

**XXVIII. Geopolitical and Geostrategic Analysis of
the Israel-Hezbollah Asymmetric War
(12 July-11 August 2006)**

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Abstract: This paper is a geopolitical and geostrategic analysis of the Israel-Hezbollah asymmetric war. It also unveils how Iran and Syria influence the Middle East geostrategic subsystem and the Lebanon case.¹

Keywords: Israel-Hezbollah, Iran, Syria, lessons learned from the Israel-Hezbollah war, C.S.T.O., S.C.O.

The Lebanon II War required utmost attention, in foreign policy terms, by both Greece and Cyprus. This is because the recent hot conflict between Israel and the Lebanon was pregnant with obvious dangers for the flaring up of all the national-state and ethnic actors in the region. These actors are satisfied by the developments in question. The actors in question are:

1. **Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah**, a graduate of the Seminary of the holy city of Rashid Ali, Najaf in Iraq, and “Sheikh” leader of Hezbollah, since 1992 (on the basis of the order given to him on 16 February 1992 in Tehran, with Tehran’s Ayatollah Ali Khamenei), and of Syrian origin, who considered that it was time to:

1. N.B.: Opinions and views in the present article are those of the author alone. It does not necessarily reflect the views of other private or public bodies collaborating with him.

(a) Settle matters with the pro-Western government of Fouad Sighora and allow Hezbollah to assume governance of the country, based on the model of Hamas;

(b) relieve his organisation of the pressure that would be exercised by the UN International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIC), as requested by the Lebanese Prime Minister (on 12.12.2005) in order to investigate the assassinations, following the assassination attempt against Marwan Hamade, Telecommunications Minister of the Lebanon, assassinations of the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (on 14.02.2005), of the leftwing anti-Syrian journalist Samir Kassir (on 02.06.2005), of the former Secretary General of the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) George Haoui (on 21.06.2005) and of the journalist and Christian MP Gebran Tueni (on 12.12.2005), and the assassination attempts against the Lebanese Defence Minister Elias Murr (on 12.07.2005) and against the (seriously injured in her arms and legs by a bombing) anti-Syrian journalist May Shidyak (on 25.09.2005); and

(c) exploit the rallying of the Lebanese people against the attacking Israel, so that Hezbollah could be considered a national resistance force rather than a “militia” and, ultimately, to avoid disarmament, imposed by both the Taif Treaty (23.10.1989) and Resolution 1559 of the UN Security Council (02.09.2004).

2. **Damascus**, which estimated that, in this way, it could become an indispensable part of a strong Islamic alliance in the Middle East, including Iran and the pockets of Shiite populations in the region (Iran, Iraq, Syria, S. Arabia, UAE), by also avoiding the pursuance of Dettlev Mehlis’ investigation within the context of the UNIIC with regard to the above-mentioned assassinations. This investigation might touch upon highly ranked Syrian officials and dangerously approach the immediate environs of President Assad. The provocative series of events leading to the crisis of 12 July is as follows:

(a) Immediately after the adoption of Resolution 1559 of the UN Security Council on 2 September, 2004, which provided for the withdrawal of Syrian troops and secret agencies from Lebanon, Rafik Hariri, Prime Minister of the Lebanon, was murdered on 14 February 2005, when explosives equivalent to around 1000 kg of TNT were detonated in a booby-trapped car, as his motorcade drove past the St George Hotel in the Lebanese capital. It is noteworthy that the former Prime Minister

had accepted the Resolution. The extent of bombing leaves no margin for suspecting the size and whoever the supplier was;

(b) On 2 June, 2005, using a booby-trapped car, Samir Kassir, founding member of the Democratic Left Movement and journalist of Beirut's *An-Nahar* daily, was also murdered. He had repeatedly adopted an anti-Syrian stance;

(c) On 21 June, 2005, using a booby-trapped car, George Haoui, former Secretary General of the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) was murdered. His successor, Khaled Hadadah, has suggested that Syria was behind this assassination;

(d) On 12 July, 2005, using a booby-trapped car, Elias Murr, the Lebanon's Defence Minister was seriously injured;

(e) On 30 August, 2005, Detlev Mehlis, German public prosecutor, issued an arrest warrant for four pro-Syrian generals of the Lebanese Army, suspected for organising Hariri's assassination;

(f) On 25 September, 2005, using a booby-trapped car, May Shidyak, a journalist at Lebanon's LBC television station, was seriously injured in her arms and legs owing to her anti-Syrian stance, and later underwent amputation in hospital.

