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## Special Reports

*Special reports are articles collecting the most relevant public diplomacy articles and information on topical issues, and are posted periodically by our research team at the USC Center on Public Diplomacy.*

## HEZBOLLAH, ISRAEL, AND THE U.S.: A CONFLICT WITH FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS

AUG 22, 2006 - 11:38PM PST  
by Jade Miller

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The 33-day military confrontation between Hezbollah and Israel and the subsequent cease-fire and aid operation has important public diplomacy implications not only for the two warring parties but for many other state and non-state actors. The conflict commanded the world's attention. Much more than a land dispute or run-of-the-mill cross-border antagonism, the conflict encapsulated, highlighted, and exacerbated many other strains in the region and in world politics at large, including the struggle of Lebanon's newly elected government to control its territory, the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Syrian and Iranian influence in Southern Lebanon through their support for Hezbollah, U.S. support for Israel, and associations with the U.S.-led war in Iraq. The actions of each party associated with the Israel-Hezbollah conflict have been noticed around the world and linked to much larger trends. The implications from this conflict for each actor are manifold.

Almost every nation in the world has a registered response to the Hezbollah – Israeli conflict. Many nations criticized both Hezbollah's and Israel's actions, and called for a cease-fire. However, many of these countries expressed their sympathies through emphasizing one criticism over the other.

The U.S. was at the forefront of those nations emphasizing Israel's right to self-defense against Hezbollah. Joining in on the pro-Israel side were allies in the "war on terror" such as the U.K., as well as some nations that were against the war in Iraq, such as Germany and Canada.

Most nations, save Syria and, to some extent, Iran, did not come out directly in support of Hezbollah, an extra-national organization regarded by some in part or in whole as a terrorist group. Countries typically associated with anti-Americanism, such as Venezuela and many Muslim nations such as Pakistan, Jordan, Egypt, Yemen, Kuwait, Tajikistan, and, perhaps of particular interest, Iraq, and Afghanistan, came out against Israel in this conflict by denouncing the IDF military campaign as overkill. Many countries that were against the Iraq war, such as Spain, Russia, France and Italy have also heavily criticized Israeli conduct.

Following the mid-August cease-fire, Israel emerged enmeshed in negative international opinion from much of the world, but particularly in Muslim nations as a result of the conflict. While many acknowledged Israel's right to react in a militant fashion to Hezbollah's initial hostilities, Israel's response, particularly in regards to civilian casualties, was deemed by many as excessive, and the product of a joint American-Israeli policy of hostility towards Muslim nations. Support and sympathy for Israel has been particularly strong in the U.S., however, where 81% of Americans reported believing that Israel's offensive in Lebanon were justified and 37% believing that all Israeli military action was justified.

While not directly involved in the military operations in Southern Lebanon, the U.S. is undoubtedly considered one of the major players in the conflict and has much at stake here. Across the world, the actions of Israel are closely linked with the image of the U.S., as a result of the U.S.'s actions regarding this situation, general U.S. policy towards Israel, and a perception that the two countries are closely allied in world politics, sharing the same goals and techniques. Many have accused the U.S. of purposefully dragging its feet in interceding in this conflict, in order to allow Israel more time to bombard Hezbollah.

Condemnation of Israel's actions in this conflict has rarely been unaccompanied by condemnation of U.S. policy; the two have been conflated in the eyes of many bystanders. The idea that Israel's actions are made possible because of the tacit approval of the U.S. means that any actions taken by the Israeli government could hardly be more associated with the U.S. than if the U.S. had performed them itself. Lebanese civilian deaths, widely documented in the Arab world, have reflected negatively not only on Israel, but on the U.S. as well. Both the Bush administration's slowness to respond to the military operations underway in southern Lebanon and its position in Iraq have led some onlookers to declare that the U.S. does not place high value on the deaths of Arab civilians. The policies of the U.S. in the Middle East and the actions of the U.S. in Iraq have been very closely attached in public discourse to the actions of Israel in southern Lebanon.

