Ceasefire in Lebanon

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For four weeks Israeli forces dropped every type of high-tech bomb onto the villages of southern Lebanon, onto the Shia suburbs of south Beirut, onto the roads, airports and communications systems of the tiny country. They have done billions of dollars of damage to homes and workplaces of the poorest sectors of Lebanese society. Yet they could not break the will to resist of Hezbollah and the Lebanese masses. By the end it was Israel that faced an abyss - a land war, hand-to-hand with Hezbollah fighters, in the wrecked villages and towns of southern Lebanon which are their home territory.

Robert Fisk (Independent August 15) reported that in one day of the fighting up to 43 Israeli soldiers were killed as Hezbollah guerrillas, still launching missiles in to Israel itself, fought back against Israel?s land invasion. In three days of the so-called major offensive, in which 30,000 IDF troops were supposed to smash through to the Litani, 3000 guerrilla fighters kept them pinned down only a few kilometres across the Blue Line. They knocked out substantial numbers of Israel tanks and armoured vehicles and inflicted heavy casualties. Faced with this stiff resistance, both Olmert and Bush called a swift halt.

Turning to the United Nations and calling in a French-led largely European force is a huge humiliation for Bush and Condoleeza Rice. It is a real blow to their objective of a ?new Middle East? completely under US control. And this is obvious to all. That is why Syria and Iran, far from being humbled, are crowing with triumph and voicing their defiance of the US more openly and directly than for many years.

Syrian president Bashar al-Assad praised Hezbollah and drew a clear lesson: ?The world will not consider our interests unless we are strong. The resistance, in all its aspects, is the alternative to regain our rights. The world would not move unless Israel is harmed and we become powerful?. He added that the guerrilla fighters had ?shattered the myth of an invincible [Israeli] army".

It is clear to all but the hired hacks of Murdoch?s media empire that it is the prestige and power of Israel and their US master that has been seriously ?degraded? in this war. The prestigious senior New Yorker journalist Seymour Hersh has reported on the motives for Bush blocking the road to a cease fire for four weeks. He has shown how deeply the Bush Administration was involved in the planning of Israel?s war, and how Bush and Vice-President Cheney genuinely believed that a successful air bombing campaign against Hezbollah?s missile and control centres could both protect Israel and serve as a prelude to an American attack on Iran?s nuclear installations.

But the attempt to ?shock and awe? Hezbollah failed totally. It did so because, unlike in Afghanistan and Iraq, it was unleashed not against reactionary dictatorships, like those of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban, which had outraged and violated their own people, but on a resistance movement with deep roots in the population it was defending.

The effects of the humbling of Israel and America ? even if it is indeed only a tactical victory, one battle in a long war - will be to hearten and encourage the masses of the Middle East and all those fighting imperialism around the globe. Obviously the Palestinians, suffering siege, starvation, bombardment and
repeated incursions by Israeli tanks, are celebrating the failure of the IDF. Palestinian fighters do not have the effective missiles and anti-tank weaponry that Hezbollah received from Iran. The IDF knows this and will, like all worsted armies, take a savage revenge? for their humiliation on weaker opponents, or rather on their wives, children and old people. But by doing so they will only continue the work their foul atrocities in Lebanon have started - the demolition of the myth of ?democratic, little Israel, defending itself against overwhelming odds?.

The antiwar and anti-imperialist movement around the world must be clear that Israel is an aggressive and expansionist colonial state and a central tool in George Bush?s plans to conquer the Middle East. We must continue to reiterate this because the war in Lebanon and in Palestine is far from over. Even if the ceasefire holds - a big if - Israel, now with the aid of the European powers, France, Germany, Italy, will press on with its war aims: a neutral, disarmed Lebanon, with a puppet government. This would complete the encirclement of the Palestinians, sealing them off from all help or assistance from the Arab and Muslim world. All this can be pursued under the guise of the UN ceasefire. Indeed, both the EU and the US are determined that it will be.

The UN ceasefire resolution, despite being modified as Israel?s failure to seize southern Lebanon or seriously weaken Hezbollah became clear, is still weighted heavily towards the Zionists. Hezbollah is to be disarmed and is to evacuate part of its own country. It has to cease all military actions, including against occupying Israeli troops. Israel does not have to evacuate Lebanon until the UN forces and the Lebanese army have taken up position and Hezbollah withdrawn. This is to ask the victors to surrender the battlefield, if not to the vanquished Israelis then at least to those who will act on their behalf. Israel is not even asked to give up its siege of the country, its violations of Lebanese airspace, and its threats to ?hunt down Hezbollah leaders and kill them.? Doubtless every Hezbollah retaliation will be called a major violation just as every Israel violation will be called a defensive action.

