

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپائی

MARCH 23, 2018

by FRANKLIN LAMB

26.03.2018

Despite Claims, Israel-Hezbollah War is Unlikely

During an interview on 2/28/18 with, the Iranian journalist, Fariba Pajoo, a friend of many of us, Professor Noam Chomsky, emphasized the imminence of a devastating Israel-Hezbollah war in Lebanon. He explained that: “There is a significant likelihood that real hostilities will break up between Israel and Hezbollah, which will probably mean the invasion of Lebanon by Israel. Israel will bombard Lebanon, which will mean the destruction of Lebanon. Israel is committed to their Dahiya doctrine, as they call it, which means they will go to war against any provocation. And it could just blow up the Iranian installations which are not too far from the Israeli border. Israel won’t allow anything near its borders. So, I think that is a very volatile and dangerous situation.”

Since first meeting Professor Chomsky in his MIT office nearly four decades ago while I was a student of his friend Professor Jerome Cohen at Harvard Law Schools, East Asia Legal Studies Center, studying the Chinese (Mao Tse Tung’s Cultural Revolution) “Legal system”, I have followed Professor Chomsky work and his activities as a US foreign policy critic, historian, social critic and political activist. Like many of us I would normally no sooner second-guess Noam Chomsky’s Middle East foreign policy analyses than I would the late Stephen Hawking’s theories about our Universe.

But geostrategic calculations are unfolding fast in Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Israel and the region and quite recent events suggest to this observer that a Hezbollah-Israel war is not on the horizon. A war between Hezbollah and Israel may be inevitable but based on this observer’s analysis it is not imminent. Focusing on recent developments in Syria and Lebanon offers scant evidence that either Israel, Hezbollah or Iran are interested in starting

another war. There are several reasons for this stalemate including, but not limited to the factors noted below.

In the coming year, but more likely well beyond, Hezbollah and its sponsors in Tehran will be shackled fighting in Syria. A major war with Israel is extremely risky for them. Despite be able to inflict serious damage on Israel; such a war would ignite a fierce Israeli response that could decimate Hezbollah and Iranian forces and bases in Syria and undermine Iran's regional goals. Iran theocratic leadership is cautious and its unlikely that it would take that risk.

Even frequent Israeli bombings over the past few years have not elicited much of a Hezbollah, Iran or Syrian response. For example, all still deny the 2007 Israeli attack on a nuclear reactor being built in Deir ez-Zor a decade ago. The reason being their inability to react militarily without risking destruction of their forces.

Iran can no longer afford to risk Israel destroying Hezbollah which serves Tehran in many ways. If Israel were to bomb Iran's nuclear weapons sites, Iran could order Hezbollah to do its utmost to damage Israel. But today the chances of such an Israeli strike appear increasing remote, considered unnecessary given the global focus on Iran's potential nuclear sites. In addition, Hezbollah has become a key part of the new Iranian empire in the region, fighting in Syria and training Shi'a militias alongside Iran's Revolutionary Guards. So Hezbollah is needed by Iran even more today than was previously the case.

Iran and Hezbollah also are keenly aware that Israel has been developing its military capabilities since 2006 and readying itself for the next war. And Israel knows the same about Hezbollah. For Israel, victory means Hezbollah's complete destruction. Therefore, Israel won't rush into a war that Hezbollah might survive.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah is stretched thin in more than three countries, and a war with Israel could jeopardize Hezbollah's and Iran's recent gains in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Meanwhile, Israel will continue its targeted attacks on Hezbollah's weapons convoys and depots with impunity. Hezbollah will not confront Israel from south Lebanon unless Tehran orders it to or it has achieved its goals in in Syria and that will take a long time, if ever, to achieve.

Meanwhile, as Hanin Ghaddar has explained, Israel knows well that in a future war with Hezbollah that it could face as many of its 150,000 rockets—compared to the 33,000 Hezbollah had in 2006. Writes Ghaddar, “Hezbollah, with Iran's help has built missile factories in Lebanon and Syria, meaning they have guidance systems that will cause serious damage to Israeli population centers. In addition, Hezbollah is now part of an army

of 200,000 Shi'a fighters from Lebanon, Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, under the command of the Quds Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. An Israeli war with Hezbollah, therefore, could mean a war with Iran's foreign legion."

There are some current factors that could increase the prospects for a future Hezbollah-Israel war, but not immediately.

Given that rebels in Syria are in many areas currently on the defensive, and even though ISIS is staging comebacks and the war is widely predicted to last for several more years, Iran and Hezbollah are using the chaos to make whatever gains possible toward establishing prominence in Syria and Lebanon with respect to taking over the economy, military and security agencies. This campaign, as noted above, includes increased documentation of Iran's financing of arms and missile factories in Lebanon and incorporating Hezbollah more deeply into its "Regional Foreign Legion."

Another relevant and growing factor is that for many in the region, the Trump Administration leadership vacuum is creating evermore pressure on US allies in the region with some contemplating taking matters into their own hands to replace the current desultory White House initiatives. Russia is filling this vacuum, which is stoking anxieties among the UK and EU as well as others. Absent focused U.S. leadership, Israel may strike out on its own to prevent Hezbollah from becoming the preeminent military force to its north

Also building pressure and skittishness along the southern Lebanese border is the fact that Israel is building a 7-meter-high wall border along a line demarcated by the United Nations in 2000, when Israel ended its 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon. Israel claims that the wall is needed to prevent Hezbollah attacks like the one that ignited the 2006 war, which claimed 1,200 Lebanese lives and more than 60 Israeli lives. Hezbollah has threatened military action if Israel begins constructing the wall. Tensions are rising according to UNIFIL which has 40,000 troops watching the border.

In addition, Lebanon last month approved a joint bid by Italian, French and Russian oil companies to explore off its coast for oil and gas. Israel claims a portion of the waters, but the competing claims are aggravating tensions between the countries. Hezbollah has also threatened to attack Israeli platforms in the Mediterranean extracting natural gas.

The Gaza Strip is restive and could ignite into a war at any time. With the increase in rocket attacks from Hamas and Israeli retaliatory strikes after Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital late last year, another Israeli military distraction with Hamas could be seen by Hezbollah as a favorable opportunity to strike Israel from the north.

Another potential wild card are recent reports that Hamas, Iran and Hezbollah have formed an alliance in consultation with Russia and China to scuttle the White House Middle East 'peace plan' "by all means." Hamas sources in the Gaza Strip, on 3/22/2018, advised the London-based Al Hayat newspaper that the discussions between the three parties — Hamas, Iran and Hezbollah have gone a long way on this matter" and are based on the belief that Trump's plan, which he has described as the "deal of the century," was the "most dangerous" in the history of the Israeli-Arab conflict. It was not immediately clear what type of military pushback effort the three claim they would mount to the US proposal, or what this latest development augurs.

A serious miscalculation is the most likely trigger to ignite another Israel-Hezbollah war in Lebanon should it happen. But over the past few years both Hezbollah and Israel have issued statements following a relatively moderate escalation expressing threats. But these 'warnings' are understood by both sides as a message that no escalation of a limited military incident will happen anytime soon.

Both sides appear to be working in concert in a sense, to avoid a new extremely risky war for the foreseeable future. And this serves the decimated civilian population of the region.