

“Limited War” in Lebanon

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On July 25, Israel launched what the press described as its “biggest military assault on Lebanon” since the 1982 invasion. The assault was provoked by guerrilla attacks on Israeli troops in southern Lebanon, killing seven Israeli soldiers. By the time a US-arranged cease fire took hold on July 31, about 125 Lebanese were reported killed, along with three Syrians and three Israelis, one a soldier in southern Lebanon, while about 500,000 people were driven from their homes according to reports from Lebanon.

Journalists in Lebanon reported that 90 percent of the 80,000 inhabitants of Tyre joined the flood of refugees northwards. Villages were deserted, with many casualties and destruction of civilian dwellings by intensive bombardment. Nabatiye, with a population of 60,000, was described as “a ghost town” by a Lebanese reporter a day after the attack was launched. Inhabitants described the bombings as even more intense and destructive than during the Israeli invasions of 1978 and 1982. Those who had not fled were running out of food and water but were trapped in their villages, Mark Nicolson reported from Nabatiye in the Financial Times, because “any visible movement inside or outside their houses is likely to attract the attention of Israeli artillery spotters, who...were pounding shells repeatedly and devastatingly into selected houses.” Artillery shells were hitting some villages at a rate of more than 10 rounds a minute at times, he reported, while Israeli jets roared overhead, and in nearby Sidon, “the main Hammoud hospital was admitting new casualties every 15 minutes by late afternoon” of July 27. An Israeli Army spokesperson said that “70 percent of the village of Jibshit is totally destroyed, its inhabitants will not recognize it.” The goal is “to wipe the villages from the face of the earth,” a senior officer added. In Tripoli, 40 miles north of Beirut, a Palestinian refugee camp was attacked by Israeli planes firing missiles. Israeli naval forces bombarded coastal areas near Beirut and intercepted vessels approaching Lebanese ports, though whether they also resumed their long-term practice of kidnapping and killing passengers on the high seas is not reported.

Israel and the UN observer force (UNIFIL) estimate that there were 300–400 active guerrillas in south Lebanon, from the Iranian-backed Hizbollah (Party of God). Eight were reported killed by Lebanese sources. The reasons for the attack were stated at once by Israel’s chief of staff, General Ehud Barak. As reported by Boston Globe correspondent Ethan Bronner, “Barak said a pattern had emerged that Israel considered intolerable: Every time Hizbollah attacked an Israeli or pro-Israeli position inside the security zone, Israel would fire back at the attackers north of the zone. Then, the attackers would lob rockets at civilians in northern Israel rather than at military targets inside the zone as in the past.”

The “security zone” is a region of southern Lebanon that Israel has occupied in one or another form since its 1978 invasion. In recent years, it has been held by a terrorist mercenary army (the South Lebanon Army of General Lahd) backed by Israeli military forces. Any indigenous resistance to the rule of Israel and its proxies is considered “terrorism,” which Israel has a right to counter by attacking Lebanon as it chooses (retaliation, preemption, or whatever) — what General Barak chooses to call “firing back at the attackers.” But the resistance has no right to retaliate by shelling northern Israel. These are the rules; one goal of Israel’s July attack was to enforce them.

The US government agrees that these are to be the operative rules, while occasionally expressing qualms about the tactics used to enforce them — meanwhile providing a huge flow of arms and any required diplomatic support. Given Washington’s stand, it follows that the rules are unchallengeable background assumptions, merely presupposed in reporting and commentary. It is unnecessary to ask what the reaction would be if any state not enjoying Washington’s favor were

to carry out comparable atrocities, in gross violation of international law and the UN Charter, were such trivialities considered relevant.

