

Background

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Strong International Support Is Required to Build Peace in Lebanon

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The August 14 cease-fire between Israel and the radical Shiite Hezbollah (“Party of God”) is an unstable arrangement that could collapse at any time without concerted international efforts to rapidly deploy effective peacekeeping forces in southern Lebanon, both to separate the combatants and to prevent Hezbollah from launching future cross-border terrorist attacks. To turn the cease-fire into a stable peace, much more will need to be done to isolate and eventually disarm Hezbollah, shore up the Lebanese government, penalize Hezbollah’s Iranian and Syrian backers, and help rebuild Lebanon.

A Flawed and Fragile Cease-Fire

The 34-day war between Israel and Hezbollah along the Israel–Lebanon border had no real winners outside of Iran and Syria. Hezbollah, which provoked the crisis on July 12 by kidnapping two Israeli soldiers to force the release of three Lebanese terrorists held in Israeli jails, suffered major losses, including over 500 dead and the destruction of its headquarters, offices, and many of its bases and arms caches. Despite these losses, Hezbollah has claimed a political victory because it was able to fight to a draw with Israel, avoiding the decisive military defeat that marked past Arab wars with Israel.

While Hezbollah has gained considerable prestige in the Arab world for killing 159 Israelis, it risks a backlash in Lebanon, which lost almost 1,200 dead and suffered substantial damage to its infrastructure from Hezbollah’s reckless attacks. Although Hezbol-

Talking Points

The United States should lead an international coalition to:

- Rapidly deploy a robust peacekeeping force in Lebanon with robust rules of engagement to enforce the fragile cease-fire.
- Isolate Hezbollah and press the Lebanese government to expel it from the ruling coalition if it fails to disarm and halt terrorism.
- Help the Lebanese government to rebuild the country while minimizing Hezbollah’s role in that effort.
- Penalize Iran and Syria for supporting terrorism in Lebanon.

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lah political leaders are part of Lebanon's coalition government, they did not consult their coalition partners before plunging the country into a costly war. Even many Lebanese Shiites, who comprise about one-third of Lebanon's 4 million people and constitute Hezbollah's power base, wonder whether Hezbollah's self-proclaimed "victory" was worth it.

Nevertheless, Hezbollah remains firmly rooted in its village strongholds in southern Lebanon and has proclaimed that it reserves the right to continue attacking Israelis inside Lebanon despite the cease-fire. Israel, concerned that Hezbollah is merely using the respite to regroup and rearm, launched a commando raid in the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon on August 19, reportedly to intercept arms supplies that were trucked across the Syrian border. Lebanon's volatile tinderbox could erupt in renewed fighting at any moment.

Under the terms of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, which established the framework of the cease-fire, Israeli troops are to withdraw at the "earliest possible" time after the Lebanese army deploys in southern Lebanon, supported by an international peacekeeping force. Although the introductory paragraphs of the resolution pay lip service to the goal of disarming Hezbollah, as required under the earlier Security Council Resolution 1559, the operative paragraphs leave the issue dangerously ambiguous. The Lebanese army is vaguely given the responsibility of disarming Hezbollah, despite Hezbollah's adamant refusal to surrender its weapons.

The resolution's key provision specifies that the Lebanese army, backed by a peacekeeping force, must establish "an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL [the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon]" between the Israel-Lebanon border and the Litani River, about 15 miles north. While this sounds good in theory, in practice it means only that Hezbollah is likely to hide its weapons and disperse its cadres to blend in with their civilian supporters.

Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's government ordered the army merely to "ensure respect" for the U.N. demarcated border and to "apply the existing laws with regard to any weapons outside the authority of the Lebanese state."¹ In other words, Hezbollah will not be required to give up its arms, but only to keep them out of the sight of government forces.

Resolution 1701 also calls for international forces to help the Lebanese government monitor Lebanon's borders to prevent the importation of weapons without government consent. Syria has bridled at this provision and has threatened to close its border if international forces are deployed along border crossings. The resolution also calls for the unconditional release of the two Israeli hostages, but Hezbollah has refused to comply, instead seeking to use the hostages as bargaining chips to force the release of jailed terrorists.

