

Stop the Bloodbath In the Arab World

by Mohammad Selim

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Since the collapse of the Camp David II conference in July 2000, the Arab world has been engulfed in a bloodbath. . . .

Our main argument is that the July-August Israeli invasion of Lebanon was part of a broader strategy of destruction devised by the neo-conservative rulers in Washington, which began in Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq, with a view of establishing a new Middle East, dominated by the American-Israeli alliance. However, such a strategy is bound to fail, as destruction has been generating more opposition to the American-Israeli project in the Arab world. But before proceeding, three main points may be in order.

First, it is too simplistic to assess this war as if it were a war between a terrorist group and a state subjected to terrorism. The concept of terrorism has been widely misused by the American and Israeli rulers to stereotype resistance groups which are determined to defeat Israeli ambitions in Arab occupied territories. The heavy hand of the Western media machine has been quite active in de-legitimizing the Lebanese, Palestinian, and Iraqi resistance groups. The end result is the mystification and de-legitimization of the other, and the inability to reach out to comprehend its grievances. The terrorism label was associated with the use of violence against innocent civilians. But all the parties, including Israel, have been using this kind of violence.

In fact, the Israeli record in this domain is unrivalled in the region. Recently, Azmy Bishara, a Palestinian-Israeli member in the Knesset, said that throughout the Israel-Hezbollah confrontations since 1985, Israel killed thousands of Lebanese civilians, including around 1,000 in the July-August 2006 invasion of Lebanon. Hezbollah has only killed 20 civilians in response to the Israeli killings of Lebanese civilians.¹ However, it is Israel that charges Hezbollah with

1. Azmy Bishara, "Conflict among cultures is a slogan that is being implemented in the Lebanon War," *Al-Hayat* (London), Aug. 10, 2006.

terrorism, Bishara added. Either the terrorism label is to be applied to all those who attack innocent civilians, including Israel, or it should be dispensed with. Selective application of the concept increases the sense of injustice, especially when the label is used to justify the occupation of Arab territories, as Israel is doing in Palestine, and the U.S.A. in Iraq. . . .

Second, this war was triggered by Hezbollah capturing two Israeli soldiers, but Israel responded by attacking Lebanese civilian targets, media stations (including the LBC [Lebanese Broadcasting Corp.], which does not belong to Hezbollah), and UN observers. The July 30 Qana massacre, in which dozens of children were killed in cold blood while in bed, was not the first. In 1996, Israel attacked Lebanese civilians in the same village who sought refuge in the UN camps, but Israeli artillery and helicopters killed almost 100 Lebanese civilians. When Boutros Boutros Ghali, the then UN Secretary General, made public the report of the UN field commander in Lebanon that Israel had deliberately targeted Lebanese civilians, the U.S.A. rewarded him by denying him a second term in office. In a recent interview with the Egyptian daily *Al-Wafd*, Boutros Ghali revealed the pressures that the U.S.A. exercised on him to classify the UN field commander report. The result was that no international investigation was done of the Qana 1 massacre, which encouraged Israel to commit the Qana 2 massacre. Had there been a full investigation of the Qana 1 massacre, Qana 2 would not have happened.

Compare the international investigation of the assassination of [Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik] al-Hariri, where Syria was asked to leave Lebanon and cooperate unconditionally with the UN Commission, with Israel's refusal even to receive the "fact-finding" UN commission into the Jenin massacre of March 2002, with no protest from any Security Council member. The same policy of targeting civilians was applied to the Palestinians. When Palestinian fighters captured an Israeli soldier, Israel replied by capturing Palestinian parliamentarians and ministers who are still now in Israeli jails, and by turning Gaza upside down with the Apaches and bulldozers. . . . Underlying these differential approaches to Arab and Israeli civilian victims, is an image which projects Arab and Israeli civilians as unequal.

Third, President Bush justified his full backing of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon on grounds of the right of Israel to defend itself. This is a valid argument. The problem is that self-defense is restricted to Israel. The Arabs have no right to exercise this right, as far the American-Israeli neo-conservative alliance is concerned. Palestinians have a right to defend themselves against Israeli occupation and colonization of their land. Iraqis have a right to defend themselves against the invasion of foreign powers, and the Lebanese also have a right to defend themselves against the occupation of Shaba'a Farms and the detention of hundreds of Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails. However, when the Arabs exercise their right to self-defense, the "terrorism" cliché is quite ready to de-legitimize such an exercise.

