

I was shaken late yesterday to learn that Hezbollah, the radical militia and terrorist group based in southern Lebanon, had crossed into Israel and captured two Israeli soldiers. This, of course, led to an Israeli incursion into Lebanon - as any even casual observer would have guessed. I am deeply saddened by this development.

Many of the countries of the Middle East are racked with terror; there are many separate battles and battlegrounds; there is much that people hate each other for over many complex histories. Lebanon, despite our recent memories of it as the seat of terror and internecine violence from the 1970's and 80s, is as much a victim as any in this. The violence visited upon it in the 1970 and 80s was mostly due to the presence of the Palestinians who, like Hezbollah today, rained missiles upon, and kidnapped soldiers from, Israel. I am no fan of Israel in its protracted conflict with and over Palestine, but the actions of the PLO, then, and Hezbollah, today, are foolhardy. The real victims, again, will be the Lebanese.

The capital, Beirut, was thrown into turmoil as various factions formed and faced off against each other: Druse, Maronite Christian, Hezbollah, Palestinians, Shiite, etc. The French and Americans intervened, or tried to, and then Syria saw a chance to take back the territory taken from it after World War I and swept in to save Lebanon from itself. Or so it seemed. In the 1980s, Israel invaded, and occupied large swaths of the country. Israel finally left just a few years ago.

Syria didn't leave until last year, after a 29 year occupation. This following its atrocious assassination of Rafiq Hariri - former Prime Minister and opposition leader.

Now Israel is back, however briefly we have yet to see. Just how far away are Syrian forces? One must worry.

Robert Fisk, Middle East correspondent for The Independent, has lived in and reported from Lebanon for over 30 years. Here is a very good piece he wrote last year, March, as the Syrian departure loomed. It has a feel of Hunter Thompson in his most lucid moments, a great sense of immediacy and intimacy with the events going on:

<http://www.robert-fisk.com/articles470.htm>

I will be looking forward to his reportage of this latest bad turn in the history of Lebanon.