siniora Government had a “terrorist” serving in it, as Minister for Water and Energy.

In the Lebanese elections in May/June 2005, Hezbollah won 14 of the 27 seats assigned to Shiites in the 128-seat parliament and, for the first time, it went into the Lebanese Government, taking the Ministry of Water and Energy. Mohamed Fneiche is the Minister. Hezbollah is on the US State Department’s list of “Foreign Terrorist Organizations”.³ In September 2002, when he was Colin Powell’s deputy in the State Department, Richard Armitage said of Hezbollah that it “may be the A-team of terrorists and maybe al-Qaida is actually the B-team”.⁴

This was an awkward issue for the US administration. They had lauded the so-called Cedar Revolution on the back of which Syria was forced to withdraw its 15,000 troops from Lebanon. The withdrawal of these troops was, we were told, the sine qua non of having free and fair elections in Lebanon. But when the troops were withdrawn and the elections held, although they produced a nominally anti-Syrian parliamentary majority, the government formed had a programme that wasn’t obviously anti-Syrian. And the government had a “terrorist” in it.

Welcoming Hezbollah

When the Siniora Government was being formed in July 2005, reporters gave State Department spokesman, Adam Erel, a hard

time on this issue. He announced at a press briefing on 20 July 2005:⁵

“We’re releasing a statement after the briefing today, welcoming the agreement between the President of Lebanon Emile Lahoud and the Prime Minister Designate of Lebanon Fouad Siniora on a proposed list of cabinet members for the next Government of Lebanon. We believe that this is a positive and an important step forward that reflects and is responsive to the will and desires of the Lebanese people as expressed through historic elections.

“This list needs to still be approved by parliament, but if and when it is approved, we certainly look forward to working with the new Government of Lebanon...”

The obvious question was: will you be working with the Hezbollah minister? It was asked:

“One of the innovations of this cabinet is a member of Hezbollah. Does your welcome for this cabinet extend to that individual? And will you be working with him?”

This rather spoiled Erel’s enthusiasm for the new Lebanese Government, because he had to say:

“... we have a policy towards Hezbollah, it’s clear, it hasn’t changed and to the extent that there are active members of a foreign terrorist organization in a government, then our ability to interact and work with those individuals is circumscribed.”

Erel was faced with this question repeatedly in various guises that day and the next at State Department briefings. And it can be guaranteed that the matter would have come up again on 18 April 2006, when Siniora was at the White House, had the press been allowed to ask questions. So, they weren’t.

Endorsement of Islamic Resistance

In fact, the American press could have made Erel’s life even more difficult in July 2005, had they known the basis on which the Siniora Government was formed. For, not only did it contain a Hezbollah Minister, the policy statement on which it was put together and approved by the Lebanese Parliament recognised the role of Hezbollah’s military wing, Islamic Resistance, in combating Israeli aggression. This means that, in Bush’s terms, each and every member of the Government, including Siniora himself, supports terrorism. All of them are complicit, not just the Hezbollah Minister.

I first heard about this policy statement from an interview by Hezbollah Secretary General, Hasan Nasrallah, broadcast on Al Jazeera on 20 July 2006⁶ (of which more later). In this interview, he said:

“... the Government statement, on the basis of which we participated in the Government, talks about the Lebanese Government’s endorsement of resistance and its national right to liberate the land and the prisoners.”

I have been unable to lay my hands on a reliable English translation, but I have located what purports to be a rough translation here.⁷ A section of this entitled *Resistance and Foreign Policy* contains the following:

“Protection of the [Islamic] Resistance and recognition that it is a genuine Lebanese manifestation of our right to liberate our lands from any occupation ...

The translation is not the best, but the general drift is clear (and it’s consistent with Nasrallah said). There is little doubt but that anybody who joined the Lebanese Government on this basis is, in Bush’s terms, a supporter of terrorism.

Lebanese Army

It is worth noting that the Lebanese Army website also recognises the role of Hezbollah in ending Israeli occupation and its continuing role today.⁸

“The national resistance which is confronting the Israeli occupation is not a guerilla and it has no security role inside the country and its activities are restricted to facing the Israeli enemy. This resistance led to the withdrawal of the enemy from the bigger part of our occupied land and is still persistent to free the farms of Shebaa. **Preserving this resistance constitutes a Lebanese strategic interest** [my emphasis] with the aim of relating the struggle with the enemy and regain all the Lebanese legitimate rights achieving and at the forefront the withdrawal of Israel from the farms of Shebaa and the return of the refugees to their land.”

Again the translation is not the best, but the drift is clear. Clearly, the Lebanese Army also supports terrorism, in Bush’s terms.

(The US has recently offered help to train and equip the Lebanese Army. Doubtless they will be equipping them with air defence systems capable of bringing down Israeli F16s, in order to make more business for Lockheed-Martin. Be that as it may, this proposition led to the following amusing dialogue with Sean McCormack at the State Department press briefing on 3 August 2006:⁹

Q: You started by saying that you’re ready to help train and equip the Lebanese army.

