

Tony Blair Enables Israeli Raids in the West Bank

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Tony Blair, seen here passing through an Israeli checkpoint, is trying to make the occupation a little more subtle. ([Najeh Hashlamoun](#) / [APA images](#))

Words can lose their meaning when [Tony Blair](#) speaks.

Collecting his “philanthropist of the year” award from *GQ* magazine, Blair recently [said](#) he could feel the “pulse of progress beating a little harder.”

Judging by the pronouncements he has made as a Middle East “peace envoy,” Blair’s definition of “progress” appears different from the standard one.

In 2010, Blair [hailed](#) a tiny easing of Israel’s [siege on Gaza](#) as a “significant change.”

The following year he [praised Hosni Mubarak](#), the Egyptian dictator who facilitated that siege, as a “force for good.”

And earlier this month, Blair [claimed](#) that [John Kerry](#) was “absolutely tireless” in his efforts to promote peace, conveniently forgetting that the US secretary of state had publicly [endorsed](#) Israel’s attack on Gaza during the summer.

Lobbying Israel?

Those attempts to pervert language are more brazen than one I found on the website run by Blair’s office in [Jerusalem](#).

A “rule of law program” involving the Blair team aims to help the [Palestinian Authority](#)(PA) “expand the scope of its legal and security footprint” in the occupied [West Bank](#). In order to achieve that goal, the team is “[lobbying](#)” Israel to “reduce military incursions” into the towns and cities where most Palestinians in the West Bank live.

Collectively known as Area A, these towns and cities are theoretically controlled by the PA from a “security” perspective.

Blair and his team are also pressing Israel to “allow for the expansion of PA legal and security infrastructure” into Area B, which is under Israeli military control. And they want Israel to let the PA use roads — “transportation networks” as they call them — reserved for the exclusive use of Jews in [Area C](#), the 60 percent of the West Bank that includes Israel’s [settlements](#).

Despite the jargon, there is something instructive about the choice of words here. By

pushing for Israel to “reduce military incursions,” Blair’s team appears to be implying that Israel has a legitimate right to undertake some military activities on Palestinian land.

I contacted Blair’s office, seeking clarification. A spokesperson replied that Blair’s team operates “under a technical mandate” stemming from the [Oslo accords](#). Part of the “mandate” covers security coordination, yet “beyond that, we do not comment on the legitimacy of certain actions,” the spokesperson added.

That refusal to comment amounts to acquiescence. Tony Blair and his team accept that Israel may attack the main Palestinian towns and cities. They would just prefer it if Israel did not do so too often.

Bias

Elsewhere in the West Bank, Blair is asking Israel to throw a few crumbs of charity to the Palestinians. If Israel allows a few Palestinian police stations to open and a few Palestinian squad cars to drive on its apartheid roads, then Blair can rest assured that the pulse of progress is beating a little faster.

Blair’s bias can also be detected in the latest [annual report](#) from his office. In his preface, Blair notes that “the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers and an extensive Israeli army operation in the West Bank” this summer.

The bureaucrats for whom Blair’s summary was intended would have to consult other sources to be reminded of what the “extensive” operation entailed. Blair made no reference to how Israel [killed](#) 45 Palestinians — among them nine children — in the West Bank between January and mid-September.

Furthermore, Blair didn’t deem it noteworthy that [Benjamin Netanyahu’s](#) government used the murder of the Israeli teenagers as a pretext for a wave of [collective punishment](#) against Palestinians. More than 2,350 Palestinians were arrested in the West Bank between June and September; hundreds of them were held without charge or trial — [administrative detention](#) in Israel’s parlance.

Blair was similarly *blasé* about the massacres Israel carried out in Gaza in July and August. His report merely referred to a “conflict” that “resulted in widespread fear, destruction and loss of life.”

Make him pay

I find it hard to believe that Blair is “lobbying” Israel in any real sense. That is because Blair has long been part of a lobby that supports Israel, rather than pressing for an end to its criminal behavior.

As a newly-elected member of Parliament in 1983, Blair [joined Labour Friends of Israel](#), a Zionist group within his political party.

He has professed his love for Israel ever since then. Last year, he [called Shimon Peres](#)— a fellow war criminal who approved an infamous [attack](#) on a UN shelter in [Lebanon](#)— one of Israel’s “great thinkers.”

Tony Blair’s office is funded by three [main donors](#). Between 2007 and 2013, the US provided

it with \$13.5 million. The [European Commission](#) was in second place with almost \$10 million; [Norway](#) third with \$3.7 million.

Blair isn't paid for his job as "peace envoy" — his formal title is "quartet representative" as he belongs to a club comprising of the US, the [European Union](#), the UN and [Russia](#). Yet he does have his meals and accommodation covered.

For much of that period, Blair [stayed](#) in the American Colony, a luxurious hotel in occupied [East Jerusalem](#).

Like many others, I find it obscene that a man who helped launch the invasion of [Iraq](#) masquerades as a peace envoy. Even if Blair isn't drawing a salary for that work, it is unacceptable that he can still dine at the taxpayer's expense.

I agree fully with the [campaign](#) to have Blair sacked as "peace envoy" — indeed, I have gone further and tried to [arrest](#) him for war crimes. Once he is sacked, he should be required to reimburse us for every cent that was spent on his food and lodging.

If that happens, then the pulse of progress will genuinely beat a little faster.

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