

## **VIETNAM, IRAQ, AND LEBANON: SUPERPOWER OVERKILL BACKFIRES**

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“An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.”  
--M. K. Gandhi

Ten Years of military intervention in Vietnam with the most sophisticated weapons did not defeat the Viet Cong, and it caused the unnecessary deaths of millions of Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians. Our "shock and awe" campaign in Iraq has left over 50,000 civilians dead and the insurgency is stronger than ever. Shias and Sunnis are also killing each other at an ever increasing rate.

For 34 days Israel bombed targets in Lebanon, killing at least 1,000 civilians, but on the last day before the cease fire Hezbollah fired more rockets than on any other day of the war. Hezbollah also surprised everyone with their anti-tank weapons, and the result was that too many Israelis soldiers died gruesome deaths in their tanks.

Superpowers become so over confident that they fail to gather necessary intelligence, fail to make long range battle plans, and fail to equip their troops properly. An arrogant Rumsfeld made sure that his troops were not prepared for the Iraqi insurgency, and he made light of the fact that many humvees were not armored. The worst day for the Israelis was when a number of troops resting in the open were wiped out by a Hezbollah rocket. NPR reported that some Israeli troops had to drink from the canteens of dead Hezbollah guerillas.

Just as U.S. warplanes left thousands of unexploded bombs in rice paddies, Lebanon is now littered with unfired bomblets from Israeli jets and artillery. Everyday in Vietnam children are born with physical defects caused by the tons of Agent Orange sprayed on their jungles. For years to come Lebanese and Vietnamese will be reminded of bombing campaigns that made far more enemies than friends.

The Israeli government thought that they could get Sunni Muslims to condemn Hezbollah, armed and funded by Shiite Iran, but Sunnis and Shias around the world, usually at odds with other, have joined ranks in support of Hezbollah. The Israelis had hoped that the Lebanese would turn against Hezbollah, but their bombing has only united them against Israel. A Druze Christian leader on NPR had more criticism for Israel than for the Shiite militants. The head of the Lebanese forces arriving in South Lebanon declared that they will not fight nor disarm their Shiite "brothers."

The Viet Cong lost nearly every battle, Iraqi insurgents caught in the open are immediately wiped out, and Hezbollah suffered many casualties. Nevertheless, they claim victories against superpowers rendered impotent by guerrilla warfare and suicide attacks. This is supremely ironic for Israel where the roles of David and Goliath have been reversed.

It is a little known fact that Israeli intelligence financed the setting up of Hamas, the Sunni religious group that now controls the Palestinian Parliament. Charles Freeman, a former US ambassador to Saudi Arabia, states that "Israel started Hamas" in order to "hem in the [secular] PLO." This idea backfired as badly as US support for the Islamic militants in Afghanistan, which produced the Taliban and Osama bin Laden.

The State Department's Larry Johnson maintains that "the Israelis are their own worst enemies when it comes to fighting terrorism. They are like a guy who sets fire to his hair and then tries to put it out by hitting it with a hammer. They do more to incite and sustain terrorism than curb it."

It is also significant to note that incursions have been common both ways across the Lebanese border. (Israeli commandos were back over the border only a week after the cease-fire.) The capture of soldiers on either side has usually led to prisoner exchanges, not all out war. Uzi Arad, a former Israeli intelligence officer, said that he "had never seen a decision to go to war taken so speedily."

The puzzle of why Israel decided on a "shock and awe" response has been addressed by Seymour Hersh, whose sources have proved him right time and time again. Writing in the August, 2008 issue of The New Yorker, Hersh offers evidence that some US officials believed that a "successful Israeli Air Force campaign against Hezbollah . . . could ease Israel's security concerns and also serve as a prelude to a potential American preemptive attack" on Iran. U. S. officials of course deny that there was any joint planning of Israel's massive attack on Lebanon.

Hersh quotes one U. S. official with close ties to Israel: "The Israelis told us it would be a cheap war with many benefits. . . We'll be able to hunt down and bomb missiles, tunnels, and bunkers from the air. It would be a demo for Iran." Now that the "demo" has failed, perhaps cooler heads will prevail on Iran.

The U. S. has been most successful in the Middle East when it has been perceived as an honest broker among the various parties. Carter, Bush, Sr., and Clinton succeeded in finding this difficult middle ground. The militant pro-Israel stance of the second Bush administration is nothing but counter productive. This policy prevents us from winning over moderate Muslims who are key to reducing the influence of militant Islamists.

A New York Times editorial proposed that "Washington helps Israel best when it supplements, and where necessary restrains, Israeli actions, not when it acts as a mindless echo chamber. America abdicated leadership in this crisis, leaving Mr. Olmert to deal with the messy outcome."

The single greatest tragedy in the Middle East has been the failure of its people to produce an Israeli or Palestinian Gandhi. American and Israeli "eye for an eye"

responses to terror attacks have made the situation worse rather than better. Gandhi said it best when he said that "eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."

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