

Col. Jacques Baud: THE PAPER TIGER: How Washington Lost Control in West Asia

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#Nima

What happened last night in the attack — yesterday we learned Israel attacked Dahia finally. And the reason they attacked is still somehow so strange, what's going on, because they attacked Dahia thinking they were going to hit some Hezbollah commanders in a building. It seems that after the attack, they realized the building was empty and didn't hit anybody, but they killed some ordinary people in the area close to that building. Then Iran said, if you attack — because Iran was warning the United States and Israel — if you attack Dahia, we're going to respond. I thought yesterday that since none of the Hezbollah commanders were hit by the attack, Iran was not going to respond. Maybe Yemen is going to respond to what happened in Dahia.

Then Iran came out and said, no, we're going to hit Israel as we said before. And they fired something like 20 missiles to the northern part of Israel. From what we've seen so far, from the footage that's coming out of Israel or outside in the region around Israel, four of them hit the target. Then after the Israeli attack, Donald Trump came out saying, okay, you attacked Dahia, Iran is attacking you, that's it. You're not going to attack Iran, and I'm not going to support you attacking Iran. Then Benjamin Netanyahu said, as we know, he's running the show, and he attacked Iran, and Iran is responding right now. It's some sort of madness, what's going on. What is your understanding of the situation in West Asia?

#Jacques

Well, that was completely predictable. In fact, we knew it would happen like this. We know that Netanyahu wants to drag the U.S. into a war in the Middle East. He wants to have the U.S. militarily committed with troops in the Middle East. So that's a given fact. It has been said many times. It's a constant. In fact, it's the follow-up of a policy that has been implemented by Israel since the 1950s. So there is nothing new there. Now, as to the current situation... we have seen that Israel has constantly tried to drag— I mean, the U.S. understands that it has been trapped into this conflict. We know, because that was published on the website of the State Department, that the U.S. intervened at the request of Israel.

Later, we have seen in a recent interview with Donald Trump that he said we shouldn't have been there. He acknowledged that the U.S. has nothing to do militarily in this region. And that's a situation that has been created by Israel. So everything was already clear from the very beginning. And each effort of Donald Trump to get out of this trap has been sabotaged by Netanyahu. And by the way, we have seen exactly the same thing when it comes to Ukraine and the U.S. and Russia. Each time that Donald Trump tried to do something and tried to establish some kind of dialogue with Russia, Ukraine and the Europeans managed to sabotage this.

So we have, in fact, actors such as Zelensky in Ukraine and Netanyahu in Israel who have identified Donald Trump as the weak link in the whole chain of command in the West. And they are trying to take advantage of this. Donald Trump has too big an ego to say that it was a mistake and to withdraw everything. He's trapped not just in a situation; he's trapped in his own ego. And everybody understands that. Trump is a prisoner of himself in that sense. And that's exactly what Netanyahu is trying to use or misuse in order to pursue his own policy. He knows that the situation with Iran and in Lebanon has gone too far and that the U.S. cannot withdraw. And therefore, if at best the U.S. wants to stop, Netanyahu will make every effort to drag them further into the conflict.

That's exactly what we have. The fact that the building was empty or not plays absolutely no role. Because we already, last week by the way, discussed the question of Dahiya and the threats on Dahiya. So they knew that Israel was about to attack Dahiya. And Iran already last week had threatened Israel to respond to such an attack. So everything was clear. The question is, why hasn't the U.S. reacted stronger against Israel, knowing that Israel was about to attack Dahiya? And that shows, as we have seen in Ukraine, by the way, that the Western — I mean, in that case, the U.S., but we can extend that to the European management or the crisis management — doesn't depart from a sober assessment of the situation.

All this crisis management is the result of gut feeling, gut reaction, and, in fact, are one-man shows. And you have a couple of advisors or individuals who may advise the decision-makers. And we have that in the U.S. I mean, it's fascinating to see that in all the discussions we have seen in the past weeks or months between the U.S. and Iran, the State Department seems to be absent from that. The State Department, as in any country, is an apparatus designed to assess a situation, to provide an element of language and things like this in order to solve situations. But apparently, in the U.S., this is... I mean, the role of the State Department is not apparent. And we have exactly the same thing when it comes to France, Germany, the U.K., and even the European Union.

This is just a one-man show run by individuals — Ursula von der Leyen, Kaja Kallas, Keir Starmer, and so on and so forth. And each time they seem to react based on what they feel about the conflict, not about what is known about the conflict. It's probably just what they know about the conflict, but not even what is known about the conflict. I assume they have intelligence services who know what will happen. And in fact, in the U.S., we even know that the CIA and other intelligence agencies have warned against an attack on Iran. They knew how things would happen. But despite this, decision-making bypasses all this advice. So we have here an extremely simplistic decision-

making process that avoids all the capabilities that we used to have in modern democratic government.

