

# It Is Complex Yet Simple

August 7, 2006

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The modern individual is to be envied. Never before in history had so many individuals so much information at their fingertips. A click away from electronic libraries, search engines, newspapers, TV and radio stations. We are flooded with information rich with lots of details. Less so with context, history, and background. We are with NATO forces in the former Yugoslavia, we are embedded with US forces in Iraq, watching North Korea's missiles tests, and now, live from the Middle East, the latest Katyusha rockets on Haifa and the latest bombing in Beirut. If you add to it other news such as elections, the economy, floods, fires, and Mel Gibson's latest drunken verbal outburst, one remains wondering, how much of that information sinks in, how much of it is understood, and how much is retained. Most important, how much if it really matters.

How many can now describe the warring factions over Kosovo (or even place it on a map), what was the war about, what was the human loss of lives, who won, what was the outcome, and is there peace on earth (there)? One could argue that Kosovo happened in the 90s and hence "not relevant" to our day. Granted. If so, name the warring factions in Iraq, the internal and external political interests, how many people die there daily from suicide bombs and "regular" attacks? What are the prospect for progress there? What is the expected (desired?) outcome?

Why are these two hot spots important? Because they have implications for human lives as well as highly interlocked international stakes. The U.S. is deeply invested in both conflicts, militarily, economically and politically. So if for the average U.S. citizen these areas are and seem remote, and if they are not fully understood, it would be fair to assume that despite the on-site constant reporting from the Middle East, our knowledge has not improved by much. We may know more but very likely comprehend less.

We suddenly hear reports on Katyusha rockets landing in Kiryat Shmona and of Israeli cannons and jest bombing Lebanon. After hearing this daily dose for four weeks, how much does an uninitiated reader/viewer understand about the war, what has brought it about, what are the stakes, who are the players, and what are the short-term and long-term prospects?

These are legitimate questions to ask in an era of instantaneous news. But also in an era in which some news are doctored and where media bias is at an all time high. Even for news junkies, there must be a level of saturation and some tuning out. Imagine what this does to the uninterested.

To be fair, this is not to say that the enemy is using (not so) carefully crafted propaganda. It surely does. It is also to say that "our news" is not so clean and not so "objective" particularly when it is trying so hard to "earn our trust." This also applies to the Israeli media which has joined the chorus of entertainment active journalism and often times substitutes reporting facts with the provision of opinions.

Occasionally the resident expert on TV, radio, or an op-ed article express their impressive knowledge on the fine differences between various Islamic sects and how it might affect this outcome or that. That is clearly important information. Except we are not in an Islam 1-001 class of General Studies. Simply said, those religious sectarian differences may be important to know but they do not explain why a certain conflict emerges at some point and place and not in another.

So let's complicate matters a bit before simplifying them. You have probably heard that if only the Hizbulla will "get back" the Shaba Farms (do you have a clue where they are?) they will stop their "resistance" and will gladly do so as soon as Israel withdraws from Lebanon? Does this sound familiar to you? If not it should because Israel already withdrew from Lebanon to the "Blue Line" in 2000 (as certified by the U.N.). The Shaba Farms? It is actually disputed territory between Israel and Syria, not Israel and Lebanon. Israel has it. Syria wants it. But wait, where does Lebanon get into the picture? Syria and Lebanon do not even have exchange of embassies. Why? because Syria views Lebanon as part of (Greater) Syria. So Syria does not want to give the Shaba Farms to Lebanon because it will be relinquishing sovereignty of Syrian territory to Lebanon. It might do so as a trick and then hope to get it back if it conquers Lebanon altogether.

Complicated enough? If not, add to that the sectarian differences between Druze, Shia, Sunni, Christian, and other minorities in Lebanon and then the international interest there which explain France's eagerness to enter as a player to this sandbox (of the multi-national force) as a reminder of when it had imperial influence there. And then there are political parties and the Hizbulla is a terrorist organization which controls a state, has members in the parliament and is funded and influence by Iran and Syria. Have you taken two aspirins already?