Syria, on the other hand, emerged in many ways a winner in the public diplomacy war, as its power and dominance in the region has been highlighted by many. The conflict has led many to suggest that the U.S. resume direct diplomatic relations with Syria, while commentators around the world (including President Bush in an accidental open-mike remark to Tony Blair) have suggested Syria as key to solving problems in the region. Iran has been the focus of similar suggestions in the world press, yet the biggest public diplomacy winner in this conflict is surely Hezbollah. Among private citizens across the world with anti-American or anti-Israeli sentiments (either as a result of this or other geopolitical conflicts), Hezbollah has emerged as an embodiment of resistance. Traditionally a Shiite movement, even Sunnis across the region have expressed feelings of admiration for and even support for Hezbollah's actions. Reports from southern Lebanon indicate that support for Hezbollah has increased, particularly among those living in towns hit by the fighting. Hezbollah has used its time on the forefront of the world stage to practice public diplomacy itself, raising its image among foreign publics while it remains an extra-national organization itself. Most recently, Hezbollah has been seen at the forefront of aid dispersal in affected Lebanese areas.

The following is an aggregation of media reports regarding the Hezbollah-Israeli conflict, focusing on issues important for public diplomacy. If you would like to post your reactions and ideas about this issue, you can add your comments at the bottom of this page.

### **Opinion polls and reactions from around the world**

Russian, Iranian, and Syrian Reactions to the War in Lebanon

*(Middle East Media Research Institute, August 11, 2006)*

The following are Russian, Iranian, and Syrian reactions to the crisis in the Middle East - From MEMRI

Poll Finds Overwhelming Majorities in Lebanon Support Hezbollah, Distrust U.S.

*(World Public Opinion, August 2, 2006)*

Most Lebanese -- including majorities across all major religious groups -- support Hezbollah in its conflict with Israel and distrust the United States as a mediator, according to a recent Lebanese poll.

Americans Believe Israeli Actions Are Justified but Share International Reservations about Extent of Military Offensive

(*World Public Opinion*, August 2, 2006)

A strong majority of Americans believe Israel is justified in taking action against the Hezbollah militia. But recent polls also show that U.S. support for Israel's offensive is not absolute. Most Americans blame both sides for the violence in Lebanon and a plurality favors the negotiation of a cease-fire as soon as possible. Like other publics abroad, a majority in the United States believes Israel's military campaign has gone too far.

Americans Not Pressing for More U.S. Involvement in Middle East

(*The Gallup Poll*, August 1, 2006)

A new USA Today/Gallup poll, conducted Friday, July 28, through Sunday, July 30, continues to show mixed sentiments about what the U.S. government should do regarding the most recent violent conflict in the Middle East. A majority of Americans overall are not pressing for the United States to be doing more in the crisis, nor do most Americans believe that the United States should call for an immediate ceasefire. (Subscription Needed).

## US

Ahmadinejad, Putin discuss ME developments by phone

(*Islamic Republic News Agency*, August 12, 2006)

"We are seriously concerned that the ongoing situation (in Lebanon) would create a backlash in regional nations, inciting extreme anger among Muslim youth, in particular, over the Zionists' brutal aggression against Lebanon," said the Iranian president.

US 'losing credibility' in Mideast

(*The Age* (Australia), August 11, 2006)

President Hosni Mubarak said the United States and the West were losing credibility in the Middle East because they were dragging their feet on a ceasefire in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah guerrillas.

Iran says West dragging feet on Mideast truce

(*Swiss Info*, August 10, 2006)

Western nations are dragging their feet over halting hostilities between Israel and Lebanon because war helps their goals in the region, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in remarks published on Thursday.

U.S. shows signs of compromise over Lebanon deal

(Sue Pleming, *Reuters*, August 5, 2006)

The Bush administration has been slammed by critics who accuse it of siding with ally Israel by not calling for an immediate cease-fire to end the fighting in southern Lebanon, which has killed 720 people in Lebanon and 73 Israelis.

Israel's Dependency on the Drug of Militarism

(Robert Scheer, *TruthDig.com*, August 1, 2006)

Bush's neoconservative foreign-policy cabal argued that troublesome regimes, such as that of Saddam Hussein, could be easily transformed into pliable, West-leaning democracies. Instead, the opposite has happened. Throughout the region, elections hyped by Bush have turned out to be a vehicle for the expression of religion-fueled rage against Israel and its U.S. sponsor.

Stop the Band-Aid Treatment

(Jimmy Carter, *Washington Post*, August 1, 2006)

A major impediment to progress is Washington's strange policy that dialogue on controversial issues will be extended only as a reward for subservient behavior and will be withheld from those who reject U.S.

assertions.

### Analysis: Bush Mideast Stance may Flop

(Tom Raum, *AP*, July 31, 2006)

The U.N. debate may end up as a reprise of the battle that the Bush administration had on "Iraq" in the Security Council in early 2003 when only it and Britain, among the council's five veto-wielding permanent members, argued in favor of an invasion.

