

Occupied Afghanistan: The Attack on the British Council in Kabul

The attack was on the 92nd anniversary of Afghanistan's independence from Britain in 1919

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The attack on the British Council in Kabul on 19th August, resulting in twelve deaths and many injuries, further underlined how unwelcome the occupiers are, in a country in which they should never have been in the first place. Further tragedies, heaped on tragedies, also illustrated how out of touch those both on the ground in country – and those in high places abroad are.

Martin Davidson, Chief Executive of the British Council, said in London, the Council had been taken: “completely by surprise.” They had seemingly had a (albeit uninvited) presence in the region, yet learned nothing of the huge significance of dates and anniversaries.

The day of the attack was both the Sabbath (Friday) and national holiday marking the 92nd anniversary of Afghanistan’s independence from Britain in 1919 and of course, the 19th: 19-1919.

The British Council, says Davidson, will: “continue its educational work in Afghanistan.” Seems it has a bit to learn itself. The Council, incidentally, also teaches English. The cynic might wonder whether that includes the meaning of: “Lie down with your hands above your head”; “We’re coming in – sorry about the door”; “A ‘tragic mistake’, there will be an enquiry at the highest level to establish what went wrong. Will \$50 cover the costs of the funerals?”

Prime Minister Cameron called New Zealand’s Prime Minister to express his thanks, sympathy and regret for the loss of life of a member of that country’s special forces in a “dreadful incident”, belatedly remembering the maybe twelve Afghans killed, and condemned the act as “vicious and cowardly.” Whatever else, people strapped with explosives, so desperate to regain their country, that they “aim the only thing I have left”, as described by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, are not “cowardly.”

Cameron and his Ministers talked the usual platitudes about monitoring closely, lessons learned, enquiries, tightened security, then, as the buildings still smouldered, the Afghans continued to damp it down, carried away their dead in woven blankets, and their wounded over their shoulders, Cameron was driven in his reinforced limo, with his security detail, to spend the afternoon [watching cricket in the rarified atmosphere of London’s elite Lord’s Cricket Ground \(founded in 1787.\)](#) Then he resumed the holiday he seemingly only reluctantly returned from, as much of London and other English cities, burned.

“Brutal attacks such as this will not lessen our resolve”, said Secretary of State Clinton from sanitised safety, exactly ten days after the bodies of thirty US servicemen killed in Afghanistan were repatriated to Dover Air Force Base.

President Obama had left for his holidays the day before. The Clintons, reportedly, leave for theirs on the 22nd of August, at a \$25 million mansion in the Hamptons. Words are indeed cheap, but seemingly not as cheap the lives of others.

Mahmoud Darwish did have words, however, they should all heed. He understood the longing for plowing one’s own furrow, in one’s own, unoccupied land, a fight no people will ever relinquish:

“When the planes disappear, the white, white doves Fly off and wash the cheeks of heaven With unbound wings taking radiance back again, taking possession Of the ether and of play. Higher, higher still, the white, white doves Fly off. Ah, if only the sky Were real [a man passing between two bombs said to me].”

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