This is not to take away from the complexity of the situation or be facetious about it but in a sense this aims to point out that at times the more complex matters are the simpler they might get. It may not be sectarian differences as such but power games between clearly defined power groups - puppets or otherwise - that try to carve out a sphere of influence. This is usually done at a great cost to those who fall victim to such aspirations.

From an Israeli perspective it matters fairly little who the players are. In the 20's and 30s of the previous century armed Arab gangs attacked Jews in what was clearly an attempt to mark (and gain) territory. At that time it was Arabism which later developed into Arab nationalism and in the 50s to Pan-Arabism. In fact, with the communist influence over the nationalistic aspirations of Arabs, they emphasize social secularism more than anything else. This was true in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt. Religiosity was relegated to the "keeper of the flag" - Saudi Arabia. In the background, as of the early 20s, religiosity emerged with the formation of the radical Muslim Brotherhood inspired by Egypt's Hassan Al Bana. This is the movement that has given rise to Al Qaida and to Hamas.

The PLO, which was established in 1964 (three years before the territories were "occupied" by Israel), claimed for years that it wants a socialist secular state (instead or alongside Israel - depending on who it was talking to). In January of 2006 the religious Islamists party Hamas took over the Palestinian Authority and officially waged Jihad against Israel, this time not in the name of Marx and Lenin but in the name of Allah.

Haifa was attacked in 1948, bombed in 1956 by an Egyptian destroyer (a "secular" one), and in 2006 by Jihadi Hizbulla rockets. So does it really matter how Israelis are killed? Or better say, by whom? The war is fought over a desire to have control over turf and people. For the Arabs the cause of secular nationalism (socialism), was replaced by pan-Arabism, and now with Jihadism. For Israel the enemy that wants to destroy her has not changed much. It still uses the same language and the same weapons.

The Jordanian King added his 2 cents of insanity when he declared earlier in the week that the root of all evil in the Middle East is Israeli "occupation." That was Yasser Arafat's line. Now it is a line that might save Abdullah from being seen as too close to Israel in the eyes of his Arab fellows.

In short, this is complicated yet simple. It matters little what is the excuse of the day. It has changed from refusing to "allow" Jewish flourishing in Israel prior to 1948 to trying to annihilate it in 1948, 1967, and 1973. When that did not work out, then "occupation" became a mantra. Thus to placate western ears "occupation" was defined as applying to "post 1967 borders" and when Israel has withdrawn from Gaza, Hamas has shown its true colors and defined occupation as pertaining to all of "Palestine" namely, where Israel is today (and might I add, "Palestine" never was).

The current war will have a cease fire and some sort of a U.N. resolution (yes, another). It will be violated and more wars will take place. Some Israelis wanted to believe - and who can blame them - that they will know no more war. That is what Begin and Sadat promised the people there. As did Arafat and Rabin when they signed the Oslo Accord of the "Peace of the Brave." But not until there will be a declaration of the END to the conflict, and an end to territorial claims will there be peace. That is the crux of the problem. Not the kidnaping of soldiers, or the lobbing of rockets (or cessation thereof).

Those who refuse to understand it will find themselves facing the same challenge illustrated by the micro cosmos of the Israeli experience: More than 1,000 home-made Kassam rockets were lobbed into Israeli territory AFTER the withdrawal from Gaza last year. Israel has not reacted (unless one considers "focused thwarting" - a.k.a "targeted assassinations" or bombing empty buildings a reaction). No other country would have shown that level of restraint. The area residents have complained but to no avail. Now the residents of half of Israel are under Katyusha attacks and Israel had no choice but to go to a defensive war.

So here is the simple conclusion: If the signs from Israel will not be heeded, the same Jihadi violence will come not to a theater near you but to your neighborhood. They are already here. The Allies waited too long before joining the war against Hitler and the Axis. Cutting the snake's head is important but the head is not the Hizbulla. The failure to eradicate the Hizbulla stems from misidentifying the real head and not trying to do something against it. Putting Iran and Syria in the cross-hair and pressing the trigger might give the world an advantage it missed in WWII: It waited too much and then later won at a far GREATER cost. Israel is showing the world why waiting too long is counterproductive. Hopefully someone is watching.