Strategic Reflections on the Escalation of Israeli Intimidation in Lebanon

Not even an hour had passed after I wrote my article of a week ago (“Lebanon and the Israeli Strategy of Intimidation”, 17/9/2024) when the Israeli intelligence agencies launched a mass terror operation in Lebanon by blowing up individual communication devices in two successive waves over two days, killing more than 40 people and wounding more than 3,500. These two waves of mass terrorism were followed by an escalation in the exchange of shells across the border, between Hezbollah and the Israeli Aggression Forces (aka IDF), preluding to the intense violent bombardment that poured down on Monday on southern Lebanon and other areas where Hezbollah is present, killing nearly 500 people and wounding more than 1,600. The bombardment is still ongoing as these lines are written.

The question that imposed itself on everyone, starting with those targeted in Lebanon, is whether this 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, with the aim of making it “look like Gaza” in the words of one of Benjamin Netanyahu’s close associates. It is indeed feared that the Zionist state will carry out a brutal aggression on parts of Lebanon, similar to the aggression that targeted the entire Gaza Strip, in line with what one of the overseers of the Israeli aggression on Lebanon in 2006 called the “Dahiya doctrine” (a reference to the southern suburb of Beirut, the Arabic word *dahiya* meaning “suburb”). This doctrine aims at achieving deterrence against anyone who has the intention of confronting Israel, by

threatening to inflict a high level of violence on areas inhabited by the civilian population to which those who nurture that intention belong, like what happened to the southern suburb of Beirut in 2006, which is the main area where Hezbollah's popular base is concentrated.

It is a fact that the 2006 aggression that followed an operation carried out by Hezbollah fighters across the southern Lebanese border against Israeli soldiers, killing eight of them and capturing two, had a deterrent effect, which was acknowledged by the Hezbollah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in declaring his regret, when he famously said on television in the aftermath of that war: "If I had known for one percent that this abduction operation would lead to a war of this magnitude, we certainly would not have done it for humanitarian, moral, military, social, security and political reasons."

What the Western media, which are quick to condemn war crimes when they are committed by the West's enemies, such as the Russian regime in Ukraine, do not say, is that the "Dahiya doctrine" is not an instance of military genius and a doctrine worthy of being taught in the military colleges of civilized countries, but rather a blatant violation of the laws of war, which consist in the practice of war crimes on a large scale, up to a genocidal level in Gaza, through an explicit intent to target civilians in order to deter combatants. It is, in other words, a terrorist strategy formulated by a terrorist state par excellence, which constitutes a stark confirmation that state terrorism is much more dangerous than the terrorism of non-state groups, as it applies the same logic, i.e. the killing of civilians for a political purpose, but with immeasurably greater potential for lethality and destruction.

Hezbollah learned two lessons from the 33-Day War in 2006. The first translates in that it has since then taken into account what it sees as a red line that, if crossed, would give the Zionist state a new pretext to attack Lebanese civilians. In

order to ward off its popular base in the first place, Hezbollah did not carry out any bold operation like the one that sparked the 2006 war – or the one carried out by Hamas about a year ago, igniting the war to destroy Gaza and exterminate its people. The second lesson led Hezbollah to acquire a huge arsenal of missiles that established a counter-deterrent by threatening civilian areas inside the Zionist state, thus achieving what is called in the vocabulary of nuclear deterrence a "balance of terror".

This equation is what explains Hezbollah's initiative of starting a limited war of attrition with the Zionist state the day after Operation "Al-Aqsa Flood", in response to Hamas's call for it to join what it had initiated. That call came in a message from the military leader of the Islamic movement in the Gaza Strip, Muhammad al-Deif, broadcast at the start of the operation: "Oh our brothers in the Islamic resistance, in Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, Iraq and Syria, this is the day when your resistance will merge with your people in Palestine so that this terrible occupier will understand that the time in which it rampages and assassinates scholars and leaders has ended. The time of plundering your wealth has ended. The almost daily bombing in Syria and Iraq has ended. The time of dividing the nation and scattering its forces in internal conflicts has ended. The time has come for all Arab and Islamic forces to unite to sweep this occupation from our holy sites and our land."

However, Hezbollah was smarter than to be overcome by euphoria to the point of believing that the day of victory over Israel and liberation of Palestine had come. It decided therefore to enter the battle as a supporter rather than a full participant, a decision that translated into the limited war of attrition. The party wanted to express its solidarity with the people of Gaza, but without exposing its popular base to a fate similar to that of the residents of the Strip. However, this calculation is now backfiring on Hezbollah, as the

Zionist aggression army, having finished its intensive large-scale operations in Gaza, is now focusing on its northern front, launching what we called the “strategy of intimidation”, which is a gradual escalation in attacks with a threat to shift to implementing the “Dahiya doctrine”.

