

A Crisis Too Far

by **Andreas Theophanous**,

Professor of Political Economy and Director General of the Research Center -
Intercollege

There is no doubt that the war in Lebanon is a symptom of a greater malaise in the Middle East as well as of turbulent trends in international relations. Indeed, the conflict in Gaza and in Lebanon is not unrelated with broader issues in the region – such as, but not exclusively, the chaotic situation in Iraq and the overall tense climate in the relations between Iran and the West and, in particular, between Iran and the US.

It also comes to confirm the view that when simmering crises are not addressed effectively, sooner or later, particular incidents may lead to escalation. In this respect, after each great crisis world leaders and the international community in general repeatedly underlined the need to act in a comprehensive and conclusive manner with respect to regional problems. It should be remembered that after September 11, 2001 there were declarations and rhetorical commitments to such a course of action. But there was no follow up probably because the international community failed to grasp the deeper causes and the implications of that momentous event.

The current crisis also brings once more to the surface the challenge of addressing the long-standing ineffectiveness of the UN. Throughout its history, more often than not, the UN has been unable to act decisively and convincingly. But there were times that its stance enjoyed respect and appreciation and also cases where UN mandates mattered and produced results. In the post-cold war era however the UN's credibility has suffered. To a great extent this has been the outcome of the new imbalance of power in the new world order.

Indeed, in the post-cold war international environment the role of the US has been domineering. In its turn this has nurtured unilateralism which more often than not led to lack of consensus on major issues. In this respect the record of the EU in playing a major role in international affairs has been poor, paralyzed by its inability to forge a cohesive foreign policy. The EU must (re)assess its overall approach and ability to play a role in regional and international affairs. Besides the human tragedy dimension, developments in Lebanon and the broader Middle East affect the EU's own security and prosperity.

The world stands at a turning point. The events in Lebanon and the terrible loss of innocent lives necessitate a change in the way crises are approached. It is essential that a minimum set of rules is adopted and implemented. And consistency when dealing with sensitive issues is vital. In an age of asymmetric security threats this is of particular importance. The inexcusable human tragedy in the current crisis should serve as a strong incentive towards such a course.

Thus, it is imperative that there is collective action not only to arrive at a cease fire but, moreover, to effectively address the causes which generate intolerance, terrorism, violence and armed conflict. Unilateralism cannot provide the answer. This crisis could have been avoided. Still, the US can work with the EU, the UN and the parties directly and indirectly involved in order to address the crisis in Lebanon in an effective manner.

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