



National Interests

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Start with what's best for Lebanon. For years, Lebanon was occupied by Syria for the benefit of Syria. The Cedar Revolution forced Syrian troops to depart but as former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has noted: "In some ways the Syrians never left."

Syrian agents have remained in place and several key members of the Lebanese government - including President Emil Lahoud -- have appeared to take their marching orders from Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. And Hezbollah - funded and armed by both Syria and Iran -- operates as a quadruple threat: a political party, a terrorist organization, a military force and, in parts of the country, a state within a state.

UN Security Council Resolution 1559 calls for Hezbollah to be disarmed. That's great except for one small detail: Lebanon's military isn't

up to the task, and no great power is prepared to do it for them. The only way the Hezbollah tiger gets decapitated is if Israel uses the war Hezbollah has provoked to get the job done.

Yes, innocent Lebanese are suffering in this conflict. That suffering at least should produce some good results. Lebanon's liberation from the suffocating embrace of Hezbollah and its foreign sponsors would qualify.

Move on to what's best for Palestinians. Most people who define themselves as pro-Palestinian favor the sacrifice of one Palestinian generation after another to violence and poverty. They excuse the theft of billions in foreign aid, and condone dispatching Palestinian children as suicide bombers - all in pursuit of the dream that someday Jews will

be ethnically cleansed from the Middle East.

It might be argued that being pro-Palestinian should mean something else: Wanting Palestinians to live in peace, prosperity and freedom in a society that maintains mutually beneficial relations with Israel.

A plurality of Palestinians did vote for Hamas in recent elections. They can not have been surprised by Hamas' approval for the firing of hundreds of missiles from Gaza into Israel, and by Hamas' cross-border assault on an Israeli military base. Nor should they be startled by the response: the return of Israeli military forces into Gaza with all the suffering that must bring them. Perhaps this suffering will cause Palestinians to seriously reconsider whether their interests might be better served by a change of approach and leadership.

What's best for Americans? Hezbollah's defeat would represent a setback for Syria, Iran and the global Militant Islamist movement that is waging war against the U.S. and other free nations. It also would represent long-delayed retribution for Hezbollah's 1983 suicide-bombing of the U.S. Marines barracks in Beirut.

Both Iran and Syria have facilitated the killing of Americans many times in many places. Assad has made good on his pledge to help turn Iraq into "another Beirut" rather than stand aside and let the U.S. help Iraqis create a decent nation. Iran's Militant Islamist regime – perpetrators

of the 1996 attack on American military forces at Khobar Towers and the 1979 seizure of the US embassy in Tehran -- also is doing all it can to undermine the U.S. project in Iraq and the broader Middle East.

Iran's rulers are convinced that the U.S. has no arrows in its quiver, no way to punish them for past attacks and no effective means to stop them from acquiring nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them. Using Hezbollah and other means they clearly intend to demonstrate who is strong and bold enough to lead a 21st century jihad against the "Zionist-Crusader" empire.

Finally, what's best for Israelis? Hezbollah is deploying missiles that are larger and have more range than many observers expected. Surely, Israelis must be asking themselves: If Hezbollah is not cut down to size now, and if Iran continues on its current course, what sort of weapons – nuclear not excluded – might Hezbollah possess in the years ahead?

Israelis are suffering now, too, and they also will have to suffer much more in order to prevail over Hezbollah. That suffering should buy more than a return to the tense standoff Israel has endured on its northern border since 2000, when it withdrew from Lebanon, taking what was called "a risk for peace."

The post-modern, academic theory that wars should be "settled," with no real victories and no decisive defeats, has been tested and found wanting many times in many places.

If Hezbollah lives to fight another day, that day will come, and the next war will exact a greater cost

from all the populations that are suffering now.

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