(g) On 20 October, Detlev Mehlis submitted his report to the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, estimating the involvement of the Syrian and Lebanese secret services in Hariri's assassination, as almost certain. The pro-Syrian President of the Lebanon, Emile Jamil Lahoud, "strongly denies" any involvement of his government services in Hariri's assassination.

(h) On 11 November, 2005, Syrian President Assad, in a speech given at the University of Damascus, accused the government of Fouad Signora of being "a slave to the son of Hariri and the Americans, who were conspiring against Syria", and declared that Syria was now "at war". Also, he considered the stance of the German public prosecutor, Detlev Mehlis, as "not unbiased" and stated that "the pressures to which Syria was subjected by his interrogation committee were not aimed at revealing the truth but, on the contrary, they (NB: the Americans) were taking revenge for our opposition to their occupation of Iraq and our support for the Palestinian cause and the Lebanese resistance. He continued: we have two choices: resistance or chaos". Which is this resistance, actually? The Lebanon had a democratically elected government,

and all sides participated in the government with ministers! It is obvious that in this extract, he is referring to Hezbollah, which must be seen as “resistance” and not as an “armed civil guard”, so that it would not be forced to disarm on the basis of the provisions of the Taif Treaty (1989) and UN Resolution 1559 (2004). When Mr. Assad’s speech was introduced for deliberation in the Lebanese Parliament, on the initiative of Prime Minister Fouad Signora, all five Shiite ministers walked out immediately, on the pretext that the “subject matter was not on the Parliament’s agenda”, as if there were no out-of-agenda issues for parliaments worldwide, the presentation of which were, furthermore, not discussed beforehand. The Shiite ministers boycotted the Parliament for seven weeks and returned only on February 3, 2006, when Signora stated that the “Resistance was and will never be named, if not by its true name, that is National Resistance”. It was this “magic phrase” that brought the Shiite ministers back to the Parliament, because of its underlying meaning that Hezbollah would not be obliged to disarm, given its “national resistance” character. How could the Olmert government find peace, particularly at a period when attacks using “Katyusha” rockets from S. Lebanon to N. Israel never ceased? Finally, it may appear that Damascus has chosen “chaos”.

(i) Exactly one month later, on 12 December, 2005, Gebran Tueni, anti-Syrian journalist and Christian MP, editor and publisher of the *An-Nahar* daily newspaper was murdered using a booby-trapped car. Three more people died with him.

(j) On the same day, a few hours after the assassination, Prime Minister Fouad Signora ratified a decision during a Cabinet Meeting, to set up an International Court of Justice for the trial of the Army Generals arrested as suspects for Hariri’s assassination, and to extend the investigations, by means of an International Investigation Committee under UN auspices, to include all the above-mentioned assassinations. All five Shiite ministers reacted immediately and resigned. Why?

Also, Damascus considered that it could equal the negotiation capacity of the US, in terms of peacemaking capacity in the region, and therefore enjoy the benefits of Bashar al-Assad retaining power in Syria, together with the Baath party. The involvement of Damascus is no more in doubt. On 18 July 2006, at the Convention of the Arab League, Mr. Assad had already threatened to vote against the proposal

for an extraordinary meeting for Lebanon, should the Arab governments fail to align with Hezbollah and Hamas. Damascus considered that, by aligning with Iran and Turkey, it could prevent the risk of a Kurdish separation tendency on its territory. Furthermore, internationally available evidence on arms procurement from Syria and Iran bear witness to this assumption. In addition, last summer, Sheikh Nasrallah stated that Hezbollah had more than 12 thousand rockets available and ready to be used against Israel. This statement was predicated on the events that followed Rafik Hariri's assassination and the withdrawal of Syria's military force from Lebanon. About seven to eight thousands of these rockets belong to the "Katyusha" 107 and 122 mm family.



Map 1: Maximum Hezbollah Rocket Strike (Source: STRATFOR)

These rockets are technologically obsolete, imprecise and suitable only for area targets (i.e. cities, troop concentrations, etc.). There are

two types of 107 mm rockets, launched from fixed or mobile units (HASEB type, of Iranian make), all with an effective range of 5 miles. The 122 mm rockets have a range of 20 miles and a 45 kg explosive head. There are 70 self-propelled launchers (Noor, Hadid and Awash). In 2000, with the consensus of Bashar al-Assad, new-generation rockets (of Iranian make and Chinese and North Korean know-how) have been available to Hezbollah, transferred from Iran through Syria. In 2000, the Fajr-3 rocket model was made available to Hezbollah, followed by Fajr-5 in 2003 (see Map 1). The delivery of the latter was completed in January 2006.

