

This Morning, This Evening: Beirut, 15 July 2006

WALID RAAD

This Morning^a

Yet another day of bombing all over the place. In the mountains here, we were subject to about three different bombing runs: the first, to continue destroying the road from Beirut to Damascus; another to destroy the cell phone antennas; and another to again hit the Beirut-to-Damascus road. Just a few minutes ago, the house was shaking again, and I can only assume the Israelis are pounding the same area. The safe areas are much further to the north, the northeastern enclave, an area traditionally Christian.

Listening to Nasrallah's¹ speech tonight was not reassuring one bit. After pleading with the Lebanese to stand firm, and after denouncing Arab governments for leaving Lebanon to pay the price for Israeli aggression, he asked us all to look at the sea and watch the Israeli gunboat that had been pounding the coast and hills all day. He said that it was about to be hit by a HizbAllah missile. He promised that it will burn, that it will sink, that its sailors will die. It made me sick to my stomach, almost as much as it makes me sick to hear Olmert's, Bush's, the Saudi and the Palestinian position about this. Nasrallah also called for an open war against Israel, and said that he will hit Haifa, and what is behind Haifa, and behind and behind Haifa. What this means remains unclear.

But clearly, it is worrying. Within minutes of the speech, parts of West Beirut were celebrating. The city is about to be reduced to rubble, and fireworks are being fired in the air. Incredible. Al-Jazeera and most local networks pointed their lenses towards the sea to look for a missile launch, which came but was not visible. This is just not good. This is just about to get worse. I don't know what to think anymore.

Pundits are speculating, making noise: Did HizbAllah need to drag Lebanon into this mess at this time? How can HizbAllah unilaterally decide to launch a war, to destroy the country? Others are convinced that Israel is simply intent on enforcing Resolution 1559, namely to disarm HizbAllah by force. HizbAllah is asking everyone to stand firm, and to be patient. This has happened before, and we have triumphed. We will triumph again, they say.

Whatever all this leads to, one thing is certain ; the scale of the destruction is enormous. People are dying in the south and elsewhere. Too many. The bombing has moved to the north, and in the past hour positions inside Syria were hit. Iran has said that were Syria to be hit, Iran will respond. A regional war? What s going on?

Embassies here are starting to evacuate their citizens. The French, the Canadians, the Germans and the Americans just announced the same. I cannot imagine the violence going on for months, despite what some officials up high are stating. I assume that the regional ploy is to disarm HizbAllah. This will only happen if Syria and Iran get something in return. What is the US willing to grant them? Also, they have to find a way out for HizbAllah. Which means that HizbAllah s position within the Lebanese government will have to be negotiated. They may disarm HizbAllah, but have to give them a way out as well. After all, HizbAllah represents 1 million people here. Israel and the US cannot kill them all.

Rumours aplenty, every ten minutes. The news ; all of it, Arab and international ; makes me sick. We are stuck with a false choice: support HizbAllah, or be thought of as an Israeli agent. That is, at least, what HizbAllah and their Syrian allies are saying. The Christian right s position is equally naïve. They want to assume that HizbAllah will just go away. They are wishing it, at least. That won t happen, no matter what.

Everyone is miscalculating, it seems ; HizbAllah, the Americans, the Israelis, the Saudis, the Palestinians, the French, the Russians, the Chinese. You name it. The effects on the ground will remain, once this crisis is resolved. It has already generated enough antagonism to last us another decade.

We are trying to think of what to do. To leave, and be stuck in the US, glued to the TV, trying to figure out what is happening ; that will be maddening.

This will clearly get worse before it gets better, and we have not seen the worst yet. Now, all parties are slowly revealing their cards.

Best,
w.

This Evening^a

We still have the landline. Cell phones are working from time to time. Electricity is being rationed. We are getting it for around eight hours a day. Generators provide the rest, at this point. It is a situation we are used to, one that is decent ; even very good, compared to what other areas of the country are living through at the moment.

More idiots on Lebanese TV speculating some more about Israeli and HizbAllah intentions. More shelling in the southern suburbs. More massacres in the south. More

missiles to northern Israel. More fireworks celebrating HizbAllah's resistance.

Do we need to say this again and again and again: There is no such thing as targeted/surgical shelling in a city with hundreds of thousands of homes, built cheek to cheek. Israel shelled the house of Hassan Nasrallah. I suppose they thought he would be home enjoying his afternoon tea at the time. They took out the lighthouse that stood on the Corniche, lest it send out distress signals that the world will not see. A family leaving, fleeing its village in the south, was pulverised; surely the smoke from the shelling blinded the scope of the gunner, preventing him/her from seeing that the small people in the car were not extremely short HizbAllah fighters. Should we tally numbers? Do we need to open more morgue doors to reveal yet another mangled body, yet another weeping parent, yet another angry relative denouncing this or that government? This or that policy?

Amr Moussa² stated tonight, after the spineless meeting of Arab ministers, that it is clear now that the US has handed Israel a free hand in solving the Mid-East crisis, as it sees fit; whether it decides unilaterally to withdraw from Gaza, from the West Bank, whether it refrains from destroying Gaza again, from destroying Beirut, etc. I wonder why it took them so long to figure this out. Is the oil in the Gulf still a weapon in their hands? Surely not, as we are reminded time and time again. What is the price of oil again? How much of Europe's oil is supplied by the Saudis and the Kuwaitis? How much of US oil is supplied by the Middle East? Did we reach 78 USD a barrel yet? Maybe the Saudis will use some of the surplus to rebuild the country again. What's a billion dollars when the price of oil reaches 78 USD a barrel? Someone knows this somewhere, and is most likely depending on it.

Israeli ceasefire conditions are announced, as I write this:

- ; Retreat of HizbAllah fighters to behind the Litani river in the south
- ; Handover of all HizbAllah missiles to the Lebanese Army
- ; Deployment of the Lebanese Army in the south

On this end, I am tired, and am not able to think straight anymore.
Hoping for a quiet night, and to wake up with a ceasefire declared.

Best,
w.

PS: To hear myself speculating on military and political matters makes me laugh, as much as it makes me laugh to listen to Jordanian, Palestinian and other Arab leaders. I am thinking of Jalal Toufic³ when he writes: "All I ask of this world to which I have already given three books is that it become less laughable, so that I would be able to laugh again without dying of it. And that it does so before my sombreness becomes second nature. This has made me sombre not only through all the barbarisms and genocides it has perpetuated, but also through being so laughable. Even in this period of utmost sadness for an Arab in general, and an Iraqi and Lebanese in specific, I fear dying of laughter more than of

melancholic suicide, and thus I am more prone to relinquish my guard when it comes to being sad than to laughing at laughable phenomena^a

NOTES

1. Hassan Nasrallah is the leader of HizbAllah, a Shia militia in Lebanon (founded in 1982 to fight the Israeli defence forces that occupied southern Lebanon till 2000). It is backed by Iran and Syria.
2. Amr Moussa, a former Egyptian foreign minister and diplomat, is the current Secretary General of the League of Arab States.
3. Jalal Toufic is a writer, film theorist and video artist at present living in Lebanon.