One-Sided Support for Israel

At the global level, the U.S.A. and the European Union pursued two main strategies which contributed to the present bloodbath in the Arab world. The first was the strategy of “benign neglect” toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, and claiming that the root causes of the conflict were the lack of democracy in the Arab world, not territorial occupation and colonization. In the meantime, Israel was given a green light to unilaterally impose its views of future peace on the Arabs, even if this required destroying them. Notice that when Israel began its bloody crackdown on Hamas in 2004, the U.S.A. gave public approval, and the EU put Hamas on its list of terrorist organizations, thereby signaling Israel to proceed to kill. The end results of this strategy were the present bloodbaths and the failure to solve the conflict or to promote democracy in the Arab world.

Second, the U.S.A. and the EU introduced a new rule into Middle East politics: Israel, and only Israel, will determine the type of peace in the region. Peace will not come about as a result of serious negotiations based on Security Council resolutions, but as a result of Israel’s own conceptualization of such peace. Notice that Security Council Resolution 425, issued in 1982, calling upon Israel to withdraw from Lebanon, was partially implemented in 2000. For 18 years, Western powers ignored resolution 425, and when Israel felt obliged to withdraw in 2000 under Hezbollah’s military pressure, it retained portions of Lebanon, Shaba’a Farms. Once again, no Western power asked Israel to complete its withdrawal. Compare this “soft” approach with the Western approach to the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559. The approach this time was the immediate, full, and unconditional withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, but Israel was never asked to do likewise from Shaba’a Farms. Had Resolution 425 been fully implemented, we would not have been in the present situation. But because of the Euro-American reluctance to ask Israel to do anything that it does not want to do, Security Council Resolution 425 has not been fully implemented until today, and the name of the game now is Resolutions 1559, and 1701.

After Sept. 11, 2001, the U.S.A. began to pursue a new strategy quite reminiscent of its strategy towards Japan and Germany after the end of the Second World War, that is, to defeat the other, force him to acknowledge defeat, and move to restructure his society for that position. In fact, that was what President Bush said in his April 2002 statement, when he referred to the cases of Japan, Germany, and Russia as models for his future Arab strategy. The neo-conservative policymakers of the Bush Administration could not comprehend the major discrepancies between these experiences and the Arabs. The countries which Bush referred to were defeated and acknowledged that, especially in the cases of Japan and Germany.

It is highly inconceivable that the Arabs will follow suit. This is essentially because the Arabs perceive themselves as



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targets of aggression. They have not committed aggression, as Japan and Germany had done. Further, Arab cultures are basically different from those of Japan and Germany. They would not accept a foreign power imposing its “cultural” terms on them, as the case of the French policy of assimilation in Algeria has proven before. Nevertheless, the Bush Administration is proceeding on the faulty assumption of rebuilding the defeated (Arab) other, and talking about “nation-building” in the Middle East (Iraq), without realizing that in this part of the world there were civilizations thousands of years ago, and that the talk about “nation-building” in the Arab world is perceived as an insult to the Arabs.

The American-Israeli project in the Middle East was given a face-lift in 2004 through the “Greater Middle East Project.” The essence of the project was democratization, as “democracies do not fight each other.” This is true, provided that there are no territorial claims between democracies. The present struggle between Israel and Lebanon and Palestine testifies to the limitations of this claim. The U.S.A. used the democratization claim in order to blackmail

Arab governments to unconditionally endorse the new American strategy in Iraq and Lebanon, or else the democracy weapon would be used, and if used it would mean their ouster from power. This explains the silence of most Arab governments towards the Israeli atrocities against the Palestinians and the Lebanese. The very survival of these governments is at stake.