SM: Right.

Q: Even if elements of Hezbollah elements are integrated into this army considering that it represents a large portion of the population?

SM: Hezbollah is a terrorist group. We’re ready to work with the Lebanese Government.

Q: So you’re saying that you are willing to train and equip and help a Lebanese army that is free of Hezbollah elements?

SM: We are ready to train and equip Lebanese armed forces when the conditions on the ground are right.)

Other aspects of statement

There are other interesting aspects to the Lebanese Government policy statement. On prisoners held by Israel:

“the commitment to continue follow-up on all Lebanese prisoners and missing in Israeli jails.”

On Palestine:

“A commitment to the Beirut Arab League Initiative (namely recognizing the State of Israel if Israel agrees to return to the 1967 borders) and the respect for all UN resolutions and international law and legitimacy.

“A belief in the right of return of the Palestinian refugees”

In a section entitled *Lebanese-Syrian Relations*:

“Rebuild excellent Lebanese-Syrian relations; excellent in its depth, strength, transparency, and equality; excellent in putting its common interests above all considerations; excellent in meticulously implementing the memoranda of understandings among both countries.

“A commitment to coordinate with the Syrians in negotiating any peace settlement with Israel.”

This is noteworthy because this Government is presented in the West as anti-Syrian, unlike its predecessors.

Hasan Nasrallah speaks

In his Al Jazeera interview,⁶ Hasan Nasrallah argued that Hezbollah’s kidnapping of Israeli soldiers in order to exchange them for Lebanese prisoners was in line with the Government statement, pointing out that it “talks about the Lebanese Government’s endorsement of resistance and its national right to liberate the land and the prisoners”.

In March 2006, a “national dialogue” began in Lebanon with 14 confessional leaders, including Hasan Nasrallah, taking part. In this interview, he described what he had told the other leaders during this process about Hezbollah’s intentions:

“Yes, I told them we would maintain the border calm. That was our policy ... I used to say there are four points, two of which can stand delaying, procrastination, and making reminders about them. No problem about that. The first issue was the continued occupation of the Shab’a farms. In this respect we can take our time. This is a limited piece of land. We do not want to go to war because of the farms, not a war like the one taking place now. The second issue is that of the air and maritime violations, and even the land violations. We can put up with these. Yes, violations of our sovereignty are condemned, but we would not raise hell because of them. However, there are two issues that can stand no postponement. The first is the prisoners’ issue, for this involves humanitarian suffering. The second is any attack on civilians.”

Specifically, on the prisoners’ issue, he said:

“I told them on more than one occasion that we are serious about the prisoners issue and that this can only [be] solved through the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers. Of course, I used to make hints in that respect. Of course I would not be expected to tell them on the table I was going to kidnap Israeli soldiers in July. That could not be.”

So, Hezbollah regarded its kidnapping of Israeli soldiers on 12 July 2006 as being in line with the statement's commitment to securing the release the prisoners. What is more, Lebanese leaders were aware that Hezbollah was going to kidnap Israeli soldiers at some time in order to exchange them for Lebanese prisoners.

Syria and Iran

In this interview, Nasrallah also said that neither Syria nor Iran knew about the incident in advance:

“True, I had not informed the Lebanese Government, but neither had I informed my closest allies. Syria and Iran had not been informed. No Syrian or Iranian person had had any prior information. They had not been informed, and I had not consulted anyone of them. We are a resistance group operating on Lebanese soil. We have prisoners in Israeli prisons. It is our natural right to restore them. There is a major government statement that stresses this right, according to which we acted.”

He was also at pains to state that Hezbollah's actions had not been carried out in pursuit of the interests of Syria or Iran:

“Are we that crazy, that I and my brothers want to sacrifice our souls, our families, our honourable masses, and our dear ones in order to have Syria return to Lebanon, or to postpone the international tribunal, or for the sake of the Iranian nuclear file. Can you imagine such statements! This is an insult. It is an insult to our patriotism and commitment.

“Yes, we are friends of Syria and Iran, but for 24 years we benefited from our friendship with Syria and Iran for the sake of Lebanon. There are others who benefited from their friendship with Syria for their own seats in power, houses, wealth, and bank accounts. But, for me, tell me where my bank accounts are? Tell me where is the palace that I built as a result of my connections to the Syrian officials in Lebanon?

“Never! Hezbollah has never taken advantage of these friendships except for the benefit of Lebanon. Today, Hezbollah is not fighting for the sake of Syria or the sake of Iran. It is fighting for the sake of Lebanon.

“Yes, the result of this battle in Lebanon will be seen in Palestine. If it ends in victory, it will be

victory there too; and if, God forbid, it ends in defeat, then the Palestinian brothers will face difficult and tragic conditions. But, God willing, there will only be victory.”

