

Shredded by Cluster Bombs: Bush and Blair: “Keep It Up!”

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Global Research, July 30, 2006

Counterpunch.org 30 July 2006

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

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I dropped by the hospital in Marjayoun this week to find a young girl lying in a hospital bed, swathed in bandages, her beauty scarred for ever by some familiar wounds; the telltale dark-red holes in her skin made by cluster bombs, the weapon we used in Iraq to such lethal effect and which the Israelis are now using to punish the civilians of southern Lebanon.

And, of course, it occurred to me at once that if George Bush and Condoleezza Rice and our own sad and diminished Prime Minister had demanded a ceasefire when the Lebanese first pleaded for it, this young woman would not have to spend the rest of her life pitted with these vile scars.

And having seen the cadavers of so many more men and women, I have to say—from my eyrie only three miles from the Israeli border—that the compliant, gutless, shameful refusal of Bush, Rice and Lord Blair of Kut al-Amara to bring this bloodbath to an end sentenced many hundreds of innocent Lebanese to death. As I write this near the village of Blat, which has its own little list of civilian dead, it's quite clear that many more innocent Lebanese are being prepared for the slaughter—and will indeed die in the coming days.

What was it Condoleezza Rice said? That “a hasty ceasefire would not be a good thing”? What was Blair's pathetic excuse at the G8 summit? That it was much better to have a ceasefire that would last than one which might break down? Yes, I entirely understand. Blair and his masters—we shall give Rice a generic title to avoid the obvious—regard ceasefires not as a humanitarian step to alleviate and prevent suffering but as a weapon, as a means to a political end.

Let the war last longer and the suffering grow greater—let compassion be postponed—and the Lebanese (and, most laughably, the Hizbollah) will eventually sink to their knees and accept the West's ridiculous demands. And one of those famous American “opportunities” for change—ie for humbling Iran—will have been created.

Hence, in the revolting words of Lord Blair's flunky yesterday, Blair will “increase the urgency” of diplomacy. Think about that for a moment. Diplomacy wasn't urgent at the beginning. Then I suppose it became fairly urgent and now this mendacious man is going to “increase” the urgency of diplomacy; after which, I suppose, it can become super-urgent or of “absolutely” paramount importance, the time decided—no doubt—by Israel's belief that it has won the war against Hizbollah or, more likely, because Israel realizes that it is an unwinnable war and wants us to take the casualties.

Yet from the border of Pakistan to the Mediterranean—with the sole exception of the much-

hated Syria and Iran, which might be smothered in blood later—we have turned a 2,500-mile swath of the Muslim world into a hell-disaster of unparalleled suffering and hatred. Our British “peacekeepers” in Afghanistan are fighting for their lives — and apparently bombing the innocent, Israeli-style — against an Islamist enemy which grows by the week. In Iraq, our soldiers—and those of the United States—hide in their concrete crusader fortresses while the people they so generously liberated and introduced to the benefits of western-style democracy slash each other to death. And now the US and UK—following Israeli policy to the letter—are allowing Israel to destroy Lebanon and call it peace.

Blair and his ignorant Foreign Secretary have played along with Israel’s savagery with blind trust in our own loss of memory. It is perfectly acceptable, it seems, after the Hizbollah staged its July 12 assault, to destroy the infrastructure of Lebanon and the lives of more than 400 of its innocents. But hold on a moment. When the IRA used to cross the Irish border to kill British soldiers—which it did—did Blair and his cronies blame the Irish Republic’s government in Dublin? Did Blair order the RAF to bomb Dublin power stations and factories? Did he send British troops crashing over the border in tanks to fire at will into the hill villages of Louth, Monaghan, Cavan and Donegal? Did Blair then demand an international, NATO-led force to take over a buffer zone—on the Irish, not the Northern Ireland side, of the border?

Of course not. But Israel has special privileges afforded to no other nation. It can do exactly what Blair would never have done—and still receive the British Government’s approbation. It can trash the Geneva Conventions—because the Americans have done that in Iraq—and it can commit war crimes and murder UN soldiers like the four unarmed observers who refused to leave their post under fire.

The idea that Nasrallah is going to kneel before a Nato general and hand over his sword—that this disciplined, ruthless, frightening guerrilla army is going to surrender to Nato—is a folly beyond self-delusion.

But Blair and Bush want to send a combat force into southern Lebanon. Well, I shall be there, I suppose, to watch its swift destruction in an orgy of car and suicide bombings by the same organization that yesterday fired another new longer-than-ever range missile that landed near Afula in Israel.

The Lebanese government—democratically elected and hailed by a US administration which threw roses at its prime minister after the US state department claimed a “cedar revolution”—has just caught the Americans off guard, producing a peace package to which the Hizbollah has reluctantly agreed, starting with an immediate ceasefire. Can Washington ignore the decision of a democratic government? Of course it can. It is encouraging Israel to continue its destruction of the democratically elected Hamas government in Gaza and the West Bank.

So stand by for an “increase” in the “urgency” of diplomacy—and for more women with their skin torn open by cluster bombs.

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