

U.S.-built weapons pummel Lebanon

By Thalif Deen

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UNITED NATIONS (NNPA) - Experts say Israel is violating U.S. arms-control laws for deploying U.S.-made fighter planes, combat helicopters and missiles to kill civilians and destroy Lebanon's infrastructure in the ongoing devastation of that militarily weak country.

The death toll, according to published reports, is more than 200 people — mostly civilians — while the economic losses have been estimated at about \$100 million per day.

"Section 4 of the (U.S.) Arms Export Control Act requires that military items transferred to foreign governments by the U.S. be used solely for internal security and legitimate self-defense," says Stephen Zunes, professor of politics at the University of San Francisco.

"Since Israeli attacks against Lebanon's civilian infrastructure and population centers clearly go beyond legitimate self-defense, the U.S. is legally obliged to suspend arms transfers to Israel," Zunes said.

Frida Berrigan, a senior research associate with the Arms Trade Resource Center at the World Policy Institute in New York, is equally outraged.

"As Israel jets bombard locations in Gaza, Haifa and Beirut, killing civilians (including as many as seven Canadians vacationing in Aitaroun), it is worth remembering that U.S. law is clear about how U.S.-origin weapons and military systems ought to be used," said Berrigan.

She pointed out that the U.S. Arms Export Control Act clearly states that U.S.-origin weapons should not be used for "non-defensive purposes."

"In light of this clear statement, the U.S. has an opportunity to stave off further bloodshed and suffering by demanding that its weaponry and military aid not be used in attacks against Lebanon and elsewhere, and challenging Israeli assertions that it is using military force defensively," she added.

That would demonstrate the kind of "utmost restraint" that world leaders called for at the G8 Summit of the world's most industrialized nations, which just ended in St. Petersburg, Russia.

The 25-member European Union has said that Israel's military retaliation against Lebanon is "grossly disproportionate" to the recent kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by the Islamic militant group Hezbollah, which is a

coalition partner of the U.S.-supported government in Beirut.

Israel has accused both Syria and Iran of providing rockets and missiles to Hezbollah, which has used these weapons to hit mostly civilian targets inside Israel. Israel's prodigious military power — currently unleashed on a virtually defenseless Lebanon—is sourced primarily to the United States.

Armed mostly with state-of-the-art U.S.-supplied fighter planes and combat helicopters, the Israeli military is capable of matching a combination of all or most of the armies in most Middle Eastern countries, including Iran, Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

The air force has continued to devastate Beirut and its suburbs with no resistance in the skies during the incessant bombings, causing civilian deaths and infrastructure destruction.

"The Israeli Air Force now flies only U.S.-origin fighters, a mix of F-15s and F-16s, and the rest of the service's fleet is almost completely of U.S. origin," says Tom Baranauskas, a senior Middle East analyst at Forecast International, a leading provider of defense-market intelligence services in the

United States.

While in earlier years Israel bought from a variety of arms suppliers with the French, in particular, being strong sellers to Israel of such items as Mirage fighters, over the past couple of decades, the U.S. has developed into Israel's preponderant arms supplier, he added.

"The U.S. domination as Israel's arms supplier can be seen in the Congressional Research Service's annual study of arms sales," Baranauskas said.

He said the latest study shows a total of \$8.4 billion of arms deliveries to Israel in the 1997-2004 period, with fully \$7.1 billion, or 84.5 percent, coming from a single source — the United States.

A major factor in this trend was the rise in U.S. Foreign Military Financing or FMF — outright U.S. grants to Israel — which now totals about \$2.3 billion a year paid for by U.S. taxpayers.

By U.S. law, Baranauskas said, 74 percent of FMF assistance to Israel must be spent on U.S. military products. This U.S. assistance has now become the main source of financing for Israel's ma-

ior arms procurements, especially its fighter planes.

From a historical perspective, he said, U.S. assistance to Israel during 1950-2005 has been staggeringly high: FMF amounting to \$59.5 billion; \$27 billion in Foreign Military Sales or FMS, mostly government-to-government arms transactions; and \$8 billion in commercial arms sales by the private sector.