The “international community”

And on the “international community”:

“Politically, the international community, first, has never been with us. So I cannot say that is not with us, isolating, and forsaking us just today. It has never been with us. Moreover, it has mostly been against. For example, we have been listed on the US terrorism list since they created the terrorism list. We are among the first to be listed on that list. Some European countries also list us as terrorists. The position of the international community is clear. Consequently, we are not surprised by the international community. We have never wagered on the international community.

“The international community adopts international resolutions of which Israel implements nothing. Even Resolution 425 [calling for withdrawal from Lebanon] was not implemented by Israel; we imposed it on Israel. It has implemented none of the resolutions concerning the Palestine question. It has implemented none of the resolutions concerning the occupied Arab territories. For us, this is neither a new factor, nor a factor of pressure.”

Never has a truer word been spoken.

28 August 2006

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Resolution 1701

DIPLOMATIC COVER FOR A CLIMB-DOWN

Resolution 1701,¹ calling for “a full cessation of hostilities” in Lebanon, was passed unanimously by the Security Council on 11 August 2006, and the cessation finally occurred early on the morning of 14 August 2006.

The cessation was not brought about by the passing of resolution 1701. It was brought about by the US telling Israel to stop, because the Israeli assault on Lebanon had become counterproductive – it was not succeeding in degrading Hezbollah’s military capacity significantly and the prestige of Hezbollah and its allies, Syria and Iran, was rocketing in the Arab and Muslim world.

So the US told Israel to call off its assault. Resolution 1701 is the diplomatic cover for their climb-down. It is about giving the impression that something has been achieved by Israel’s military action, that the status quo ante is not being re-established. However, try as they might, they cannot obscure the fundamental military reality that, after 34 days of pounding by Israel, Hezbollah is still an effective military force.

Immediate ceasefire

The Security Council normally reacts to an outbreak of hostilities anywhere in the world by calling for an immediate ceasefire and the restoration of the status quo ante. Such a resolution may or may not have any impact on the hostilities, but it is the usual thing to do. However, in this instance, the US, backed by the UK, blocked the passage of such a resolution, as only veto-wielding powers can do. They did so because they were fully in support of the Israeli assault on Lebanon.

Instead, to buy Israel time to proceed with its assault, the US proposed that the UN Secretary General send a mission to the Middle East, which took about 10 days to complete. The US continued to block a ceasefire resolution until early August when it decided that Israel’s assault was counterproductive, and at this point a Security Council resolution became necessary to provide diplomatic cover for their climb-down. Resolution 1701 is the result.

A full cessation of hostilities

Famously, in Paragraph 1, resolution 1701 calls for “a full cessation of hostilities” but then says that the “full” doesn’t apply to Israel. The paragraph as a whole reads:

“[The Security Council] *Calls for* a full cessation of hostilities based upon, in particular, the immediate cessation by Hezbollah of all attacks and the immediate cessation by Israel of all offensive military operations”

The paragraph is illogical – how can there be “a full cessation of hostilities” if one side is not required to cease “all” military operations, but only “offensive” military operations? And this is supposed to be “international law”!

In any case, to ask Israel to cease “offensive” operations is hilarious, since throughout its history it has never admitted to engaging in any “offensive” military operations. All its actions, including the laying waste of Lebanon in 2006, are said to have been undertaken in self-defence, so what operations is it supposed to cease?

What US says goes

In reality, what matters is not what resolution 1701 says, but what the US says. If the US has told Israel to cease all military operations, then it will cease all military operations. Neither the text of resolution 1701, nor the presence of UN “peace keeping” troops in southern Lebanon, is going to restrain Israel from engaging in military operations, if the US has given it license to do so.

Media talk about the ceasefire being under threat because of a failure of France and other states to supply troops to enhance UNIFIL is a load of codswallop. Even with the maximum complement of 15,000 troops specified in the resolution (Paragraph 11), UNIFIL will not be in a position to prevent Israel attacking any corner of Lebanon if it has been given license to do so.

It will be stationed in southern Lebanon, so how can it possibly prevent Israel bombing Beirut or any other part of the country? That would require air defence systems stationed all over the country. It won’t even be equipped to repel an Israeli ground invasion – Hezbollah would have to be called into action again to do that.

It’s doubtful if it is capable of stopping Hezbollah mounting attacks across the border into Israel or firing rockets into Israel, if it has a mind to do so (which is highly unlikely in present circumstances), since no less a person than the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, said on 15 August 2006² that there was no expectation that UNIFIL was going to disarm Hezbollah.

UNIFIL – an interim force

UNIFIL – United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon – was originally created by Security Council resolution 425,³ passed on 19 March 1978, after Israel invaded Lebanon. Resolution 425 called

“upon Israel immediately to cease its military action against Lebanese territorial integrity and withdraw forthwith its forces from all Lebanese territory” (Paragraph 2).

