

Reactions in the Middle East to the Israel-Lebanon Crisis

Jul 18, 2006



Brief Analysis

The outbreak of hostilities after Hizballah's July 12 raid into Israel, in which it captured two Israeli soldiers and killed eight others, has elicited a variety of responses from government officials and other prominent figures throughout the Middle East. Though it is not surprising to see harsh statements about Israel, it is unusual to see Arab leaders criticizing Hizballah for its role in precipitating the conflict. The usually cautious Saudi authorities implicitly criticized Hizballah for adventurism; it seems that Riyadh may be wary of Iranian influence. The following is a sampling of Middle Eastern reactions, compiled from various regional and international media sources.

Strong Condemnation of Israel

"This aggression is not just against Lebanon and Hezbollah, but against our dignity and our future." —Mustapha Barghouti, member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) (Agence France Presse, July 17)

"Israel seems to be executing a clear and well-programmed plan aimed at destroying Lebanon and its infrastructure in a savage manner." —Emile Lahoud, president of Lebanon (Agence France Presse, July 15)

"Arab people will sooner or later take matters in their own hands if their governments do not find serious ways to give them hope. . . . We count on Arab support, solidarity and assistance." —Fawzi Salloukh, foreign minister of Lebanon and Hizballah ally (Agence France Presse, July 15)

"Syria supports the national Lebanese resistance against Israeli aggression. The resistance will triumph and Israel will be conquered. . . . Resistance is a legitimate and sacred right. [It is necessary to] make a distinction between resistance and terrorism." —Mohsen Bilal, information minister of Syria (Agence France Presse, July 16)

"After having achieved Iraq's destruction and sabotaged all efforts to resolve the Israeli-Arab conflict and find a just peace in the region, the U.S. administration has given its green light to the Israeli government of Ehud Olmert to burn down the region beginning with Gaza and Lebanon. . . . This is part of an Israeli-American plan for total hegemony in the region." —Editorial in the Syrian government daily Tishrin (Agence France Presse, July 16)

"We say a no, a thousand no's to Israel and its terrorism, and everybody should know that we in Iraq will not stay quiet against the rampaging Zionists. . . . I urge the people of Iraq and the political parties to stand behind the people of Lebanon. Let us forget our divisions, because I know our unity will be the arm to help the Lebanese in their confrontation with our common enemy." —Muqtada al-Sadr, Iraqi Shiite cleric (Agence France Presse, July 14)

"If the Zionist regime commits another stupid move and attacks Syria, this will be considered like attacking the whole Islamic world and this regime will receive a very fierce response." —Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad, president of Iran (Washington Post, July 13)

"It is certain that the occupation is provoking the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples. That's why there is a Lebanese resistance and a Palestinian resistance. Resistance is necessary at a time when the Zionist entity is launching attacks and carrying out massacres against the Palestinian people." —Faruq al-Shara, vice president of Syria (Agence France Presse, July 12)

“The victory of the homeland cannot be achieved except by embracing resistance and those who resist. Victorious nations are those that build a strong homeland, which stands firm against its enemies, and to realize this we need real unity between the sons of the homeland and its leaders.” —Commentary by Sayyid al-Amin in the independent Lebanese al-Safir newspaper (BBC Monitoring International Reports, July 14)

“Wiping out the Zionist regime is not only a religious and national duty but a human one. . . . Political, logistical and arms support for Hamas and Hizbollah and sending combatants to the front is the minimum cost that the Islamic countries must pay for safeguarding their security and independence. . . . The Muslim nations should not let the engagement remain in its limited regional boundaries. The Zionists are scattered in many parts of the world and their identification is not that difficult. . . . Everywhere in the world must be made insecure for the Zionists. . . . After all this does not need the permission of governments.” —Hossein Shariatmadari, editor of the Iranian newspaper Kayhan, which is controlled by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (Kayhan, July 17)

“[I view] the statements of Abbas . . . and the call for a decision on negotiations about the three prisoners with astonishment and disapproval. . . . The issue of the prisoners and Arabs is one issue, and we view the statements of [Hizballah secretary-general] Mr. Hassan Nasrallah positively. It is possible that what is required is a comprehensive statement about this issue, which will require a great effort.” —Yahya Mousa, Hamas PLC member (al-Hayat, July 14.)