On July 30, Hizbollah announced that rocket attacks on northern Israel could only end “with the complete and permanent halt of aggression against villages and civilians and the stopping of Israeli attacks from air, land and sea on all Lebanese territory.” The statement “received a testy response in Jerusalem,” the New York Times reported. Reviewing the Lebanese operation, the Cabinet did not even consider the Hizbollah proposal, the spokesperson for the Rabin government said. That is understandable. The rules are that Israel is allowed to strike “villages and civilians” at will, anywhere, if its occupying forces are attacked in southern Lebanon. Since these rules are also accepted by Washington, the Hizbollah statement was dismissed here as well.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher was highly praised by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin for arranging the cease-fire, which, according to Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, satisfied all of Israel’s demands, imposing its rules, thus granting the expected rewards for “benign aggression,” the category that is acceptable to the world ruler. The Israeli leaders informed the press “that the US-brokered deal included an understanding that Israel and the southern Lebanese militia it sponsors would continue to operate freely inside Israel’s so-called security zone” in southern Lebanon, while rocketing of northern Israel will cease (Bronner). There must be “quiet, I stress, on both sides of the border,” Rabin emphasized, referring to the “security zone.” “The status of the security zone has not changed,” Peres added, “and if they try to plot against our forces there, or the South Lebanon Army forces there, we will take measures against them.” The meaning is clear. The new “understandings” permit Israel to carry out military operations at will anywhere in Lebanon, as in the past, if it perceives “plots” against its mercenary forces or its own military rule. The tacit assumption, surely, is that in such an eventuality, Israel will receive at worst a tap on the wrist accompanied with a new flow of weapons.

The occupation is in violation of UN Security Council resolution 425 of March 1978, calling on Israel to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from Lebanon. The government of Lebanon has reiterated this demand, notably in February 1991 during the Gulf conflict; apart from odd corners like this journal, the request was drowned out by the self-congratulatory oratory about the wondrous new order of law and justice. Israel is free to ignore such minor annoyances as the Security Council and international law thanks to the stance of its superpower patron, which is powerful enough to reduce the UN to an instrument of its foreign policy and to shape international law as it chooses, as was seen once again in the ludicrous legal arguments put forth to justify Clinton’s bombing of Iraq in June.

For the same reason, Israel is free to reject the concept of “terrorism” held by the international community, but rejected by the United States. The concept is spelled out in the major UN General Assembly Resolution on terrorism (42/159, December 7, 1987). which condemns international terrorism and outlines measures to combat the crime, with one proviso: “that nothing in the present resolution could in any way prejudice the right to self-determination, freedom and independence, as derived from the Charter of the United Nations, of peoples forcibly deprived of that right..., particularly peoples under colonial and racist regimes and foreign occupation or other forms of colonial domination, nor...the right of these peoples to struggle to this end and to seek and receive support [in accordance with the Charter and other principles of international law].” The Resolution passed 153–2, US and Israel opposed, Honduras alone abstaining. Naturally, Washington denies any right to resist the terror and oppression imposed by its clients.

US rejection of a General Assembly Resolution amounts to a veto, and suffices to remove the issue from the realm of articulate opinion, which reflexively adopts the US government position as axiomatic. Accordingly, when the PLO endorsed all UN resolutions on terrorism, Yasser Arafat was: denounced with derision across the spectrum for his evasiveness on terror and his failure to repeat George Shultz's "magic words" with appropriate humility; as Shultz now reports in his much acclaimed apologia, *Turmoil and Triumph*, he told Reagan in December 1988 that Arafat was saying in one place "Unc, unc, unc," and in another he was saying, 'cle, cle, cle,' but nowhere will he yet bring himself to say 'Uncle,'" in the style expected of the lesser breeds.

Similarly, no one within the culture of respectability could dream of questioning the doctrine that Iran's support for resistance against foreign occupation, in accord with the Charter and the near-unanimous Resolution on terrorism, is still further evidence that it is a terrorist state — though Washington's support for the illegal military occupation and its violence within and beyond does not suggest that the US is a terrorist state.

The Logic of Terror At the outset of the operation, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin informed the Israeli parliament "that he planned to flood Beirut with refugees to press the Lebanese government to end the attacks," the *Times* reported: "He said Israel would continue to blast villages as long as Katyusha rockets slammed into Israeli settlement towns in Galilee" — in retaliation against Israeli attacks on civilian targets in Lebanon to counter guerilla attacks in the "security zone." Israel's plan, Army spokesperson Michael Vromen stated, was to "create pressure on the Lebanese government [to rein in the Hizbollah guerrillas] by having as many refugees as possible gathered around Beirut." The "limited war" is "a noisy, frightening 'message' in the words of officials [in Tel Aviv] that the south will be uninhabitable unless Hizbollah is stopped" (Ethan Bronner). "We believe that the Lebanese government of Rafik Hariri, which has been promising order and stability in Lebanon, will not allow this kind of chaos to continue for very long," a senior Israeli official explained: "Between the population of the south, the Lebanese government and the Syrians, we are hoping Hizbollah will be stopped." As the cease-fire was announced, Rabin stated that one of the goals of the operation, now achieved, had been "the use of firepower to create conditions to allow understandings with the power brokers who influence the terrorist organizations in Lebanon."

