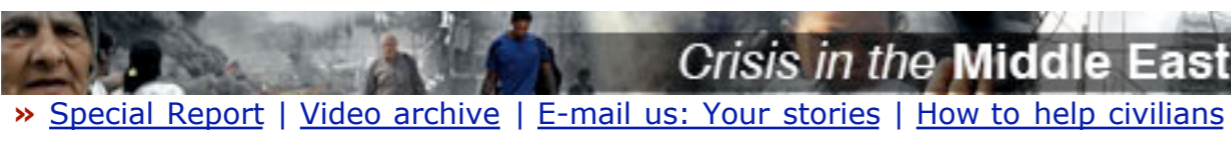


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Qana attack stirs worldwide outcry

U.S. resists calls for immediate Israel-Hezbollah cease-fire

Sunday, July 30, 2006; Posted: 7:10 p.m. EDT (23:10 GMT)

LONDON, England (CNN) -- A deadly Israeli airstrike in the southern Lebanese town of Qana provoked stiff and swift condemnation across the globe Sunday as the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon showed little sign of ending.



A body is carried from the remains of the building in Qana.

Denunciations spread across the Arab and Muslim world, with citizens decrying the attack that killed civilians and diplomats reproaching the Israeli act as unacceptable at a time the world wants to find a solution to the 19-day crisis.

"In view of this horrendous crime the atmosphere now is very, very, very tense," said Lebanese Justice Minister Charles Rizk. In an impassioned television address, Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora said: "We scream out to our fellow Lebanese and to other Arab brothers and to the whole world to stand united in the face of the Israeli war criminals."

But Western reaction showed a split, with many calling for an immediate cease-fire, but the United States and Britain stopping short of supporting such calls.

The U.N. Security Council met Sunday in emergency session, with Secretary-General Kofi Annan reiterating his call for an immediate cessation of violence. (Full story)

More than 60 bodies have been pulled from the rubble in Qana, the Lebanese representative to the U.N., Nuhad Mahmoud, said Sunday. Lebanese internal security officials said 37 of the dead are children.

A Red Cross official said the Qana airstrikes hit a residential building that housed refugees. Israel said the building was near Hezbollah rocket launching sites.

Israel later agreed to halt airstrikes on southern Lebanon for 48 hours to investigate the raid, a U.S. State Department spokesman said.

"This was a mistake, and we will have a full investigation," Israeli government spokeswoman Miri Eisen told CNN.

"Hezbollah has chosen this as their launching ground for their attacks on us, intentionally endangering their civilians because they know that something like this is liable to happen," said Israel Defense Forces spokesman Jacob Dalal.

However, the Arabic-language news networks showed scenes of the strike's gory aftermath, and many in the Arab and Muslim world didn't appear to be buying Israel's argument.

Mohamed Chatah, senior adviser to Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, said on ABC's "This Week," that the "Lebanese people are justifiably outraged at what's happened."

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called the Qana attack "an ugly massacre" and called for Israel to stop its attacks "for the protection of civilian life."

The Syrian Arab News Agency reported that Syrian President Bashar Assad called Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, expressing "shock and sorrow" over the attack and saying it showed Israel's "barbarism."

"President Assad assured the Lebanese president again of full Syrian solidarity with Lebanon and its readiness to help," according to a SANA report.

Hundreds of protesters angry about the Qana attack stormed the United Nations compound in Beirut, shattering the glass walls protecting the U.N. building and climbing inside the inner courtyard.

In Gaza City, Palestinian security forces on Sunday ejected about 2,000 demonstrators who had stormed the U.N. compound protesting the Qana attack.

Iran's state-run Islamic Republic News Agency on Sunday reported Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi's condemnation.

"Certain U.S. officials should go on trial for crimes being committed in Lebanon," Asefi was quoted as saying. "U.S. schemes are not limited to just one country but cover the entire region. Washington wants the regional governments to be its puppets."

Jordan's King Abdullah said the strike was an "ugly crime" that was a "gross violation of all international statutes."

EU official pushes cease-fire

President Bush said Sunday the United States "mourns the loss of innocent life" and that all parties with a stake in the Mideast conflict "must work together to achieve a sustainable peace."

Bush said he spoke twice Sunday with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who is in the region.

The Bush administration has refused to call for an immediate cease-fire, with officials saying they first want to create conditions for a lasting peace. However, the Qana strike complicated U.S. diplomatic efforts, prompting Siniora to cancel a meeting with Rice.

Bush told reporters the United States is resolved to work with members of the U.N. Security Council to draw up "a resolution that will enable the region to have a sustainable peace."

Bush said he also spoke with British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

During a visit to California on Sunday, Blair expressed optimism that a lasting solution could be achieved.

"What has happened at Qana shows that this is a situation that simply cannot continue," he told reporters after making a series of calls to other leaders, including Siniora.

"I think there is a basis for an agreement that would allow us to get a U.N. resolution, but we have to get this now," he said.

He said the situation in Qana is "absolutely tragic," but added that negotiations should "lead to a general cessation of hostilities in a way that allows us to put an end to them for good."

Javier Solana, the European Union's foreign policy chief, said he spoke to Siniora and "expressed profoundly dismay and deep sorrow."

"Nothing can justify that. I have transmitted to him that the EU is continuously working to reach an immediate cease-fire."

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Union external affairs commissioner, said the "attack on the city of Qana means an escalation of violence that is unjustifiable at a time when the international community is jointly working to find a solution."

Calling for an immediate halt to violence, Ferrero-Waldner said the "killings of innocent people, particularly of children, must stop now."

In Madrid, the Spanish Foreign Ministry issued a statement expressing its "deepest consternation and condemnation" of the Qana bombing and called for an immediate cease-fire. The Spanish government also extended its "deepest sympathy" to the victims and the Lebanese government.

In Paris, French President Jacques Chirac's office issued a statement saying "France condemns this unjustifiable action, which shows more than ever the need to reach an immediate cease-fire."

U.S. Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns on Sunday rejected suggestions that Israel's actions amount to war crimes.

"We believe that every country has a right to defend itself," Burns told ABC. "But we also believe that this type of fighting has to come to an end."

He said the United States and other countries believe "Israel has a right to its own self-defense. Israel was attacked two weeks ago. It had rockets fired in its territory. It had soldiers abducted."

But American Muslims expressed outrage. The Council on American-Islamic Relations, an American advocacy group, said the killing of civilians by Israel amounts to state terror.

"Whenever civilians are attacked to achieve a political goal, the charge of terrorism must be applied," said CAIR spokesman Ibrahim Hooper in a written statement.

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