

## **Israel and the crises in Lebanon and Canada (Greg Albo)**

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The last few weeks, and indeed days, have seen an enormous escalation in the conflict in the Middle East. Israel has re-occupied the Gaza strip, led an all-out assault on Lebanon in an effort to destroy Hezbollah and reshape the political authorities in Lebanon, and threatened both Syria and Jordan with military and aircraft deployments.

Israel has done so unilaterally and illegally, invoking its own doctrine of “pre-emptive intervention,” without sanction of the United Nations Security Council.

Israel’s assaults on both Gaza and Lebanon have occurred in a manner that clearly violates international law. This is seen in the “collective punishment” being severely meted out against Palestinians in Gaza and against Lebanese civilians, and it is seen in the wholesale and blatant destruction of civilian infrastructure and the large numbers of civilians being murdered in both Gaza and Lebanon.

Israel’s actions are in the face of condemnation of world opinion, and the vast majority of states of the world. The U.S. and Canada are two of the exceptions to world opinion, both endorsing and justifying the rogue behaviour of Israel, seemingly with no moral limits being able to be breeched of acceptable international conduct in the case of Israel.

The violence has claimed the lives of at least seven Canadians (and many more Canadian casualties) in Lebanon as a result of Israeli military aggression, according to news reports.

The response of Canadian authorities has been what has come to be expected from the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper: following American imperialism; an ideological shift toward military aggressiveness and defence of Israel whatever actions it undertakes and no matter what the violation of international law, judicial rulings and public opinion; and administrative neglect and incompetence in meeting the needs of

Canadian citizens, especially those who cannot claim European ancestry.

The previous Liberal government of Paul Martin had already begun moving in these directions with its support of the Canadian military deployment into a combat role in southern Afghanistan, and the siding with the U.S., Israel and a few other American vassal states in resolutions before the United Nations on Israel's failure to uphold United Nations resolutions on Palestine and other human rights issues.

Rather than continuing with Canada's historical support for multilateralism and international rule of law, Canada now defends the right to exercise unilateral military measures for the U.S. and Israel, and also separate international rules on a host of issues.

At the same time, Canada hypocritically follows the U.S. in claiming only to want to hold North Korea, Iran, Venezuela and others to international rules and norms. According to Canada's new foreign policy position, some states apparently have the right to extra-territorial sovereignty, and some states can exercise their sovereign rights only at the discretion of others.

Harper has taken these positions up even more vigorously than the previous Liberals, continually invoking all the American clichés of how the world has changed since 9/11. Harper made Canada the first nation to place sanctions on the newly elected Hamas government in the Palestinian territories — the sanctions that became the real trigger that began the escalation of hostilities (not the phony line from the media blaming the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier at the Gaza border, while ignoring the Israeli and Western sanctions on the Palestinian government and the murder by Israeli rockets of Palestinian citizens at the beach in Gaza).

Indeed, not only has Harper lined Canada up with the U.S. at the G8 meetings in defence of the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon, Harper has been the most vociferous defender of the "proportionality" of the Israeli assaults in both Gaza and in Lebanon. In London, on his way to the G8 meeting in Russia, Harper termed Israel's ferocious attacks a "measured response."

(One could cynically observe how much continued Middle East conflict does to aid Harper's efforts to sell Alberta's oil sands to the American government and oil monopolies, and Harper's trumpeting Canada as an "energy superpower.")

With so much effort given over to ideological posturing, the administrative incompetence of the Harper government in aiding Canadians stranded in Lebanon has been shocking. The Foreign Affairs bureaucracy has been tied up binding Canada even more tightly into the American empire and preparing Harper's G8 trip.

The hapless Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay is on vacation in Nova Scotia; MacKay comically suggested in a TV interview that Canadians in Lebanon get to the nearest internet connection to contact the Canadian embassy on how to leave Lebanon! Such incompetence in administering the basic machinery of the state from neoliberals is hardly new, but this is beyond the pale. Indeed, the government's posture is a national disgrace after Canadian citizens have been killed by illegal bombing of civilian targets by Israel.

This is the very bombing which Prime Minister Harper has explicitly endorsed as a "measured response." The Canadian government, as much as the regime in Israel, has the blood of Canadians (and of course of hundreds of innocent civilians in the region) on its hands.

It is a very sorry, reckless and morally troubling foreign policy position that Canada now endorses: closer integration into U.S. foreign policy positions, including the doctrine of the right of the U.S. and Israel alone to use military "pre-emptive intervention," apart from any sanction by the UN Security Council; uncritical alignment with U.S. and Israeli military interventions, including more active Canadian military deployments; and political and bureaucratic disregard for Canadians who might get in the way of these foreign policy positions (whether this is Canadians stranded in Lebanon, or Canadians illegally extradited via the U.S. "war on terror" sweep).

The silence (in the case of the Liberals) and disarray (in the case of the Bloc Québécois and the NDP) of the parliamentary opposition forces has been frustrating. But given how timid they have been with respect to actively opposing the Harper Conservatives, and

their own political realignments in terms of neoliberalism and Canadian foreign policy positions, it can't be said that their lack of vocal opposition is surprising.

It is clear that there needs to be an immediate seizure of Israeli assaults on Lebanon and Gaza (and the reported incursions into Syria and Jordan as well). These attacks have claimed hundreds of innocent lives, and entailed a catastrophic destruction of civilian infrastructures in acts of "collective punishment" by Israel in violation of international law.

The sanctions and embargo on Gaza, including food and medical supplies, which is making for a humanitarian disaster, must also immediately end. The world governments and the Canadian and international peace movements must reject the attempt by the U.S. and Israel to unilaterally determine who is and who is not an acceptable sovereign government, and to redraw unilaterally the political and territorial boundaries of the Middle East.

The attention of the world needs to turn to the mass imprisonment and human rights violations of Palestinians by Israel, including the incarceration of children in Israeli prisons; the violations of Israel of international courts in building the apartheid separation wall (much of it well outside the boundaries of its 1967 borders in an open land grab, even beyond the illegal settlements in place in the West Bank); the attempt to fully absorb East Jerusalem into Israel; and the need to negotiate a fully independent and sovereign Palestinian state (for which it is quite unclear that Israel believes actually has the right to exist, given its actual practices with respect to the Palestinian Authority).

Without these steps, there will certainly be no easing of the conflict between Israel and its bordering states, social justice for Palestinians and the same sovereign rights to self-government and national self-determination as any other peoples in the world, or end to the political instability encompassing the entire Middle East. The Middle East cauldron will keep boiling, and crisis upon crisis will revisit Lebanon.

Canadians need to call the Harper government to account for why it keeps stoking the flames of conflict across the Middle East, and how its actions have contributed to the loss of Canadian civilians in

Lebanon and Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan. This bloody, awful day must have some good come out of it.

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