Berrigan said the U.S. is undoubtedly the primary supplier of Israeli firepower.

In the interest of strengthening Israel's security and maintaining the country's "qualitative military edge" over neighboring militaries, the U.S. Congress provides Israel with annual FMF grants that represent about 23 percent of its overall defense budget. Israel's 2006 military budget is estimated at \$7.4 billion.

According to the Congressional Research Service, FMF levels are expected to increase incrementally by \$60 million a year to a level of \$2.4 billion by 2008, compared with \$2.2 billion in 2005.

"Israel has been the largest recipient of U.S. foreign

aid every year since 1976," Berrigan said.

Additionally, the U.S. provides Israel with billions of dollars worth of weaponry.

She pointed out that recent military sales to Israel include fast patrol boat propulsion systems worth more than \$15 million from MTU Detroit Diesel; an \$8 million contract to Lockheed Martin for high-tech infrared "navigation and targeting" capabilities for Israeli jets; and a \$145 million deal with Oshkosh Truck Corp. to build more than 900 armor kits for Israeli Medium Tactical Vehicles.

In December of last year, Lockheed Martin was awarded a \$29.8 million contract to provide spare parts for Israel's F-16 fighter planes. Berrigan also said that Israel has one of the world's largest fleets of F-16 fighter planes, made in Fort Worth, Texas, and also in Israel by Lockheed Martin Corp.

Israel has more than 378 F-16s, considered one of the world's most advanced fighter planes — as well as 117 F-15s, 94 A-4 Skyhawks, 110 F-4E Phantoms — all supplied by the U.S.

Somalis reach consensus with Ethiopian assistance

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) - Aided by an Ethiopian mediator, the leaders of Somalia's weak, U.N.-backed government have resolved their differences over how to deal with an increasingly strong Islamic militia that controls much of the south, officials said Sunday.

Somalia's transitional government was formed two years ago with the support of the United Nations to help the Horn of Africa country emerge from 16 years of anarchy and violence.

It has been unable to assert authority beyond the city Baidoa, 150 miles from the capital, Mogadishu, and watched helplessly as Islamic militants seized the capital and much of south in recent months.

The Islamists have imposed strict religious courts, raising fears of an emerging Taliban-style regime.

The United States accuses the Islamists of harboring al-Qaida leaders responsible for deadly bombings at the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.

Somali President Abdullahi Yusuf and his Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi had disagreed on how to deal with the rise of the Islamic militants known as the Supreme Council of the Islamic Courts. Yusuf has the support of parliament Speaker Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden.

Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin mediated between the leaders. A rift had led 40 Cabinet and junior administrators to resign July 27.

However under the agreement, Gedi will

appoint a new Cabinet of 31 members, 31 deputy ministers and 12 state ministers within seven days and parliament will not debate a no-confidence vote for six months, according to an official speaking anonymously. The official requested anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss details with reporters.

"The leaders hugged, kissed and shook hands with the Ethiopian diplomats for their role in solving the problems," said Siyaad Ali, an aide of Gedi.

On July 30, Gedi survived a no-confidence motion because only 126 lawmakers supported it — 13 short of the number required for the motion to pass. Only 88 lawmakers voted to keep Gedi.

Last week, Yusuf said that he wanted a government delegation to go to Khartoum, Sudan on Aug. 1 for Arab League-sponsored talks with the Islamists. But Gedi said that the talks have been postponed to Aug. 17.

The ministers leaving Gedi's government have all cited his lukewarm support for Arab League-sponsored talks as their reason for resigning.

Seyoum is the first Ethiopian official to visit Somalia in years. Ethiopia and Somalia fought a war in 1977 to 1978 and view each other as enemies, but Yusuf is a longtime ally of Ethiopia.

Unexploded munitions lay scattered all over Mogadishu from 16 years of violence that has plagued the capital since dictator Mohamed Siad Barre was overthrown by warlords.

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