And at the end of the day, the decision concentrates just around the brain of one individual. And even if we can talk about a brain, but that's another question, you see. And that's exactly where we are. And so the U.S., instead of reacting to the situation and starting to get on top of the problem, they seem to remain as a tool, or a toy even, of Israel. Because as we see, the person who is running the show in the conflict is Netanyahu, in fact. And Iran, on the other hand, understands that the only way to resist or to—I mean, the only way to survive in this situation is to have a credible deterrent policy. And I insist on the word credible, because credible means that you show that you have the means to respond, and you have the means to respond with strength, efficiently.

But the credibility is about the willingness to use those assets. And therefore, when Israel threatens to attack Dahiya and Iran says, if you attack Dahiya, we'll have to respond, they have to respond. Otherwise, their deterrence will not be credible. So that's where we have a situation that is extremely dangerous because it can, in fact, create a kind of snowball effect and create a situation that worsens the whole situation. And Israel knows that. And they know that in order to keep the U. S. involved in the region, they need to have a serious situation.

And that's the reason why they continued this operation in Lebanon, although they have not even respected the ceasefire that was decided at the end of 2024. And that's, in essence, the reason why Hezbollah had to continue fighting, because Israel didn't comply. And this situation has become kind of, let's say, a primer. If you talk about explosives, when you want to launch an explosion, you need to have a primer. And that's exactly what Lebanon is in this conflict. Limited capacities to attack Iran, but Lebanon is the best way to inflict damage, to gain territories. So Lebanon is the ideal primer for a conflict.

And they are using that in order to escalate the conflict and, at the end, to force the U.S. to be committed in the conflict. That's the mechanism of the whole thing. So all that was absolutely predictable. And in fact, we have said that. The only way to get out of this conflict, that's the perverse consequence of this. Because Iran has understood that. But I'm not sure that the Americans have understood that, and probably not even the Israelis. Not because they are not able to understand, but because they are too self-convinced of their superiority. But Iran has understood that in order to get out of this loop, the only way should be to completely destroy Israel, to have what I have mentioned many times, a decisive victory.

And that's what Israel is trying to avoid, because they know that if they destroy Israel, that will probably trigger something that is unpredictable in the region. But this is the only way for Iran to get out of this situation, because of the fanaticism of the current government in Israel. Unless we have a change in Israel and we have people who understand that we are in a loop that can only go towards escalation, and ultimately that can go to the erasure of Israel, unless we have that, we are on the way of going in that direction. And that's a situation that I think the West is not aware enough of,

because we keep being convinced that Iran has only limited response capabilities. And that's certainly not true. So that's a little bit how I assess the situation.

#Nima

Yeah. Donald Trump said, you know, right after seeing that both sides are attacking each other, Donald Trump came out and said Iran and Israel must immediately stop shooting. And this is the problem, Carl, that when they attacked Dahiya, they said that the United States—Donald Trump came out and said, we didn't know about what's going on. But the Israeli side said they had the green light of the United States to attack Dahiya. We have two different stories about the attack on Dahiya. That's why Iran has decided, because there is no way to control Israel.

#Jacques

Well, it's hard to tell who is telling the truth in all that. Because, first of all, you cannot trust Trump on that. You never know exactly what he means. He's always just hours away from a superb deal that is in favor of everybody, solving the problem. Every day he's solving a new problem. But none of these problems are solved. He claims things that are obviously wrong and things like this. So that's one part. But that's part of the personality of Donald Trump. He wants to show, in a very childish way to some extent, how good he is, how best he is, and things like this.

The Israelis, in my view, are more, let's say, dangerous, because it might be that they said that if Iran does this, they will continue, and maybe they didn't receive any response from the U.S., and they consider that the U.S. has been informed, and they have accepted, and they have green-lighted the thing. From the Israeli side, I wouldn't trust them either. And I don't know exactly how the dynamics work. We understand from what has happened in the last three months that the U.S. ultimately does what the Israelis want to do, period, because of internal pressure, because of many factors. In any case, the question here is that we should have obliged Israel to go back to its borders. Or, on the other side, since they don't have any border, let's say, on the border of Lebanon, because this border is known.

The one of Israel is not known. But let's say along the Green Line, the line of 1949. In any case, we should have forced that. We should have a UN... You know, if the US were serious about the situation, they would have, with other countries, become convinced that other UN Security Council members would agree with such an idea, if the US agrees, that Israel should withdraw to the Green Line and that the UN should enforce a ceasefire. We already have the UNIFIL there, which is mainly, not mainly, but at least a big part of the UNIFIL are French troops, by the way. And we see that there's absolutely no activity of the UNIFIL in order to prevent the advance of the Israelis, although that would be their task.

And that requires a decision from the UN Security Council to force Israel back into its borders. And so we have the tools. We even have the troops already deployed there. We already have a mandate

for these troops, but we don't want to apply it. So that means that we are not serious about this. You know, in all the discussions we have, and when you talk to other people and think about the situation in Lebanon, nobody talks about UNIFIL. But UNIFIL, in fact, is deployed exactly in the area where the Israelis are deployed, meaning between the border of Lebanon, the southern border of Lebanon, and the Litani River, exactly where the Israeli forces are. So what is UNIFIL doing?