22 years later, in May 2000, Israel finally obeyed the call, more or less (though it still occupies Sheba’a Farms – Paragraph 10 of resolution 1701 asks Kofi Annan to make proposals about resolving this issue). Paragraph 3 of the resolution established a UN force “for the purpose of confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces”, in other words, they were just observers, to be stationed in southern Lebanon.

Over 28 years later, the force is still in southern Lebanon. Its initial deployment was for 6 months, but every 6 months since

then the Security Council has passed a resolution to extend its mandate by another 6 months. About 250 UNIFIL personnel have been killed in the course of their duties, the vast majority as a result of Israeli military action, including 4 on 25 July 2006.

Biased towards Israel

The text of resolution 1701 is a dog's breakfast, bearing the marks of repeated amendment. Its meaning is opaque, particularly with regard to the duties of the enhanced UNIFIL and the degree of force it is authorised to use, and under what circumstances it can use it.

It is overwhelmingly biased towards Israel. Despite the fact that Israeli military action has killed over 1000 people in Lebanon and injured thousands more, and caused a quarter of the population to flee, there isn't a scintilla of criticism of Israel in the resolution, let alone a demand that it make reparations.

It was accepted by the Arab states including Lebanon with great reluctance in order to save further bloodshed, as Sheikh Al-Thani, the Qatari Ambassador to the UN, made abundantly clear in his statement to the Council before the resolution was voted on:⁴

"The draft resolution does not clearly and explicitly address the horrors of destruction caused by the Israeli aggression against innocent civilians and the Lebanese infrastructure. Moreover, it does not clearly spell out Israel's legal and humanitarian responsibility for that destruction or address in a balanced manner the question of the Lebanese prisoners, detainees and abducted persons in Israeli prisons, despite the fact that the exchange of prisoners and detainees is the logical and realistic way to settle this question.

"Nevertheless, we have accepted the draft resolution in its present form in order to stop the bloodshed of innocents and to spare Lebanon and the region further horror and destruction."

See also Tarek Mitri's uncompromising remarks on behalf of Lebanon on the same occasion.⁴

In a resolution with 19 operative paragraphs, action is required of Israel in only three of them: Paragraph 1 that calls for it to cease all "offensive" action; Paragraph 2 that calls for it "to withdraw all of its forces from southern Lebanon", as the deployment of Lebanese armed forces and UNIFIL "throughout the South ... begins"; and Paragraph 8 that requests the "provision to the United Nations of all remaining maps of landmines in Lebanon in Israel's possession".

Strangely, resolution 1701 doesn't specifically call for the release of the two Israeli soldiers captured by Hezbollah, which Israel claimed was the objective of its war. It is true that the resolution's preamble does emphasise "the need to address urgently ... the unconditional release of the abducted Israeli soldiers" and, separately, encourages "the efforts aimed at urgently settling the issue of the Lebanese prisoners detained in Israel". That these are separate is a reflection of Israel's unwillingness to acknowledge publicly that they will be solved together.

Contrary to UN Charter

Resolution 1701 should never have been passed by the Security Council, because it is contrary to the UN Charter in two important respects:

(1) It purports to authorise the enhanced UNIFIL to use force, which can only be done under Article 42 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, but it is not expressed to be a Chapter VII resolution.

(2) Many aspects of it constitute interference in the internal affairs of Lebanon, contrary to Article 2.7 of the UN Charter, which says: "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter ..."

In a sense, none of this matters since in practice, like most Security Council resolutions, resolution 1701 will mean what the great powers, especially the US/UK, want it to mean. But, the UN Charter is supposed to enshrine the principles governing relations between states in this world, and the procedures to be followed by the Security Council in addressing problems between states. That the principles and procedures have been set aside in order to cobble together a cloak for Israel to abandon its aggression against Lebanon shows how seriously the UN Charter is taken in practice.

But then Article 2.4 of the UN Charter says:

"All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state ..."

Is there a day goes by without the US and/or Israel threatening to use force against a fellow member of the UN? Of late, Iran and Syria have been in the frame. Before that it was Iraq, and before that Afghanistan, and before that it was Yugoslavia

Not Chapter VII

Security Council resolutions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter are meant to deal with "the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression" to quote from the first Article of Chapter VII (Article 39). The Security Council may make recommendations under Article 40 to remedy the situation, and, if necessary, enforce these recommendations by imposing economic sanctions under Article 41, or, failing that, by authorising the use of "all necessary means", that is, military action, under Article 42.

