

An International Force for Lebanon?

No Sustainable Stabilisation Without a Political Conflict Settlement

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In reaction to the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier by Palestinian extremists in June 2006 and two Israeli soldiers by the Lebanese Hezbollah in mid July, Israel has launched massive military operations in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon. These have targeted not only the facilities of the militants but also the civilian infrastructure and have severely affected the civilian population. The international community has given Israel a free hand, at least implicitly, to achieve its goals by military means. In its statement of mid July 2006 the G8 suggested comprehensive measures to reach a lasting ceasefire, but debate in political circles and the media has increasingly narrowed to the deployment of an international stabilisation force in south Lebanon. In Germany attention has centred on the question of possible German participation in such a force.

The declared goals of the Israeli operations in Lebanon are to rescue the kidnapped soldiers, wear down Hezbollah's military capabilities, create a buffer zone in the south of the country to protect Israel's north from future rocket attacks and infiltration, and to demonstrate Israel's readiness for retaliation, thus re-establishing an effective deterrent. Hezbollah, for its part, has justified the kidnappings with wanting to obtain the release of Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners in Israel through a prisoner exchange, which would also help the Palestinians. It has also seen the violence as an opportunity to show off its military capabilities. This demonstration of force is directed first and foremost towards Israel, where Hezbollah's rockets now reach cities far from the border such as Haifa, Tiberias

and Nazareth and cause destruction and casualties, especially among the civilian population. Secondly, it is aimed at the Arab public to whom Hezbollah seeks to prove its legitimacy, presenting itself as the only resistance movement capable of standing up to Israel. Thirdly, Hezbollah wants to demonstrate its strength to the Lebanese central government. The main intention here is to put a stopper on the disarmament of the movement demanded in Security Council Resolution 1559 of September 2004 (and reiterated in SC Resolution 1680 of May 2006).

The "Second Front"

The escalation in Lebanon followed an intensification of violent clashes between

Israel and the Palestinians on the one hand and inner-Palestinian conflicts on the other, both connected with the formation of the Hamas government in March 2006. To date Hamas has not succeeded in effectively running the government and achieving a monopoly on the use of force—against the backdrop of increasing anarchy in the Palestinian territories, Fatah’s unwillingness to accept its election defeat, the far-reaching diplomatic isolation of the government and the deprivation of its resources, the sealing off of the Palestinian territories and the resumption of targeted killings and arrests by the Israeli military.

In reaction to the kidnapping of one of its soldiers in June 2006, the Israeli army began an extensive military operation in the Gaza Strip (“Operation Summer Rain”), the declared goal of which, in addition to rescuing the soldier, was to put a complete end to the shelling with Qassam rockets. Israel also arrested dozens of members of parliament, ministers and mayors in the West Bank who are members of Hamas. Although Hamas in exile under the leadership of Khaled Meshaal in Damascus boasted about the kidnapping and has been accused by Israel of masterminding the affair for its backers in Damascus and Tehran, there are strong indications that the abduction was carried out by a local cell. But it certainly met with the approval of those who wish to torpedo the inner-Palestinian reconciliation process and a ceasefire with Israel, which the agreement between Fatah and Hamas on the so-called “Prisoners’ Paper” on the eve of the kidnapping had brought within reach, at least from the Palestinian side.

The escalation on both fronts is no coincidence. Despite the unilateral withdrawal of Israeli settlers and soldiers from the Gaza Strip in August 2005, the occupation regime has not ended there—not to mention the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Living conditions in the evacuated areas have increasingly become unbearable, particularly since they have been repeatedly sealed off for months at a time. As far as

south Lebanon is concerned, from which the Israeli Army withdrew unilaterally in May 2000, the conflict over the Shebaa farms—an area at the foot of Mount Hermon that Israel continues to occupy, which the UN considers Syrian territory but Syria and Lebanon consider Lebanese—has been left unresolved.

A Military Solution?

Led by the US the international community has called on Israel to act proportionally in its response and avoid harming the civilian population, but it has basically accepted the logic of military conflict management. Instead of demanding an immediate and unconditional cessation of violence—which would not prejudice the political process but merely pave the way for it—the international community has insisted that there must be a “comprehensive and lasting ceasefire”. This basically gave Israel the go-ahead to carry through its goals militarily as it was understood that such a ceasefire could only be negotiated when Israel’s military objectives had been achieved.

The assumption that the conflicts between Israel and its neighbors could be settled or even just sustainably contained by military means is not only untenable from a humanitarian viewpoint, the underlying reasoning is also flawed in several respects. *Firstly*, the military logic brings with it the danger of further escalation, for example through the Lebanese or Syrian army intervening in the fighting. *Secondly*, the military actions further weaken the government in Beirut. The disastrous effects on the Lebanese civilian population undermine the legitimacy of those who call for the disarming of Hezbollah, and the radicals are ensured an influx of new supporters. *Thirdly*, the disarmament cannot be enforced militarily—neither by Israel nor by an international force—it can only be achieved through a political process. After all, Hezbollah, which was founded in 1982 as a resistance movement to the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon, is not a mar-

ginalised terrorist cell: In addition to its military wing it not only includes a social movement deeply rooted in the Shiite section of the population but also a political party represented in government by two ministers. Disarming Hezbollah will therefore have to be negotiated in a national dialogue. *Fourthly*, the unilateral creation of a buffer zone in southern Lebanon, apart from the illegitimacy of such a measure under international law, would not bring about any lasting stabilisation. This was shown, not least, by the experience of the former Israeli occupation.

