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ANOTHER VIEWPOINT
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ISRAEL AND LEBANON:
A SHOWDOWN OR THE BEGINNING OF A SOLUTION?

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Israel's rain of fire onto Lebanon was as much an attack on civilians as were the missiles of Hizbollah aimed at Northern Israel. Both were blind, cruel, costly in life and material, and disruptive of the peace process between the Arabs and Israel. The governments of both countries say they want peace. Bombs, unfortunately, are a tragic expression of the desire for peace.

It may be true that the Lebanese government is not in full control, but it must take responsibility for what goes on within its borders. Israel may be correct in wanting to protect its citizens, but it must not infringe on the sovereignty of Lebanon, occupy its land, or destroy the life and property of its people. Hizbollah may be the villain, keeping the barrage of fire on both sides flowing, but the causes go deeper: it is occupation of the Lebanese land that lies behind that violence. Israel occupied what it calls a security zone when Palestinian guerrillas used to penetrate into Israel and cause harm to Israelis. The Palestinian in Lebanon no longer infiltrate into Israel to carry out military activities. The presumed rationale for the occupation of a security zone no longer exists but Israel continues the occupation. Is it logical to expect the Lebanese to accept the occupation as if it did not exist?

Days of killing and destruction went by before the international community began to notice. Even then it took seven more days to stop the shelling, put an end to the displacement of civilians from their homes, or seek a permanent solution. It was only after the embarrassing Israeli rockets hit a United Nations compound and killed about a hundred people did some of the big powers try seriously to mediate a cease-fire. Strangely enough, mediation seems to have been directed primarily toward a cease-fire and a return to the prior status quo, even though that condition represented neither a solution nor a stable relationship in the region. A permanent solution must be found so as to remove the causes of violence and not just the symptoms.

The leaders of Israel and Lebanon have frequently declared their interest in peace and stability. This is as good a time as any to search for that peace. The leaders' declarations, taken seriously, mean that the two countries are half-way on the road to a solution. It remains for the experts on both sides to come up with an acceptable solution, and, no doubt, they are capable of finding one. As an expression of support and encouragement in their search, here are some points for consideration:

1. Negotiations for a permanent peace should be held between the Israeli and Lebanese governments, directly or

through an intermediary, but not between Israel and Hizbollah. Israel cannot and must not negotiate with Hizbollah or with any other militia or feudal force in Lebanon. Nor should Iran be regarded a party to the negotiations. Similarly, Syria should not be considered the main counterpart to Israel in negotiating a settlement, as the United States seems to have concluded. Treating Syria as the major negotiator can only dilute Lebanon's sovereignty even farther than it has been. The decision makers and activists in the conflict at the Lebanon/Israel borders are Lebanese and Israelis and the territory involved is Lebanese territory. Therefore, Lebanon and Israel should be the primary negotiators.

2. Now that a cease-fire has been arranged, representatives of Israel and Lebanon should take responsibility for implementing the cease-fire and declare their readiness to negotiate a permanent settlement.

3. Israel should declare its willingness to withdraw fully by a certain date at the same time as the Lebanese government declares its readiness to maintain security on its borders.

4. As a measure of maintaining security, the Lebanese government may co-opt a Hizbollah leader as one of its negotiators with Israel. Lebanon may also mobilize Hizbollah fighters into its army, both to maintain discipline and to strengthen its armed forces .

5. To assist the Lebanese government maintain security on its southern borders, the United Nations and the Arab League may be expected to cooperate in the most efficient way to make it possible for the Lebanese government to fulfill its obligations. Syrian forces came into Lebanon to create stability on behalf of the Arab League. Syrian or other Arab forces may again be co-opted by the Arab League.

Israel and Lebanon have little choice: if they want peace they have to take the necessary steps in that direction. There is a wealth of ideas on how to end violence and initiate a peace process. What is needed is the will and determination to choose the ideas and implement them.

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