

Disasters in Lebanon, Gaza, Israel and the US Mainstream Media

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You read about it in books, but now it is here. Look and observe. What a treat for a scientist! If only we could look upon it in solely academic amazement! But we cannot. To look upon it, and see what is happening, without emotion is not to be a human being.

And now, as in 1982, the refugees run. Lebanon burns. Israel invades. Palestine burns. Israel invades. The US supports. The US provides diplomatic cover. The bombing is done by US planes with Israeli pilots, by US tanks with Israeli drivers, by US guns with Israeli soldiers. The US vetoes, alone in the world with Israel - o its heroic, titanic struggle! - the lone hero of peace-rejection, of diplomacy-scuttling, of arms-provision, of military aid and propaganda flak and anti-fact goggles.

It is upon the worst crimes of our allies, and ourselves, that we expect the worst possible coverage from our media. This is possibly the most well-established fact in the social sciences. But reading the New York Times - liberal, the paper of record, the voice of reason - coverage over the last few days is incredible. Not at all unexpected. But the reminder that we do not live in a reasonable world - that we live in a distrusting, fearful, atomized, shadowy, self-censored world of propaganda and manipulation in the west and in a murderous, villainous world of death in the east - is as brutal and as despairing as ever.

Nowhere in the mainstream press have I found reported any of the following facts.

1. If you listen to the mainstream media you get the impression that this whole recent episode started when a few Hamas dickheads captured a couple of Israeli soldiers. Quite aside from the situation for Palestinians living in Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan Heights - a lifetime of oppression which for which it would take reams of details to arraign just the worst atrocities, just the most outrageous injustices and just the most vicious of the slaughter and crushing and degeneration - quite apart from this, there was also a proximate cause. Just before the Israeli soldiers were kidnapped, Israeli forces kidnapped *two Palestinian civilians*. A

doctor and his brother, civilians. Kidnapping civilians is a crime on another scale of magnitude from soldiers, explicit violation of international humanitarian law. Yet this went unreported, and we do not know the victims' names. We rarely know the victims' names, their anguish, the plight of their friends and families and so on; on the other hand, the anguish of the Israeli soldiers' capture is terrible, and it is well known. Reported a little in the US press, usually buried at the end of an article (where you can expect to find inconvenient details which still pass self-censorship), is the fact that Israel holds thousands of Palestinian prisoners indefinitely, and (less so do you hear about this) about a thousand are in administrative detention without trial - that is, kidnapping by the state. The magnitude of the respective crimes are in their usual proportions.

2. If you listen some more, you will get the impression that the current Israeli invasion of Lebanon (the mainstream media calls it an "entrance", in perfect propaganda style) was all Hezbollah's fault because they started firing hundreds of rockets into Northern Israel. Except that, the chronology is all wrong. Probably the first Hezbollah action was the capture of two more Israeli soldiers, as they had been talking about for some time, since Israel holds hundreds of Lebanese prisoners. There were some rockets fired at the time, if the New York Times is to be believed, as a diversion. This is an extraordinarily idiotic and reckless and irresponsible act by Hezbollah, of course. But the hundreds of rockets which were fired by Hezbollah came later. They came after the incredible Israeli response, an extreme response, destroying civilian infrastructure, destroying airports, destroying roads and bridges and neighbourhoods. Almost all the Lebanese casualties are civilians; there is absolutely no restraint, no check, no observance of international humanitarian law. There are now numbers of refugees in five or six digits; it is not clear how many or where. The bombing is not confined to southern Lebanon, it extends through the entire country. In some areas Israel has dropped leaflets and urged Lebanese residents to leave, then announced that all vehicular traffic will be regarded as hostile and a target.

But even the claim that Hezbollah was unprovoked is not clear. Recall that Israel occupied southern Lebanon until about 2000, following the invasion of 1982, an extraordinarily brutal invasion. Most of us are probably too young to recall the bombing of Beirut, shelling a whole civilian city, clearing it suburb by suburb; the herding up and massacres of civilians; all of it well documented, war crimes everywhere. Even up until now both sides regularly conduct raids across the border, with the usual proportions of violence; Israel regularly kidnaps Lebanese civilians on their own land. Claims of unprovoked attack in this region are rarely true: it has been going back and forth for decades, though with our allies usually doing the vast majority of the killing, of course.

