

U.S. Army Falls Deeper Into British Sykes-Picot Trap

by Carl Osgood

Sept. 25—No study of the wars of the Middle East can be competent unless it takes up the historical question of British involvement in the region and the imperialist system that still controls how people think about it, both inside and outside of the region. Yet, a U.S. Army study, entitled *Back to Basics: A Study of the Second Lebanon War and Operation CASTLEAD*, published by the U.S. Army's Combat Studies Institute (CSI) last May, rejects that historical approach in favor of a minute examination of what happened in the dirt during those two wars, seeking lessons that might be applicable to Afghanistan and any future conflicts that the U.S. might get involved in. The report declares that the reforms in doctrine and training instituted by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) between the two wars "paid great dividends to Israeli soldiers and aircrews. [Operation CASTLEAD] also demonstrated Israeli resolve, created a schism in the Muslim Middle East and is only one of a series of escalations in what is becoming a very dangerous conflict in the region."

In a May 4 address at Central Connecticut State University, *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche argued that both sides in the conflict are being played like puppets. "The conflict is not determined by the Israelis or Arabs," he said. "It's determined by international forces which look at this region." Those forces, based largely in London, play on the mentality of both sides stemming from the 1916 Sykes-Picot carving up of Palestine by the British and the French, to keep Israelis and Arabs at each other's throats, permanently, to keep them killing each other over particular parcels of land. Why is this happening? "Somebody's playing and orchestrating the situation," LaRouche said. That somebody is the British Empire, based in London, but really an empire of financier interests that protect their power by orchestrating conflicts around the globe, to keep people who should band together in common cause, fighting each other instead.

The United States was founded in opposition to that same British imperialist system. So, what does it mean today when the U.S. Army "studies" recent episodes of that manipulated conflict, the 2006 Lebanon war and the December 2008-January 2009 Israeli assault on Gaza, and concludes that while Israel "failed" in 2006, the wholesale changes the IDF made in its doctrine and training resulted in a "military success" in Gaza? In fact, both wars "succeeded" from the British standpoint, because they guarantee further conflict (unless London's policies are smashed), and eventual disintegration of the region, which precisely serves British imperial interests. The Army report, therefore, plays into this dynamic, rather than alleviating it, thereby sucking the U.S. military deeper into this trap: Witness the deepening U.S. involvement in Afghanistan demanded by elements of the U.S. military establishment, based explicitly on British methods.

Abandoning a Failed Doctrine

An earlier CSI report, *We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War*, by Matt M. Matthews, published in 2008, documented the IDF's tactical failure in the Lebanon campaign. The IDF had adopted a new doctrine a few months before going to war in Lebanon, that was based on certain concepts of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), including Effects Based Operations (EBO) and a particular Israeli invention called Systemic Operational Design (SOD). These concepts were supposed to enable the IDF to better plan campaigns and to concentrate on predicting and generating "effects" by chosen courses of action.

Matthews, who also authored a chapter of the *Back to Basics* report, documented that the RMA-based doctrine failed miserably. It relied heavily on air power to produce "effects" that would force Hezbollah out of southern Lebanon and cause them to disarm. The air



UNWRA

The 1916 imperial British-French Sykes-Picot Agreement still imposes its legacy of carnage in the Middle East. Here, UN Relief and Works Agency warehouses burn during the December 2008-January 2009 Israeli invasion of Gaza.

campaign failed to produce any such effect, however, though it did succeed in destroying nearly every highway bridge in Lebanon, causing significant hardship for the population. When the air campaign proved inconclusive, ground forces were finally sent in to try to stop the daily barrage of Hezbollah rockets being fired into northern Israel. The Israeli army, which had been routinized by years of occupation duty in the Palestinian territories, proved to be totally incapable of even basic conventional combat operations against Hezbollah's well-prepared and expertly executed defense. The Israelis couldn't even coordinate tanks and infantry, and suffered heavy losses to Hezbollah anti-tank weapons as a result.

So, the IDF suffered a strategic defeat in Lebanon. Under the pressure of internal inquiries and the Winograd Commission report, the IDF did a top-to-bottom assessment of its failure, which resulted in a complete overhaul of its doctrine and training. Over 2007 and 2008, the army went back to large-scale exercises, up to division level, emphasizing conventional combat skills, including infantry, armor and artillery coordination; it totally abandoned the RMA-based doctrine.

Simultaneous to the re-institution of conventional combat training, the IDF prepared a new campaign plan for Gaza. The CSI report states that "The IDF did not go to war with plans to conduct a sustained occupation, to

try to destroy Hamas or all its forces, or to reintroduce the Palestinian Authority and Fatah, although contingency plans and exercises may have existed." The IDF also had "an unprecedented" amount of intelligence information on Hamas, which it had been preparing for years, which gave it "a remarkably accurate picture" of Hamas targets in Gaza. According to sources quoted in the report, notably Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., the campaign set objectives that could be achieved within ten days of a ground incursion, because that was the limit that IDF planners calculated the war could go on before serious negative consequences, including civilian casualties and regional instability,

would build up.