A broader goal was outlined by Uri Lubrani, Israel's coordinator of Lebanese policy. The purpose of the attack, he said, is to induce the Lebanese government to demand Syrian permission to negotiate directly with Israel. "This is an attempt to drive home a point," Lubrani said. "Lebanese government, you claim you want to exercise authority over all of Lebanese territory. You want us to take you seriously in your negotiations. Go to your masters [in Damascus] and tell them: 'Let me decide on my own fate.'" According to this conception, Israel is advancing the "peace process" by attacking Lebanon. That is entirely reasonable, if we understand the "peace process" to be a program for imposing US-Israeli dominance over the region by a mixture of violence and diplomacy with a gun visibly cocked — as we should.

Doubtless Lebanon should be free from the Syrian domination that was backed by George Bush as part of the payoff for Syria's participation in his Gulf war. But by US-Israeli logic, Syria should have the right to make much of Israel uninhabitable by intensive bombardment, driving hundreds of thousands of refugees to Tel Aviv, to impose its demands, including the demand that Israel observe UN Security Council resolutions, among them, the Council's order that Israel withdraw from Lebanon and rescind its effective annexation of Syria's Golan Heights. That has yet to be advocated here.

Lubrani's analysis was confirmed by Shimon Peres, describing the "achievement" of the Israeli operations as they ended. Previously, he said, Lebanon had not accepted Israel's "suggestion" that it negotiate separately with Israel; now the "suggestion" is taken more seriously. Predictably, both he and Rabin argued that Israel's violence had promoted the peace process, not only by driving a wedge between Lebanon and Syria but also by opening channels for further negotiations Israeli officials elaborated. It follows that Israel should next bomb Amman, thus contributing to peace by separating Jordan from the other Arab parties and opening new channels of communication as the US moves to terminate the assault by imposing Israel's demands.

Naturally, Israel has always preferred separate arrangements with much weaker neighbors who will succumb to its threats, leaving the Palestinians in the lurch, along with Arab states whose territory Israel occupies (in this case, Syria).

Lubrani was Israel's de facto Ambassador to Iran under the Shah, then a leading figure in the sale of US arms to Iran via Israel that began immediately after the Shah was overthrown. The purpose of this project, he explained publicly in 1982, was to establish contact with elements of the Iranian military who were "determined, ruthless, cruel, ...emotionally geared to the possibility that they'd have to kill ten thousand people." Such a force could take over Teheran, he said, and restore the Israeli-Iranian alliance. A long-time Labor Party functionary, Lubrani has lost none of the qualities that have endeared the Party to left-liberal opinion for many years.

Israeli military officials confirmed yet another motive: to adjoin to the "security zone" a broad strip of land to its north that will be a no-man's land where Israel can strike freely. In this way, Israel can extend "the area of Lebanon it controls without having to commit ground troops, a move that would be unpopular with the Israeli public," Julian Ozzane reports, noting that the pattern of bombardment also reveals these objectives. Arab officials and press commentary suggest further motives, Lamis Andoni reports: to pressure Syria to accept Israel's plans for the Golan Heights, and to focus regional and international attention against Iran, a major current policy objective, as is not obscure (see *Z* magazine, June). She also reports that "Contrary to the Western view that Hizbollah and its Iranian backers provoked the violence to sabotage the peace process, Arabs argue that Israel has used the incident as a cover to achieve its goals in Lebanon and to pressure Syria to accept its terms for peace."

The "Western view" — more accurately, Washington's — is adopted reflexively in US reporting and commentary, with the rarest of exceptions, the usual pattern. Thus it is simply a Fact, requiring no discussion or argument, that Hizbollah "started the latest round of fighting in an effort to sabotage the peace negotiations and provoke a wider conflict" (New York Times Middle East specialist Elaine Sciolino). Or if one prefers, it is a Fact that Syria, "seeking to remind everyone that Damascus is the source of all peace and war in the region, encouraged its Party of God proxies to fire scores of rockets into northern Israel." (Times chief diplomatic correspondent Thomas Friedman, omitting a few relevant stages). It could not be that the guerrillas who were mobilized by Israeli aggression and terror, as all concede, had some other interest: say, to drive the occupying army out of their country and disperse its terrorist mercenaries.