The rockets were transported, either through Syria or by sea, to Lebanon and delivered to Hezbollah. Their effective range is between 40 and 75 kilometres and it is exactly these rockets that hit Haifa. The mobile launchers are towed by Japanese-made trucks. Syria delivered also, in 2001, BM-27 self-propelled launchers, capable of launching 220 mm rockets at ranges of up to 70 kilometres, bearing a 100 kg explosive head. All this movement was with the knowledge of, or at least “deliberately ignored” by, both the Lebanese government, and the UN.

On 31 January, 2006, the Lebanese government acknowledged for the first time that, in defiance of UN Resolution 1559 providing for the disarmament of the various paramilitary organisations by the country’s government, it had officially allowed the transport of weapons from Syria to Hezbollah (truck convoy). On February 13, the UN officially reported on this issue. The investigation by the Organisation (headed by Special UN Envoy Terie Larsen) revealed that the Lebanese government had allowed the transportation, because it considered Nasrallah’s organisation to be a “resistance force”.

Based on existing evidence and Hezbollah’s firing practice, the following Israeli cities are within the firing range of Hezbollah’s rockets: Haifa (50 km), Akko (30 km), Nahariya (10 km), and Sfat. Haifa is the optimum target, because (i) it is the harbour base used by the Israeli navy; (ii) it is the country’s second largest port; (iii) it has many chemical industries (indirect mass destruction blow); and (iv) it houses many high-tech industrial complexes, vital for Israel’s defence (the largest and most known being Rafael). The population of the areas within the rockets’ shooting range is approximately two million (out of a total Israeli

population of 7 million). A few months ago, Dr. Ephraim Dvir, head of the Geography Department for Disaster Areas, stressed that if the region of Haifa were hit (especially the chemical sector), the disaster would be huge.

In January, 2005, Shin Bet arrested a Muslim holding a Danish passport (Iyad ash-Shua, related to Hezbollah), who was photographing military installations in Haifa. Other agents were also arrested while photographing refineries and chemical industry complexes.

Rocket attacks are, beforehand, an asymmetrical response, given that their economic impact for Israel is much more significant than the value of the weapons. In 1996, about five hundred “Katyusha” rockets hit N. Israel, causing a damage of USD 100 million. The systems that Israel has developed to counter this threat (THEL and MTHEL laser systems) are not ready yet, and are not projected for operational readiness until 2008. Also, it is not certain if Hezbollah has access to the explosive heads developed by China and purchased by Iran, in order to use them on the 220 mm rockets. These heads are laser-guided during the final stage of their trajectory. In other words, their precision is significantly high and allows for the capability to hit a target with a 30 m diameter from a 60-70 km distance (if there is, of course, an operator to “laser-point” on the target). In such a scenario, the oil and chemical tanks are the easiest of targets. Based on evidence so far, it may be that either Hezbollah does not have access to such rocket heads, or that it is preserving them for future escalation, at a time that it will deem politically opportune.

3. **Iran**, which has estimated that it (a) has diminished the pressure from the so-called “international community” against its nuclear programme; (b) could be transformed into the strongest negotiator of the US in the region, against the value of “nuclear” and political offsets; and (c) would emerge as a leading force in the Islamic world and, more in particular, in the region, and strengthen its relations with Ankara, affect Iraq’s domestic affairs, support Syria in its peripheral strategy and its hopes for re-acquiring Lebanon through Hezbollah, converge with Ankara and Damascus for eliminating the Kurdish issue and exercise strategic pressure on Tel-Aviv. It is also worth noting that Tehran was not at all embarrassed by the rise of international oil prices, causing the inflow of millions to its treasury without any increase of oil production on its part.

4. The **group of petroleum monarchies of the Gulf**, which considered that (a) a successful Israeli attack would eliminate their main opponent in the region, in other words the Shiite zealot movement, which they consider as Tehran's "long arm" in their domestic affairs, given the Shiite demographic pattern of oilfield workers; (b) it was time to get rid of the Baath regime of Syria; and, therefore (c) drastically increase the inflow of petrodollars in their treasuries.

