

A Fight For Survival

Amid the din and clamour of media outlets and commentators falling over each other to condemn Israel's actions, vital questions have been ignored. For what are Hezbollah fighting; for what are the militants in Gaza fighting? For the militants in Gaza who fired rockets into Israel before tunnelling under the border in order to murder two Israeli soldiers and capture nineteen year old Gilad Shalit, it cannot be an unoccupied Gaza, because they already have this. Israel withdrew from Gaza leaving no trace of their occupation. Instead of creating infrastructure; building schools, hospitals, roads, Hamas fired rockets into pre-1967 Israel (internationally recognised as part of sovereign Israel). This on the very day of Israel's departure from Gaza! It was simply an act of aggression on the part of Hamas in order to draw Israel into conflict.

For what is Hezbollah fighting? Hezbollah, 'The Party of God', is a fundamentalist Islamic group whose express goal is to eliminate Israel and create an Islamic Middle East. Hezbollah is not fighting for land; Hezbollah is not retaliating against an Israeli attack. Hezbollah is fighting simply to aid Hamas in their campaign against Israel; to cripple Israel and eradicate Israel.

What is Israel fighting for? Israel is fighting for the same cause it has been fighting for since its birth in 1948- the right to survive.

The reasons put forth for the attacks on Israel will strike some as unsatisfying, and they are, because these are only preliminary, 'face value' explanations. The root reason will be suggested once the events of the past few weeks have been documented.

As was mentioned above, Hamas militants have been firing rockets into Israel from Gaza since the Israeli pull-out last year. Then, on June 25th, militants ambushed Israeli soldiers, killing two and kidnapping Gilad Shalit. Israel retaliated by attacking transport systems (so as to stop the militants from moving Gilad Shalit) and likely hide-outs of Hamas terrorists. Hezbollah have been launching rockets into Israel, from Southern Lebanon, intermittently for the past two decades, these have increased over the past few months. On July 12th, Hezbollah fired rockets into Israel before transgressing the border, killing three Israeli soldiers and taking two Israeli soldiers hostage. The capturing of Israeli soldiers was a deliberate manoeuvre to drag Israel into a war; Hezbollah and Hamas well aware of Israel's retrieval policy for captured soldiers. Israel neither instigated nor provoked the attacks levelled upon them, a fact recognised by the G8 and many Arab nations, who call for an end to Hezbollah's violence.

A third question, unasked, is: for whom are Hamas and Hezbollah fighting? There is a great connection between Hamas and Hezbollah besides their mutual loathing of the state of Israel. Iran and Syria are the major patrons of both Hamas and Hezbollah. Iran is a major financial backer of Hamas; Iran also supplies Hezbollah with weapons and provides Hezbollah between \$US 10 million- 20 million a month. Syria provides Hezbollah with logistical aid and political backing. Iran's President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has recently come under international pressure regarding Iran's nuclear programme; his heated remarks against Israel and his rigorous anti-Semitism. Since the spate of violence, begun by Hamas and Hezbollah, the Iranian threat has been relegated

to side-show status, with the media preferring to focus on their favourite target, Israel, and with world leaders looking to solve this more pressing issue. Hamas and Hezbollah have done a good job of taking the heat off Iran, with the added bonus of pummelling Israel.

What is occurring is both a diversion and a subtle flexing of muscles by Ahmadinejad; Hamas and Hezbollah exist firmly in the pocket of Iran. The brazen attacks on Israel are an implicit warning shot on the part of Iran, without Iran having to actually attack Israel themselves. Ahmadinejad is making clear the fact that he can deliver on his threats and attack the West, if need be, by using his minions to attack the symbol of the West in the Middle East- Israel. The opinion that Hezbollah and Hamas are a diversion ploy is echoed, too, by the governments of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan; they believe that the attacks by Hamas and Hezbollah have been carried out in order to divert the world's attention from Iran's nuclear programme and Syria's alleged complicity in the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Lebanon is not thrilled with Hezbollah's attacks on Israel either as Hezbollah has shown the state of the Lebanese government to be truly weak- the Lebanese army does not have a presence in Southern Lebanon, it is instead patrolled by the Hezbollah militants. Lebanon exerts no control over Hezbollah, a member party of the Lebanese cabinet; instead, Iran, with their monetary assistance and training of militants, controls them. Further, the Hezbollah attacks emphasised the fact that Lebanon has not acted upon the United Nations Resolution 1559 of two years ago which called on the Lebanese government to disarm Hezbollah and patrol its southern border (many in Lebanon are now looking to Israel to complete a task its government has failed to carry out). The Lebanese government has done nothing, and can effectively do nothing, to stop a member of their government from attacking Israel, as Hezbollah is an Iranian-run militia.

Again, Israel's actions are widely criticised while the actions of the other side are described in a perfunctory manner. Israel, again, is under attack from its enemies for the sin of existing. Hamas and Hezbollah's targets are civilians. To date, Hezbollah has fired rockets on Haifa, the now deserted town of Nahariya, Kiryat Shmoneh, Meron, Tiberius, Rosh Pina and the holy city of Safad. All their targets have been civilian targets. The Iranian-provided rockets are going further into Israel than ever before, reaching Haifa, Israel's third largest city. Israel does not purposefully target civilian areas, Hezbollah creates their headquarters within civilian areas so that an Israeli attack will cause civilian casualties, which leads to an international outcry. Israel warned civilians to evacuate before firing upon Lebanese targets; Israel attacks infrastructure such as transport systems, fuel supplies, surveillance capabilities etc. in order to make it difficult for Hezbollah to operate and to immobilise them. Hezbollah stores rockets and portable launchers in civilian areas such as garages and apartments so that if Israel locates them, the chances of civilian casualties will be increased. For Israel, civilian casualties are to be avoided as much as possible and are not a military goal, for Hamas and Hezbollah; the opposite is true- this was demonstrated by Hamas militants' reactions to finding a dead, dismembered Israeli- they reacted with gleeful chants.

Israel has been fighting almost since the day of its creation- fighting for acceptance and the right to exist, the conflict in Lebanon is yet another round of the same battle but this time there is the added hardship of wide-spread anti-Israel sentiment in the world, and the real danger posed by Iran, illustrated by their power in this latest conflict. Perhaps now with the G8's tentative support of Israel and the Arab nations' tentative lack of support for Hezbollah's cause, Israel may gain some respite from misplaced condemnation.

By Mika Hackner