Transforming a Shaky Cease-Fire into a Stable Peace

The goal of U.S. policy should be to transform the flawed cease-fire into a stable peace by isolating Hezbollah, limiting its ability to wreak havoc, bolstering the power of the Lebanese government, dismantling the Hezbollah state within a state, and creating long-term trends that will exert increasing international and Lebanese pressures on Hezbollah to disarm and halt terrorism or face exclusion from Lebanon's democratic politics.

The Bush Administration should therefore mobilize an international coalition to:

- **Rapidly deploy a robust international force with robust rules of engagement to Lebanon to enforce the cease-fire.**

The U.N. stabilization force to be deployed in Lebanon will retain the name of the existing 2,000-man United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) at Lebanon's request but will have an expanded mandate and be bolstered by up to 13,000 more troops. This force should deploy rapidly to prevent Hezbollah from filling the vacuum after an Israeli with-

1. Sam Ghattas and Zeina Karam, "Lebanon Skirts Issue of Hezbollah's Arms," Associated Press, August 16, 2006.

drawal. It should be a muscular force with artillery, armor, air support, and intelligence assets to enable it to operate in a potentially dangerous environment. And it should be granted robust rules of engagement under a clear command structure to enforce the cease-fire and defend itself from attack.

The original UNIFIL was an ineffective collection of light infantry units from various countries that was hampered by weak rules of engagement. Deployed in 1978 after Israel intervened in Lebanon to fight Palestinian terrorists who were launching cross-border attacks to kill civilians, UNIFIL has done little to rein in Palestinian or Lebanese terrorists and has lost 257 killed over the past 28 years in Lebanon's harsh environment.

The new force will have to scramble to deploy and insert itself between Israeli and Hezbollah forces before the fragile cease-fire explodes. It was hampered initially by France's vacillating attitude toward participating in the operation, but it appears that Paris now will commit 2,000 troops as it had earlier promised to do. Italy has offered up to 3,000 troops, and smaller commitments of ground troops or other forces are expected from Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Nepal, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey. Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia also have offered troops but should not be allowed to participate because they do not recognize Israel.

While the disarmament of Hezbollah should remain a long-term goal, as enshrined in Security Council Resolution 1559, no international force is likely to succeed in disarming Hezbollah against its will in the immediate future. UNIFIL will have to settle for assisting the Lebanese army, if it requests help, in curbing Hezbollah as much as possible in the south, destroying Hezbollah weapons caches wherever they can be found, and closely monitoring the Lebanon-Syria border to prevent the transfer of arms and supplies to Hezbollah. Washington should vigilantly oversee the operations of UNIFIL to prevent it from once again backsliding into ineffective irrelevance.

- **Isolate Hezbollah and press the Lebanese government to expel it from the ruling coalition if it fails to disarm and halt terrorism.**

No international peacekeeping force can succeed if the Lebanese government continues to side with Hezbollah, which has 14 seats in the Lebanese parliament and two cabinet positions in the government. Allowing Hezbollah to compete in elections without having disarmed and renounced terrorism was a huge mistake. Like Hamas, which remains committed to terrorism and has exacerbated the conflict between Palestinians and Israel, Hezbollah has dragged Lebanon into a costly war with Israel. The recent terrorist activities of these two radical Islamic groups expose the folly of allowing armed militias to compete as political parties in elections. To be eligible to participate in future elections, such groups should be required to disavow terrorism and dismantle their militias permanently.

The U.S. should condition its offer of aid for Lebanon's postwar reconstruction on the expulsion of Hezbollah from the ruling coalition. This will help to force Lebanese political leaders to do what they can to curtail Hezbollah's political power. Many leaders of Lebanon's Christian, Sunni, and Druze sects resent Hezbollah's hijacking of Lebanon's future and want to see its political power reduced. Putting strings on U.S. economic aid gives these leaders political cover to insist that Hezbollah must disarm as required by Security Council Resolution 1559 and the 1989 Taif Accords that helped to set the terms for ending Lebanon's bloody civil war.

Even many members of Lebanon's Shia sect have growing doubts about the wisdom of Hezbollah's reckless policies. Sayyed Ali Al-Amin, a Shiite religious leader, publicly criticized Hezbollah in an interview in a Lebanese newspaper:

I don't think Hizbullah asked the Shi'ite community about the war. Perhaps the great emigration from the south is the best proof that the people of the south

were against the war. The Shi'ite community authorized no one to declare war in its name or to drag it into a war that was far from its wishes and from the wishes of the other ethnic communities in Lebanon.²

Ultimately, Hezbollah will be disarmed only if Lebanese Shiites see Hezbollah's terrorism as undermining their own interests by plunging them into an endless war with Israel that serves only Iranian and Syrian interests.

