

World News

Print E-mail story Most e-mailed Change text size

WARFARE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Allies Losing Patience With U.S. Terms for Cease-Fire

By Kim Murphy and Sebastian Rotella, Times Staff Writers
July 26, 2006

LONDON — Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's calls this week for a deliberate approach to building "a new Middle East" are facing increased skepticism among many who ordinarily would be America's strongest backers in efforts to end the conflict in Lebanon.

U.S. allies in Europe and the Arab world are warning that without Washington's endorsement of an immediate cease-fire in Lebanon, the possibility of escalating violence could eclipse any hope to transform a region beset by autocracy and terrorism to one based on democracy.

"Now more than ever, we call for moderation, with the goal of a cessation of hostilities that are provoking enormous damage and a humanitarian tragedy," said Massimo D'Alema, foreign minister of Italy, which today will hold a meeting of Western and Arab leaders in an attempt to broker a resolution to the crisis.

Britain has continued to back President Bush's call for a "sustainable," if not immediate, cease-fire, and supported Israel's right to guarantee security on its borders.

France, which initially called for an immediate cease-fire and condemned Israel's campaign as "totally disproportionate," in recent days has

eased closer to the U.S. position, blaming Syria and Iran for inciting Hezbollah.

But Italy and Spain have pointedly criticized the United States' failure to halt the bloodletting.

Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, whose Socialist government has had testy relations with Washington since coming to power a little more than a year ago, has also been critical of "abusive" force in the region, alluding to Israel.



Photo Gallery

Scenes from the Mideast Conflict



Diplomacy and fighting proceed

(Sources: The Associated Press, Reuters, BBC, Times reporting)
July 26, 2006



Hezbollah's reach?

July 20, 2006
click to enlarge

Related to this Article

- More Coverage of the Mideast Conflict
- U.N. Shocked by Strike on Border Post
- Conflict as a Way of Life

ADVERTISEMENT

Remodeling Personal style Gardening

Click here for the hottest trends!

HomeDesign OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT

- Personals
- Deals at Local Stores
- Coupons
- Newspaper Ads

Place an Ad

- Member Services
- Sign Up
- Log In
- Help
- Contact Us
- L.A. Times Archives

- HOME DELIVERY
- Customer Support
- Subscribe to L.A. Times



Local Ads Buy a link

"The silences of today in light of what is happening in the Mideast could become the regrets of tomorrow, because waiting for time to pass costs human lives," Zapatero said.

Germany, while recognizing Israel's right to defend itself, warned that Lebanon could be "further destabilized" under a prolonged bombing campaign.

Perhaps more worrisome for Washington, two of its strongest Arab allies, Saudi Arabia and Egypt — which had generally sided with the U.S. as the conflict began — on Tuesday voiced strong misgivings over the severity of the Israeli airstrikes and echoed European calls for a speedy end to the crisis.

In an apparent reference to Rice's description of the turbulent "birth pangs" of a "new Middle East," Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak called for an immediate cease-fire and warned that "what is happening in the region is destructive chaos, not creative chaos."

Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah went further, warning that "no one can predict what will happen if things get out of control" in Lebanon. If peace options fail, he said, "there will be no other option but war."

A Saudi government advisor said that "America is doing a disservice to everyone by not reining in the Israelis."

Washington's closest Arab allies are entrenched, undemocratic regimes whose leaders support the Bush administration's stance on Lebanon in part because they fear that the popular Islamic activism embodied by Hezbollah and Hamas could turn against them at home. Those governments now worry that the popular perception that the United States is standing behind Israel will undermine their credibility at home and invite new militancy.

"Yes, there is a new Middle East — in the worst sense, not in the sense the Americans would like it," said Nawaf Obaid, an analyst in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and an adjunct fellow with the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies.

New rifts, Obaid said, may result in "a Shia world headed up by Iran vs. a Sunni world headed up by Saudi Arabia — and this is exactly what no one needs."

France, which headed European opposition to the U.S.-led war in Iraq, now looks to be almost allied with the U.S. over the conflict in Lebanon.

President Jacques Chirac had expressed great concern about the destruction wrought by the Israeli bombardment and called for an immediate cease-fire. But he recently tempered that criticism of Israel with rebukes of Hezbollah that have hardened over time, narrowing the distance between French and U.S. viewpoints.

This week, Chirac referred to "initiatives taken by Hamas and Hezbollah which could not have been taken alone." This was, the French newspaper Liberation suggested, "an almost explicit allusion to Damascus and Tehran."

Many European countries now find themselves forced into a balancing act, not wanting to offend the U.S. or Israel, but mindful of public opinion that has tended to favor the underdog in Lebanon, said Italian analyst Furio Colombo, a former newspaper editor and a senator for the ruling Democratic Left party.

- If Peace Comes, Just Who'll Go In to Keep It?

