

War and Principle in Britain

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Prof Prins and his pals at the Royal United Services Institute have just warned us darkly of a loss of 'national identity' and thus of a greater susceptibility to six main threats, the greatest of these being 'terror' brought by Islamic fundamentalists. The 'terror' of the Christian fundamentalists who drive the genocidal war on Iraq do not figure in the RUSI rubbish.

Is our national identity threatened by our multi-culturalism □ a natural and welcome outcome from the blood of empire, or more by scepticism or downright cynicism in the citizen arising from the corruption of power in Westminster? There is some fragmentation of our societal cohesion because clarity and thus confidence are constantly under the guns of propaganda, especially that which spews out of the State Broadcaster. What are some of the influences which gnaw at our national resolve and esprit de corps?

The House of Lords sounds a fine place for principle. Lord Boyce, a former chief of staff, and Lord Guthrie, another ex-chief of staff, took part in a debate on 'defence' on 22nd of November. 'Blood on the deck of the MOD' was the headline. The former holds a remunerated directorship in VT Group plc. This little business sells warships to Her Majesty's Government, among other boys' toys. The register shows Guthrie to be a part of Colt Defense LLC. Assault rifles are its stock in trade and security services another string to a deadly bow. Few "defence" companies can neglect an "industry" which is third only to oil and killing in Iraq, and which is yet another facet of the supreme international war crime from which all other crimes flow. Hansard shows neither declared a pecuniary interest in this debate.

Field Marshal The Rt Hon Lord Inge is yet another ex-chief of staff who took part in this big gun debate. He is part of Aegis. It is reported that it supplies mercenaries to the occupation powers in Iraq; its turnover was over 80 million pounds in 2006. And neither did he declare an interest. Another ex-soldier, Lord Bramall, took part but he has no pecuniary interest in killing machines.

The other day, miluds Boyce, Guthrie and Inge apologised in the H of L for these failures. But this is insufficient. When parish councillor, Bob the builder, sees his tender for replacing the parish notice boards coming up the agenda, he withdraws from the room just as the high and mighty should withdraw from the chamber.

There is another question for General Lord Guthrie. He was speaking at a conference in Herzliya, Israel, January 2006 and 2007 and it was not about his interest in small arms. His subject in 2007 was "Upgrading Israel's strategic partnerships with the Atlantic community: the US, NATO and the EU". There was a good sprinkling of Israeli warriors there like

Netanyahu and Perle. Being subject to the Official Secrets Act and to military honour, we assume he would have been careful in speech and debate. After all, as an ex-chief of defence staff he must know the whole shebang. But was it wise for him to take this subject?

HMG and many other western governments have been silent in the face of the grotesque collective punishment of the Palestinian people. Of course, British collusion with the Zionist cause began early in WW1. How potent are the Friends of Israel in the main political parties here? It is difficult to measure, but they are not dining clubs. Liberal Democratic Friends of Israel was the first party to so affiliate. The website brazenly states that group's first aim is to "maximize support for the State of Israel within the Liberal Democrats and Parliament". The Conservative Party boasts that about 80 per cent of members are within this fold and the party's youthful leader, David Cameron, has declared his allegiance, saying "I am a Zionist" (Jerusalem Post, 13 June 2007). Further to the right we have the Labour Friends of Israel. The president is Dr Gwyneth Dunwoody.

Find any Commons debate on Palestine/Israel or the Middle East on the website of They Work For You or in Hansard where this potent interest is declared. It will be as rare as hens' teeth. There was a debate on 'Arms smuggling into Gaza' (irony is dead) on the 19th of February. Five out of the six members taking part are 'Friends'. Dr Kim Howells, the Minister whose responsibilities include the Middle East, is a past chairman of Labour Friends of Israel. As usual, neither he nor his four fellows declared their friendship with the gaoler and tormentor of 1.5 million people. How many citizens even know of Friends of Israel?

As noted in a recent leader of the Morning Star 15th February, the STWC 'had performed beyond all expectations' but cohesion might have been damaged by lack of clarity. A letter was signed by over 4000 people, including this author, which sought the arraignment of Blair and his cabal for war crimes. It was addressed to Kofi Annan and headed by Tony Benn, president of STWC. A meeting to make a final decision is recorded thus in Tony's new diary:-

Lindsey German and Nicholas Wood came to see me about the next stage in the campaign on the war crime question, about how we could advance the cause of the letter. There's been no coverage in the press, although Kofi Annan has replied. We went on to discuss the whole question really of whether we were demanding a war crimes tribunal. My view is that you shouldn't do that. I think it's a complete waste of effort trying to put Blair and Bush on trial : (a) it won't happen; (b) it's so negative: (c) it's all about personalities.

War crimes are war crimes - there are no ifs and no buts. If Blair and his cabal go scot free, then with the available weapon systems and media driven by governments, the abyss is certain.

We must stay wedded to law and principle.

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