

US gives Israel a blank check to wage war

By Barry Grey
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The Bush administration has given Israel a carte blanche to wage war against Lebanon, bombing and killing as it sees fit. American diplomacy in the crisis precipitated by Israeli aggression first against Gaza and then against its neighbor to the north is concentrated on blocking any move for a ceasefire and concocting a pretext for future military action against Syria and Iran.

It is transparently clear that for President Bush it is of no consequence that tens of thousands of American citizens, not to mention other foreign nationals, are in harm's way, as Israel continues to blast away at civilian populations in every part of the country, including the capital, Beirut. Already, eight Canadians have died as a result of an Israeli bomb attack on a house in southern Lebanon.

Far from issuing a warning to Israel to desist until the Americans can be evacuated, Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have been using every available forum to justify Israel's savage assault and scotch all efforts to halt the lopsided fighting, in which Israel has an overwhelming military advantage.

The US government's indifference to American life, as well as Lebanese and, for that matter, Israeli, should serve as an object lesson on the cynicism and callousness of American imperialist policy—as well as its immeasurable hypocrisy. It is worth recalling that in 1983 the Reagan administration used a non-existent danger to a handful of American students in Grenada as the pretext for invading the Caribbean island nation after factional warfare had erupted within the ruling New Jewel Movement.

The entire American political establishment, Democrats no less than Republicans, and the mass media are proclaiming in unison that Israel is the victim and the militant Islamic groups, Hezbollah and Hamas, and their political allies, Syria and Iran, are the aggressors. They repeat endlessly that Israel is merely exercising its "right to defend itself," and the blockade and bombing of a sovereign country, Lebanon, was provoked by Hezbollah's kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers.

They conveniently ignore the statements of the families of the captured Israeli soldiers, who have demanded that the Israeli government negotiate with Hezbollah for the release of their loved ones as part of a prisoner exchange, and criticized their own government for refusing to take diplomatic steps, wondering out loud whether the soldiers have been abandoned in the pursuit of expansionist aims.

In Orwellian fashion, any form of Arab resistance against Israel is branded as "terrorism," while the indiscriminate bombing of cities, villages, roads, power plants, airports and bridges is called "self-defense."

One example of Israeli self-defense occurred on Saturday, in the deadliest single attack on Lebanese civilians since Israel

launched the war last Wednesday. According to Reuters, residents sought to leave the border village of Marwaheen in southern Lebanon after the Israeli military ordered them to evacuate over a loudspeaker. Israel then bombed a civilian convoy trying to leave the village, killing 16 people.

Even the pro-US regime in Beirut, the product of the American- and European-orchestrated Cedar Revolution of 2005, was flatly turned down when it requested that Washington call for a ceasefire. The same governments and media outlets that hailed the "revolution" which supposedly established Lebanese sovereignty by expelling Syrian troops now either overtly or tacitly endorse Israel's onslaught against the "sovereign" country.

In reality, the carnage in the Middle East—which has the potential of exploding into a far wider war—is the outcome of the imperialist and colonialist policies of the United States and its major client regime, Israel, in Palestine, Iraq and throughout the region.

It is difficult to capture in words the depths of cynicism expressed in the statements of American leaders and politicians. In his typically crude and stupid manner, Bush in effect called on Hezbollah and its hundreds of thousands of Lebanese Shiite supporters to commit suicide. Following talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday, the US president declared: "The best way to stop the violence is for Hezbollah to lay down its arms and to stop attacking."

The same basic line was put forward on the Sunday news programs by representatives of the administration and both political parties. Interviewed from the site of the G8 summit in St. Petersburg, Rice reiterated on the CBS News program "Face the Nation" the firm opposition of the US to a ceasefire and repeated the US-Israeli demand that Hezbollah be removed from southern Lebanon and disarmed, along with threats against Syria and Iran.

Jane Harman, the California Democrat who is the ranking member of the House of Representatives Select Intelligence Committee, responded to Rice's comments by saying, "I was positive about what she said as far as she goes..." She stated the obligatory, "I do think Israel has a right to defend herself," and then sought to attack the Bush administration from the right, denouncing it for not acting sooner to disarm and remove Hezbollah.

Declaring the political/guerrilla movement, which has a mass base of support among the impoverished Shiite population of Lebanon and holds positions in the Lebanese cabinet, to be "more dangerous than Al Qaeda," she went on to describe Israel's three-week-old attack on Gaza and its war against Lebanon in openly racist terms: "Israel is draining the swamp here, both in Lebanon and in Gaza..."

Appearing on "Fox News Sunday," Senator George Allen, Republican from Virginia, declared his unqualified support for Israel, and then gave vent to the visceral hatred of the Arab masses that animates US policy, saying, "Now, there was a glimmer of

hope when that reptilian terrorist corrupt Arafat died...”

His Democratic counterpart, Senator Chris Dodd of Connecticut, began by saying it was necessary to “begin any discussion of this recognizing that what has happened over the last several days occurred because of Hezbollah and Hamas’ highly provocative, despicable actions...”