A Security Council resolution is normally expressed to be a Chapter VII resolution, by including within it the clause: "*Acting* under Chapter VII of the Charter, ..." after the inevitable preamble. You will find this in, for example, resolution 678,⁵ passed in November 1990 to authorise the use of force to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait. But you will not find it in resolution 1701, even though in Paragraph 12 it authorises UNIFIL to use force:

"Acting in support of a request from the Government of Lebanon to deploy an international force to assist it to exercise its authority throughout the territory, [the Security Council] *authorizes* UNIFIL to take **all necessary action** [my emphasis] in areas of deployment of its forces and as it deems within its capabilities, to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind, to resist attempts by forceful means to prevent it from discharging its duties under the mandate of the Security Council, and to protect United Nations personnel, facilities, installations and equipment, ensure the security and freedom of movement of United Nations personnel, humanitarian workers and, without prejudice to the responsibility of the Government of Lebanon, to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence;"

The phrase "all necessary action" means force.

In the drawing up of the resolution, there was obviously a lot

of argument between the parties concerned. The Arab states didn't want a Chapter VII resolution that unambiguously mandated UNIFIL to use force, lest it be used to attempt to disarm Hezbollah presumably. Before the resolution was voted on, Sheikh Al-Thani, the Qatari Ambassador to the UN told the Security Council⁴:

"We welcome the fact that the draft resolution is limited to augmenting the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), that its mandate will continue to be subject to the provisions of Chapter VI of the Charter, ..."

In which case, it shouldn't have authorised the use of force.

UNIFIL duties

The duties of the enhanced UNIFIL are set out in Paragraph 11 of resolution 1701. These are its original observer role under resolutions 425 and 426, plus:

- (a) Monitor the cessation of hostilities;
- (b) Accompany and support the Lebanese armed forces as they deploy throughout the South, including along the Blue Line, as Israel withdraws its armed forces from Lebanon as provided in paragraph 2;
- (c) Coordinate its activities related to paragraph 11 (b) with the Government of Lebanon and the Government of Israel;
- (d) Extend its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons;
- (e) Assist the Lebanese armed forces in taking steps towards the establishment of the area as referred to in paragraph 8;
- (f) Assist the Government of Lebanon, at its request, to implement paragraph 14;

Of these, only (e), and to a lesser extent (f), is controversial. (a) is essentially the original UNIFIL role; (b) and (c) assigns UNIFIL a carer role in respect of the Lebanese armed forces in south Lebanon, which is unnecessary but harmless; (d) has a humanitarian purpose, which may turn out to be UNIFIL's main role (since, thanks to Israel, there's plenty of humanitarian work to be done), in addition to the observer duties it has always performed.

The area referred to in (e) is the buffer zone defined in Paragraph 8, which "calls for Israel and Lebanon to support a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution based on the following principles and elements". One of these "principles and elements" is:

"security arrangements to prevent the resumption of hostilities, including the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani river of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL as authorized in paragraph 11, deployed in this area"

This is aimed at creating a buffer zone from the Israeli border to the Litani river free from Hezbollah military personnel, assets and weapons. But, on 15 August 2006 Condoleezza Rice ruled out UNIFIL disarming Hezbollah,² and Kofi Annan's spokesman, Edward Mortimer, repeated this on 26 August 2006, saying:⁶

"Everybody understands that the disarmament of Hezbollah as a whole is not going to be done by force."

So, precisely how UNIFIL is going to help the Lebanese Army to create this buffer zone is a mystery. Since the Lebanese Army is not going to disarm Hezbollah either, it is a mystery how this buffer zone is going to be created.

(The text could be interpreted as giving UNIFIL licence to take military action to expel Israeli forces back over the Blue Line, if they cross it into Lebanon, but don't hold your breath.)

- (f) is concerned with assisting the Lebanese Government "to secure its borders and other entry points to prevent the entry in Lebanon without its consent of arms or related materiel and requests UNIFIL as authorized in paragraph 11 to assist the Government of Lebanon at its request"

in accordance with Paragraph 14. But, as (f) states, this is at the request of the Lebanese Government, so UNIFIL may have no role here either.

Are 15,000 troops necessary?

President Chirac had a point when he questioned whether the enhanced UNIFIL needed anywhere near 15,000 troops. The question is: does UNIFIL need to be enhanced at all? The answer is YES – otherwise it will look as if the status quo ante is being re-established.

Remember that the original suggestion for a UN force in southern Lebanon came from Prime Minister Blair at the G8 on 16 July 2006. Then, it was to be a separate force, not an enhancement to UNIFIL. It was always a force looking for a role, but despite this somebody put a figure of 15,000 on the maximum number of troops required.

Blair's proposal was part of the delaying tactics engineered by the US/UK to avoid an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, in order to give Israel time to destroy Hezbollah (they hoped). When that failed, and a climb-down became necessary, it was imperative to give the impression that the status quo ante was not being established – so UNIFIL had to be enhanced from its original 2,000, whether or not its duties warranted it, and a great fuss had to be made about getting loads of troops into south Lebanon.

(To add to the fun in London and Washington, when France hesitated about providing troops for no purpose, they were able to engage in their usual game of belittling France.)

Interference in the internal affairs of Lebanon

That Syria and Iran cease interfering in the internal affairs of Lebanon has been a constant refrain from US/UK in the past couple of years – while they interfered constantly themselves.