### America Transforms the Middle East, but Not As Imagined

(James Carroll, *Boston Globe*, July 31, 2006)

The prewar naiveté of US planners, enshrined in the much-noted Bernard Lewis/Samuel Huntington alarms, assumed that the defining "other" of the civilizational clash was a univocal enemy -- "Islam." Washington had no idea that Islam, in its Middle East manifestation, was an atom waiting to be split. A sectarian argument had divided followers of Mohammed not long after his death, and that conflict defined the Muslim tradition.

### Doomed Diplomacy

(Patrick Seale, *Gulf News*, July 28, 2006)

So long as the US concerns itself only with Israel's security and ignores the interests of the Arab parties to the conflict, Rice's efforts will be doomed to failure.

### Rice on the Defensive After Rome Summit

(Helene Cooper, *The New York Times*, July 28, 2006)

But in the space of one hour in Rome on Wednesday, the public rewards of that hard work — the view around the world that the United States may now be more willing to play nice with others — may have been undone. Once again, it seemed, the United States had reverted to its my-way-or-the-highway approach, and Ms. Rice was on the defensive.

### Washington Risks a Wider Conflict

(Jim Muir, *BBC*, July 28, 2006)

One major difference this time is that Israel enjoys an indulgence from Washington far beyond anything previous, essentially giving it a free hand.

### At the Heart of the Lebanon Crisis Lie the Lethal Mistakes of President George W. Bush

(Jonathan Freedland, *The Guardian*, July 26, 2006)

It's fashionable to blame the US for all the world's ills, but in this case the sins, both of omission and commission, of the Bush administration genuinely belong at the heart of the trouble. Diplomacy has had a difficult task from the start, in part because the US is not seen as an honest broker, but as too closely aligned with Israel.

### U.S. wants peacekeepers

(Sandro Cotenta, *The Star* (Toronto), July 25, 2006)

The U.S. has been sharply criticized in Lebanon for dragging its feet on a ceasefire while Israel bombs the country's infrastructure — and a growing number of civilians — to pieces.

### Time For Real Diplomacy

(Zbigniew Brzezinski, *TIME*, July 23, 2006)

The present crisis, however, clearly stands in the way and imposes a particularly important challenge for the U.S. If that crisis continues to percolate and take a higher toll in human life, and continues to demonstrate that terrorism on one side is matched by brutal repression by the other, then the chances for peace in the Middle East will be set back, the region will be progressively radicalized and increasingly dominated by extremist forces. America's position in the region will be placed in jeopardy, and if America's position in the Middle East are undermined, America's global leadership will ultimately be at stake.

### Back Off Buddy, Beirut's My Sister

(Joel Klein, *L.A. Times*, July 23, 2006)

It is time for Angelenos to take up arms. No, we are not the most likely Hezbollah recruits -- so many of us being either Jews or Western imperialists or both -- but sometimes history presents no choice. Last month, Los Angeles decided to make Beirut its sister city. In retrospect, this may have been poorly thought out.

### U.S. Blunders Roil the Mideast

(Robert Kuttner, *Boston Globe*, July 22, 2006)

The latest violence in the Middle East demonstrates the bankruptcy of the Bush administration's grand design for the region.

### We Have to Talk to Bad Guys

(John McLaughlin, *Washington Post*, July 22, 2006)

We will have to get over the notion that talking to bad guys somehow rewards them or is a sign of weakness. As a superpower, we ought to be able to communicate in a way that signals our strength and self-confidence.

### Israel is on the way to defeating its aims

(*Financial Times*, July 22, 2006)

Israel is therefore well on the way to defeating its aims, as well as dragging the sullied reputation of its American ally through the Lebanese mud.

### U.S. Threatened With More Isolation

(Tom Raum, *AP*, July 21, 2006)

President Bush's uncompromising support for Israel in its battle with Hezbollah, now backed by Congress, is threatening to isolate the United States even further from the international community.

### US Affairs: Seal of approval

(Nathan Guttman, *Jerusalem Post*, July 20, 2006)

The outbreak of war between Israel and Hizbullah turned out to be an easy sell in America, with the administration giving Ehud Olmert's government a free hand to go ahead and take care of Hizbullah.

### Leviathan Run Amock

(Pepe Escobar, *Asia Times*, July 18, 2006)

The perception in the Arab street -- as well as for most of the world's 1.4 billion Muslims -- has been reinforced: the US/Israel axis seems to hold a license to kill Arabs with impunity.

