

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 1165
July 18, 2006

Containing the Escalating Crisis in Lebanon

James Phillips and James Jay Carafano, Ph.D.

Hezbollah and Israel are locked in an escalating conflict that will not be resolved soon. Neither Israel nor Hezbollah—nor Hezbollah’s Iranian and Syrian backers—is willing to accept a ceasefire on terms acceptable to the other. Hezbollah continues to launch cross-border rocket attacks, and Israel is determined to reduce the rocket threat as rapidly and effectively as possible through systematic air strikes and to secure the return of its kidnapped soldiers. Any proposed diplomatic solution must not merely seek a return to the *status quo ante* because that has become an inherently unstable and dangerous situation. Rather, the ultimate goal should be to reduce the future risk of terrorism by disarming Hezbollah, as called for by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559.

At minimum, a diplomatic solution must facilitate the deployment of the Lebanese army to southern Lebanon, possibly supported by an international peacekeeping force, to separate the combatants and keep Hezbollah terrorists away from the border with Israel. Any proposed diplomatic “solution” that leaves Hezbollah in a position to bombard Israeli cities would result in a precarious respite that would end when Hezbollah or its Iranian patron wishes it to. That is unacceptable.

The participants at the G-8 summit last weekend realized that the fighting has not yet reached its peak and that calls for a ceasefire would fall on deaf ears. Therefore the G-8 did not take an assertive stance on the upsurge of Middle East violence but

merely supported the U.N. Secretary-General’s mission to the region.

Any lasting solution to the current crisis should incorporate UN Security Council Resolution 1559, which called for the dismantlement and disarmament of all Lebanese militias, the deployment of the Lebanese army to southern Lebanon, and the withdrawal of all foreign forces. This would help restore peace and stability in Lebanon by enhancing the authority of Lebanon’s government, minimizing Hezbollah’s capacity to provoke crises, and removing several hundred Iranian Revolutionary Guards from the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon, where they have long trained and supported Hezbollah.

Although Hezbollah is unlikely to accept the disarmament of its militia, it may eventually be forced to accept the displacement of its forces in southern Lebanon by units of the Lebanese Army if it is hampered by strong Israeli counterattacks and concerted international diplomatic pressure is applied to Syria and Iran. But no stable solution can be found so long as Hezbollah continues to subvert Lebanese sovereignty and is free to raid Israel’s northern border.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/research/middleeast/wm1165.cfm

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center
for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

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It would be preferable for the Lebanese Army, rather than a UN peacekeeping force, to take control of the border. UN peacekeepers failed to halt terrorism or keep the peace in southern Lebanon in the 1980s, and a two thousand-man UN peacekeeping force remains in Lebanon, to little effect. This force, possibly augmented by other foreign peacekeepers, could be used to support the Lebanese army deployment in the south, but this should not be considered an acceptable solution in itself. UN peacekeepers do not have the firepower, staying power, or willpower to obstruct future Hezbollah terrorist operations. Neither does the Lebanese army, unless Hezbollah is first weakened by Israeli counterattacks and the Lebanese develop a strong national consensus against allowing Hezbollah to usurp Lebanon's sovereignty by plunging it into war with Israel.

The Bush Administration must rule out the commitment of U.S. troops to any proposed international peacekeeping force for Lebanon. American

troops are already spread too thin in the global war against terrorism. Moreover, they would become a lightning rod attracting terrorism.

The U.S.-led multinational peacekeeping effort in Lebanon failed in 1983-1984 due to repeated attacks by Hezbollah and other Lebanese factions, supported by Iran and Syria. Both Iran and Syria remain violently opposed to building a sovereign, peaceful, and stable Lebanon today. Before a stable peace can be brought to Israel's northern border, the United States must lead a determined international coalition to pressure Iran and Syria, through threats of isolation and economic sanctions, to end their hostile and disruptive policies in Lebanon.

James Phillips is Research Fellow in Middle Eastern Studies, and James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., is Senior Research Fellow, in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.