Preconditions for the Success of a Stabilisation Force

International debate has quickly become narrowed to the deployment of an international stabilisation force with a robust mandate, which would replace or complement the blue helmets of UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) who have been stationed in south Lebanon since 1978 but proved to be largely ineffective. In Germany the debate has increasingly focussed on the question of a possible German participation in such a force.

However, a stabilisation force only makes sense under certain conditions. *Firstly*, its mandate must go beyond safeguarding a ceasefire and stabilising the border area. It must rather be geared primarily towards supporting the Lebanese government to use its army to enforce the state monopoly on the use of force throughout the country. *Secondly*, the mandate must be part of a political process directed towards a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. *Thirdly*, all regional actors and their legitimate interests will have to be taken seriously, not just those countries which have been cooperative (Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia), but also those which to date have acted as spoilers, particularly Syria and Iran—which are not puppets of Hamas and Hezbollah but do influence the two movements considerably through the rhetorical, logistical and financial support

they give. In this context, the policy of isolating Syria, the Palestinian government and—at least as far as the USA is concerned—Iran, has proved counterproductive.

Elements of a Conflict Settlement

Stabilising the situation will therefore entail tackling the main problems of the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict—blueprints for settlements for the various bilateral dimensions are already on the table and have, in some form or another, been discussed at negotiations between the parties—and creating positive incentives for the actors involved. This goes for the main parties to the conflict, but also for Iran. A plan for a political process should therefore contain a combination of immediate measures and medium to long-term steps. It should address the legitimate interests of the relevant actors, offer incentives to all parties involved and be structured in such a way that all of them, in their own best interests, can commit themselves to it. Although this might sound quite utopian in view of the current escalation of violence, we should be aware that even a force with a robust mandate will not succeed in bringing about lasting stability and security if once again only the symptoms are treated, instead of striking at the root of the problems.

Immediate measures: withdrawal of the Israeli army from Lebanon and the Gaza Strip; **comprehensive and unconditional cessation of violence** between Israel and Hezbollah on the one hand and Israel and the Palestinian militants on the other; this is particularly important so that the international community's humanitarian measures in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip can take effect.

Elements of a conflict settlement:

- ▶ **Exchange of prisoners** involving both the kidnapped Israeli soldiers and Lebanese and Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails – above all the Hamas members of parliament and ministers arrested at the end of June 2006

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- ▶ Resumption of the **Palestinian reconciliation process**: public renunciation of violence by all groups, clarification of the competencies and hierarchies within the Palestinian Authority (PA), integration of Hamas into the PLO; support of the reconciliation process by the international community through ending the isolation of the Palestinian government
- ▶ Implementation of the November 2005 **“Agreement on Movement and Access”** in order to enable economic development and as normal as possible a life in the Palestinian territories; permanent presence of a Quartet representative, equipped with a broad mandate, in order to push ahead implementation
- ▶ Intensification of the **Lebanese national dialogue** with the goal of persuading Hezbollah to renounce the use of force and hand in its weapons as well as incorporating the militia into the regular armed forces
- ▶ Settlement of the conflict over the **Shebaa farms**: withdrawal of the Israeli army, binding declaration under international law by Syria that it—contrary to the border demarcation of 2000—considers the area Lebanese territory and stakes no further claims
- ▶ Negotiations on the **Golan Heights** occupied by Israel in good faith and with the goal of ending the occupation in the medium term; enactment by the EU of the **Euro-Med Association Agreement with Syria** (currently on ice in large part because of the Hariri proceedings) as a further incentive and in order to stabilise Syria economically
- ▶ Pressure from **Syria and Iran** on Hezbollah (as well as on the Damascus-based wing of Hamas) to give up the armed struggle; ending logistical, rhetorical and financial support of the armed struggle
- ▶ **Reconstruction** of Lebanese infrastructure with the aid of the donor community; mine-clearing in south Lebanon (with the support of Israel, which must provide the relevant maps)
- ▶ Establishment of an effective **conflict resolution mechanism**, for example by all parties involved submitting to arbitration
- ▶ Deployment of a **stabilisation force** to help monitor the ceasefire and provide training, financial and logistical support to the Lebanese government forces, putting them in the medium term in a position to safeguard the state monopoly on the use of force in the whole country; possibly establishment of a **demilitarised zone** in the Israeli-Lebanese border area
- ▶ Final **demarcation of the border** between Lebanon and Syria
- ▶ Negotiations on Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian **final status agreements**; normalisation of relations between Israel and its neighbours or, as suggested by the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, with all Arab countries