This Israeli behaviour demonstrates the effectiveness of Hezbollah’s counter-deterrence, as the Zionist government is forced to be cautious about igniting a full-scale war that it knows will be costly to Israeli society, even if the cost to Hezbollah’s base will be much higher given the great superiority of Israeli military capabilities. The Zionist government hence resorted first to escalation through “asymmetric warfare”, a term that usually describes the actions of an irregular force against a regular army. Here, it is the Zionist state that is dealing a devious and painful blow to Hezbollah and its civilian milieu by blowing up communications devices. This was followed by an escalation of conventional war that began on Monday, constituting a dangerous escalation of pressure on Hezbollah to force it to surrender and accept the conditions set by Washington with the approval of the Zionist government, the most important of which is the withdrawal of the party’s forces to north of the Litani River.

Confronted with this escalating pressure, the party finds itself trapped in mutual, but unequal, deterrence. It does not possess the capabilities of waging “asymmetric warfare” deep inside Israel and cannot strike there in a way that would cause hundreds of deaths, like what the Zionist army inflicted on Lebanon on Monday, for fear that the response would be overwhelming, knowing that Israel is fully capable of responding at a much higher level. The Zionist government is wholly aware of the conditions of the equation. While it wishes to dismantle Hezbollah’s deterrent capacity, it cannot initiate a comprehensive war without ensuring full US participation in it, similar to Washington’s participation in

the war on Gaza during several months, the most deadly and destructive months, to the point of countering all calls for a ceasefire. The Zionist government needs such full US complicity in the event of launching a full-scale aggression on Lebanon, the political conditions of which have not yet been met. It is working to achieve them, however, and may well issue a warning with a limited deadline to Hezbollah for that purpose, as we mentioned a week ago.

From all of this, it appears that Netanyahu has begun to fear that his friend Donald Trump might well fail in the upcoming US presidential elections in about a month and a half. It seems that he therefore decided to escalate matters, taking advantage of the last months of presence of his other friend, the "proud Irish-American Zionist" Joe Biden, in the White House. The question now is: will Biden pressure Netanyahu firmly enough to prevent a war that is likely to negatively affect the campaign of his party's candidate, Kamala Harris, 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?

Gilbert Achcar

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Portugal: Deadly forest fires

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Between Sunday and late Tuesday afternoon, more than 71,000 hectares burned in Portugal, compared to 22,500 hectares previously, including the 5,000 hectares of the Madeira fires. In just three days, what was supposed to be a quiet year in terms of burned areas has become the fourth-worst year of the last decade. The figures are published by *Público* , but the newspaper warns that they are based on satellite images and therefore may be excessive. But even if we do not take into account 15 per cent of the burned area, this year's figures are only exceeded by those of 2016, 2017 and 2022.

In the north and centre of the country, the fires have spread due to weather conditions considered to be the most severe, particularly the easterly wind with strong gusts. On Wednesday, the National Emergency and Civil Protection Authority (INEM) counted five deaths and 118 injured , including ten in serious condition, stressing that the number of deaths was transmitted to it by the INEM and does not include the two civilians who died of a sudden illness. The maximum risk of fire affected 50 municipalities on Wednesday and the government decided to extend the state of alert until Thursday.

More than 100 active fires

On Wednesday morning, there were more than 100 active fires, with restarts and wind changes during the night, which made the situation in Águeda "uncontrollable" and approached urban centres. The firefighters who fought the Albergaria a-Velha fire , which has entered the resolution phase, are also fighting these fires. During the night, the Castro Daire fire

progressed towards Arouca , reaching the Paiva footbridges and confining several villages, after people with reduced mobility had been evacuated. In Covilhã, the night was spent fighting a fire in a pine forest area in Gibraltar that had escaped the Serra da Estrela fire two years ago.

Very complicated traffic

Several fires are also raging in the Porto district and some villages have evacuated their inhabitants . In Mangualde and São Pedro do Sul, it is reported that homes and businesses have been destroyed by fire. By late morning, Civil Protection reported 142 fires, 58 of which were in the final stages, with more than 5,500 agents on the ground, accompanied by 1,700 land resources and 37 air resources.

At the same time, the government reported that rail traffic on the Douro line between Marco de Canaveses and Régua and on the Vouga line had been interrupted, with several trains suspended. The A43 motorway between Gondomar and the A41 and the A41 between Medas and Aguiar de Sousa were also closed on Wednesday morning, as was the A25 between Albergaria and Reigoso (Viseu), as well as several national roads.

Bloco de Esquerda

Monday 27th September 2024

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Bloco de Esquerda is a radical left political party in Portugal formed in 2000 as a coalition of the formerly Maoist UDP; Politica XX1, a current that had left the Communist Party; and the PSR, Portuguese section of the Fourth International. Today it is a recognised political party with elected representatives in the national and European

parliaments.

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