The chief instrument for this interference has been Security Council resolution 1559, passed on 2 September 2004. The two key paragraphs of it are:

[The Security Council]

2. Calls upon all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon;
3. Calls for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias

Paragraph 2 was aimed at Syrian forces in Lebanon (which were hastily withdrawn after the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005, for which the West blamed Syria). Paragraph 3 was aimed primarily at Hezbollah's military wing.

President Chirac began the process that led to the passing of 1559, out of personal friendship with Rafik Hariri. Chirac approached President Bush at the G8 summit at Sea Island, South Carolina, in June 2004 and proposed a Security Council resolution demanding the withdrawal of Syrian troops from

Lebanon. The US added the part about disbanding and disarming militias.

The resolution, proposed jointly by the US and France, barely got through the Security Council. It was opposed by the Lebanese Government on the grounds that it was an unwarranted interference in Lebanon's domestic affairs, contrary to Article 2.7 of the UN Charter, which it obviously is. It received the bare minimum of 9 votes required by Article 27.3 of the UN Charter. In addition to the proposers, four other European states – UK, Germany, Spain and Romania – voted for it plus Angola, Benin and Chile, but the other 6 Council members at the time – Russia and China plus Algeria, Pakistan, the Philippines and Brazil – abstained, all of them (bar Russia) agreeing with Lebanon that the matters it addressed were outside the competence of the Security Council.

(Had Article 27.3 been applied as the authors of the UN Charter intended, resolution 1559 would not have been deemed passed. According to Article 27.3, a resolution must have “the concurring votes of the permanent members” in order to pass, in other words, all five permanent members must vote for a resolution, if it is to pass. When the Soviet Union boycotted the Security Council in the early 50s, absence was interpreted as concurrence, and, from then on, as long as a resolution received at least 9 votes, with no permanent member voting against, that is, vetoing it, a resolution has been deemed passed. Many, perhaps most, Security Council resolutions have been deemed passed, despite the fact they never received “the concurring votes of the permanent members”, as required by Article 27.3.)

The essence of 1701 is that 1559 must be fully implemented, for example, Paragraph 3 says:

“[The Security Council] Emphasizes the importance of the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory in accordance with the provisions of resolution 1559 (2004) and resolution 1680 (2006), and of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords, for it to exercise its full sovereignty, so that there will be no weapons without the consent of the Government of Lebanon and no authority other than that of the Government of Lebanon;”

All this is an internal matter for the Lebanese Government and people. It is true that Hezbollah's military wing is not under the control of the Lebanese Government, because of the way it developed as a Shiite resistance movement against Israeli occupation. This is an anomaly, but it is an anomaly for the Government and people of Lebanon to sort out, or leave as it is, as they see fit.

Having said that, it is worth noting that resolution 1701 doesn't specifically require Hezbollah to disarm and, if Hezbollah were to become a Lebanese state force, the requirements of resolution 1701 would be fulfilled without it giving up any weapons, and, subject to the approval of the Lebanese Government, it could then replenish its weapons from Iran or anywhere else, without infringing 1701.

Israel was enforcing 1559

Israel's Ambassador to the UN, Dan Gillerman, addressed the Security Council before the vote was taken on resolution 1701 in the following terms:⁴

“It is often said, ‘Where there's a will, there's a way. But recent years have demonstrated that where there is a way, there is not always a will. The way to avoid the crisis between Israel and Lebanon has been clear: implementation of the unconditional obligations set out in resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), which set out issues for resolution between Lebanon and Syria. The clear path

forward required the disarming and disbanding of Hezbollah and other militias, and the exercise by Lebanon, like any sovereign State, of control and authority over all its territory. But the will to implement this way has been lacking, and over the past month the peoples of Israel and Lebanon have paid a heavy price for that inaction.

“In the face of the failure to ensure that the obligations set out in those resolutions were implemented, Israel has had no choice but to do what Lebanon has failed to do. As a result, Hezbollah's lethal capabilities have been dealt a major blow: bases have been dismantled and stockpiles of Iranian missiles have been destroyed. Southern Lebanon has been substantially cleared of the infrastructure of terrorism, and the terrorists and their sponsors have learned that a campaign of brutal terrorism will meet with the forceful response it deserves.”

Hezbollah's lethal capacities were so severely damaged that it managed to kill 33 Israeli troops after Gillerman made these remarks, nearly 30% of Israeli military casualties overall, and on 13 August 2006 it managed to fire more rockets into Israel than on any other day of the hostilities.

Leaving that aside, it is touching to observe Israel's new found enthusiasm for the implementation of Security Council resolutions, enthusiasm so great that it is prepared to make war for a month in order to (fail to) enforce just one. Can we now expect Israel to implement Security Council 252 (passed on 21 May 1968) and unannex East Jerusalem? Or 446 (passed on 22 March 1979) and dismantle all of its settlements in the Occupied Territories? Or 497 (passed on 17 December 1981) and unannex the Golan Heights?

