

Doesn't Want To Know

Via **Vital Perspective** (which, by the way, is doing a good job collating news about the current Israeli hostage-rescue operation in Gaza):

Bear in mind that not too long ago, **Annan wasn't even aware that there were rocket attacks** against Israel from Gaza.

In the aftermath of the Gaza incident, Prime Minister Olmert spoke by phone with U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan. Annan demanded an explanation for the Gaza deaths. When Olmert asked why Annan had not shown similar concern about the scores of missiles hitting Israel, Annan was nonplussed. "What missiles?" he asked.

Can it really be true that the Secretary General of the United Nations, the man at the pinnacle and focus of international relations, whose primary role is to promote and maintain international peace and security, was unaware of the hundreds of missiles that have been pouring into Israel from Gaza ever since the Israelis ended their occupation of the territory? Or is it just that he doesn't see anything wrong with that situation?

Wed, 06/28/2006 - 19:40 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Perhaps he doesn't think they

Perhaps he doesn't think they qualify as "missiles", not being very sophisticated? Just a thought.

by a reader on Fri, 06/30/2006 - 12:22 | [reply](#)

Re: Perhaps he doesn't think they qualify

Whether he does or not, that seems an unlikely interpretation of his reported response, because Olmert's question was obviously not about the technology of the weapons. Olmert was comparing Annan's instant, passionate and sarcastic condemnation of Israel following the alleged accidental killings by Israeli artillery, with his lack of any similar response to the *murders* committed with

Qassams, as well as the hundreds of attempted murders of which there are now about a dozen a day. The **dead** so far have included several children.

by **Editor** on Fri, 06/30/2006 - 13:02 | [reply](#)

Annan's condemnation of Israe

Annan's condemnation of Israel on this matter stems from the blatant one-sidedness of the conflict. It is well to remember that Israel's actions, however you choose to assess them, are conducted with virtual impunity. As Washington's leading client state, Israel inherits the right to do as it chooses. A dramatic illustration of this right, quite relevant to Lebanon, was offered in the USA in 1996. On April 19, there was much anguished commentary on the car bombing at Oklahoma City a year earlier, when middle America "looked like Beirut", headlines lamented.

Beirut, of course, had looked like Beirut long before; for example just 10 years before, when the worst terrorist attack of the period was perpetrated in Beirut, a car bombing timed to cause maximum civilian casualties, virtually duplicated at Oklahoma city. The facts are well known, but unmentionable. That act of terror was carried out by the CIA, a fact that suffices to remove the incident from history along with much else that suffers the same defect.

by a reader on Thu, 07/13/2006 - 14:15 | [reply](#)

'Rescue Mission'

"The dead so far have included several children"

Today it was reported in the mass media that Israel's air strikes on parts of Lebanon, which are billed as being part of a 'rescue mission', but which are in fact intended to take a toll on the civilian population so as to force Hezbollah into submission to Israel's demands, have resulted in the deaths of 35 civilians so far, including at least 10 children.

Editor: do you have children? Can you imagine them being destroyed by explosives or falling rubble? I think you should, because having done so you might think twice about taking sides in such an obscene conflict. Here on **Setting the World to Rights** it seems that one can find all sorts of justifications for acts of war, as long as they are perpetrated by those with whom you agree ideologically.

Just picture this: YOUR children lying broken and bloody in the heap of rubble that was your home. Picture yourself holding one of them to you and screaming at the sky in anguish. Then come back at me with your justifications for acts of obscene and horrific violence.

by another reader on Thu, 07/13/2006 - 14:37 | [reply](#)

Re 'Rescue Mission'

It's fairly clear what you are arguing *against* here, but not what you

are arguing for. Is it pacifism (the immorality of all warfare)? If not, could you give an example of warfare that you are in favour of?

billed as being part of a 'rescue mission', but which are in fact intended to take a toll on the civilian population

Who else knows the real intention, apart from you? For instance, are the pilots who launch the missiles aware of it?

so as to force Hezbollah into submission to Israel's demands

And these demands are what?

by **Editor** on Fri, 07/14/2006 - 09:23 | [reply](#)

Demands?

