Hezbollah’s Miscalculation

written by Gilbert Achcar | October 2, 2024

The party fell into the trap set for it by Israel, through its insistence on continuing to exchange fire with it “until a ceasefire in Gaza”, while it became clear that the weight of the battle was shifting from the wracked Strip to Lebanon.

Last week, we wondered “whether the sudden escalation in what we called the ‘Israeli strategy of intimidation’ is paving the way for a full-scale aggression against Lebanon that would include indiscriminate heavy bombing of all areas where Hezbollah is present, including the densely populated southern suburb of Beirut”. This led us to another question: will US President Biden “pressure Netanyahu firmly enough to prevent war… or will he once again go along with his friend’s criminal endeavour, even if accompanied by an expression of regret and resentment meant to deflect the blame in his and his Secretary of State Blinken’s usual hypocritical way?” (“Strategic Reflections on the Escalation of Israeli Intimidation in Lebanon”, 24/9/2024).

The answer to these two interconnected questions was not long in coming: the Israeli ministry of Aggression (falsely called ministry of “Defence”) announced last Wednesday that its director general received a new aid package worth $8.7 billion during his visit to the US military command at the Pentagon. The ministry commented on the matter by saying that it confirms “the strong and enduring strategic partnership between Israel and the United States and the ironclad commitment to Israel’s security”. Two days later, on Friday night, the current onslaught by the Zionist armed forces on Hezbollah culminated in the assassination of the party’s Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah and a number of its leaders, completing what turned out to be a systematic decapitation of the organization after having sabotaged its communications network, in preparation for new steps on the path to a comprehensive onslaught on the party’s areas, which have so far included intensive, concentrated bombardment and the gradual expansion of a ground invasion that Israeli sources claim will remain “limited”.

Thus, it becomes clear that the US administration’s call for a three-week ceasefire between Hezbollah and the Zionist state, which was issued after French prompting and announced in conjunction with Paris, was not sincere at all, as it was not accompanied by any actual US pressure. It is worth noting in this regard that the *Washington Post* published an investigation last Wednesday that showed that opinions regarding the ceasefire differed within the Biden administration, with some of its members seeing in the Israeli military escalation “a potentially effective means of degrading the Lebanese militant group”. The administration’s response to Hassan Nasrallah’s assassination, starting with Biden himself, was to applaud and praise the operation, describing it as “a measure of justice” by branding Hezbollah and its Secretary-General as terrorists. This reaction confirmed Washington’s total military and political complicity in the ongoing onslaught against Lebanon after its blatant complicity in the ongoing genocidal war in Gaza.

The Biden administration’s hypocrisy reached a new low with this, since labelling the Lebanese party as a terrorist organization is in stark contrast to the negotiations it has been conducting with it

for several months, seeking what it called a “diplomatic solution” to the conflict between it and the Zionist state. How could Washington negotiate with a “terrorist group”, through the mediation of Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, Hezbollah’s political (but not military) ally, and seek a diplomatic settlement with such a group? Not to mention that there is no type of act that could be described as terrorist that the Zionist state has not committed with an intensity and murderous brutality that surpass everything that Washington has described and continues to describe as terrorist (ignoring what it itself has committed, of course).

Here is once again, after the genocidal war in Gaza, a malicious justification for a war aiming at the eradication of a mass organization that has several elected MPs and oversees a large civilian quasi-state apparatus, by branding it as a whole as terrorist, without even distinguishing between its military wing and its civilian institutions. In contrast to the case of Hamas, whose Operation “Al-Aqsa Flood” was widely exploited to stick that label to it, Hezbollah under the leadership of Hassan Nasrallah did not carry out any act that could be described as terrorist in the sense of deliberately attacking Israeli or US civilians or non-combatants. They therefore recalled the 1983 attacks that targeted the US embassy, and US and French troops participating in the “Multinational Force” in Lebanon, and even attributed these attacks to Hassan Nasrallah, who was not in the party’s leadership at the time and was only 23 years old! In fact, Nasrallah supervised the party’s transformation towards engaging in Lebanese political life by taking part in parliamentary elections for the first time in 1992, the year he assumed the position of Secretary-General.

Last week, we described how Hezbollah’s calculation in waging a limited battle against Israel in support for Gaza had begun to backfire on it, as it found itself “trapped in mutual, but unequal, deterrence” with the Zionist army. The truth is that the party fell into the trap set for it by Israel, through its insistence on continuing to exchange fire with it “until a ceasefire in Gaza”, while it became clear that the weight of the battle was shifting from the wracked Strip to Lebanon. It would have been more appropriate for the party to publicly announce its acceptance of the French-US call for a three-week ceasefire (especially since it was in dire need of catching its breath and restoring its leadership apparatus after its communications network was blown up) and a cessation of military operations on its part, which would have been an embarrassment to the Zionist government and would have exposed it to intense international pressure urging it to follow suit.

Recent days have made it clear that Hezbollah’s perception of “mutual deterrence” between it and the Zionist state did not sufficiently take into account the unequal nature of this deterrence (a miscalculation similar to Hamas’s, albeit much less serious), and that its perception of the commitment of its sponsor in Tehran to defending it was also illusory, as Iran responded to the repeated attacks that Israel has been launching directly against it only once, last April, and in a manner that was almost more symbolic than harmful.

It seems that Hezbollah has confirmed its willingness to return to implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1701 of 2006, which calls for the withdrawal of its forces to the north of the Litani River, thus acknowledging the imbalance of power between it and the Zionist state and accepting the condition that was imposed on it through US mediation. This willingness was confirmed by the Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister, Najib Mikati, following his meeting with Nabih Berri. It is therefore worth wondering about the utility of insisting on continuing to fight until a ceasefire is reached in Gaza, thus giving the Zionist government a pretext to further escalate its onslaught against Lebanon and against Hezbollah in particular.

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