



Press briefing given by M. Jacques CHIRAC, President of the Republic, following the meeting of ministers on Lebanon

Toulon, 9 August 2006

THE PRESIDENT I wanted today to take stock with the Prime Minister and defence and foreign ministers of the situation in Lebanon and northern Israel. Sadly, for several weeks, we've been witnessing in this region a tragic spiral of death and suffering together with countless acts of destruction. Every day brings fresh horrors and reinforces the feeling of incomprehension and distress among the civilians.

In Lebanon, the basic infrastructures are all but totally destroyed and a million displaced people have lost everything. In Israel, people are suffering thousands of rocket attacks by Hezbollah.

In the face of this crisis which is threatening the stability of a whole region, France immediately mobilized, with two priorities:

- first, of course, to come to the aid of the stricken civilians and allow those of our compatriots living in Lebanon who wished to do so to come back to France. We did this by establishing sea and air links, which have enabled more than 10,000 French women and men to return to our country and also benefited a good many Lebanese who wanted to leave Lebanon. These arrangements are, moreover, still in place today and will remain so. We did this too by mounting a major humanitarian aid operation.

- at the same time, we deployed all our efforts to get a ceasefire and a sustainable resolution to this tragic crisis. As France has affirmed from the outset, nothing will be resolved by force; any solution must come through a political agreement.

This is why I asked first the Prime Minister and then the Foreign Minister, who went three times to the region, to listen to our partners and present our proposals. France has made active efforts at the Security Council to get the international community to find a solution to this crisis under United Nations auspices. I repeat, only dialogue can restore peace and security in the region.

The settlement we're working on today has, to my mind, to respect a twin imperative:

- restoration of Lebanon's sovereignty over the whole of her territory; this is essential for the Lebanese;



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- and, of course, Israel's right to security.

So we have envisaged, through a draft Security Council resolution, a two-phase mechanism which offers the two parties the necessary political and security guarantees.

- the first phase consists of a complete and immediate cessation of hostilities, in any case, as soon as possible, since the people are enduring tragic suffering. On this basis, we have to establish the principles and elements of a permanent ceasefire and a long-term political solution, which has the agreement of both parties and bears in particular on the delineation of the border, including the Shebaa farms, the abducted Israeli soldiers and Lebanese prisoners.

Once these conditions have been met, we'll move on to the second phase consisting of the deployment of an international force. This force's mandate will be defined on the basis of a political commitment by the two parties, verified by the United Nations. France will decide on her participation in this force depending on the mandate given to it and a fair sharing of its constituent contingents between the countries contributing to it.

The draft Security Council resolution on which we came to an agreement with the United States is a working basis. Israel and Lebanon have reacted, and we have to take account of these reactions and, in particular, of Lebanon's interests, of her stability, unity, sovereignty and independence.

The Lebanese government yesterday proposed deploying 15,000 soldiers of her armed forces in southern Lebanon. I note that the government took this decision unanimously and we salute it, since it should allow the Lebanese government to exercise its sovereignty throughout its territory. There's no free and independent State which doesn't exercise its sovereignty over the whole of its territory.

We have taken account of this major development in the proposals we're making in New York, in particular, in order to achieve a Security Council resolution as soon as possible. Our objective is to get a cessation of hostilities so that, I repeat, there's an end to the succession of deaths, suffering and destruction. This is our absolute priority.

Q. This morning we've learned that there's deadlock in the negotiations between the Americans and French on accepting the amendments the Lebanese had asked for in the resolution. We get the feeling that the Americans and Israelis are playing for time in order to pursue the fighting, the bombing you've described. What's France going to do if the fighting continues, if the Americans don't accept the French arguments for Lebanon's amendments?

THE PRESIDENT The Lebanese government, which had made a proposal in the form of seven points, including several important ones, concerning Israel's withdrawal from its territory, the prisoners, and also the Shebaa farms, is



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entitled to defend Lebanon's position, a position of a State which wants its independence and stability.

Let me add that the Arab League has approved and supports this position, as its three representatives, including the Secretary-General, affirmed when they went yesterday to New York, after the League's meeting in Beirut two days ago.

Given this, I think it's normal for us to take into consideration the solutions which are being envisaged, particularly by the parties to the conflict. We have to take these into account and it's why, on the basis formed by France and the United States' agreement on a draft resolution, we've asked for this draft to take on board a number of these requests.

Indeed, there seem to be American reservations about adopting this draft. I don't want to think of there not being a solution, since that would mean which would be the most immoral of solutions us accepting the present situation and giving up on the immediate ceasefire. So I don't want to think of the Americans or anyone else doing that.

So we're going to see. If we arrive at a solution in line with the principles I reiterated just now those of humanity, political, peaceful principles so much the better. If we don't, obviously we'll have a debate at the Security Council and everyone will clearly state their positions there, including, of course, France, through her own resolution.

Q. Have you set a timetable for this?

THE PRESIDENT I don't even want to talk about the idea of a timetable, because that would mean that we think the ceasefire, cessation of hostilities can be delayed. I don't want to think about the possibility of basing a policy on delaying the cessation of hostilities, especially in a country which has suffered the destruction, loss of life, injuries and displacement of people I was talking about just now.