5. **Russia**, simply because of the drastic increase of its foreign currency reserves and its net domestic product, without a corresponding increase of production or the expansion of its foreign customer base. Such an increase can satisfy a high development rate of seven % annually. Besides, in September 2006, Russia's President Putin repaid Russia's debts in full to the Paris Club and, therefore, Moscow now confronts its future without any financial problems whatsoever.

6. The **European Union**, which considered that, "at the expense of Israel", it would be forever relieved from the threat of an Islamist movement and the export of its terrorist activity into EU territory, benefiting also from a huge market, which is subject to full restructuring.

7. The **US**, which considered the overall situation as particularly positive for expanding its influence in the Greater Middle East "at the expense of Israel", through the elimination of the last strongholds of Islamist reaction and terrorism, and, also, through the complete control over the oil reserves and transport routes in the region and the elimination of all possibilities of cooperation in the domains of energy and technology between Iran and Syria, on the one hand, and Russia and China, on the other. The US also considered that the completion of this geo-strategic restructuring in the Greater Middle East, particularly during a period of change in energy resources and related technologies, would allow for the preservation of the single-pole structure of international power, for decades to come. It is noteworthy that the emergence of strong allies in the region, through the so-called *nation building processes*, is another significant challenge that follows any positive trend for Washington's geostrategic aims. In the eyes of the US, future developments will be centred on Iran and the Moscow, Beijing and Tehran geostrategic triangle, as the cause of strong fears. In particular, these fears can be enunciated in the following:

(a) Iran controls more than ten percent of international oil reserves and fifteen percent of international gas reserves. It is also a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), ensures more than thirteen percent of China's oil demand, is strongly related with Cuba in the fields of agriculture, biotechnology and industry and has developed close ties with the Venezuela of Hugo Chávez.² In the eyes of W. Charara,³ Iran is seen as the "last stronghold against the effort to continuously submit the Near & Middle East to the US" and as the only strategic ally of Syria and of some paramilitary Palestinian organisations in the area. Based on such considerations, it could therefore concentrate Middle Eastern power and emerge as a hegemonic pole in this geopolitical subsystem.

(b) Preventing a new era of American military intervention in the Middle East is considered by Washington to depend, to a large extent, on Tehran's isolation and, ultimately, submission. This is also the estimation of Beijing and the NAM, which have declared *urbi et orbi* that they will not allow for such developments.

(c) Also, a source of concern for Washington is Tehran's intention to create a particular Petroleum Exchange, where transactions will take place in Euros and which could therefore compete strongly with London's International Petroleum Exchange (IPE), and the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYMEX), thus threatening the prevalence of the USD in the petroleum market between Iran and the EU countries, as well as the countries of the NAM, i.e. more than half of the UN member-states, representing around two thirds of the world's GDP. Tehran's intention was to proclaim the establishment of this Exchange in March, 2006. The system would be based on the Euro-based oil exchange mechanism. The Euro is a stable currency and, therefore, disallows a type of international state levying by the US, by means of depreciations of the USD, caused by the Fed. Without this "international", as well as "obscure", taxation of national-state actors and of the international oil companies whose interests are not paralleled by Washington, the overall international hegemony of the US would be questioned and the international community would move towards a multi-polar world of power, built on the foundation of "hard"

2. See: *IRNA*, 10 & 12 August 2005 [www.irna.ir].

3. See: W. Charara, «Après Bagdad, Téhéran», *Le Monde Diplomatique*, janvier 2005

economic criteria, of high technology production and know-how possession, that would not have to resort to, or rely upon, the “discriminatory taxation” of these actors through the centrally-controlled depreciations of the USD which in turn affect the national economies by forcing them to purchase the required quantities of hydrocarbons in USD, depreciated in the meantime, i.e. from the time such foreign currency reserves are purchased until they are utilised for the purchase of the above-mentioned quantities of crude oil or natural gas.

(d) EU countries would be greatly relieved, both financially and politically, by negotiating their energy resource needs in their strong, domestic, currency, rather than having to resort to the costly process of obtaining inflationary petrodollars.