- Poorer Nations Scramble to Evacuate Their Citizens

- 'This Is All We Brought With Us'

- Besieged Residents Hunker Down

- Iraqi Leader, Bush Split on Israel

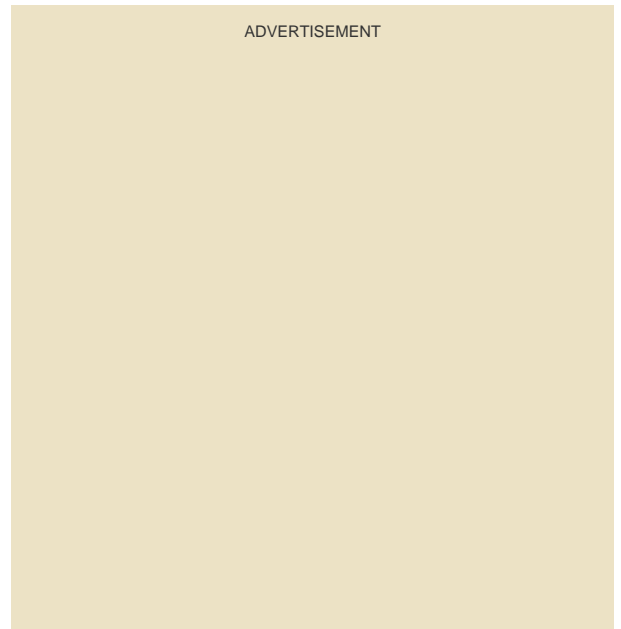
More World News

- U.N. Shocked by Strike on Border Post
- Conflict as a Way of Life
- Iraqi Leader, Bush Split on Israel
- China Sees Hepatitis B Advances
- New Legal Front Opens in Recount Battle

Most Viewed Most E-mailed



- E-MAIL:** News sent directly to you.
- RSS:** Pick the topics, create your page.
- WIRELESS:** L.A. Times any time, anywhere on your mobile device.
- PODCASTS:** Tune in to The Times.



As a result, he predicted, the Europeans probably will not be able to act with the determination necessary to find a solution, at least in the short term, such as during today's meeting in Rome.

"The results will be mild, watered down ... very European," he said.

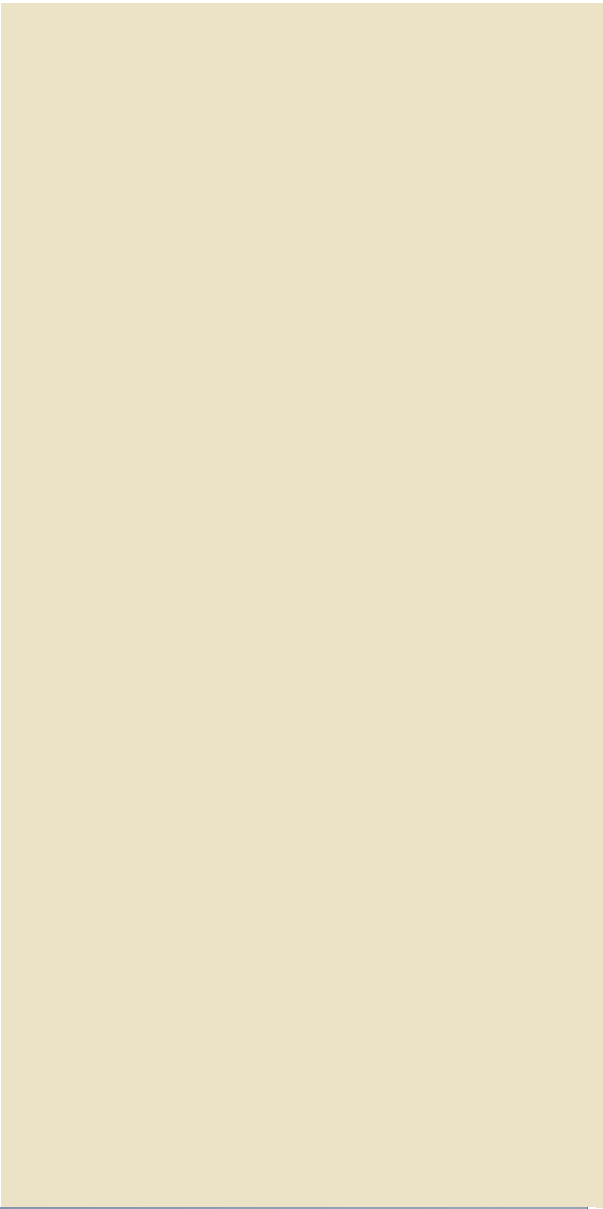
Murphy reported from London and Rotella from Paris. Times staff writers Tracy Wilkinson in Rome and Christian Retzlaff in Berlin contributed to this report.

MOST E-MAILED

- **Look, Ma, no gas -- and yet zero to 60 in just four seconds**
- **The Ranger Who Told All About Anais Nin's Wild Life**
- **The Mayor Needs It -- Now**

More World News

- **U.N. Shocked by Strike on Border Post**
- **Conflict as a Way of Life**
- **Iraqi Leader, Bush Split on Israel**



Copyright 2006 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Home Delivery](#) | [Permissions](#) | [Contact](#)

Partners: [Hoy](#) | [KTLA](#) | [Careerbuilder.com](#) for jobs | [Cars.com](#) for autos | [Apartments.com](#) for rentals | [ShopLocal](#) for shopping | [FSBO](#) (For Sale By Owner)