

## LEBANON – THE DESTRUCTION OF DEMOCRACY



Those witnessing the hushed exchanges between Dubya and Son at the G8 summit must have thought they were watching a political spoof.

“Hey pop, Canna do the Middle East roadshow before Conodoleeza gets there? Canna, canna, canna? A sorta warm up act? I can do it pop. Honest I can. Watcha think?”

“Piss off, son. Just take a walk round the block for god’s sake. Condy can take care of herself. ‘Sides, you tell me which part of the Middle East we ain’t already warmin up and I’ll send the planes.”

“No. I mean, maybe I could get Syria to stop Hizbullah firing rockets into Israel?”

“Christ, Tone. Don’t yuh understand nuthin? A’ve told m’god fearin

friends in Israel they can bomb the crap outta everythin what moves in Lebanon. Chase out them Heezboolah terrorists. Don’t you go spoilin’ things with no ‘ceasefire’ talk. Just get that new Foreign Tourist Guide Minister o’yours to take Condy on a walkabout round them Derbeeeshire hills. Condy’s headin’ to Bayroot, but not till the fun’s finished. The walk’ll do her good.”

Ok. This wasn’t exactly the conversation that took place, but it may as well have been. The consequence was that the G8 failed to do the one thing that the outside world believed they could do...call for a ceasefire. On his return, it was almost shameful to be in a parliament whose Prime Minister could not even bring himself to make the call for an immediate ceasefire. Let us just be clear where we are starting from. The bombing of the Lebanon and incursions into Gaza have nothing to do with the rescue of captured soldiers. It is part of a wider plan to destabilise the Palestinian Authority, turn Lebanon into an Israeli puppet state, and pave the way for the next wars on Iran and Syria.

Even the former head of Mossad has said that if you want the soldiers returned, you negotiate prisoner release. A country that kills 15 Palestinian (or Lebanese) citizens for every one of its own dead has no difficulty in negotiating generous terms of prisoner exchange...where they want to. Sadly, the truth is that the Israeli prisoners are just as much pawns as the Palestinian and Lebanese citizens.

The first war on Iraq was fought over far fewer transgressions against Kuwait than are now taking place in the Lebanon; and with none of the destruction of infrastructure that threatens the very survival of the Lebanon. Saddam’s appalling destruction of the oil wells was on the way out, not the way in. Israel is not bombing Hizbullah, but the Lebanon as a whole. It is the collective punishment of a society, for harbouring those who would stand up against some of the most wretched degradation of Palestinians that has gone on for decades.

Blair can legitimately criticise Hizbullah’s shelling of Israeli towns and cities, but the hypocrisy lies in his silence over Israeli bombings of Gaza and Palestinians communities.

It is many years since I visited what were then referred to as the occupied territories. Gaza, Ramallah and large parts of the West Bank were already huge sprawling slums in the middle of Israeli affluence. Beautiful new estates were going up on one side of the road – for settlers – whilst Palestinians lived in hovels. One side of the road had green grass and water sprinklers while the other was arid and people queued for water at standpipes. Nine tenths of the water went to Israeli's and the other tenth to Palestinian neighbourhoods.

PLO delegates showed us round Gaza whilst their leaders were locked in 'peace' negotiations in Washington. We walked around streets where buildings had had their fronts blown open like dolls houses, and families lived their lives in full view of the street. The frontages had been removed by shells from Israeli tanks on 'fishing expeditions' for Hamas sympathisers. It was with irony as well as sadness that our hosts pointed out that the acro-props holding up people's floors and ceilings, and the calor gas stoves they were cooking with, all came from Hamas rather than the PLO. The PLO was included in a peace process that made their people's lives poorer. Hamas was frozen out, but made life bearable. Inevitably, it was the peace process that would do more damage to the PLO than Hamas.

There is much talk from the Israeli government, but getting no peace in return. Look into the nature of the land arrangements, however, and you will understand the absence of peace. Land sequestration continues to take place. The 'security' wall was an arbitrary land grab. New building in East Jerusalem continues an encirclement of the City, designed to squeeze Palestinians out. Only those in the Jewish peace movement seem capable of having a discussion about how to share an open Jerusalem that celebrates its place as a cornerstone of three of the world's great religions. For such thought crimes, peace activists are almost as hated as 'the enemy' in Hamas and Hizbullah.

As the Lebanon is now discovering, Israel will turn off the economic lifeblood of those it would seek to contain and manage. Blockades of land and sea are daily reminders of the power relationship that exists. The only democracy in the Middle East sits comfortably upon a third World state within its own boundaries; a daily reminder about who are the owners and who are the owned. Blair rants about the Katyusha rockets fired by Hizbullah, and their supply line from Iran. The sad truth is that the Katyusha rockets are sourced as much by the moral silences of the West as by the military stockpiles of Iran.

When Israel's killing spree in the Lebanon finishes there will, no doubt, be a call for a UN presence to patrol the border and protect the peace. You can bet, with even greater certainty, that no similar call would be entertained for a UN military presence within Israel to deliver equal rights and equal security for both sets of communities.

There have always been voices in Israel that wanted to annexe Lebanon. In 1955 David Ben-Gurion wanted to install a Christian officer to run Lebanon as a dictatorship. In 1982, Ariel Sharon tried to do so. The first of his 'installed' leaders was soon murdered and the brother who succeeded him was later driven out of office. Then as now, it was assumed that the violence would turn Lebanese people against Hizbullah. Then, as now, it ended up having the opposite effect.

From the security of the White House (or the tranquillity of the Derbyshire Dales) it may only look like a small hop from the disciplining of Lebanon to direct strikes on Syria and Iran, but Britain has already been mis-led into one war in the Middle East. It won't be mis-led into a second. Even now people are asking as much about the source of the bombs landing in Lebanon as the source of Katyusha rockets

aimed at Israel.

In Blair's long walk around the block, he would be better asking himself what to do about rights in Gaza than wrongs in Tehran.

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