Non-binding recommendations

When, prior to the invasion of Iraq, it was pointed out that Israel was in breach of more Security Council resolutions than Iraq, the answer from Israel (and from the British Government) had two strands to it:

- (1) That Iraq was in breach of numerous Chapter VII resolutions, which are mandatory, whereas Israel was in breach of Chapter VI resolutions, which are merely non-binding recommendations.
- (2) That the resolutions outstanding against Israel required action by states other than Israel, and therefore a process of negotiation with other states was necessary to effect their implementation.

The latter might be said to be true about resolution 242 (in which Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories is conditional upon other parties recognising it), but it is obviously not true in respect of the resolutions mentioned above (and about 30 others) that are outstanding against Israel. Nevertheless, Israel pretends otherwise, and is never challenged about it.

Answering charges of a double standard as regards Iraq and Israel in the Security Council, Israel's Ambassador to the UN, Yehuda Lancry, put it this way on 17 October 2002:⁷

“Israel feels compelled to take the floor in the light of the numerous charges, made in the course of this debate, that the Security Council has adopted a double standard with regard to Israel's compliance with Council resolutions.

“In fact, those statements are the strongest proof that there is indeed a double standard: one directed against Israel. What else could explain

such a deliberate blindness to the fundamental differences between Iraq's defiance of the Council and Israel's commitment to a peaceful settlement of conflict with its neighbours? What else could explain the failure to see any distinction between binding resolutions, adopted under Chapter VII of the Charter – resolutions that set out specific actions to be taken by Iraq, independent of the actions of any other party – and interdependent recommendations or statements of principle, adopted under Chapter VI, that are designed to move all the parties forward in the Middle East?"

So, Chapter VI resolutions are mere "recommendations" by the Security Council that can be ignored at will by any state that is subject to one, as Israel has done in respect of dozens.

Resolution 1559 is a Chapter VI resolution. By the principle invoked by Israel, it is mere recommendation by the Security Council that Lebanon was and is free to ignore.

Yet, according to Dan Gillerman, Israel laid waste to Lebanon for a month in order to enforce it.

28 August 2006

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NO WAY TO GO TO WAR, SAYS YA'ALON

In June 2005, Ariel Sharon replaced Moshe Ya'alon as Chief of Staff by his deputy, air force general, Dan Halutz, who was in charge of Israeli military assault on Lebanon. On 14 September 2006, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz carried a fascinating interview with Ya'alon by Ari Shavit,¹ in which he was fiercely critical of the conduct of the Lebanon campaign.

The title of the interview – *No way to go to war* – gives the flavour of it. Ya'alon tells an astounding tale of a failure to implement the plan he had drawn up, when he was Chief of Staff to respond to an event like the one that occurred on 12 July 2006, when Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers, and of a growing delusion amongst the Israeli political leadership (nourished by Halutz, he says) that Hezbollah's military capacity could be destroyed from the air.

Ya'alon may have an axe to grind as a commander who was replaced, but the tale he tells is consistent with other information that is in the public domain. And, when it was put to him that, since he had been chief of staff or deputy for 5 out of the last 6 years, he must accept some responsibility for the debacle in Lebanon, he said he supported the establishment of a state commission of inquiry on the matter and proposed that he be the first witness. "I have nothing to hide", he said.

(Prime Minister Olmert has set up two commissions of inquiry, both reporting to the government. The first, headed by former Israeli Defense Forces Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, is supposed to investigate the military's role in the war. Lipkin-Shahak was a senior adviser to Israel's Defense Ministry during the war. The second, a political commission, is to be headed by former Chief of Mossad Nahum Admoni, a close confidant of Olmert. By contrast, a state commission of inquiry, which Olmert has refused to set up, is mandated by Israeli law and under the control of the Israeli Supreme Court. It is headed by a sitting or retired Supreme Court justice and has the power to subpoena witnesses and documents and its findings, including recommendations of resignation, are made public.)

Ya'alon was opposed to Sharon's proposal to "disengage" from Gaza in August 2005, which cost him his job, and he is opposed to any "disengagement" from the West Bank. But he isn't dogmatically opposed to ceding "land for peace", if the end result is the recognition of Israel's right to exist. Thus, for example, he revealed in the interview that in the summer of 2003 he suggested to Sharon that he enter into negotiations with Syria:

"I thought that the very existence of negotiations with Syria on the future of the Golan Heights would crack the northern alignment of Iran-Syria-Hezbollah and perhaps also cause its dismantlement. Sharon rejected my suggestion outright. He preferred the disengagement."