#Nima

Is it the same way that we have between northern Cyprus and southern Cyprus? Because there is the presence of the UN.

#Jacques

Well, it's similar, but it's a different type of peacekeeping operation. In Cyprus, it's more like a ceasefire observation, in fact. But in Lebanon, this is more like peacekeeping in the real sense of the word, because they have not just observers, but they have troops that normally should be able to fight. And in fact, they used to fight. And the strange thing, by the way, we had a report earlier this year that the French forces, for instance, were fighting Hezbollah. So we see that the UNIFIL mandate has been misused to avoid protecting Lebanon. It has been kind of a tool for some troop-contributing countries to fight Hezbollah.

And of course, this is also very disturbing because you have a peacekeeping force that is supposed to impose peace in the region and to prevent any invasion from Israel, because that was the initial purpose of UNIFIL in this particular region. It was not just to observe, it was also to prevent. It had a prevention and deterrent function in theory. And then in this UNIFIL operation, you have many countries. You have probably 10 or 12 countries, I don't remember exactly. In any case, a large contingent is made up of the French forces. But strangely enough, the French government decided to define Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. So, of course, that means that their mandate now is not just—because if you consider Hezbollah as it is in Lebanon, they consider Hezbollah as a militia, but for the defense of Lebanon.

Hezbollah is not considered a terrorist organization in Lebanon. You know, it's not part of the armed forces, but it's not even—it's been granted a status. They were accepted, and they have a status to be there as a defense structure against external threats. I remind you that in the 80s, the Taif Agreements were signed within Lebanon to disband all those militias that used to fight each other within Lebanon. But Hezbollah has never been an organization to fight other militias inside Lebanon. Hezbollah has always had as a mission, as a purpose, to fight external threats, namely the Israeli threat. And that's the reason why, despite having signed—I mean, not despite—within the Taif Agreement, Hezbollah was granted the right to remain in place while other militias were disbanded.

And with the idea that as soon as the Israelis would comply with the UN resolutions asking for the departure of Israel from Lebanon, then Hezbollah would disband. That's the mechanism. That's why,

when you start in that sense, Hezbollah was considered by the Lebanese government as a resistance movement, or a defense movement, if you prefer. Now, since Israel keeps invading Lebanon, keeps some Lebanese territory under its control since 1982, that, of course, justifies the presence of Hezbollah. And that justifies the fact that you have constant fights at the border between Hezbollah and the Israeli forces. And, of course, Israel considers Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

But if you look at the history of the movement, if you look at the way the movement was developed and the rationale of Hezbollah, including all these bunkers and tunnels, which are essentially defensive structures or infrastructures, it means that Hezbollah has no claim over Israel. So the definition of terrorism is simply wrong. It cannot apply to Hezbollah. But Israel, as soon as they want to have the rest of the world helping them, they define individuals or some groups and so on as terrorists. So terrorism has nothing to do with the operational dimension of the group. It has to do with the political support Israel can gain through this idea of fighting terrorism.

That's why, for instance, after 9/11 in 2001, Israel tried to redefine the Palestinian organization as a member of Al-Qaeda in order to have the support of the Americans. They said, well, the Palestinians have exactly the same purpose as Al-Qaeda in order to have this support. So it's a game from Israel to use different denominations in order to gain political and military support from the rest of the world. And you know, when you fight terrorism, you're essentially allowed to do anything — make torture, you can kill children, you can do all that. As long as you name them as terrorists, everything is allowed. And that's exactly how the West has operated in Iraq and things like that.

You know, in Iraq today, for instance, you have all these... Kataeb Hezbollah, Kataeb Imam Ali, and so on and so forth. All these Kataebs are in fact resistance movements. They are resistance movements against the U.S. military presence in Iraq. But they are considered as terrorist movements by Israelis, Europeans, and so on. In reality, they're simply resistance because the U.S. should not be in Iraq in the first place. So we use the word terrorist just in order to fight them. And that's exactly what happens in Lebanon. That's the reason why UNIFIL cannot take sides with Hezbollah, because that would mean they take sides with terrorists.

And here you see, that's why when you have a peacekeeping operation, you need to have an impartial presence there. That's the purpose of a peacekeeping operation. You cannot engage in a peacekeeping operation when you consider one of the parties you are supposed to protect—because that's the purpose of a peacekeeping operation. You cannot be part of a peacekeeping operation when you consider one party to the conflict as a terrorist. You can't. And that's exactly the dilemma in which UNIFIL is. And that's the dilemma in which the French forces are, which is, by the way, a very important contingent.

And that's also a contingent that is part of a country that is a permanent member of the Security Council. Therefore, they have an important political role in this UNIFIL setting. But the French, in fact, are not impartial in that. And that's where you see how the way we understand our management of crises is childish. And that's very much, when you listen to Jean-Noël Barrault, the

current Minister of Foreign Affairs, you understand that this is somebody who doesn't understand the whereabouts of what he does. He just wants to treat it as, they are terrorists, they are this and that. He's just naming things and naming people.