Shadows of the Past

To appreciate more fully what is happening, some historical background is useful. Israel's 1978 invasion killed several thousand Lebanese and Palestinians, drove hundreds of thousands

to the north, and left a region of the south under the control of a murderous proxy force, Major Haddad's militia. Haddad's forces were responsible for many atrocities, reported in Israel but not here, one of the most notorious being the massacre of all remaining inhabitants of the Lebanese town of Khiam during Israel's 1978 invasion; the population had been reduced from 30,000 to 32 by Israeli bombing in earlier years. During its 1982 invasion, Israel selected Khiam as the site of its notorious Ansar I prison camp, used since to punish people suspected of anti-Israel activity in Lebanon, or their relatives, thus to undermine any resistance to the South Lebanon Army. There is ample evidence of hideous conditions and savage torture, reported by the press in Israel and England, but not authenticated by the Red Cross or any humanitarian organization because Israel refuses to allow any access to the horror chamber run by its proxies under its supervision.

The 1978 invasion was presented as retaliation for a Palestinian terrorist attack, which originated far north of the zone Israel invaded. In earlier years there had been a pattern of cross-border attacks by the PLO from Lebanon into Israel (called "terrorism") and by Israel into Lebanon (called "retaliation"). The scale was radically different, reflecting the force available to the attackers and their susceptibility to international reaction. Diplomats and UN officials in Beirut estimated about 3,500 killed in Israeli raids in the early 1970s, along with unknown numbers of Palestinian civilians, with hundreds of thousands fleeing what was, in effect, a scorched earth policy carried out with US support and equipment. PLO actions, some of them atrocious acts of terror, took a vastly lesser toll.

Often Israel's terrorist operations lacked any pretense of retaliation. Thus in February 1973, Israeli airborne and amphibious forces attacked Tripoli in northern Lebanon, killing 31 people (mainly civilians) and destroying classrooms, clinics, and other buildings in a raid justified as preemptive. In December 1975, Israeli warplanes bombed and strafed Palestinian refugee camps and nearby villages, killing over 50 people, while "Israeli officials stressed that the purpose of the action had been preventive, not punitive," the New York Times reported. That particular attack, arguably, was indeed retaliation: against the United Nations, which, two days earlier, had arranged for the PLO to participate in a session to consider a proposal for a two-state settlement advanced by the PLO and the Arab states, supported by the world generally, angrily denounced by Israel, and vetoed by the US — hence out of history, like other unacceptable facts. One of the targets was Nabatiye, again emptied today. Nabatiye was a frequent target, including an attack in early November 1977, when the town was heavily shelled, with no provocation, by Israeli batteries on both sides of the border and Israeli-supported Lebanese Maronite forces; in the ensuing exchange, over 70 people were killed, almost all Lebanese. Egyptian President Sadat cited this Israeli-initiated exchange, which threatened to lead to a major war, as a reason for his offer to visit Jerusalem a few days later. By the time Israel invaded in 1978, Nabatiye's population of 60,000 had been reduced to 5,000, the remainder having fled "mostly from fear of the [Israeli] shelling," the Jerusalem Post reported. Others fared similarly.

As PLO cross-border terror declined in the mid- 1970s, Israel intensified its own terror in Lebanon, with US compliance and media silence, for the most part. Hundreds more civilians were killed in Israeli attacks after the 1978 invasion, almost 1,000 by August 1979, the Lebanese government reported. In July 1981, Israel once again violated a cease-fire, attacking civilian targets in Lebanon. Palestinian retaliation elicited heavy Israeli bombing. Some 450 Arabs — nearly all Lebanese civilians — were reported killed, along with six Jews. From these events, all that remains in historical memory in the US is the scene of Jewish civilians huddling in bomb shelters under attack from PLO terrorists and their Katyushas.