The report concludes that "the IDF's real triumph" in Gaza "was not its ability to quash an inferior military organization like Hamas, but how the Israeli military retrained and restructured its ground forces in the wake of their disappointing performance in 2006. These post-war re-examinations and alterations allowed it to defeat Hamas so decisively and convincingly that would-be enemies of Israel could not fail to take note."

Tactics and War Crimes

The report's description of IDF tactics inside Gaza is remarkably antiseptic, given the level of civilian casualties and destruction they caused. The report notes the use of Caterpillar D-9 bulldozers and heavy fire power to create "new avenues of approach" through buildings and walls, to avoid Hamas ambushes and booby traps. The report also notes the IDF use of white phosphorous, but says, "the Law of Land Warfare does not prohibit the use of WP against enemy personnel." That may be true, but press reports and human rights groups charged that the IDF used WP shells in populated areas, which *would* be a violation of the laws of warfare. The facilities of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which provides support to hundreds of thousands of Gazans, were hit by Israeli bombs and shells—also likely war crimes.

A total of 1,434 Palestinians died in the assault, according to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, including 235 combatants and 239 police, and another 5,303 were wounded. Of the 960 civilians killed, 288 were children and 121 were women. The wounded included 1,606 children and 828 women. The destruction in the wake of the Israeli assault, left the Gaza population, already suffering from an 18-month Israeli siege, destitute and dependent on whatever foreign aid the Israelis have been willing to let in. That is the fruit of the Israeli tactics employed against Gaza.

By contrast, Israeli casualties were minuscule—ten soldiers killed in action and three civilians killed due to a relative handful of Hamas rockets and mortars fired into Israel. The report praises the force protection measures taken by the IDF, such as the use of dogs to enter buildings and trip booby traps. Lt. Col. Abe Marrero, writing in Chapter 3 of the report, comments: “Considering the scope of the operation, its tempo, and the inherent advantage of well dug-in defenders, the relatively small number of IDF or collateral civilian casualties [!] is remarkable. This is attributable to the lessons learned from the Second Lebanon War being well-heeded by the IDF and subsequent development and enforcement of effective force protection measures.”

The Complex Hamas Factor

Complicating matters is that Hamas is not simply the “terrorist” group that the CSI report, and indeed most analysts, imagine it to be. The report attributes the rise of both Hamas and Hezbollah to the poor economic conditions in Gaza and Lebanon, respectively. It ignores the fact that both groups were founded as resistance movements to Israeli occupation. The additional irony not mentioned in the report, though not unknown, including inside Israel, is that the growth of Hamas was initially fostered by Israeli authorities from the 1980s on, to undermine the PLO, recognized worldwide as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

Furthermore, the principal leaders of Hamas have been members of the Muslim Brotherhood, itself a creation of the British Empire in the 1920s to undermine legitimate Arab nationalist (meaning also anti-British) movements in the wake of Sykes-Picot. Hamas has evolved significantly, and is today far more of a complex organization, with political factions open to a gen-

uine two-state solution, as evidenced by a recent *Wall Street Journal* interview with Hamas’s secretary general, Khalid Mashaal.

Contrary to what the CSI report claims, Hamas rocket attacks did not trigger the Israeli assault on Gaza, but rather the assault was a product of the Sykes-Picot mentality cited above. Sources inside Israel had informed *EIR* in January 2008, that the Israeli security cabinet had already approved plans for strikes against Hamas in Gaza. Those plans included contingency plans for strikes into Lebanon, should Hezbollah decide to take action, and against Iran if that country were to actively support Hamas. The conflict, launched by then-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert just before Netanyahu took office, also sabotaged then-ongoing back-channel negotiations with Syria that, had they come to fruition, might have led to a just solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and an end to the tyranny of the Sykes-Picot arrangements, as LaRouche noted at the time.

Digging Holes Instead of Ending Wars

The *Back to Basics* report does not explicitly state what lessons the U.S. Army should take from the Israeli 2006-09 experience, but it is meant to feed into the ongoing dialogue and debate on Army doctrine. The implication of all this may have best been stated by Army Brig. Gen. H.R. McMaster, the director of concept development for the Army Capabilities and Integration Center at Fort Monroe, Va., during remarks at the Joint Warfighting Conference in Virginia Beach, Va. on May 12. He ridiculed the RMA concepts “that lead to the idea that you have perfect knowledge and can apply military power perfectly.” He told his audience that, instead, “It is time to divest ourselves of this unrealistic thinking and get back to real war.”

The Obama Administration is plunging deeper into the Afghanistan war. The Israeli experiences of 2006-09 will, no doubt, play a role in informing the strategy and doctrine that the U.S. military is taking into that war. Also informing its strategy is a counterinsurgency doctrine largely inspired by British methods of imperial policing. The only way out of the resulting hole is by breaking with the Sykes-Picot paradigm, and returning to the anti-colonial outlook of America’s founders and greatest statesmen. The *Back to Basics* report is an indication that, instead, the U.S. Army is looking for a better shovel.