

Alastair Crooke: The Collapse of Greater Israel: No One Saw This Coming

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#Nima

What has happened between Israel and Lebanon? Israel announced that they're going to hit the city they call Dahia in the southern part of Beirut, and they announced that everyone should evacuate the city. Then we had the Iranian response announcing the same thing for the northern part of Israel — if Israel attacks Dahia, they're going to do the same in the northern part of Israel. When it comes to this sort of support from Iran to Hezbollah, from Hezbollah to Iran, many people would want to know what is going on. What is the axis of resistance? We know that you wrote a book in 2009, **Resistance**.

The essence of the Islamic Revolution — and here you describe it. What does it mean? What is resistance? What is the essence of the Iranian Revolution? What is the mindset of this revolution? But whoever is interested in learning more about Iran and what's going on in Iran today, you can go to this book. It's from 2009. Alastair wrote it in 2009, but everything he said in that book is still the same, and you can go and find it there. And the other one is the article, the new piece that you wrote on your Substack about "Iran Takes Its Chance with War." You mean the way that Iran is responding to Israel. And where are we right now with the case of Iran and Israel and Hezbollah?

#Alastair

Well, there has been a significant shift in Israeli thinking. I mean, not just about Lebanon, but we have moved, first of all, to a new security doctrine. And we've moved also to a new understanding of Greater Israel — that Greater Israel should be a messianic project for some, not all in Israel, but for some it should be a messianic project to bring about, by force of arms, Greater Israel and therefore make redemption possible and become real, because this is the precursor, if you like, to redemption and the arrival of a new Messiah, according to that wing in Israel. But in the security element, things have changed dramatically with the adoption of the idea of permanent security. So they moved away from the old style of security doctrine that existed, if you like, going back to the founding of Israel.

And at that time, the prime minister said very clearly, we are a small country, small population, small resources. We have to stay within our borders, and we have a professional military. And we have to

rely very much, therefore, on reservists to make up the numbers if we need it. But it was also a Clausewitzian view that was being expressed in the sense that, you know, war wasn't an end in itself. It is a means to political ends, to political solutions, to political understandings. And all of that, by Ben-Gurion, has been turned 180% around in this period, largely because of the 7th of October. And what the Israelis have moved to is the sense that they are claiming that what happened on the 7th of October was a holocaust against them. It wasn't, but that's how they are seeing it.

And it has been deeply assimilated into Israeli consciousness, I would say, that this was a Holocaust. Not the Holocaust, but another Holocaust. And that has brought about the idea that the Holocaust, therefore, is not over. And that the 7th of October shows that Israel is always at the threshold of a Holocaust. That another Holocaust is inevitable, will come. That the Holocaust is not a past event, it's a present event and on our threshold. And to deal with it, we have to go to the root. Now, there's a history to this permanent security, which is that it goes back to basically the war, the Second World War. And the idea of permanent security and going to the root was that you could not allow a hostile population to remain and their children to grow up and be hostile to you.

It was considered, first of all, in terms of the thousand-year Reich, and that there was not a willingness to allow, if you like, any challenge or enmity to this Reich to emerge. And so the idea has come, therefore, and this is why we see and we understand this is the doctrine that lies behind the idea that there are no innocents in Gaza. The children are subject to target, the women are targeted, because we go to the root of this problem, which means the end of the Palestinians as a force that can ever, ever be a threat to Israel. Now, just to be clear, because it's important to understand this quite clearly, there is quite a lot of pushback within the military, the Israeli military.

We follow the Israeli Hebrew press quite closely, and serious Israelis are saying, you know, this is ridiculous. We are bogged down in seven wars for aims which are not clear. We do not have the resources for it, and we are losing these wars. Maybe it's time to go back to the Ben-Gurion doctrine that Israel has to stay within its borders. But of course, and this is current, really what is happening is it is actually couched in that way, couched as saying the danger was that this military doctrine of permanent security after the 7th of October has become fused with a messianic view that we have to take all of this territory that is Greater Israel, because this will bring redemption closer at hand.

And so what they are actually saying, but not explicitly, is we have to rethink the whole concept of Zionism. That's what it means when it says we've got to go back to Ben-Gurion, away from this messianic and permanent security concept, that Israel cannot go on as it is. It is stuck. It is at a dead end. It's at a dead end with Iran, and it's at a dead end in all of these other wars that they have provoked and created at this time. So this is a long explanation, and I'm sorry for that, but it's important to understand the background. This lies behind what is happening in Lebanon.

It is the sense, and this is why, you know, when people talk about ceasefire and so on, they don't understand permanent security precludes the existence of Hezbollah continuing adjacent to the northern towns. The northern towns, the towns that lie near the border with Lebanon but stretch

down to the Galilee. And they say, you know, under this new doctrine, which is not just a military doctrine, which is one that has been quite absorbed by Israelis generally, of permanent security—permanent security at the root—does not embrace the idea of an armed Hezbollah sitting in southern Lebanon. So this was the start of this whole process.