The US mediated a cease-fire, “and after mid-1981 the Lebanese-Israeli border was quiet,” William Quandt — a well-known Middle East expert and NSC staffer during the Nixon and Carter administrations — writes in his history of the “peace process.” Quandt’s version is the standard one. The “border was quiet” in the sense that the PLO adhered to the cease-fire rigorously while Israel continued its violations: bombing and killing civilians, sinking fishing boats, violating Lebanese air space thousands of times, and carrying out other provocations designed to elicit some PLO reaction that could be used as a pretext for the planned invasion. The border was “quiet” because the crossborder terror was all Israeli, and only Arabs were being killed.

The occasional reports here reflected the common understanding. Thus in April 1982, Israel bombed alleged PLO centers south of Beirut, killing two dozen people, in retaliation for what it called a PLO “terrorist act”: an Israeli soldier had been killed when his jeep struck a land-mine in illegally-occupied southern Lebanon. The Washington Post sagely observed that “this is not the moment for sermons to Israel. It is a moment for respect for Israel’s anguish — and for mourning the latest victims of Israeli-Palestinian hostility.” Typically, it is Israel’s anguish that we must respect when still more Arabs are murdered by Israeli terror, and are thus to be seen as victims of mutual hostility, no agent indicated.

The same attitudes prevail today. H.D.S. Greenway of the Boston Globe, who reported the 1978 invasion graphically, now writes that “If shelling Lebanese villages, even at the cost of lives, and driving civilian refugees north would secure Israel’s border, weaken Hizbollah, and promote peace, I would say go to it, as would many Arabs and Israelis. But history has not been kind to Israeli adventures in Lebanon. They have solved very little and have almost always caused more problems,” so the murder of civilians, expulsion of hundreds of thousand of refugees, and devastation of the south is a dubious proposition. Can one imagine an article recommending a murderous and destructive attack on Israel, if only it could secure Lebanon’s border and promote peace?

Having failed to elicit the desired PLO reaction, Israel simply manufactured a pretext for its long-planned invasion of June 1982, claiming that it was in retaliation for an attempt to assassinate the Israeli Ambassador to London; the attempt, as Israel was aware, was carried out by the terrorist Abu Nidal organization that had been at war with the PLO for years and did not so much as have an office in Lebanon.

The official line in the US has been that “Operation Peace for Galilee — the Israeli invasion of Lebanon — was originally undertaken” to protect the civilian population from Palestinian gunners, and that “the rocket and shelling attacks on Israel’s northern border” were ended by the operation, though “If rockets again rain down on Israel’s northern border after all that has been expended on Lebanon, the Israeli public will be outraged” (Thomas Friedman, New York Times, January-February 1985). This is plainly nonsense, given the history, which is not challenged. Since it is now recognized that the rockets still rain down, the story has been modified: “Israel’s two military forays into Lebanon [1978, 1982] were military disasters that failed to provide long-term security for Israel’s northern border” (Elaine Sciolino, July 27, 1993). Security had been at risk only as a result of Israel’s unprovoked attacks from 1981, and to a large extent before. The phrase “military disaster” does not refer to the killing of some 20,000 Lebanese and Palestinians in 1982, overwhelmingly civilians, the destruction of much of southern Lebanon and the capital city of Beirut, or the terrible atrocities carried out by Israeli troops through the mid-1980s; rather, to Israel’s failure to impose the “new order” it had proclaimed for Lebanon, and its inability

to maintain its occupation in full because of the casualties caused by unanticipated resistance (“terror”), forcing it back to its “security zone.”

The actual reasons for the 1982 invasion have never been concealed in Israel, though they are rated “X” here. A few weeks after the invasion began, Israel’s leading academic specialist on the Palestinians, Yehoshua Porath, pointed out that the decision to invade “flowed from the very fact that the cease-fire had been observed” by the PLO, a “veritable catastrophe” for the Israeli government because it endangered the policy of evading a political settlement. The PLO was gaining respectability thanks to its preference for negotiations over terror. The Israeli government’s hope, therefore, was to compel “the stricken PLO” to “return to its earlier terrorism,” thus “undercutting the danger” of negotiations. As Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir later stated, Israel went to war because there was “a terrible danger.... Not so much a military one as a political one.” The invasion was intended to “undermine the position of the moderates within [the PLO] ranks” and thus to block “the PLO ‘peace offensive’” and “to halt [the PLO’s] rise to political respectability” (strategic analyst Avner Yaniv); it should be called “the war to safeguard the occupation of the West Bank,” having been motivated by Begin’s “fear of the momentum of the peace process,” according to Israeli Arabist and former head of military intelligence Gen. Yehoshaphat Harkabi. US backing for Israel’s aggression, including veto of Security Council efforts to stop the slaughter, was presumably based on the same reasoning.