I think Israel's "demands" are well known, and fairly straightforward: recognition of its right to exist and an end to terrorist attacks. Neither Hezbollah nor Hamas are willing to accept either of these reasonable "demands." Neither are their sponsors in Iran and Syria. Anyone who thinks that there is any solution to the killing in the Middle East without recognizing Israel and ending terrorist attacks is sadly mistaken.

by **Michael Bacon** on Fri, 07/14/2006 - 18:33 | [reply](#)

'Who else knows the re

'Who else knows the real intention, apart from you?'

I certainly don't claim to 'know' the real intention. But it is no great mental stretch to infer that blowing up an airport and killing dozens of innocents was not an act that was intended to contribute to any kind of rescue mission. How could that act possibly result in the release of the kidnapped servicemen, except as a demonstration that as long as Hezbollah hold the hostages, Israel will use its superior military might to kill innocent Lebanese. If the Editor can positively demonstrate to me in what other way the tactics of the Israeli army in this 'mission' have contributed to the goal of securing release for the hostages, I will be extremely impressed.

'And these demands are what?'

The release of the hostages, of course.

I would also ask the Editor to explain why he thinks that, in the context of a 'rescue mission', such tactics as have been followed by the Israeli military are in any way excusable, given the civilian death-toll up to this point.

by a reader on Mon, 07/17/2006 - 10:29 | [reply](#)

Re: who else knows

I certainly don't claim to 'know' the real intention.

Then you now withdraw this claim?:

Israel's air strikes on parts of Lebanon, which are billed as being part of a 'rescue mission', but which are **in fact intended** to take a toll on the civilian population...

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 07/17/2006 - 10:46 | [reply](#)

Israeli tactics

If the Editor can positively demonstrate to me in what other way the tactics of the Israeli army in this 'mission' have contributed to the goal of securing release for the hostages, I will be extremely impressed.

Thank you, but it is not a feat deserving of such plaudits, for how the Israeli tactics are related to that goal is public knowledge.

The problems facing the Israeli armed forces are primarily as follows: the terrorist organisation Hezbollah, which is heavily armed, trained and financed by Iran and Syria, dominates southern Lebanon and from that base has been murdering and kidnapping Israelis. The murder, currently being committed by means of salvoes of missiles aimed at population centres, is done mainly for its own sake, and the kidnapping has the additional intention of forcing Israel to release other murderers, foremost among whom is [Samir Kuntar](#) [please read that link if you have not already done so], whom it would be a crime to release.

A severe constraint on Israel's options is that it would be immoral to obtain the release of the current hostages by means that strengthen Hezbollah both materially and in its ideology, and hence cause more hostage-taking and other crimes in the future. In order to have the best chance of rescuing the hostages while at the same time reducing the ability of Hezbollah to commit crimes, Israel is taking military action against Hezbollah. Tactically, the most urgent thing to do is to make it as difficult as possible for Hezbollah to take the following measures: (1) move freely between South Lebanon and safe havens such as Syria and other areas in Lebanon. (2) Obtain replacement supplies of heavy equipment from their sponsors. (3) Move the hostages, especially to Iran but also from place to place in Lebanon. (4) Fire their missiles. (5) Take more hostages. To achieve this, Israel has set up a *blockade* of Southern Lebanon, and to some extent of Lebanon as a whole. They have bombed the road to Syria, placed warships off the Lebanese coast, and disabled Beirut airport. Within the blockaded area, and also within the Hezbollah-controlled area of Beirut, they have also attacked missile launching sites, missile storage sites, Hezbollah headquarters, and Hezbollah leaders. They have not attacked civilians at all.

Civilian casualties have occurred almost entirely because Hezbollah, like all Israel's enemies, exploits the matchless moral scrupulousness of the Israelis by systematically using civilian human shields. Israel has warned Lebanese civilians to evacuate

certain areas temporarily, and is giving them time to leave, precisely in order to minimise casualties among them.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 07/17/2006 - 11:31 | [reply](#)

"...the matchless moral scrup

"...the matchless moral scrupulousness of the Israelis"

So the Israelis are an intrinsically morally scrupulous people? Unlike Arabs?

