

Turning a Blind Eye to Israeli Atrocities: Middle East “Peace Envoy” Tony Blair Parties as Gaza Burns

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Friday 25th July was the eighteenth day of Israel’s onslaught on Gaza. 1.7 million people, walled in, embargoed, with no place to hide, squeezed now in to just 66% of the forty mile long strip of land on orders from the Tel Aviv Reich. Six Palestinians were killed, the death toll in all on the day rose above eight hundred and fifty. The hospital in Beit Hanoun was bombed, part of an ongoing attack until minutes before midnight, injuring a number of people.

Fred Ekblad, a Swedish activist who was part of an international group staying in solidarity with the hospital staff and patients, bleeding from a head wound told journalist Amira Hass: “It is now chaos, the military is shelling directly at us.” There was no way to move bed bound patients trapped two floors above to safety. (1) The previous day an UNRWA school was hit, killing fifteen.

The Fourth Geneva Convention is specific in prohibiting attacks on civilian hospitals, medical transport and of course designates collective punishment a war crime.

Moreover regarding Israel:

“... the UN Human Rights Council in its Resolution of the 23th July 2014 (noted that) the two parties to the conflict cannot be considered equal, and their actions - once again - appear to be of incomparable magnitude.

“Once again it is the unarmed civilian population, the ‘protected persons’ under International humanitarian law (IHL), who is in the eye of the storm. Gaza’s civilian population has been victimized in the name of a falsely construed right to self-defence, in the midst of an escalation of violence provoked in the face of the entire international community.”

It must also never be forgotten in the latest violence by Israel: “The so-called Operation Protective Edge erupted during an ongoing armed conflict, in the context of a prolonged belligerent occupation that commenced in 1967.” (2) Actually of course, the “armed conflict” and “belligerent occupation” has been ongoing since Israel became Palestine’s unwanted guest in 1948. 1967 was simply its first major incursion into and attack on its neighbours, the onset of a compulsive repetitive disorder for which it has never had counseling or attempted to break.

However, near forgotten is that finally pressure has been mounting on Israel internationally and international tolerance and patience running out.

On 29th November 2012 the UN recognized Palestine as a State, a Resolution overwhelmingly approved by a vote of 138-9.

On 26th November 2013 the UN General Assembly: "... proclaimed 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People ..."

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People pledged to organize with governments and relevant UN organizations the promotion of solidarity with the Palestinian people being a "central theme, contributing to international awareness."

Priorities included "urgent action" regarding settlements (ie stealing Palestinian land) "Jerusalem, the blockade of Gaza and the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory ... mobilization of global action (for) a comprehensive ... lasting solution (for) Palestine in accordance with International law and the relevant Resolutions of the United Nations."(3)

The most comprehensive list of UN Resolutions condemning Israel over illegalities towards Palestinians and Palestinian Territory is only to January 2010, but is certainly gives of increasing international anger and frustration.

It is salutary to note that the very first Resolution of September 18th 1948 condemns a murder. Resolution 57 "Expresses deep shock at the assassination of the U.N. Mediator in Palestine, Count Folke Bernadotte, by Zionist terrorists."

The second Resolution (89) on Nov. 17, 1950 "Requests that attention be given to the expulsion of 'thousands of Palestine Arabs' and calls upon concerned governments to take no further action 'involving the transfer of persons across international frontiers or armistice lines', and notes that Israel announced that it would withdraw to the armistice lines."

They started as they meant to go on, from attacks on the UN to murder and ethnic cleansing of their Palestinian hosts. The list (4) is salutary, including attacks on Syria and other national neighbours, a mirror image, past to present.

However, has the recognition of Palestine by the UN and the international year in solidarity driven Israel to doing the unthinkable, making as much of it as possible uninhabitable, and killing or forcing to flee (though to where) and making another and land grab, this time Gaza? The fact that much of it is now demolished would hardly be deterrence to a take-over, demolition to make way for squatters settlements is par for the course. Israel would also then have direct access to the huge gas deposits discovered off Gaza in Gaza's territorial waters.

Back though to the carnage of 25th July. Where, in the horror of it all was the largely Jerusalem based "Middle East Peace Envoy" Anthony Charles Lynton Blair? This time in the further destruction of another Middle East State, he didn't even have to devise another dodgy dossier, it was all taken out of his hands by Israel, who, in 2009 awarded him the \$1 million Dan David Prize for leadership, an honour given those who have contributed to "outstanding achievements" including those of "cultural or social impact on our world." (5) No, Dear Reader, I can't work it out either.