The thinking behind Israel’s terrorist operations in Lebanon is also no secret. It was outlined, for example, by the respected former Foreign Minister Abba Eban, considered a leading dove. He was responding to a review by Menahem Begin of atrocities against civilians carried out by the Labor governments in which Eban served, a picture, according to Eban, “of an Israel wantonly inflicting every possible measure of death and anguish on civilian populations in a mood reminiscent of regimes which neither Mr. Begin nor I would dare to mention by name.” Eban does not contest the facts, but criticizes Begin for revealing them. He also explains the reasons for Israel’s wanton attacks: “there was a rational prospect, ultimately fulfilled, that affected populations would exert pressure for the cessation of hostilities.”

In short, the civilian populations were to be held hostage under the threat and exercise of extreme violence, until they compel their governments to accept Israeli plans for the region. As we have seen, the current assault is quite frankly predicated on the same “rational prospect.”

As for the civilian toll, the basic thinking goes back to the founding fathers. In a January 1, 1948 diary entry, David Ben-Gurion wrote: “What is necessary is cruel and strong reactions. We need precision in time, place and casualties. If we know the family — [we must] strike mercilessly, women and children included. Otherwise the reaction is inefficient. At the place of action there is no need to distinguish between guilty and innocent. Where there was no attack — we should not strike.” The qualifications were quickly dropped, by Ben-Gurion in particular, and by now have long been forgotten. Talk of “purity of arms” or the “benign occupation” is disgraceful apologetics, as widely recognized by now within Israel.

Safeguarding the Occupation

Harkabi’s description of the 1982 invasion a “the war to safeguard the occupation of the West Bank” might be applied to Israel’s July 1993 attack as well, though the intentions of the Labor government and its US sponsor are not quite those of the Likud government of 1982. The latter

called for extension of Israeli sovereignty over the occupied territories, though not annexation, the distinction being left vague. The Labor government, in contrast, calls for “territorial compromise,” its traditional position from the “Allon plan” of 1968.

The descendants of this plan vary somewhat in manner of implementation, though the principles remain stable. Israel is to maintain control over the resources and usable land of the territories, including a wide and growing region called “Jerusalem.” Much of the indigenous population, which lacks national rights, will eventually find its way to existing Arab states (“transfer”), as the leading figures of the Zionist movement always hoped and intended, while those who remain will either be administered by Jordan, or allowed to run their own local affairs. Israel will proceed with its plans for settling and exploiting the territories, maintaining effective overall control. Questions remain about just how to deal with the Golan Heights, and over the disposition of Gaza, which has become such a hellhole under Israeli occupation that there are now thoughts of abandoning it — which means virtual destruction under current conditions. The Arab states are to accept Israeli arrangements and enter into a full peace treaty. The general project is entitled “land for peace” or “territorial compromise.”

Pursuing the project, Israel proceeds with its programs of expansion and integration of the territories, now helped by US loan guarantees in addition to the traditional huge subsidies, which have no remote analogue in international affairs; the \$10 billion loan guarantees, demanded with much passion for Russian immigrants who were being forced to Israel by pressures on Germany, the US, and others not to allow them a free choice, are now being used for infrastructure and business investment, it is frankly conceded — of course freeing funds for settlement in the territories. And while Jewish settlement flourishes and expands, the Palestinian inhabitants of the occupied territories sink into misery and despair, the decline sharply accelerated by Rabin’s closure of the territories, which threatens even survival in a region that has been denied any possibility of independent development under the cruel military occupation. The “closure,” of course, observes the usual racist criteria: Jewish settlers in the territories are exempt.

The July 1993 operations are intended to advance all of these prospects, making it clear to the Arab states and Palestinians that they have no choice but to yield to the force exercised by Israel under US protection. All other possibilities have been eliminated in the New World Order, in which there is no deterrent to US force, no space for independent initiatives (“neutralism,” “nonalignment”), no annoying impediments from international institutions, and no thought of a European role in what is recognized to be US turf.