The current Israeli offensive in Lebanon, much like those of earlier years, has the intent of punishing the civilian population so that the government of Lebanon will be compelled to accept U.S. - Israeli demands. It is this "rational prospect, ultimately fulfilled, that affected populations would exert pressure for the cessation of hostilities" that has always motivated Israel's attacks on civilian populations, Israeli diplomat Abba Eban explained years ago.

What moral creed worth a gobbet of spit allows the killing of children as a regrettable effect of the enemy's locating himself amongst innocents?

by a reader on Mon, 07/17/2006 - 12:31 | [reply](#)

Accept U.S. - Israeli Demands?

Reader,

What are these terrible demands that Arabs in the region would be forced to accept? Recognition of Israel and an end to terrorist attacks? Aren't these prerequisites for any substantive negotiations aimed at achieving an overall settlement? Perhaps you believe that these are phony demands. If not, can't we agree that, short of Israel's surrender, the fighting won't end until these "demands" are met?

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Mon, 07/17/2006 - 13:45 | [reply](#)

Matchless moral scrupulousness

The "rational prospect, ultimately fulfilled, that affected populations would exert pressure for the cessation of hostilities" [...] has always motivated Israel's attacks on civilian populations, Israeli diplomat Abba Eban explained years ago.

That is a **lie** propagated by Chomsky.

"What moral creed [...] allows the killing of children as a regrettable effect of the enemy's locating himself amongst innocents?" The answer is, of course, all of them, depending on circumstances – with one exception: pacifism. And pacifism is immoral because it is an abdication of the responsibility to defend oneself and others.

(The circumstances include, for example, some of those where *all*

options have the killing of children as regrettable consequences.)
Moreover, the worse the evil being faced, the more immoral pacifism is.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 07/17/2006 - 15:21 | [reply](#)

Err, that's Syria, not Israel

The Golan Heights, like much of Israel, are occupied territories. Given the number of UN resolutions calling on Israel to return to it's 1967 borders, I'm sure Mr Annan, no matter how senile he appears at times, is aware of what's going on.

Given the frequent illegal incursions of Israeli soldiers onto sovereign Lebanese soil, I think that the use of the word hostage is incorrect - try Prisoner of War. Or perhaps you would prefer illegal combatant?

by El Bizarro on Tue, 07/18/2006 - 09:08 | [reply](#)

Re: Err, that's Syria, not Israel

One of the essential features of the rule of law is that one can't just make up laws on the spur of the moment and require others to obey them - or pretend that they have been enacted. And that holds even in the nebulous and ambiguous field of international law.

In reality, the UN Security Council has never passed a resolution such as you describe. References to the 1967 border have always been qualified with phrases such as 'based on' and 'secure and recognised'. Israel is a sovereign state, and Hezbollah's and Hamas's cross-border bombardment and hostage-taking across internationally recognised borders are naked aggression under any conception of international law. Israel is defending itself against that. Syria has been at war with Israel ever since it and the other Arab states rejected the UN partition of Palestine in 1948. Israel has been defending itself against that aggression, which is openly in defiance of the UN Charter - but which you seem to endorse by referring to 'much of Israel' as 'occupied territory' - and which has frequently been openly genocidal in intent. Preventing genocide, as Israel was forced to do in previous wars, is compulsory under international law. Occupying territory during a defensive war is not contrary to international law. For these and many other reasons the IDF are lawful combatants and Hezbollah and Hamas are not. You can argue otherwise, redefine self defence as itself being genocide, redefine hostages as legitimate prisoners of war, redefine any warfare by Israel as being aggression, only by means of special pleading that would suffice to define anything as anything. Hamas and Hezbollah redefine Jews as being murderous sons of pigs and apes engaged in a massive sinister conspiracy to rule the world, but that doesn't make it so.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 07/19/2006 - 11:42 | [reply](#)

Re: matchless moral scrupulousness

The Israelis constantly boast of their 'surgical' or 'pin-point' precision in air attacks. If this is true, then there are far too many civilians being killed in the Lebanese bloodbath to make every one of them an accident.

True, Hizbollah are killing civilians in Israel, but their missiles are inaccurate and the West, which has done no more than mildly disapprove of Israel's retaliatory onslaught, must surely expect higher standards of the Israeli armed forces than of the terrorists.