### Why U.S. Looks to Others in Mideast Crisis

(Howard LaFranchi, *Christian Science Monitor*, July 17, 2006)

The problem, as Hughes sees it, is that the means of pressuring the two countries are limited, especially when the US has only a "relationship of hostility" with either [Iran or Syria]. "The only people who can call [Hizbullah] back are the Iranians and Syrians," he says. "But what quids are there?" Clawson says he was "amazed" to see Israel turn to Russia to make contact with Syria - a measure of the US's fallen standing in the region.

### Arabs Watching Helplessly

(Marc Lynch, *Abu Aardvark*, July 15, 2006)

American public diplomacy has been virtually invisible on [Israel's actions in Gaza and Lebanon] at a time when it is more urgently needed than ever. I can understand this -- you have to have a policy if you want to try to explain or defend it, and right now the Bush administration doesn't seem to have any policy at all beyond supporting Israel and issuing calls for 'restraint' which Israel promptly and publicly rejects. And what administration official wants to subject him or herself to tough Arab questioning on live TV right now?"

## Syria and Iran

The U.S. may have to resume talks with Syria

(Shmuel Rosner, *Haaretz*, July 31, 2006)

But the most decisive argument in favor of talking with Damascus could be a public-relations argument: The U.S. administration is finding it increasingly harder to explain its refusal to talk to Syria. According to one U.S. official, the government has few tools left for dealing with Syrian President Bashar Assad, and in the absence of an attractive plan for waging war against it, the only thing left is jaw-jaw rather than war-war.

Israeli strikes may boost Hizbullah base

(Nicholas Blanford, *Christian Science Monitor*, July 28, 2006)

Lebanese no longer blame Hizbullah for sparking the war by kidnapping the Israeli soldiers, but Israel and the US instead. The latest poll by the Beirut Center found that 8 percent of Lebanese feel the US supports Lebanon, down from 38 percent in January. "This support for Hizbullah is by default. It's due to US and Israeli actions," says Saad-Ghorayeb, whose father, Abdo, conducted the poll.

Syria is Part of the Solution

(Faisal al Yafai, *The Guardian*, July 26, 2006)

Damascus has repeatedly signalled its willingness to enter the fray diplomatically: this week deputy foreign minister Faisal al-Meqdad said Syria was ready to talk to the US. The US has refused to invite Syrian officials to the meeting of Arab and European leaders in Rome today. It is, say the Americans, part of the problem. The US may hope that friendly Arab countries like Egypt and Jordan can pressure Syria; but, eventually, it may have to talk to Damascus, as the only Arab country that can plausibly rein in Hizbollah.

Talking Turkey With Syria

(Thomas Friedman, *The New York Times*, July 26, 2006)

Can we get the Syrians on board? Can we split Damascus from Tehran? My conversations here suggest it would be very hard, but worth a shot. It is the most important strategic play we could make, because Syria is the bridge between Iran and Hezbollah. But it would take a high-level, rational dialogue.

(Purchase Required).

Syria at the center of diplomatic efforts to end war in Lebanon

(Shashank Bengali, *Mercury News*, July 24, 2006)

Long shunned by the Bush administration for its patronage of Hezbollah, its support of terrorism and its hostility to Israel, Syria is suddenly at the center of diplomatic efforts to end the two-week-old war in Lebanon.

## Israel

Our World: As Ahmadinejad Watches

(Carole Glick, *Jerusalem Post*, July 31, 2006)

Somehow, between the US's early and misguided decision to ignore the Lebanese government's support and responsibility for Hizbullah and the Olmert government's clearly halfhearted prosecution of the war, both governments have gotten lost. The goals that now form the basis of their diplomatic agendas serve only to advance the interests of their enemies.

Rome Conference Fails

(Marc Lynch, *Abu Aardvark*, July 21, 2006)

While there's disagreement as to whether Israel acted on behalf of an American project, there is near-consensus about American responsibility for not stopping what al-Jazeera is now calling "the sixth [Arab-Israeli] war". For instance, al-Jazeera's prime time Behind the News on July 25 was devoted to "the American project for a new Middle East" (with no American officials accepting their invitation to participate).

## Back to Beirut, Ready to Defy Israel

(Rami Khouri, *Daily Star*, July 18, 2006)

Protecting Israel has long been the primary focus of Western diplomacy, which is why it has not succeeded.

## Hezbollah

### Tide of Arab Opinion Turns to Support for Hezbollah

(Neil MacFarquhar, *The New York Times*, July 28, 2006)

Now, with hundreds of Lebanese dead and Hezbollah holding out against the vaunted Israeli military for more than two weeks, the tide of public opinion across the Arab world is surging behind the organization, transforming the Shiite group's leader, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, into a folk hero and forcing a change in official statements. (Purchase Required).

