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U.S. Should Not Impose a Ceasefire Deadline on Israel

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Rising civilian casualties in Lebanon are triggering calls for the U.S. to impose a ceasefire on Israel before Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice travels to the region and the United Nations Security Council takes up the issue. However, Israel is exercising its legitimate right to defend itself after an unprovoked attack by the Hezbollah terrorist organization across an internationally recognized border. That attack resulted in the killing of eight Israeli soldiers and the taking of two hostages, and it has plunged the Middle East into a new war. The United States should resist calls to impose a ceasefire on Israel.

Israel is engaged in a struggle against a terrorist organization and its sponsors who publicly call for its extermination. As well, this is an important front in a global war on terrorism. And only when Hezbollah, Iran's strategic asset in Lebanon, is defeated, will Iran get the message loud and clear that terrorist provocation does work.

Moreover, a sovereign state cannot declare a ceasefire against a terrorist organization that refuses to recognize its legitimacy—it will not hold. The U.S., for example, has not declared a ceasefire against al-Qaeda. And importantly, Iran and Syria are enemies of democratic Lebanon, disrupting its nascent democratic government and pushing the ethnically- and religiously-divided country back into turmoil to gain political clout. Iran and Syria are determined to disrupt President Bush's policy to bring democracy to the Middle East. Defanging Hezbollah will be a blow to their plans.

The Ayatollahs' Message

Hezbollah is terrorism's "A-Team," says former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. Armitage refers to Iran as the A-Team's owner and Syria as its coach. Firing short-range missiles into Israel, Hezbollah is the major destabilizing force in the Middle East and the main obstacle to democratization and stability in Lebanon. It is thus a hindrance to the Bush Administration's policy of expanding democracy in the region. It is also one of the major culprits—and targets—in the global war on Islamist terrorism. The majority of the Lebanese, including the non-Shi'a political elite, want Hezbollah disarmed and out of southern Lebanon. Israel appeals determined to carry out this mission, and the United States should not hold its ally back.

Iran views Hezbollah as the first line of attack against the U.S. and its ally Israel, a senior Iranian official told Western diplomats in London according to a recent article in *Al Sharq al-Awsat*. The Iranian leadership, starting with the late Ayatollah Khomeini, the current "supreme leader" Ayatollah Ali Khamenai, and President Mahmoud Ahmadine-

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jad, publicly has denied Israel's right to exist and called for measures to "wipe Israel off the map."

Iran founded, funds, trains, and equips Hezbollah with Katyusha missiles, Fajar 3 and 4 missiles, and Zalzal missiles, while Syria, listed by the U.S. State Department as a terrorist-sponsoring state and a junior partner in the Hezbollah joint venture, facilitates the supply of Hezbollah via Damascus International Airport and across the Syrian border.

Hezbollah's attack was timed to coincide with the G-8 summit of industrialized nations, which planned to discuss Iran's rejection of the generous offer it received from the U.S., the E-3 (Great Britain, France, and Germany), Russia, and China. The plan aimed to make the Iranian nuclear program transparent in exchange for massive aid, including a light water reactor. Teheran responded by ignoring the offer and apparently giving a green light to Hezbollah's attack on Israel.

The G-8 summit, held in St. Petersburg, Russia, on July 15-17, denounced Hezbollah's attacks. As well, major U.S. Arab allies in the Middle East, including Egypt, Jordan, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, have placed responsibility for the new war squarely on the doorstep of Hezbollah and its backers, namely Syria and Iran.

U.S. Interests

The U.S. has multiple interests in the current conflict. First, it needs to send a strong message to Iran that its policy of using terrorist proxies (Hezbollah and Hamas) to derail the multilateral diplomatic process to make the Iranian nuclear program transparent will not work. Second, the U.S. and its allies have an interest in assuring that Hezbollah disarms, disperses, and ceases to exist as a terrorist militia. Third, the U.S. wants to see stability in Lebanon and development of its democratic government. This means preventing foreign actors, such as Iran and Syria, from destabilizing it.

Finally, the U.S. is interested in limiting civilian casualties in Lebanon and Israel. For that to happen, Hezbollah must stop using civilians as human

shields for its massive weapons caches, commanders, headquarters, and military targets and stop raining missiles on Israeli towns and villages, indiscriminately targeting civilians.

Self-Defense

The United States supports the right of countries to defend themselves under international law, especially while fighting the war on terrorism. Israel indeed has such a right. The government of Lebanon is in explicit violation of international law and U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559, which required it to disarm Hezbollah and take control of the country's south. Lebanon, whether out of weakness or ill intent, is ultimately responsible for Hezbollah's aggression against its neighbor Israel.

While exercising self-defense, Israel is targeting Hezbollah's positions, weapons depots, training camps, TV and radio stations (which regularly broadcasts blood-curdling propaganda), and other assets. Israel is not deliberately targeting civilians.

Conclusion

The United States should not impose any deadline that would press Israel to cease its fire. Israel has the right and duty to defend itself until its security is ensured and Lebanon's future is safe from Hezbollah's provocations. Instead, the U.S. should work with Israel, France, and moderate Arab states to support those elements in Lebanon that want to disarm Hezbollah and end the flow of arms and the support of its sponsors. In the interim, Hezbollah should fully withdraw north, until it is out of striking range of Israel, and agree to begin surrendering its heavy weapons, including missiles. This challenge is an opportunity to make both Lebanon and Israel more secure and to score a victory in the global war on terrorism.

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