Restrained Reactions

“It is difficult to apportion blame to one party in this profound crisis without also citing the other.” —Editorial in Egypt’s state-run al-Ahram al-Massai newspaper (Agence France Presse, July 14)

“The rhetorical escalation by all parties threatens to provoke an explosion of the situation and to herald a dangerous phase for the region.” —Ahmed Abul Gheit, foreign minister of Egypt (Agence France Presse, July 13)

“All sides should realize that the side that is hurt more than others as a result of the attacks on the Lebanese-Israeli borders and the Israeli destruction of Lebanon’s infrastructure, especially bridges and Beirut’s international airport, is the helpless Lebanese citizen who was just starting to reap the fruits of stability and restoration of full sovereignty.” (Editorial “Urgent international effort required to stop escalation”) —Editorial in the Egyptian al-Ahram newspaper (BBC Monitoring International Reports, July 14)

“The sensitivity [in Lebanon] necessitates the regional countries—including Iran—to be cautious about adopting a stand on the Lebanese developments. . . . Iran’s ideological interests in Lebanon and other parts of the world are inevitably defined in the light of the national security and interests. . . . The sensitivity of the situation is such that striking a balance between the said interests for Iran is a strategic necessity.” —Editorial in the Iranian proreformist Kargozaran newspaper (Kargozaran, July 15)

“[Bahrain supports a] halt of the military escalation and resorting to the voice of reason and dialogue. . . . [Bahrain] opposes all that could threaten the security and sovereignty of Lebanon.” —King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain (Bahrain News Agency, July 15)

Criticism of Hizballah

“Viewing with deep concern the bloody, painful events currently taking place in Palestine and Lebanon, the Kingdom would like to clearly announce that a difference should be drawn between legitimate resistance and uncalculated adventures carried out by elements inside the state and those behind them without consultation with the legitimate authority in their State and without consultation or coordination with Arab countries, thus creating a gravely dangerous situation exposing all Arab countries and their achievement to destruction with those countries having no say. The Kingdom views that it is time that these elements alone bear the full responsibility of these irresponsible acts and should alone shoulder the burden of ending the crisis they have created. . . . The Kingdom will continually

seek security and stability in the region, exerting every possible effort to protect the Arab Nation from Israeli oppression and transgression.” —Statement of an unnamed Saudi government official (Saudi Press Agency, July 14)

“We have seen this film before and accordingly we can expect its end. It is not important how many times a film is shown as long as the end is the same. It means destruction, misery and evacuation of homes for the Lebanese and Palestinians. . . . In fact, we will be actually irresponsible if we do not stop and think for a moment. Over more than 15 years, Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah, has kept saying that he is keen on consulting Damascus and Tehran, but this makes one wonder about the reasons that made the leader of Hezbollah refrain from consulting the government of his own country, Lebanon.” —Commentary by Yusuf Ibrahim in the UAE al-Ittihad newspaper (BBC Monitoring International Reports, July 14)

“The war is no longer Lebanon’s . . . it is an Iranian war. . . . Iran is telling the United States: You want to fight me in the Gulf and destroy my nuclear programme? I will hit you at home, in Israel.” —Walid Jumblatt, Lebanese politician (al-Arabiya, July 16)

“The region is being dragged along by an adventurism that does not serve the interests of Arab affairs. . . . The necessity for all the parties in the region is to act responsibly and not to move towards an escalation aimed at taking the region to a dangerous situation and confrontations that will leave the countries and their peoples bearing the consequences.” —Joint Statement by Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak Jordanian King Abdullah II (Agence France Presse, July 14)

“People of Arab countries, especially the Lebanese and Palestinians, have been held hostage for a long time in the name of ‘resisting Israel.’ . . . While the people of Palestine and Lebanon are paying the price of this bloody conflict, the main players, who caused this conflict, are living in peace and asking for more oil from Arab countries to support the facade of resisting Israel. . . . This war was inevitable as the Lebanese government couldn’t bring Hezbollah within its authority and make it work for the interests of Lebanon. Similarly leader of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas has been unable to rein in the Hamas Movement. Unfortunately we must admit that in such a war the only way to get rid of ‘these irregular phenomena’ is what Israel is doing. The operations of Israel in Gaza and Lebanon are in the interest of people of Arab countries and the international community.” —Ahmed Al-Jarallah, editor of Kuwait Arab Times (Kuwait Arab Times, July 16)

This selection of quotations was assembled by Daniel Fink, Nathan Hodson, and Nicholas Ravella. ❖

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