### Support for Hezbollah Increasing Among South Lebanon Residents

(Challiss McDonough, *Voice of America*, July 28, 2006)

Many residents of south Lebanon say the military campaign is strengthening support for Hezbollah, not weakening it.

### Bitterness grows in Lebanese resort city

(Chris Allbritton, *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 28, 2006)

Groups that previously have opposed the Islamic group. According to a survey by the Beirut Center for Research and Information conducted this week, 87 percent said they support Hezbollah in its fight against Israel.... "I was not with Hezbollah, but now I am," he said. "I will fight for Hezbollah. I will fight (Bush)! I will fight him every time, every day."

### The innocent pay as war returns to Beirut

(Brian Brady, *Scotsman*, July 23, 2006)

The scale of the Israeli bombing so far is thought to have radicalised large sections of the Lebanese people - most of whom previously hated Hezbollah. Now, with Israel expected to launch a ground invasion of southern Lebanon - seeking to rid itself of an organisation on its northern border committed to its destruction - the Lebanese troops are likely to be forced into an uneasy alliance with Hezbollah in an attempt to repel the invaders.

### Arabs Rally Behind Hezbollah

(Salah Nasrawi, *AP*, July 21, 2006)

Key Arab allies of the United States, predominantly Sunni countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt, fear the rising power of Shiites in the region: Hezbollah militants who virtually control southern Lebanon, Iraq's majority Shiite government, and -- most worrisome -- the Shiite theocracy that has run for decades. Yet many ordinary people, Sunnis as well as Shiites, are cheering the Lebanese guerrillas because of their willingness to stand up to Israel.

### The Region: The Arab Mind-Set

(Barry Rubin, *Jerusalem Post*, July 17, 2006)

Hamas and Hizbullah are now in the drivers' seat of the Arab world. It is worth underlining the fact that these two groups were supposedly going to be moderated by winning elections and participating in governments...

### Arab World Fed Up With Hizbollah

(*Jerusalem Post*, July 17, 2006)

Until last week, Arab political analysts and government officials were reluctant to criticize Hizbullah in public. But now that Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah and his top aides are in hiding, an anti-Hizbullah coalition is emerging not only in Lebanon, but in several other Arab countries as well.

## UK

### Stand Up to U.S., Voters Tell Blair

(Julian Glover and Ewan MacAskill, *The Guardian*, July 25, 2006)

Just 30% think the prime minister has got the relationship about right, against 63% saying he has tied Britain too closely to the US. The wide-ranging survey of British attitudes to international affairs - the first since the conflict between Lebanon and Israel started - shows that a large majority of voters think Mr. Blair has made the special relationship too special.

## Lebanon

### A Way Forward

(David Ignatius, *Washington Post*, July 21, 2006)

The best strategy for containing a militia such as Hezbollah is to build a strong Lebanese state; any lasting solution for this conflict will be political, not just military; continued Israeli bombardment of Lebanon to destroy terrorists might backfire by creating another failed state from which terrorists can operate more freely.

U.S. State Department: "Lebanon is not responsible for Hezbollah"

(Omri Ceren, *Israpundit*, July 18, 2006)

Alberto Fernandez, Director of Public Diplomacy in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the State Department, took a conference call with Jim Zogby's Arab American Institute in order to clarify the US's official policy regarding the war: that the Lebanese government is not responsible for Hezbollah's actions.

## Blogging about the conflict

### Blogging From the Belly of Beirut

(Cyrus Farivar, *Wired*, July 21, 2006)

Mana is in her mid-20s and lives with her parents in an apartment near the city center of Beirut. She's been "blogging" about the Israel-Lebanon conflict since it began more than a week ago, and her posts, such as the one above, have turned her LiveJournal account into a gathering point for vibrant and surprisingly conciliatory discussions by both Lebanese and Israelis.

### Bloggers on the Mideast Violence

(*Newsweek*, July 19, 2006)

Amid the blaring sirens, young, tech-savvy bloggers are taking the Middle East debate to the Web.

### Live From an Israeli Bunker

A live blog from an Israeli bunker via laptop and wifi. Provides a unique and unprecedented insight into the rapidly escalating situation in the middle east. Experience the events thru the eyes of the people who live them, and perhaps get an idea of how it's really like over here. This is much more human and accurate than the major news channels.

### Bloggers in the Middle East

Visual map with content links.