The critical question now is will the UN forces, will the Lebanese government dominated by pro-American forces, will the pressure of the United States on the Arab regimes, succeed in winning the peace for Israel despite failing to win the war. In short, can imperialist pressure, this time with the European Union playing the role of false friend rather than the USA as open enemy effectively demilitarise Lebanon, meeting Israel?s demand that it become a buffer state, not a base for resistance to their expansionist plans in Palestine.

The answer to these questions lies with the leadership of the resistance and the governments of Syria, Iran and of course Lebanon itself. Hezbollah, whilst accepting the ceasefire, has not pledged itself to lay down its arms whilst a single Israeli soldier is on Lebanese soil and whilst Israel?s attack and siege continue. Good. The Lebanese government has said that it will not attempt to forcibly disarm Hezbollah. Good - they must be kept to this. Having failed to strike a single blow in defence of their own country, it would be an obscenity if the Senioria government were to launch a civil war against Hezbollah. If Senioria?s regime did so, it would be seen for what it was, a wretched tool of Israel and the USA.

The danger is that Syria, Iran and the Hezbollah leadership might decide that, having forced Israel and the USA to the United Nations, all that is needed now is covert negotiations aimed at securing a place for Hezbollah in the confessional constitution of Lebanon. This would be a reactionary settlement that would leave the poor and dispossessed of Lebanon, and above all the Palestinians, out in the cold. Probably in the present situation it would be difficult for most of the above parties to openly accept such a deal. More important, Tel Aviv and Washington, smarting under their loss of prestige, will not be long in renewing the war, with the Palestinians and if not at first Lebanon.

In Lebanon and across the region the masses must come out onto the streets and take action to ensure
that no such deal is done, that not one of the resistance fighters is disarmed and that on the contrary the masses are armed and trained in a popular militia. The workers parties, the trade unions, must play a key role in forming this anti-imperialist united front. Certainly the war of resistance must go on. But it must be waged on a broader front than just Lebanon or Palestine. The Arab regimes that were silent, especially Egypt, must come under mounting pressure from the streets. They must be forced either to break their links with Israel, to de-recognise the terrorist rogue state, to cut off all trade links, to turn off the oil taps, to send aid and assistance and allow volunteers to join the fight- or they must be overthrown.

To do all this will require the conquest of democratic rights, first of all the right to demonstrate, to organise to assemble ?real practical democracy. The paramilitary forces, the brutal secret police must be smashed and the soldiers won over to the side of the people. For this purpose councils (shuras) of the workers and the urban and rural poor must spring up across the Middle East.

The accomplices of imperialism and Zionism must be driven from power. This means a revolution against imperialism and its stooges. However, it could not stop there: to deal with the economic might of imperialism it is necessary to make a social revolution against local and international capitalism. The democratic and anti-imperialist revolution must develop into a socialist revolution, led by the working class. It will not happen without revolutionary communist parties to lead the masses. It is vital for anti-imperialists and socialists to be clear that only this strategy that of permanent revolution, where the fight for the freedom of semi-colonies like the Arab countries, like Iran and Afghanistan, from invasion and occupation becomes a revolutionary struggle against capitalism itself, can be finally and completely victorious. Only through this socialist struggle can a single Palestinian state truly be forged. The property that today lies in the hands of the rich and the Zionist settler state must be socialised.

Around the world the progressive forces- above all the workers movement- must break its remaining illusions in Israel. The complicity of the Social Democratic and Labour Parties with Israel and Bush and Blair must be exposed. So too must the shameful evasion of the European Left Parties, which called on European imperialism to intervene, which support the UN ?peacekeepers? and call for the resistance fighters to be disarmed. The antiwar movement and the European Social Forum must condemn these policies and demand that the deputies of Rifondazione, the PDS, the PCF, oppose the sending of troops to Lebanon or call for their withdrawal.

Israel must be made into an international pariah just as South Africa was in the 1980s. Its legitimacy, its ?right to exist? as a racist settler state ever expanding into Arab land, killing and destroying with total impunity, must come to an end. A massive campaign to boycott Israel, through workers sanctions, refusing to handle trade with the Zionist state, and mass consumer boycotts of Israeli produce must be launched. Political and social revolutionary movements must arise in all the Arab countries especially those surrounding Israel. The Hosni Mubaraks and King Abdullahs must be overthrown and their states? long collusion with the USA and Israel ended.

The fight to defeat the USA?s ?war against terrorism?, the armed expression of globalisation, must spread and intensify. The United States is vulnerable to social revolution, to the revolt of the millions it oppresses and exploits, including millions within the United States itself. Only by the working class coming to the head of these movements, led by revolutionary workers parties and seizing power can imperialism be toppled. Imperialism and fight.

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