

Israel Has Successfully Provoked Iran To Enter War



*Mireille Rebeiz -
Dickinson College*

10-06-24 ~ *An interview with Lebanon expert Mireille Rebeiz, who says that “I would like to believe that Lebanon will not turn into a second Gaza,” but now finds itself “in the middle of a major storm.”*

After nearly a year since the Hamas-led terror attack on southern [Israel](#) that resulted in the deaths of close to 1200 people (roughly 800 civilians and nearly 400 security forces though some Israeli civilians and soldiers may have been killed by friendly fire as the controversial “[Hannibal Directive](#)” was deployed on that date, according to reported testimonies of soldiers and officers), Israel’s destruction of [Gaza](#) continues unabated.

Israel has rejected calls from the international community for a ceasefire/prisoner swap deal and blatantly ignored an [International Court of Justice ruling](#) not to engage in any military offensive in Rafah where the situation in the southern Gaza city was already “disastrous.” Now, however, after having killed more than 41,000 Palestinians (though the toll could reach up to 186,000 dead according to a study published in early July in the prestigious medical journal [Lancet](#)) and making Gaza practically unlivable, Netanyahu’s neo-fascist government that makes Europe’s right-wing extremists seem like little farceurs has turned its focus to Lebanon. A joint operation between the [IDF and Mossad](#) spread terror by exploding walkie-talkies and [pagers](#) that people in Lebanon used, killing many

and [severely wounding thousands](#), while the Israeli military carried out massive airstrikes across southern Lebanon that have already killed more than 1,000 people, including many children, and wounded thousands.

Airstrikes have killed scores of senior Hezbollah figures, including its long-time leader, [Hassan Nasrallah](#). But the airstrikes on Lebanon did not stop even after Nasrallah's death despite calls for de-escalation, raising fears of a regional war between Israel and Iran. The Israeli military has even targeted [central Beirut](#), and [up to one million people may have been displaced](#). And as even further evidence that Israel is seeking to provoke a regional war, it launched a [ground offensive](#) in the south of Lebanon where heavy fighting is apparently taking place between Israeli forces and Hezbollah fighters. Indeed, Iran seems now to have been dragged into a regional war by launching a major [missile attack](#) on Israel.

What is Israel after in Lebanon? Has Nasrallah's death altered the direction of the conflict? Are we on the brink of a full-blown war in the Middle East? In the interview that follows, Mireille Rebeiz, a Lebanon and Hezbollah expert tackles these and other related questions. Rebeiz is Chair of Middle East Studies and Associate Professor of Francophone Studies & Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Dickinson College (Pennsylvania).

C. J. Polychroniou: Almost a year after launching its devastating attack on Gaza, which the International Court of Justice, scores of international human rights organizations and leading international law scholars and historians have called a genocide, Israel has turned its focus on Lebanon. It blew up communication devices that the armed group Hezbollah had ordered months before the explosions, killing dozens and wounding thousands, and the Israeli military launched a wave of deadly attacks on Lebanon's capital, one of which struck Hezbollah's headquarters killing its long-time leader, Hassan Nasrallah. Israel's war objectives in the Gaza Strip are to wipe Hamas off the earth and make Gaza unlivable. What is Israel trying to accomplish with its attacks on Hezbollah and Lebanon?

Mireille Rebeiz: From Israel's point of view, the on-going war on Lebanon falls under its right to self-defense against terrorism.

Last week, we saw a series of attacks on Hezbollah fighters including the explosions of [pagers and other wireless devices](#) and the assassinations of several

leaders. Although Israel has not officially commented on the attacks, evidence suggests that it has been planning this action for some time now.

Escalation continued with the assassination of Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah and several other commanders. Israel dropped at [least fifteen-times, American - manufactured, 2,000-pound bombs on south Beirut](#). Dubbed the "bunker busters" for their ability to pierce the ground before detonating, these bombs leveled several concrete buildings.

More recently, Israel started a [ground invasion on south Lebanon](#) and [bombed Damascus](#) by air.

The announced goals are clear: eliminate Hezbollah at all costs and send a message to Iran and Syria that Israel will no longer tolerate Iranian-backed militias in the region.

On the surface, one may look at these facts and consider that Israel is justified in its actions. However, international law tells a different story for Israel is piling violations of several rules and regulations related to armed conflicts. Furthermore, the war on terrorism is never innocent and always carries other motives.

[Article 7 of Amended Protocol II on the Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices](#), to which Lebanon, Israel, and the United States are parties, explicitly bans these types of weapons and methods of warfare. Article 2(4) of Amended Protocol II defines "booby-trap" as "any device or material which is designed, constructed, or adapted to kill or injure, and which functions unexpectedly when a person disturbs or approaches an apparently harmless object or performs an apparently safe act."

Clearly, the pagers and other wireless devices have been tampered with to cause harm irrespective of its holder. As a result, [at least 32 people, including two children were killed and thousands more were injured](#), and it is impossible to argue that every single person killed or injured is a Hezbollah fighter.

