

The Washington Post

Mixed Reviews for Nasrallah's Candor

A Daily Survey of What the International Online Media Are Saying

THURSDAY, AUGUST 31, 2006

Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasrallah faces new criticism in the English-language Arab online media after admitting Sunday that he had not anticipated massive Israeli retaliation for his group's July 12 capture of two Israeli soldiers.

"Had I known that capturing the soldiers would lead to this result, I never would have done it," he told Lebanon's New TV on Sunday. **Translated versions of two news reports on the interview, one Lebanese and one Israeli, can be viewed on Link TV's Web site.**

The criticism of Nasrallah reflects continuing suspicion among Sunni Arabs about the new-found popularity of the Shiite cleric and his allies in Iran and throughout the Arab world as Lebanon begins to recover from the 33-day Israeli bombardment.

Also out of Lebanon:

* Prime Minister Ehud Olmert rejected U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan's request for Israel to end its blockade of Lebanon.

* Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Sinora announced his government would pay \$33,000 to every family whose home was destroyed in the wide-ranging Israeli attacks.

* An Iranian vice president arrived in Lebanon promising that the Islamic Republic would help finance reconstruction of the country.

As Lebanon attempts to get back on its feet, Nasrallah's prime-time interview "was clearly designed to calm fears that there would be any second round of fighting," wrote London Daily Telegraph



World Opinion Roundup

By Jefferson Morley

correspondent Patrick Bishop. "It contained a frank admission that, had he known the destruction that would result from the capture of two Israeli soldiers, he would never have allowed the operation to go ahead."

The Telegraph report also noted that the Hezbollah leader granted the interview to a woman journalist of a liberal, secular Lebanese station over his own al Manar.

The interview, while thought by some to bolster Nasrallah's popularity in Lebanon, also emboldened commentators in Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Arab countries who offered muted criticism of the Shiite leader during the Israeli attack.

"As much as we salute the leader of the resistance for his courage and honesty, we must blame those who sought to falsify facts and considered the recent conflict a heroic act, strategic choice and a war for freedom and liberation," writes Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed, the general manager of Al-Arabiya television, in the Saudi-funded Ahsarq Alawsat.

Ahsarq Al-Awsat editor Tariq Alhomayed, meanwhile, thanked Nasrallah for "a step in the right direction."

The pro-monarchy Arab News reported that reaction in Saudi Arabia was negative.

"With the Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah expressing regret Sunday on Lebanese TV for the month-long war in Lebanon in which more than a thousand people died, many people in the Kingdom accused the Hezbollah militia of 'adventurism' and being 'irresponsible.'"

In Kuwait, the editor of the pro-U.S. Arab Times calls Nasrallah's

admission a "bad excuse."

"If for the sake of argument we admit Nasrallah is acting alone without receiving instructions from Iran, then his recent excuse proves that he is not qualified to be a decision maker," writes editor-in-chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah.

Nasrallah and his allies "are trying to convince us that they did not start the war and that they were victorious," wrote columnist Hazem Saghieh in the pan-Arab daily, Al Hayat. "They are also trying to convince us that they are not an extension of Syrian and Iranian policies."

Another Al-Hayat columnist, Daoud Shirian, wrote, "While it is certain that the statement did not imply admitting defeat nor apology, it does represent an important shift in Hezbollah's policies. Nasrallah's statement could be seen as Hezbollah's clear and direct renunciation of their concept of war in the future."

Views from Elsewhere

* Nasrallah Saves Olmert: Germany's Spiegel Online says "Ehud Olmert couldn't have asked for better publicity."

* The Fruits of Surprise: Writing in Haaretz, Yossi Mellman says, "If Hezbollah is no longer claiming victory, then Israel was not in fact defeated."

* Talking Peace: In India, the Hindustan Times says, "Nasrallah most of all knows how much hurt the Israelis have inflicted on Lebanon and the Hezbollah, and he would be cavalier indeed if he chose to ignore it."

