

Message from GUSH SHALOM

International release, July 31.

Day 20 of the Lebanon carnage
And more than a month since the tanks rolled into Gaza

Adam Keller

[A note to those who missed our messages in the past weeks appears in the end]

We got up with the news of Condoleezza Rice at last putting down her foot (or at least, giving this impression on TV) and forcing a temporary halt to the systematic Israeli bombing of Lebanon's towns and villages. The declaration was made from Washington, after Israel's Defence Ministry agreed to announce it but failed to do so. The halted bombings gave a respite also to the communities of Northern Israel, where those who had not run away had been living in bomb shelters for the past three weeks.

It was, of course, in the aftermath of yesterday's atrocity at Qana, the second mass killing perpetrated in the same unfortunate Lebanese village. What happened yesterday was just too big and too horrible to ignore, as the smaller daily killings of Lebanese civilians were ignored - with the images from Qana reverberating endlessly throughout the world, from every TV screen.

As reported in the morning papers, the generals were "greatly surprised" and highly displeased with the order to stop the bombing raids for at least the next 48 hours. As the day wore on, there were more and more bellicose pronouncements and declarations from ministers and generals: there is and will not be a ceasefire any time soon; the "regrettable" mass killing in Qana was the fault of the victims themselves "who were warned and did not run away"; ours was and remains "The Most Moral Army in World"; the ground offensive into Lebanon will not only be continued but will be greatly intensified; the air force is still authorized to assassinate Hizbullah militants "wherever they are found"; the air offensive will be soon resumed and inhabitants of South Lebanon are warned to run away today or be killed in the new bombings tomorrow; "maximum fire-power" should and would be used "in the most intensive way"... In the evening it culminated with the mock-Churchillesque televised speech of PM Olmert, complete with the promise of "pain, tears and blood".

The streets are still full of patriotic posters, most of them put up by banks and big corporations and bearing the promoter's logo beside the Israeli national flag and the stirring slogans "United We Will Win!", "Israel Is Strong!", "Everybody Embraces Our Soldiers!". But only a few citizens seem to have taken up the call to raise the national flag over their own homes and cars.

Meanwhile, at least many in the mainstream Left who in earlier days remained silent or outrightly supported the "Justified War Against Hizbullah Aggression" have been shocked or moved by the Qana carnage. Meretz leader Yossi Beilin has at long last come to the conclusion that the "continuation of the war is useless and counterproductive" and that it should come to an end. A few hours before he made this statement, a leader of the Meretz Youth declared her resignation, feeling "sick and tired of being involved in a peace movement which supports war". And a whole group of Meretz activists, led by former KM's Naomi Hazan and Yael Dayan, participated in yesterday's protest outside the Defence Ministry gates.

The influential dovish commentator Nahum Bar'nea wrote in today's "Yediot Aharonot": "Except for the lunatic fringe leftists, no one disputes that Israel had to react to the killing and kidnapping perpetrated by Hizbullah in our

territory (...). I have confidence in the army's High Command, but having confidence does not stop me from having painful questions. Didn't the government, the army, the political system, the media, all let themselves be carried away by blind enthusiasm which serves only the enemy? I have heard Defence Minister Peretz boasting that he had "released the army from all restrictions" about harming "civilian populations which live at the side of Hizbullah militants". We saw the results of this "release" yesterday, with the bodies of women and children taken out of the house in Qana" (...)

So, there is every reason for the anti-war movement to continue and intensify its own "offensive". Demonstrations take place every day in various cities. Tonight at the basement of the Kibbutz Movement Headquarters - actually, not far from where the Inner Cabinet ministers met to approve a wide-scale extension of the ground invasion into Lebanon - Gush Shalom representatives took part in a coordinating meeting of the main peace groups, which resolved on holding a larger protest in the weekend.

The speeches of PM Olmert are full of bombastic cliches on "our heroic boys in uniform", but the 32-year old Reserve Captain Amir Fester was not convinced: he went to prison yesterday rather than obey the order to enter Lebanon. "He is not of the radical left, but in the last few days has been feeling more and more that the war is not justified" his girlfriend Nitzan Lahav told Yediot Aharonot. "The more the war continued he was increasingly troubled. In the beginning we like everybody supported the war, but we came to the conclusion that within two weeks there will anyway be an agreement with the Lebanese. So why not stop it now and end the killings?"

(See also Ha'aretz

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/744379.html>

Y-Net

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3283899,00.html>)

A note to those who missed our messages in the past week: in exactly this critical time, we were faced with the unfortunate combination of the health problems of some of our staff, the holiday of others (a holiday planned long since, with the assumption that "nothing special happens in July") and pesky computer problems which needed time and energy exactly when these were in short supply, and were spent more on organizing the actions than on reporting them.

We hope you found your way to the Gush Shalom website with the frequent war comments by Uri Avnery and where you also find a report of yesterday's demonstration and by scrolling down many earlier ones, and last but not least the text of the now daily little ads we have been publishing in Haaretz.

See:

<http://zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en>

<http://gush-shalom.org/pics/kirya-30-6-06/>)

Footage of the recent protest marches can seen on "The Social TV" at

<http://www.tv.social.org.il/medini/hafgana-16-7-06-web.htm>

<http://www.tv.social.org.il/medini/hafgana-22-7-06-web.htm>

<http://www.tv.social.org.il/medini/hafganat-nashim-29-7-06.htmhtm>

(voice in Hebrew but quite comprehensible also to non-speakers).

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