Common [Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions](#) specifically states that persons not taking part in the hostilities and those placed "hors de combat" should not be targeted and shall be treated humanely. The wireless communication device explosions and the intense bombing of south Beirut cannot guarantee any

protection to civilians and those unrelated to Hezbollah. Many civilians — Lebanese citizens, Palestinians and Syrian refugees — live in south Beirut for its affordable housing.

Beirut itself ranks as the [6th most expensive city in the Arab world](#), coming after Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Riyadh, and Jeddah. Globally, it ranks as the 113th most expensive city out of 178.

According to [the World Bank 2023 report](#), inflation rate in Lebanon is in the triple-digit. There is serious decline in income as the Lebanese pound lost over 90% of its value. This led to the erosion of the middle class, and half of the population plunged under poverty line with unemployment nearing 30%.

Major events aggravated the financial crisis in Lebanon: the collapse of the infrastructure, the severe shortage of fuel, the pandemic that put a lot of stress on medical care, and finally the [Beirut port explosion of 2020](#).

These factors pushed many Lebanese and others to rent apartments in south Beirut, and Israel cannot guarantee that every resident of this part of town is a Hezbollah fighter.

There is no doubt that these tactics imply a major escalation and a serious violation of international law. [Former CIA director Leon Panetta](#) labelled these attacks in Lebanon as terrorism: “I don’t think there’s any question that it’s a form of terrorism.”

Since the United States of America is the one providing many of these weapons, there might be [criminal implications under U.S Law](#) as the violation of Article 7 (2) could amount to federal offense. This prompted [Secretary of State Anthony Blinken](#) to quickly dissociate the US from the attacks and call for restraints. This comes at a time when the [Biden Administration is under investigation](#) for the export of billions of dollars in arms to Israel in assistance of a foreign government accused of committing gross human rights violations including blocking humanitarian aid.

Furthermore, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has a strategy that goes beyond the Israel - Hezbollah war. His political survival is dependent on him staying in power.

Before the October 7 attacks, Netanyahu was on trial for corruption. After winning the election, he aligned himself with extremists, forming a far-right government, one that sought to transform [Israel into an autocratic theocracy](#). For instance, his government proposed [a contentious law](#) to reduce minority rights, make it harder to file complaints against corruption, and legalize the annexation of the West Bank. His plans triggered massive protests around the country.

The October 7 attacks were heinous, and they provided Netanyahu with the perfect excuse that would allow him to stay in power: he shifted the narrative to Palestinian rights - including the right to self-determination - as an existential threat to all Jews, justifying thus the need for a long war in Gaza.

In other words, it is in Netanyahu's interest to keep Israel in a permanent state of war. To do so, he must reject all diplomatic negotiations and place the blame of their failure on the other party.

At this point, Netanyahu is buying time to present the messianic radicals, on whom he relies on to stay in power, with concrete results, ones that would save his image and political career. His undeclared goals would be the annexation of Gaza, the West Bank, and possibly south Lebanon. The hostages are not among his primary concerns.

Under international law, annexation of territory is illegal. The [International Court of Justice](#) (ICJ) said Israel's occupation of the West Bank is illegal and ordered Israel to stop its illegal settlements in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza strip. The United Nations even declared these settlements as ["settler-colonialism."](#) Netanyahu's response was that the ICJ's decision is based on lies.

The occupation of the [Syrian Golan Heights](#) is equally illegal, and the on-going ground invasion in Lebanon is not only a violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and an act of war, but also may be the excuse to occupy south Lebanon and annex it.

C. J. Polychroniou: Hezbollah emerged in Lebanon largely in response to the Israeli invasion of that country in 1982. It is an Iran-backed Shiite Islamist militant group and political party with lawmakers in the Lebanese parliament and is seen in fact as something like "a state within a state." What does Hezbollah do in Lebanon and how much support does it have?

Mireille Rebeiz: Over time, Hezbollah's popularity shifted inside Lebanon.

[Hezbollah itself was born in 1982](#) when Israel invaded Lebanon and imposed a brutal two-months siege on Beirut killing an estimated number of [17,000 to 19,000 people](#). While Israel retreated from Beirut, it kept south Lebanon under occupation till 2000. During this period, it illegally detained thousands of Lebanese resisting the occupation. Over 200 were detained and tortured in the [Khiam Detention Center](#).

From 1982 till early 2000, many Lebanese supported Hezbollah and saw it as the guardian of Lebanon's sovereignty and its liberator. The shift began in 2000 when Israel withdrew from the south. Many Lebanese started speaking up against Hezbollah's armed presence in Lebanon, its alliance to the Syrian regime, and its commitment to Iranian ideology.

As a matter of fact, Hezbollah explicitly supported the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad despite the numerous reports of [severe human rights violations in Syria](#). As to Iran, in its [1985 Manifesto](#), Hezbollah vowed its allegiance to Iran's Supreme Leader Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini and made explicit its wish to create an Islamic state in Lebanon.