On NBC’s “Meet the Press” program, former Republican speaker of the house, Newt Gingrich, not only defended Israel’s actions and called for Hezbollah to be “cleared out” of southern Lebanon, he said that the events in Lebanon were part of a new “world war” against terrorism and terrorist regimes such as North Korea, Iran and Syria.

Democratic Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware, an announced contender for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2008, called Israel’s actions “a totally legitimate self-defense effort” prompted by an “unprovoked effort by terrorist organizations supported by outside states to destroy a democracy” in the Middle East.

The *New York Times*, in an editorial published Saturday, offered a particularly cynical and dishonest whitewash of Israel’s aggression in both Gaza and Lebanon. Declaring unequivocally that responsibility for the “latest outbreak” in “the circle of violence in the Middle East” rested with Hamas and Hezbollah, the Times cautioned that Israel needed to calibrate its military response, “however legally and morally justified,” so as to deny the Islamist groups “opportunities to rally broader Arab support.”

The newspaper went on to say that Israel was “fully justified in treating [the capture of Israeli soldiers by Hamas and Hezbollah] as unacceptable acts of aggression,” and to denounce the “provocateurs of Hamas and Hezbollah and their allies in Damascus and Tehran.”

As the *Times* well knows, this is an utterly potted version of events, ripped out of their real political and historical context.

This latest eruption of military aggression by Israel is the outcome of an unrelenting campaign of violence and repression systematically pursued, with the support of the United States, since 2000. In September of that year, after President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak failed to extract a total capitulation from Yasser Arafat at the Camp David talks, Ariel Sharon staged his infamous provocation at the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Sharon’s demonstration of Israeli contempt for the Palestinians and their claims to sovereignty over the city was calculated to provoke angry protests, which were then seized on to initiate a new level of repression.

Sharon’s action, which was tacitly supported by the Clinton administration as well as Barak, signaled a decisive shift from any negotiated settlement with the Palestinians to a policy aimed at the destruction of the Palestinian Authority.

Under Bush, this policy was intensified, and Israel was given a blank check to pursue its war against the Palestinian and Arab masses. The Bush administration saw unfettered Israeli violence against any and all forms of Palestinian resistance as conducive to its own plans to invade Iraq and establish American hegemony and unchallenged control over the Middle East’s oil wealth. Israel was to function as Washington’s junior partner and major enforcer in upholding US dominion over the area.

Washington abandoned any pretence of even-handedness in

the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and gave its blessing as Israel launched a campaign of provocations, military violence, targeted assassinations, economic sabotage and land grabs that has continued to the present. Israel made a practice of launching attacks so as to frustrate new attempts by the Palestinian leadership to initiate negotiations toward a diplomatic settlement.

Israel’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, and its dismantling of Jewish settlements in Gaza in 2005, both of which are presented by Israel’s apologists as peace moves, were in fact part of a strategy to unilaterally draw Israel’s borders, annexing a large part of the West Bank and all of Jerusalem, and leaving the Palestinians with discontinuous rump territories that could never form the basis of a viable state.

For the past six months, ever since Hamas won the Palestinian Authority elections, Israel has been carrying out a military and economic siege of the Occupied Territories. Israel stepped up its military offensive in recent weeks, launching hundreds of shells at Gaza and killing at least 14 civilians.

The raid by Hamas into Israel and its capture of an Israeli soldier on June 25 provided the pretext for the government of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to launch its incursion into Gaza. That Israeli escalation coincided, by no means accidentally, with Hamas’ acceptance of an agreement committing Hamas to a “two-state” solution that implicitly recognized Israel.

Such a development was anathema to Israel, which does not want any kind of peace deal and is determined to prevent the creation of even a truncated Palestinian state. The Israeli attack on Gaza put paid to the efforts of the Hamas leadership and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to fashion a new basis for negotiations.

There is, in fact, compelling evidence that the Israeli government allowed the cross-border Hamas raid to take place. Israel’s security service, Shin Bet, insisted in the aftermath of the raid that it had given the government and the Israeli Defence Forces a specific warning that militants intended to use a tunnel to abduct soldiers at a crossing on the southern part of the Israel-Gaza border.

This was the context—more than two weeks into a brutal Israeli offensive in Gaza—in which Hezbollah carried out the raid across Israel’s northern border that resulted in the killing of eight Israeli soldiers and capture of two others.

Hezbollah is a bourgeois nationalist movement with broad support within Lebanon and throughout the Arab world. It has won support in large part because of its armed resistance against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, which extended from the Israeli invasion of 1982 until Israel’s pullout from southern Lebanon in 2000.

It has every right to carry out actions against Israeli military targets, under conditions in which Israel continues to maintain a brutal and illegal occupation of Palestinian territories.

Israel and the US are now demanding either the destruction of Hezbollah, or its removal from southern Lebanon. Such a policy would entail the killing of hundreds of thousands of Lebanese Shiites and the eruption of a new civil war in the country.

This only underscores that the real target of US and Israeli policy is any and all resistance by the oppressed masses of the Middle East to the colonialist aims of both powers.