I think, in reality, that we have to state clearly the necessity of an immediate cessation of hostilities, it's the United Nations' responsibility to affirm it. We must then very quickly achieve a political agreement which presupposes the two parties' agreement, so that they each find in it the guarantees they are entitled to express.

If this happens, indeed, in a month for example, an international force, in one form or another, can be put in place. Some people have talked about an improved UNIFIL, others of an international force, it doesn't much matter. But in any case, an international force in which France will participate provided the force's mandate is clear, fulfils the imperatives I have just reiterated and whose mode of deployment is clearly laid down, and with the contributions of the different participating countries fairly balanced.



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Q. Can you tell us what role Syria is playing in the negotiations? Is anyone talking to the Syrian government and also is anyone talking to Iran? And what's the atmosphere of the negotiations with those countries?

THE PRESIDENT Everyone understands and is perfectly aware of the ties existing between Iran and Hezbollah. Given these, it's legitimate for Iran, an important power in the region, to be consulted, at any rate, for there to be contacts, relations, if only to determine what influence she can have on restoring peace in the Middle East.

You ask me about Syria; everyone is also aware of her ties with Hezbollah. I'd say, to be totally frank, that experience has led me not to have total confidence. Moreover, I note that a few days ago, the Spanish Foreign Minister, Mr Moratinos, went to see the Syrian leaders; when he emerged from the meeting he clearly announced the result of the discussions saying that Syria was going to use all her influence to restore peace in the region. In the next half hour, the Syrian President totally refuted what Mr Moratinos had said.

That doesn't really encourage the establishment of relations with a country with which we'll in any case have to negotiate, particularly on the delineation [of the Shebaa farms area]: here too Syria has several times indicated her agreement on the Shebaa farms being Lebanese. But she has never agreed to do so in writing, knowing perfectly well that this is a normal, legal requirement so that the UN, the United Nations Security Council and the UN General Secretariat, can declare a modification, decide on a modification of the border. So I repeat, I'm not confident.

Let me add that there is a major problem on which Syria could do something which would be a strong demonstration of her goodwill, and would facilitate things for the international Commission of Inquiry set up by the UN, which is led by Judge Brammertz and tasked with finding out the full truth on Rafiq Hariri's assassination. Here too, a strong demonstration of goodwill could strengthen that confidence.

I've mentioned Rafiq Hariri's name. I'm a bit appalled to see that Lebanon, which had been through the wars everyone knows about and been totally rebuilt, and whose Prime Minister at the time had created an extremely important feeling of national unity in Lebanon, to see all that work, in a way, destroyed. Those who murdered Rafiq Hariri and those complicit in his murder, their accomplices, dealt Lebanon and the whole Lebanese people a very hard blow. I want to restate this here.

Q. This morning on "France Info" the Foreign Minister said: "now we have to find the balance between the Israeli forces' withdrawal and the deployment of the Lebanese army with UNIFIL, the UN force". Does this mean that France supports the idea of sending the Lebanese army with UNIFIL to southern Lebanon before the deployment of a multinational force?



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THE PRESIDENT What the minister said, rightly, is that the situation being what it is, progress can come only from an agreement. This agreement would include, on one hand, the Israeli army's withdrawal from the territory it's currently occupying in Lebanon, which has to be progressive, and, concurrently, the Lebanese army taking control of the territory from which the Israelis had withdrawn. So there's a problem of timing to be settled.

And then, over there we have UNIFIL, which is today a bit paralysed, but which could be given back a bit of strength and robustness, and perhaps the capacity, if this is desired, if it's in the political agreement, to be able to observe or facilitate things. I'd see only advantages in that.

Q. Do you really believe that the Lebanese government is today capable of implementing UNSCR 1559, especially of disarming Hezbollah, and afterwards of disarming the Palestinian factions in Lebanon? Aren't you afraid that we're entering a spiral of violence?

THE PRESIDENT It's for the Lebanese to answer that question. One simple thing has to be understood: historically there's never been a State which hasn't had authority over the whole of its territory. So wanting to claim that part of Lebanese territory is under the control of militias is incompatible with a stable Lebanon which is developing democratically.

So it's up to the Lebanese to realize this and the fact that those who are encouraging parties to opt for war, terrorist attacks, terrorism, are making a serious mistake. In the end it's all the Lebanese, whatever their faith be they Sunnis, Shias, Druse or Christians, who are picking up the pieces, as we're seeing.

So if all the Lebanese suddenly realize that, if they want to live in a Lebanon which is a historic reality, going back several millennia, a democratic, peaceful Lebanon, they have to make this clear at the political level to those wanting to challenge a Lebanese government, one in fact formed as a result of free, democratic elections. So I can't urge the Lebanese too strongly to realize their political responsibility to encourage all the forces working for peace and stability in Lebanon and above all her unity, and affirm her sovereignty and independence.

Q. You haven't spoken to President Bush since St Petersburg...?

THE PRESIDENT I apologize for interrupting you, the next bit of the question seems to me irrelevant since it postulates that there's no contact between the US and France, when in fact we're in contact at every level, daily... That doesn't mean we agree on everything, but contact is absolutely permanent. Thank you.

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