And many paid a heavy price for speaking out. [Former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri](#) was assassinated on February 14, 2005, and fingers pointed at Hezbollah and Syria. Many Lebanese journalists and political figures were also assassinated: a blast killed the anti-Syrian journalist, [Samir Kassir](#). The former Communist party leader [George Hawi](#) and the journalist and lawmaker [Gibran Tueni](#) were also killed in car bombs.

This wave of killings sparked the [Cedar Revolution](#), which clearly expressed the Lebanese's opposition to Hezbollah and Syria.

In the past two decades, this opposition continued and took different forms.

In 2005, the anti-Hezbollah and anti-Syria bloc won the parliamentary elections.

In 2015, the environmental movement ["You Stink"](#) was born. It criticized the State's inability to sustainably manage waste, and it opposed all political parties, including Hezbollah. In 2019, massive protests erupted all over the country under the slogan of ["All Means All"](#) to denounce the corrupt elites.

There is no doubt that Hezbollah operates as "a state within a state." In light of

the weakness of the State of Lebanon, Hezbollah offers its own healthcare, education system and other social services to the Shiite community. It functions inside and outside the governmental structure and unilaterally holds the decision for peace/war.

In 1992, Hezbollah participated in parliamentary elections and won several seats in the Parliament. In 2005, it entered the government. Alone, they were never a majority. However, their presence was strong enough to oppose any parliamentary or governmental decision that would go against their own interests.

C. J. Polychroniou: Nasrallah was being considered as something of a pragmatist rather than an ideologue. It is now quite conceivable that the next Hezbollah leadership might be more driven by revenge than Nasrallah was. At any rate, what does Nasrallah's death mean for Hezbollah, Lebanon, and the Middle East? Will Iran become directly involved in the conflict?

Mireille Rebeiz: Nasrallah's death is a definite blow to the group, and it did not take long for Iran to respond. In fact, [Iran launched several missiles into Israel](#) to avenge the killing of [three of its top leaders](#): Hamas Chairman Ismail Haniyeh, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, and Deputy Commander in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Abbas Nilforushan. Iran made it clear that this is a self-defense attack and that it will respond further should Israel attack Iran.

Ironically, Hezbollah started this war to support Hamas and the Palestinian cause. Now, the attention has completely shifted from Gaza and the West Bank to Iran, Israel, and the United States.

C. J. Polychroniou: Under president Joe Biden, US foreign policy in the Middle East has been a complete failure. Over the past several months, Biden has said on countless occasions that "we are closer than ever" to a Gaza ceasefire only to see Netanyahu turn Gaza into a graveyard. Biden called for a 21-day ceasefire along the Israel-Lebanon border only to see Netanyahu make him look again like a bumbling idiot. How do you explain the US-Israel relationship?

Mireille Rebeiz: The US is Israel's closest and proudest ally. However, the failure of US foreign policy in the Middle East is in large part to blame for the recent events. At no point in the past two decades did the US lead any serious diplomatic dialogue on Israel - [Palestine](#).

President Biden continues to support a far-right government in Israel irrespective of the consequences in the region and the major escalation we are witnessing. [Many Americans](#) are horrified by this support and the US' potential complicity in atrocities in Gaza.

Netanyahu's' visit to the United Nations, his rejection of the 21-day cease-fire, and the immediate attacks that followed in Lebanon indicate a clear separation between what the US would like to see and what Israel wants.

Stephen Collinson speaks of a [humiliating pattern indicating American impotency](#) in curtailing Israel's defiance, and the results are obvious: Gaza is leveled with over 41,000 civilians killed, of which 17,000 are children. Lebanon is under attack with a ground invasion in progress, and violence is escalating in the West Bank.

C. J. Polychroniou: Gaza is gone, and there are fears that Israel could turn Lebanon into a second Gaza. In your view, what does the future hold for Lebanon?

Mireille Rebeiz: So far, the rhetoric is that Israel will only bomb areas where Hezbollah fighters are located or areas suspected of storing Hezbollah's weapons.

The level of destruction is massive, and the number of casualties is on the rise. I would like to believe that Lebanon will not turn into a second Gaza. However, the situation is fluid, and it depends on on-going diplomatic negotiations and the arrival of other actors on the scene such as the [Houthis](#) in Yemen or [Kata'ib Hizballah](#) in Iraq or even Iran.

In any case, I pray that Lebanon will be spared. Lebanon is in the middle of a major storm. As US-backed Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah militants are exchanging fires and settling debts, the Lebanese people are caught in the middle of the crossfire.

Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/iran-lebanon-israel-war>

Our work is licensed under Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0). Feel free to republish and share widely.

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. His latest books are *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic and the Urgent Need for Social Change* (A collection of interviews with Noam Chomsky;

Haymarket Books, 2021), and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (Verso, 2021).