Why, for example, did the Israelis attack and destroy the headquarters of the Liban-Lait company in the Bekaa Valley, the largest milk factory in Lebanon? Why did they bomb out the factory of the main importer for Proctor and Gamble products in Lebanon, based in Bchmoun? Why did they destroy a paper box factory outside Beirut? And why did Israeli planes attack a convoy of new ambulances being brought into Lebanon from Syria yesterday, ambulances which were clearly marked as a relief aid convoy? Were all these 'terrorist' targets? What of the convoy of villagers from Marwaheen in Southern Lebanon, ordered to flee their village by Israeli troops, and subsequently attacked by an Israeli F-16 fighter-bomber, killing at least 20 people, many of them women and children, one of whom, a girl of about eight, was photographed lying dead in a pile of rubble (a picture which has been published in British newspapers today)? Were all these 'terrorist targets'?

How can you continue to defend these war crimes?

by a reader on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 12:30 | [reply](#)

How can we defend war crimes?

We can't and we aren't.

You ask many questions. Please state the answer that you believe to be true, to just one of them.

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 17:20 | [reply](#)

Nasty Bastards

You seem to be implying with your question that Israelis are nasty bastards who want to hurt people.

If that is so, can you explain why they haven't done a hell of a lot more? Nothing is stopping them militarily. And you have said they already do bad things and the West hardly complains.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/blog/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 19:52 | [reply](#)

Questions answered, and nasty bastards

Editor - a rather cowardly way to avoid answering difficult

questions.

Oh well, here's what I think:

"Why, for example, did the Israelis attack and destroy the headquarters of the Liban-Lait company in the Bekaa Valley, the largest milk factory in Lebanon?"

Because they are targeting Lebanon in the most inexcusably indiscriminate way. Why? Because that's exactly what Hizbollah are doing, and Israel is punishing the people of Lebanon for that crime.

"Why did they bomb out the factory of the main importer for Proctor and Gamble products in Lebanon, based in Bchmoun?"

See above.

"Why did they destroy a paper box factory outside Beirut?"

See above.

"And why did Israeli planes attack a convoy of new ambulances being brought into Lebanon from Syria yesterday, ambulances which were clearly marked as a relief aid convoy?"

See above.

"Were all these 'terrorist' targets?"

No.

"What of the convoy of villagers from Marwaheen in Southern Lebanon, ordered to flee their village by Israeli troops, and subsequently attacked by an Israeli F-16 fighter-bomber, killing at least 20 people, many of them women and children, one of whom, a girl of about eight, was photographed lying dead in a pile of rubble (a picture which has been published in British newspapers today)? Were all these 'terrorist targets'?"

No, they were not terrorist targets, and their being targeted demonstrates a deplorably lack of conscience and care on the part of the Israeli military.

Now give me your answers.

As to the 'nasty bastards' comment: why is it that when one criticises Israel's actions in any way one is instantly accused of hating the Israelis, and of tarring all Israelis with the same crude brush? I am doing no such thing. Just because Israel is Israel does not exempt it from criticism when its military causes the indiscriminate killing of hundreds of innocent people.

If you do not answer my questions and comments fully, I will assume that you have no answers.

by a reader on Fri, 07/21/2006 - 08:48 | [reply](#)

Answers

Oh well, here's what I think:

Thank you.

"Why, for example, did the Israelis attack and destroy the headquarters of the Liban-Lait company in the Bekaa Valley, the largest milk factory in Lebanon?"

Because they are targeting Lebanon in the most inexcusably indiscriminate way. Why? Because that's exactly what Hizbollah are doing, and Israel is punishing the people of Lebanon for that crime.

That does not actually answer your own question, because it does not say what the purpose of the punishment is. To relieve the Israelis' feelings through revenge? (Inflicted on a third party?) To coerce the Lebanese government, through sympathy with its people's suffering, to cease to harbour Hezbollah? To coerce Hezbollah, through its sympathy with other Lebanese, to cease trying to kill Israelis? All of these things? Or what? But anyway, we shall respond to your answer as far as it went.