Washington should also press the European Union to declare Hezbollah a terrorist group and cease diplomatic contacts with it. Although the Europeans until now have accepted the fiction that Hezbollah is an acceptable political party, its recent efforts to hide behind Lebanese civilians while it indiscriminately sought to slaughter Israeli civilians provides yet more evidence that it remains an unreformed terrorist movement.

- **Help the Lebanese government to rebuild the country while minimizing Hezbollah's role in that effort.**

The United States should lead an effort to create an international fund for the rapid disbursement of funds for the reconstruction of Lebanon's shattered infrastructure, subject to external audits. On August 21, President Bush pledged \$230 million for reconstruction on top of the \$50 million that had been offered previously. The United States should organize an international effort, including Saudi Arabia (which already has pledged \$500 million) and other Persian Gulf oil kingdoms, to provide aid to the Lebanese people. Riyadh and other Sunni Arab governments have a strong interest in containing the influence of Shiite Iran and its Hezbollah surrogates.

Reconstruction efforts in the south should be coordinated with the rival Amal movement to curtail Hezbollah's role in the international rebuilding effort. A stable peace is possible only

after the Lebanese Shiites in the south see that their government, not Hezbollah, can help them attain security, prosperity, and a return to normal life.

The United States should also help to bolster Lebanon's army and police so that the central government can reassert its authority along the southern border more effectively. The Pentagon recently has studied how to enhance the training and equipment of the Lebanese army. This plan should be put into effect, and a similar one should be drawn up for the Lebanese police.

- **Penalize Iran and Syria for supporting terrorism in Lebanon.**

Iran and Syria have long supported Hezbollah and Palestinian terrorist groups that operate from Lebanese territory. Iran helped to create Hezbollah in 1982 and remains its principal source of arms, training, ideological inspiration, and external financial support. Tehran provides an estimated \$100 million in economic support and probably at least as much in military equipment each year. It furnished Hezbollah with the Katyusha rockets, surface-to-surface missiles, anti-ship missiles, and many of the anti-tank missiles used in the recent conflict. Syria also has provided sophisticated Russian anti-tank missiles, along with other arms, and facilitates the transshipment of Iranian arms to Lebanon. One of the Hezbollah terrorists captured in the July 12 attack admitted that he had been trained in Iran. Iran also has deployed up to 200 Revolutionary Guards inside Lebanon, down from the estimated peak of 2,000 in the 1980s.

The United States should strongly urge that its allies impose economic and diplomatic sanctions on Iran and Syria for their continued support of terrorism and meddling in Lebanon. Both countries have economies that are hampered by mismanagement and corruption and that sorely need Western technology, investment, and trade. Washington should ask that

2. "Intra-Shiite Criticism: Hizbullah Didn't Ask the Shiites About the War," Middle East Media Research Institute, *Special Dispatch—Lebanon* No. 1266, August 25, 2006.

its allies join it in withholding these to the greatest degree possible.

At a minimum, Washington should insist that the U.N. peacekeeping force report any violations of the arms embargo or the presence of prohibited foreign forces in Lebanon to the Security Council for possible action. Syria already is under a U.N.-sponsored investigation for complicity in the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, and Iran faces imminent Security Council action for its prohibited nuclear activities. If the international community continues to stand idly by despite Iranian and Syrian support for terrorism in Lebanon, the world will become a much more dangerous place.

Conclusion

The flawed cease-fire in Lebanon will remain unstable as long as Hezbollah remains a powerful force in Lebanon. The United States should lead a

coalition of the willing to pressure Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria to halt terrorist activities or face escalating diplomatic, economic, political, and possible military costs for continuing their campaign of mass murder. Meanwhile, the newly reinforced UNIFIL should seek to curb, if not fully disarm, Hezbollah south of the Litani River and cut off its arms supplies from Iran and Syria.

Unless such actions are taken, the situation in Lebanon will revert to *status quo ante*: the reemergence of a Hezbollah state within a state, which President Bush has proclaimed to be intolerable. Should this happen, war will return to Lebanon when Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria find it convenient to reignite the fuse.

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