So on Friday 25th, Blair threw a lavish "birthday" party for his wife in a country mansion, one

of his seven multi-million pound UK homes, for “one hundred and fifty” of their “closest friends.” Heaven forbid the man who had a major hand in the destruction of Iraq should be stuck in a war zone, so he partied several thousand miles away. Described as being at the “heart of negotiations” between Israel and Palestine, he simply fled, ate and drank cocktails as Gaza bled and burned, the traumatized dug their relatives out of the rubble and patients in the Beit Hanoun hospital “spent a terrifying night huddled in the X-ray department as the building was shelled.” (6)

A few days before, pursued by Channel 4’s Michael Crick and asked several times if he should not be in Gaza, he “grimaced” and refused to answer. According to Crick he “cites security reasons” for near never visiting Gaza in his seven years as “Peace Envoy.” Clearly he only starts wars (Iraq) or cheers them on (Libya, Syria, Ukraine) but would never set foot in an area of risk. He has been to Gaza just twice (in 2009) but has visited Jerusalem 119 times. (7) The risk averse Blair has a constant police guard of twenty and at his tastelessly timed and tasteless party where an entertainer sang “If I ruled the world” in his honour, guests were searched by armed police who also patrolled the grounds.

In Northern Ireland he memorably said: “This is no time for sound bites, but I feel the hand of history on my shoulder.” Perhaps one of the reasons for such neurotically massive security – apart from a courage deficit – is that given the amount of people determined to make a citizens arrest which might land him at the International Criminal Court in the Hague, he fears another kind of hand on his shoulder.

The death toll in Gaza now exceeds that of “Cast Lead” the massacre over Christmas and New Year 2008-2009.

The death and destruction to midnight on 31st July are:

<p>Palestinians killed: 1372 (315 children, 166 women and 60 elderly). Palestinians wounded: 7680 (2307 children, 1529 women and 287 elderly). Buildings destroyed: 5238 Buildings damaged: 4374 Damaged Hospitals and Health Centres: 13 hospitals and 10 clinics 34 health facilities closed 12 ambulances damaged 38 health personnel injured including: Two pharmacists, four paramedics, one assistant pharmacist, one laboratory and blood bank manager. One nurse and an Administration Manager died as a result of Israeli airstrikes. The Roman Catholic Church in Gaza, hosting over 800 refugees and 29 handicapped children was threatened with bombardment although it was impossible to move the handicapped children outside the church. Once again, Israel has targeted offices providing services to Palestinian and international media. Over 245,000 people have been forcibly displaced. 1,700,000 people (the entire population of the Gaza Strip) have been affected by the destruction of electricity, water and waste-water infrastructure. (8)</p>

(With thanks to the meticulous collation of **Leslie Bravery** of the Palestinian Human Rights Campaign, Auckland, NZ.)

Both the eloquent and courageous Chris Gunness of UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency) and Al Jazeera’s correspondent Wael Al-Dahdouh in Gaza have broken down in despair, on air, as a result of the horror and carnage they have witnessed.

The last UN school to be targeted as those seeking sanctuary tried to sleep had given their co-ordinates to the Israeli authorities seventeen times. Blair has been silent.

As one correspondent commented: “Time to evict Tony Blair from the Middle East – and the world stage as a whole” adding: “they might as well have given the job to Genghis Khan. (9)

Incidentally Cherie Blair's birthday is on 23rd September, not the 25th July but any excuse for Blair to escape any minimal risk to life and limb.

Notes

1. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.607184>
2. <http://mondoweiss.net/2014/07/international-collective-punishment.html>
3. <http://palestineun.org/international-year-of-solidarity-with-the-palestinian-people-2014-3/>
4. <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2010/01/27/rogue-state-israeli-violations-of-u-n-security-council-resolutions/view-all/>
5. <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/may/18/tony-blair-israeli-award>
6. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2706941/He-Middle-East-not-UK-Peace-envoy-Tony-Blair-blasted-throwing-surprise-birthday-party-wife-Cheries-60th-6million-mansion-Gaza-death-toll-passes-1-000.html>
7. <http://blogs.channel4.com/michael-crick-on-politics/gaza-tricky-middle-east-envoy-tony-blair/4236>
8. http://palestine.org.nz/phrc/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2056&Itemid=44
9. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/time-evict-tony-blair-middle-3927078>

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