One should add a footnote here. The Greater Middle East project was not a response to Sept. 11, or the invasion of Iraq, but was a project designed by the neo-conservatives in the mid-1990s and brought in to the open only in 2003. I remember I visited the Rand Corporation in Santa Monica, California in July 1994. There I met Zalmay Khalilzad, the present U.S.A. "ambassador" to Iraq, and one of the leading neo-conservative figures. He introduced himself as the director of the "Greater Middle East Center" at Rand. When I asked him to clarify the meaning of this newly coined concept, he just smiled. The second time I heard about that concept was in 2004, when the neo-conservatives pulled it out from their files and announced it as if it were a response to the Middle East problems. . . .

Real Causes and Solutions

Where do we go from here? Condoleezza Rice said that the New Middle East is emerging from this war. The Arabs understood that Miss Rice wants a Middle East void of any opposition to American and Israeli interests, or as one Egyptian analyst put it, "Miss Rice wants a great apartheid regime in the Middle East under the name of democracy."² In fact, the Greater Middle East is widely perceived in the Arab world as a new "Sykes-Picot" Agreement.³ The present war will not result in the fulfillment of the American-Israeli design of the new Middle East. The Israeli experience in Lebanon in 1982, the American experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, are strong testimonies to the accuracy of that conclusion. Notice that Hezbollah was created as a response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The goal of the invasion was to finish off the Palestinian resistance. Granted that the PLO was ousted from Lebanon, but Hezbollah was established as a resistance force to Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon between 1982 and 2000, and it was that resistance that forced [Israeli Prime Minister Ehud] Barak to withdraw.

President Bush also said he would like to deal with "root causes" of the problem, which is the capture of the Israeli soldiers. This is *not* the root cause of this war. The root cause is inherent in the failure of Israel to honor its commitments

2. Mohammad Said, *Al-Ahram*, July 31, 2006.

3. In 1915, the British promised Sherif Hussein of Mecca and the Arab nationalists in Syria to establish an Arab unified kingdom in the Arab East and the Arabian Peninsula, if the Arabs joined them to oust the Turks from these areas. The Arabs accepted the promise. But in 1916, the British and the French signed a secret deal known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, according to which they divided the Arab East between them.

under the Oslo agreements and to commit itself to full withdrawal from the Arab occupied territories, and the Israeli-American determination to impose a settlement which amounts to the Bantustanization of Palestine.

The first step in any sustainable solution is the full implementation of all the agreements and the resolutions which are already in place. Virtually all the agreements which Israel had signed with the Palestinian Authority were not fully implemented (and some were not implemented at all), and no agreed-upon withdrawal dates were respected by Israel. The Arab Peace Initiative of March 2002 (full withdrawal and full normalization of relations) was immediately reciprocated by Israel with the Jenin Massacre. The Road Map was an attempt to absorb the fury of Arab public opinion against the invasion of Iraq by appearing as if the U.S.A. and Britain were trying to solve the Palestinian question, at a time in which they were invading Iraq. The Road Map has partially achieved its objective and has been shelved into the archives of history.

What is needed now is to go back to the "real" root causes. These are Israeli occupation of Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian territories. This means the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 425 and all the agreements signed with the Palestinian Authority, and initiating real negotiations on the full withdrawal from Palestinian territories and Syrian territories occupied in June 1967, and the dismantling, not of Hamas, but of the colonies that Israel has been building on Palestinian and Syrian territories. Realistically, given the present Middle Eastern and global power equation, this is not likely to happen in the near future. But during this war, Hezbollah was able to stand up to the Israeli war machine, and frustrate its objectives. This has changed the strategic equation in the Middle East in the direction of a possible sustainable and equitable solution. For once, Israel should realize that vicious military force has its limitations, and that political solutions based on mutual recognition of the other are indispensable. Any other outcome, including the recently issued Security Council resolution 1701, will mean that the Middle East bloodbath will continue.

Such a prospect can be tremendously facilitated by Eurasian powers cooperating to present an alternative to the militaristic strategy of the neo-conservative warmongers in Washington. Such an alternative should include political and economic dimensions. The political dimension should include the immediate convening of a multilateral Middle East peace conference to reach an agreement on the territorial and arms control issues, and devise supporting confidence-building mechanisms to reinforce any deal on those issues. As for the economic dimension, new links must be established between the Eurasian mega-economic projects and the Middle East countries, with a view of extending the benefits of these projects to these countries, and diverting the region from the culture of conflict and domination, to a one of cooperation and mutual respect.