Asked if he would be ready to cede the Golan Heights in return for peace with Syria, he replied:

"I never sanctified any piece of ground. If a territorial concession will bring about true peace and full recognition of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, I am not against that. However, even if we did not reach a land-for-peace agreement, the very fact of the renewal of the dialogue channel with Syria would have distanced it from Iran and would have weakened the northern

alignment, which I defined as a strategic threat."

As regards Hezbollah, Ya'alon takes it for granted that Hezbollah cannot be destroyed by Israeli military action alone. As he explained in his interview:

"... it was clear to me that Hezbollah is a rooted phenomenon and will not be eradicated by military action. It was also clear to me that there is no unequivocal military solution against the rocket deployment. I therefore encouraged political activity, which in the end would lead to the disarming of Hezbollah as a result of an internal Lebanese process, and concurrently I drew up a military plan intended to address a scenario of a Hezbollah offensive that would oblige us to deal with the organization militarily."

The plan was to make a military response of limited duration and seize the opportunity to get the US and others to apply political pressure with a view to getting Hezbollah disarmed. As he explained the plan's basic assumptions were:

"That the IDF [Israeli Defence Forces] must act in a way that would set in motion a political process that would lead to the disarming of Hezbollah, the removal of the Iranians from Lebanon and perhaps also the imposition of sanctions on Syria and Iran. In a scenario of the abduction of soldiers, exactly as occurred on July 12, the IDF was supposed to respond with an aerial attack and the mobilization of reserve divisions, which would act as a threat to the Syrians and to Hezbollah and would encourage Lebanon and the international community to take action to achieve the desired goal."

Then:

"If the threat itself did not achieve the goal, a ground move would have begun within a few days aimed primarily at seizing dominant terrain as far as the Litani River and the Nabatiya plateau. The ground entry was supposed to be carried out speedily, for an allotted time, without the use of tanks and without entering houses or built-up areas. Because of our awareness of the anti-tank missile problem and our awareness of the bunkers and of the fact that the routes are mined, the intention was to activate the IDF in guerrilla modalities. That was the operational idea, that was the plan and that is how the forces were trained."

A dominating theme in Ya'alon's criticism is that in the ground assault Israeli soldiers' lives were squandered by tactics that left them vulnerable to Hezbollah anti-tank missiles.

Asked why the plan was not implemented, he replied:

“I don’t know. That is one of the questions that the state commission of inquiry will have to investigate. In my opinion, the aerial offensive was correct. The air force delivered the goods. In a few areas it even provided favorable surprises. But the activation of the ground forces was a catastrophe. There was no defined goal. There was no required achievement. They jumped from one idea to the next and introduced new missions all the time without any logic.”

Asked when he recognised that something had gone wrong, he said:

“At the end of the first week. Until then things were conducted reasonably well. I was critical of the fact that the reserves were not mobilized, but I understood more or less what the goal was. But then, instead of plucking the political fruits of the aerial offensive, they continued to use force. They over-used force. And instead of coordinating with the Americans for them to stop us when the operation was at its height, and setting in motion a political process to disarm Hezbollah, we asked the Americans for more time. We let the Americans think that we have some sort of gimmick that will vanquish Hezbollah militarily. I knew there was no such gimmick. I knew the whole logic of the operation was that it be limited in time and not be extended.”

This removes any illusion that the US diplomatic activity was geared to stopping the conflict and saving lives. Clearly, it was tailored to suit Israeli military requirements.

Asked if he had tried to warn the political and military leadership, he replied:

“... I discovered that the political level had the feeling – which was nourished by the chief of staff – that the matter could be wrapped up from the air. And when it turned out that the aerial move was not going to deliver the goods it was never meant to deliver in the first place, frustration set

in. A desperate search began for some kind of move that would produce some sort of feeling of victory. The delusory idea of a one-kilometer ground move developed.”

Ya’alon reserves his harshest criticism for the final Israeli ground attack, which was launched on 11 August 2006 as the Security Council was about to pass resolution 1501. In the next 2 days until the ceasefire on the morning of 14 August 2006, Hezbollah killed 33 Israeli military personnel, over a quarter of Israel’s military losses in the whole conflict. For an account of this, see *Three terrible days* by Nehemia Shtrasler (*Haaretz*, 18 August 2006).²

The conversation on this went as follows:

Q And the final ground move that ended the war?

“That was a spin move. It had no substantive security-political goal, only a spin goal. It was meant to supply the missing victory picture. You don’t do that. You don’t send soldiers to carry out a futile mission after the political outcome has already been set. I consider that corrupt.”

Q You are saying a very serious thing. Thirty-three soldiers were killed in that operation. Were they killed to achieve a spin?

“Yes. And that is why people have to resign. For that you don’t even need a commission of inquiry. Whoever made that decision has to assume responsibility and resign.”

Q Does the prime minister have to resign?

“Yes. He can’t say he did not know. ...”

Q Must the chief of staff resign?

“Yes. He should have resigned immediately after the conclusion of the campaign.”

28 September 2006

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LEBANON

HEZBOLLAH WINS