You copied your list of questions verbatim from yesterday's article by Robert Fisk in The Independent. Incidentally, it may be helpful to you to know that Robert Fisk, by his disregard for facts, his tendentious reinterpretations of history, his relentless agenda of demonising the actions of the US, Israel, and the West generally, and his anti-Western racism, has become a byword for systematic factual unreliability caused by pathological ideological bias. So he is not someone whose utterances are worth laboriously typing into a computer, and certainly not citing as a factual reference when trying to persuade someone who does not share his agenda. However, it so happens that that is not directly relevant to our discussion here, because it is undoubtedly true that factories have been hit by Israeli air strikes during the current war. So let us assume, for the sake of argument, that one of them was the Liban-Lait company in the Bekaa Valley, and that it was targeted rather than hit accidentally.

The obvious way in which this could come about would be if Hezbollah fighters, or leaders, were using the factory as a base, or for storing or launching their missiles. That is not an implausible thing for them to be doing, since it is their systematic policy. Only yesterday, Israeli forces discovered a Hezbollah arsenal **in a mosque**, so it is inconceivable that Hezbollah would hesitate to use a milk factory in the same way.

One therefore has to ask oneself this: *if* the motives for the current Israeli air raids were exactly as the Israeli government is publicly claiming, would one expect any factories to be hit? The answer is clearly yes. And so one should consider further: would one then expect Fisk to interpret those raids as evidence of immoral intentions on the part of the Israelis? Again, clearly, yes. Would they in fact *be* evidence of that? Clearly not in themselves, because they are, on the face of it, also consistent with other intentions, including those that the Israelis claim to have.

However, to make a fair judgement, one must consider whether

your alternative explanation is plausible too, namely that this was part of an inexcusably indiscriminate, collective punishment of the Lebanese people, "exactly what Hizbollah are doing" [to the Israeli people].

One problem with that explanation is that, as Elliot said, the Israelis would be going about this punishment in a very illogical and self-defeating way. They keep insisting that that is not what it is. And they are taking extraordinary measures to, for example, allow the flow of humanitarian aid, and to reveal in advance where they are going to strike so that civilians can leave the area. Moreover, they are limiting themselves to using only a tiny proportion of their military power. Whatever you may think of the morality of their choice of targets, they are manifestly *not*, as Hezbollah is, choosing them according to population density. Now, you may think that all such apparently perverse measures are camouflage, intended to disguise what you know to be the true intentions of the Israelis. If so, then you are at least claiming that those intentions are being systematically disguised. In other words, the alleged Israeli intentions we are discussing, and the military planning and actions which you say they are causing, are part of a conspiracy.

There is also the fact that this alleged punishment mission is costing the lives of Israeli soldiers. The Israelis claim to care deeply about the loss of individual lives, and to be deeply averse to risking them other than in self-defence. They must be lying about that too, if the real intention of these actions is revenge. Perhaps you are not saying that it is; there are forms of punishment that are not vengeful - though rarely against third parties. That is why we hoped you would be explicit as to what motive you are actually alleging.

But in any case, there would have to be a conspiracy, and all this leads us to consider its nature, and how plausible it could be that it exists. We refer you to our [series](#) on the subject. but in brief, if the real intention of the current Israeli actions (such as the bombing of any particular building) differs as you say from the reasons that they publicly defend, then they are faced with what seems to us an impossible problem of dupe-management. In this regard, bear in mind that the Israeli Air Force in particular contains officers with a vast range of political opinions. Regularly, some of them resign, or refuse to participate in certain actions, because they disagree with them politically. It is therefore beyond the bounds of credibility that, in the briefing for a mission to bomb a milk factory, the pilots would be given a justification such as "*this* will pay back those Lebanese for Hezbollah's murders of our children", and for the conspirators in the government to expect those pilots to go out and attack, including risking their own lives, in pursuit of such an intention.

The pilots are not raw conscripts. They are world-class professionals, highly skilled and knowledgeable about the enemy and the military situation. Is it plausible that they could be fobbed off again and again with a rationale for their missions that was such a gigantic lie? Would they not be constantly encountering situations where the *purported* national aims would be best served by one mission, yet they were being ordered to fly a completely different

mission inconsistent with those aims?

And therefore finally, we are led to consider whether, if what was really happening was that *all* of the missions really are in conformity with Israel's purported aims, Robert Fisk would be saying so. And whether you would be.

by **Editor** on Fri, 07/21/2006 - 14:35 | **reply**

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