(e) As pertains to Russia, given their “European-oriented” “trends” in the energy and armament sectors (cf. the Russia-Germany pipelines through the Baltic Sea, the Russia-Europe pipeline through Rumania and Hungary, the Blue Stream pipeline through Turkey, Greece and Italy, the purchase of four percent of EADS’s share capital, etc.), transactions in the Euro are God’s gift: alas, one entailing a new, harder blow on the financing of America’s economy. It must be reminded that all the countries of the former Warsaw Pact, including new EU member states, cover 75 percent of their natural gas and 80 percent of their oil needs with imports from Russia. Even the UK did not manage to overcome the need to resort to Russian hydrocarbons: last June, President Putin announced the construction of a “North European pipeline” to transport Russian natural gas through an existing network of pipelines operated by Gazprom, to the port of Wilborg in the Baltic Sea and, from there, to Germany and Britain, in quantities exceeding 55 billion cu. m. p.a., after 2010. Besides, Gazprom already covers 25 percent of Europe’s needs and the company’s strategic outlook is rapidly expanding towards the Chinese and the American markets, given its control of 80 percent of Russia’s production and of 20 percent of worldwide reserves of natural gas. The size of the blow for the US economy can easily be understood, were the USD to be replaced by the Euro for transactions of such quantities of hydrocarbons. It should be remembered that the principal stakeholder of this energy giant is the Kremlin, which, by means of Rosneftgaz, controls 51 percent of its share capital.

(f) Also, China wants to be connected with Russia's energy. Beijing has already deposited USD 6 billion with Russia's Rosneft, as down-payment in exchange for 48 million tons of crude oil, to be supplied by 2010. This effort bears witness to Beijing's desire to rely less on its American oil suppliers, so as to be able to serve the country's swift development, currently of an average rate of 10.5 percent annually. Given Beijing's anxiety about US military control over the Strait of Hormuz in the Arab-Persian Gulf, as well as the US occupation of Iraq, it is clear that the country is accelerating its move towards Russia and Iran for resolving its energy problem, and is thus enhancing this triangular geo-strategic relationship between Beijing, Moscow and Tehran. Beijing's policy is exemplified by its USD 70 billion agreement, in 2005, with Tehran for the procurement of 250 million tons of gas. This illustrates China's unwillingness to waive its interests for a second time (the first being Saddam's Iraq, after the Anglo-American invasion) by allowing any hegemonic actor to threaten Iran.

In conclusion, it can be said that such monetary and financial changes can have a very serious impact on the economic hegemony of the US and, naturally, can even cause spasmodic reactions by Washington's economic and political decision-makers.

8. **Israel** considered the war as "high time" to deal with its pending issues with the Islamist movement, that has been involved in its conflict with the Palestinian Authority and, of course, Hamas, and to eliminate the Shiite Islamist movement and its supporters by aiming, primarily, at a wrongful move by Damascus that will involve the latter directly in Israel's hot conflict with Hezbollah and Hamas. Of course, if Iran chose to follow the track of Damascus, Tel Aviv would gain the support, not only of Washington, but also of the EU-US dipole, supported also by the Jordan-Egypt-S. Arabia and UAE axis, in the ideological and political context of the "anti-terrorist front". In this way, it would minimise the reaction of the so-called, "international community". The message of statements from Brussels, Riyadh, Jordan and Cairo are all too obvious. Besides, the regimes of these Arab countries consider that there would no benefits for them, compatible with the current governmental entities in Damascus and Tehran. None of these countries would ever want to see the Lebanon being offered as prey to Hezbollah and its

allies, because such an eventuality would greatly strengthen Tehran's theocratic regime and would, on the contrary, politically eliminate their regimes, as such.

9. **France**, given the possibility of imposing its geostrategic load on the Lebanon, after the complete elimination of Hezbollah's military presence, and, thus to project power towards Syria and the greater Israeli-American geostrategic game of the M. East, by controlling part of the region's energy routes. France was the last "mandatory power" in Lebanon and has never forgotten the "glorious" days, which Washington revitalised by assigning to Paris the responsibility for a "New Lebanon" after the "Cedar Revolution" in February, 2005.

There is only one actor, both dissatisfied and in a very difficult situation: Turkey. It would be the first country to suffer from a nation building process. Also, if Ankara failed to comply with its defence agreements with Tel-Aviv (that are activated in the case of a Syrian attack against Israel), it would be very difficult to neutralize the consequences. This is not only because it would displease Israel. It would also greatly displease Washington, for a second time. In other words, it would displease its strategic partners three times. And we have all known, since our very childhood, that committing the same mistake for a third time can prove disastrous.

Bibliography

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