3. It is occasionally also buried - you will need a keen eye to find it in the

mainstream media - that prisoner trades have happened in the past, are not unusual. The usual proportions are one or two Israelis for a few hundred Palestinians or Lebanese. What is different this time, though perhaps not unusual or unexpected, is Israel's rejection of any negotiation in practice and to take the path of extreme destruction. It is clear that they have decided on a different strategic path. It is a violent, dangerous and extreme strategy. It is a strategy of atrocities, but it is also a continuation of policies supported by a substantial proportion of the Israeli elite since Israel's inception.

4. As usual, the most of the world is united in its denunciation of the violence, and also the usual disproportion of violence. Dozens of Israelis killed and captured, which is a tragedy. Hundreds of Palestinians and Lebanese killed, also a tragedy. Thousands of refugees on both sides. And Europe, the United Nations - all of the world except those that matter, namely the US, Israel and a few proxies - have called for a ceasefire, have denounced terrorist attacks and the disproportionate response by Israel, have called for the observance of international law. But the heroic, lonely US-Israel-proxies maintain their course of rejection of what is regarded by almost the entire world as the only and obvious acceptable solution. It has, as usual, received only coded mention in the New York Times, urging Israel "among growing international criticism" to show a little restraint, while laying the blame entirely at the feet of Hezbollah.

On this note, I have not seen mentioned anywhere in the mainstream US press how it was the US who vetoed the ceasefire in Gaza in the Security Council a few days ago. Perhaps another passing, coded mention. As usual. Historically, there is a clear pattern. Votes on Palestine in the UN usually go approximately 14-1 (US veto in the Security Council) or about 180-2 (US-Israel, perhaps also a few proxies, against the whole world in the General Assembly).

5. Finally, the more direct active and passive US role is entirely ignored. It is of course fine to denounce and blame Syria (and Iran) for its involvement with Hezbollah; and there are links between them - never mind that one does not control the other, and the most likely explanation for Hezbollah's actions at this stage was as an independent act, an act of solidarity with Gazans after the most recent Israeli invasion there. But it simply cannot be mentioned the role that the US plays in all of this. The rockets fired by Hezbollah that kill a dozen Israelis might be Syrian or Iranian rockets. But the F-16s that bomb civilian infrastructure, airports, roads, highways and ports and kill hundreds of civilians are American. The tanks are American. The artillery is American. Israel is the recipient of the most stupendous amount of military aid in history. The whole country of Israel is essentially an offshore US military base. To say that the US is standing back or not doing enough is nonsense; it is writing the blank cheque with which this destruction is being wrought. Its practice through the last 40 years is to

provide this stupendous aid; and stand back and utter a few scolding words when the Israeli proxy transgresses the bounds of acceptable viciousness, reserving the majority of the blame for the Palestinians.

I will refrain from drawing comparisons with, say, Pravda. Suffice it to say that US propaganda is much more effective because it is often believed as the whole truth. It is rarely wrong on the facts, but the facts which are buried, self-censored or ignored, are telling, when we find them. This forms a general pattern, which goes back many decades and through many crimes and brutalities. If you want sources, I will be happy to provide them.

Of course, we should not assume there are any good guys in this conflict. We are not here attempting to lay out precise proportions of blame. We are not attempting to minimize the attacks of Palestinians and Hezbollah, which are also terrible crimes, though in proportion they are usually minimal. The whole region has been brutalized for decades. The methods employed by these groups have often degenerated. The obvious solution -championed by almost the entire world - has been consistently rejected by the US and Israel, virtually alone. There is no reason to see any particular political or military grouping as a saviour. As usual, the best that we can hope for is a nonviolent resistance to oppression and violence, and that the better conscience of the people of Palestine, the people of Israel, and of the world, will eventually prevail. It has not yet; it has been mercilessly crushed for the last 40 years. But still it must prevail. It is the only possible solution.