Israel may well consider that these opportunities are now enhanced. The Clinton administration is regarded as even more extreme in rejection of Palestinian rights than the government of Israel itself. Two weeks before the latest Israeli attacks, the political correspondent of Hadashot, Amnon Barzilai, observed that the US proposals presented to Israel and the Palestinians break new ground in rejectionism: for the first time, they stipulate that “all the options will be left open,” including even “the demand for full annexation of the territories” under “Israeli sovereignty.” In this respect, Clinton goes far beyond the governing Labor Party, “which never demanded that all the options be kept open,” insisting rather on “territorial compromise.” The US initiative can only “strengthen the suspicion among the Palestinians that there is reason to fear an Israeli conspiracy with American support,” though in reality, neither the United States nor the Israeli political blocs, Labor or Likud, would consider true annexation of the territories with the enormous costs that would entail, such as extending at least minimal social, economic, and political rights to their inhabitants.

US policy has always been strictly rejectionist, similar to that of Hizbollah, except that Washington denies national rights to Palestinians, not Jews. Again, the modalities have varied over the years, though basic assumptions have been stable, as has the doctrinal framework: thus, Washington is invariably seeking peace and justice, pursuing the “peace process,” a term of newspeak that refers to Washington’s efforts to impose its own rejectionist goals, excluding all diplomatic initiatives that conflict with them. In its recent version, the “peace process” has been based on the Baker-Shamir-Peres consensus of 1989, which barred any “additional Palestinian state in the Gaza district and in the area between Israel and Jordan” (Jordan already being a “Palestinian state”) or any negotiations with the PLO, and declared that “There will be no change in the status of Judea, Samaria and Gaza other than in accordance with the basic guidelines of the Government” of Israel, which reject Palestinian self-determination. With these “basic principles” in place, there are to be “free elections” under Israeli military occupation to yield “autonomy” — what Israeli journalist Danny Rubinstein, who has been covering the occupied territories with distinction for years, calls “the autonomy of a POW camp.”

In the aftermath of the Gulf conflict, there were new opportunities for advancing this project as well as new urgency in pursuing it. The opportunities derived from the forceful assertion of unilateral US power over the region, the demoralization of the Arab world (and the Third World generally), the abdication of Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union, leaving Russia as an even more loyal client than Britain, perhaps. The urgency arose from the need to concoct some “triumph” to conceal the disastrous consequences of the US-UK war in the Gulf, with Saddam firmly in power cheerfully slaughtering Shiites and Kurds while Stormin’ Norman and the heroic George Bush stood quietly aside, US corporations were beginning to rake in huge contracts for reconstruction of the ruins, and “an excess of more than 46,900 children died [in Iraq] between January and August 1991” from the effects of the war and the sanctions, according to a study conducted by leading US and foreign medical specialists reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, far more since.

Something had to be done. Accordingly, a new “peace initiative” was declared with much fanfare amidst praise for the noble President who “has made very clear that he wants to breathe light into that hypothetical creature, the Middle East peace process” (Anthony Lewis). The story since should surprise no one who looked beyond the impressive chorus of self-praise to the not-very-obscure facts (see *Z Magazine*, October, December, 1991).

The US still remains committed to the “peace process” it initiated, not surprisingly, given its framework. We therefore have even more powerful reasons for recognizing that “this is not the moment for sermons to Israel,” rather for “respect for Israel’s anguish — and for mourning the latest victims of Israel-Palestinian hostility.” Sermons — let alone any other reaction — would only impede the “peace process.” Indeed the “peace process,” apologists argue, has been advanced by Rabin’s violence, not only for the powerful reasons given by Israeli authorities but also because it enables Rabin to fend off criticism from the right as he strides towards “territorial compromise.”

Rabin’s assault on Lebanon is thus much like Clinton’s bombing of Iraq a month earlier in retaliation for an alleged threat to assassinate a former US leader, a crime so heinous that our pure sensibility can scarcely even imagine how it could be conceived by some distorted and primitive mind. Clinton’s brave act, we were informed, relieved the fears that the old draft dodger might be less prone to violence than his predecessors, and refuted the dangerous belief that “American foreign policy in the post-Cold War era was destined to be forever hogtied by the constraints of multilateralism” (*Washington Post*) — that is, by international law and the UN Charter.

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