They've been trying to do it, first of all, by getting a part of the—not all of it, but a part of the—Lebanese government involved, particularly the Christian, the Maronite, and some of the Sunni groups, to say they will take on the task of defanging Hezbollah, taking away its weapons and everything. And then it was concluded, pretty obviously, that this was impossible. The Lebanese government was not in a position to, even if they had the political will—which some of them did—they were not going to be able to disarm Hezbollah. And Hezbollah is part of the government and certainly part of the fabric of the state.

But the Lebanese government is trying to shift that and say, no, actually, the state that we want to represent is the old Lebanon, when it was founded by the French as a Christian, largely then Christian enclave. And that was before it became Greater Lebanon, which included all of the south and included, of course, Hezbollah. But that's the constitution. That's how it is, even if they wish it were back then, you know, to those early days when it was just a small Christian enclave. It isn't. And Hezbollah isn't going to accept that view at all. So what happened with that was then when they said, no, we're not going to disarm Hezbollah, we're not going to deal with them and destroy them politically, then Israel said, well, we'll do it.

And we're going to take southern Lebanon and make a buffer state. It's not a buffer state they're making. They're making a desert. I mean, they are, you know, this is attrition to the level of a desert. They're flattening everything. Not even a tree remains in some parts. And they are killing civilians widely in this process. And the Dahiya threat has a history. And I remember because I was in Lebanon in 2006. Now, I may have got the general wrong, but I think it was Eisenkot who talked about the Dahiya solution, even then, so many years ago. And he was saying, you know, the Dahiya solution is we need to flatten Dahiya. For those that are listening to the program, Dahiya is a major suburb of Beirut, a southern suburb. It is not a Hezbollah encampment. It is an ordinary suburb of Beirut.

Yes, it has many Hezbollah living there, and it has Shia living there, but it is just a part of Beirut. And it was badly destroyed. Many of the apartment buildings were all knocked down in 2006. But this is what they wanted to do again and only sort of destroy it even more. Why? It's nothing to do with Hezbollah commanders being there. Of course, they're not sitting there. Everyone knows the threat. And indeed, many people have evacuated. No, it is punishment. They want to punish Hezbollah, and they believe that if they punish the civilians of Lebanon sufficiently, they will turn on Hezbollah. This has been an old refrain of Israel. You know, we just have to make it so painful that they will drive out all the terrorists and then everything will be fine. So this is... this is the background. So this is what it was.

And, you know, Iran reemphasized something that was in the ceasefire agreement from the time of the Islamabad talks. You know, it's a ceasefire for all or it's a ceasefire for no one. And so Iran has said from the beginning, it has to be a ceasefire for all the elements of resistance to Israel — Yemen, Lebanon, even in Gaza and in the Green Zone. So this was proclaimed, and as Nasrallah said very clearly, Iran said very clearly in this, all right, if you start attacking Dahiya — I mean, already in Lebanon, I think 3,000 people have died, a million have been made homeless by these constant attacks. The IDF are still in Lebanon, in the south. The forces are there.

But what has made it particularly difficult from the Israeli and American perspective is Hezbollah has been pushing back, and pushing back really hard, against the IDF forces inside Lebanon as they've invaded it and started knocking down houses. They have been attacked, and Hezbollah have got new drones, fiber-linked drones, and they are using them to attack military targets inside those northern towns of Israel, so that actually they are creating a buffer zone in Israel in equivalence to Israel's attempt to create a buffer zone in southern Lebanon. And it's killing a lot of troops, a lot. There's no formal numbers given — it's all censored — but probably eight to ten a day casualties, not all killed, but eight to ten. I mean, so they're losing a lot of troops, and this is, it seems, intolerable to public opinion in Israel.

And so when Netanyahu, after the telephone call from Trump, when Netanyahu said, okay, we won't attack Dahiya, Beirut — we won't attack Beirut — there was a tsunami of protests across Israel at him for saying this, for suggesting that Israel was no longer going to, was not going to be allowed to attack Hezbollah in Lebanon. This is permanent security. This is a change that has taken place in these last years, away from the old concepts of security, which were fairly conventional, to this concept of permanent security at the root — that you cannot allow any threat to exist. And so this was a huge pushback, which I think is going to, you know, this is not going to go away. I mean, it's not going to just — I think the consequences of this are going to continue. There's no way that Israel will back down.

So what they've done now is they've had a meeting with those particular members of the Lebanese government who are sympathetic to Israel, or were sympathetic to Israel, and hostile to Hezbollah, and had a meeting and said, okay, well, let's have a ceasefire, and you agree that Hezbollah will have to be rooted out. And they say, the government says, no, we can't, you know, we will make a few little spots, perhaps, where Hezbollah won't be present, but we can't do it in a full way. And in any case, Hezbollah says, forget it. We don't agree with the ceasefire that's been negotiated in Washington between Aoun and the others. So I think, you know, all I'm saying is this isn't something that's about to disappear. This is a major issue in any question of what happens next in the relationship between the United States and Iran and Israel and the United States.