

JULY 20, 2010

## "PEACE ENVOY" BLAIR GETS AN EASY RIDE IN THE INDEPENDENT

Last month, the Independent carried an interview with Tony Blair, the former British prime minister and now "the international community's Middle East envoy." (Donald Macintyre, 'Tony Blair: Former PM urges Israel to ease Gaza blockade', Independent, June 4, 2010; <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/tony-blair-former-pm-urges-israel-to-ease-gaza-blockade-1991105.html>)

Taken literally, the "international community" refers to the UN General Assembly, or perhaps to a majority of its members. But in media Newspeak, the term stands for the United States joined by its allies and clients. As Noam Chomsky has noted: "Accordingly, it is a logical impossibility for the United States to defy the international community." (Chomsky, 'The Crimes of "Intcom"', Foreign Policy, September 2002; <http://www.chomsky.info/articles/200209--.htm>)

As for the "peace process" being facilitated by the "peace envoy", Gideon Levy, a columnist in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, comments:

"The masked ball is at its peak: Preening each other, Obama and Netanyahu have proved that even their heavy layer of makeup can no longer hide the wrinkles. The worn-out, wizened old face of the longest 'peace process' in history has been awarded another surprising and incomprehensible extension. It's on its way nowhere." (Levy, 'An excellent meeting', Haaretz, July 8, 2010; <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/an-excellent-meeting-1.300686>)

This, Independent readers were told portentously, was Blair's first newspaper interview since the Israeli navy "halted" the Gaza peace flotilla. Questions were posed by Donald Macintyre, the paper's Jerusalem correspondent since 2004 and, previously, its chief political commentator for eight years. (Macintyre, op.cit.)

Macintyre began by channelling Blair's call for "an easing of the 'counterproductive' blockade of Gaza" and a new "strategy" which "isolates the extremists and helps the people and not one that operates the other way round."

Blair, the reporter told us, "stressed more than once that the world needed to understand Israel's deep-seated security concerns and the fact that [Israeli soldier] Gilad Shalit, who has been held for almost four years by Gaza militants, was a 'huge issue' for the Israeli public. Mr Blair again called for Sgt Shalit's release."

Blair's sympathy for Israel's security concerns was clear, and dutifully reflected in Macintyre's piece:

"Mr Blair said the captivity of Sgt Shalit and the fact that ' Hamas as an entity is hostile' would be a 'very difficult situation for any country'."

Macintyre relayed Blair's assertion "that not enough international attention was paid to the fact that 'the events that we see across TV screens are perceived completely differently in Israel, and people have got to understand that the pressure on [Israeli prime minister Benjamin] Netanyahu in respect of Gaza from many quarters is to be tougher'."

The "once-flourishing Gaza businessmen" Blair had met at an international Bethlehem conference on the Palestinian economy were, said Blair, "victims of the Hamas takeover, not supporters of it".

The whole tone of the Independent interview was uncritical and respectful; a bland and meek summation of the sincere and well-intentioned thoughts of a man with the blood of untold numbers of victims on his hands: men, women and children in Iraq, Afghanistan, the former Yugoslavia and, indeed, in Palestine itself.

### "Deep-Seated Security Concerns"

The interview had been a wonderful opportunity for some tough questioning by an experienced journalist. But it was missed. Instead, Blair was allowed to parade his supposed credentials for peace in the Middle East. Macintyre uncritically relayed Blair's assertion that "the world needed to understand Israel's deep-seated security concerns."

It is true that Israeli politicians often speak of an "existential threat." But, as Chomsky observes, "the most immediate and severe 'existential threat' is [Israel's] unwillingness to pursue diplomatic options that are open, and its adoption of the [apartheid era] South African doctrine that the reigning superpower [the United States] can enable it [to] withstand the world." (Noam Chomsky interviewed by Netta Ahituv, Ha-ir ("City") Magazine (Tel Aviv edition), June 25, 2010; <http://www.israeli-occupation.org/2010-06-27/noam-chomsky-city-magazine-tel-aviv-interview/>)

For years, Israeli politicians have claimed - falsely, and with media complicity - that "there is no partner for peace." In fact, Israel has for decades rejected a near-unanimous international consensus for a two-state settlement, including all the security guarantees of UN Resolution 242. In rejecting almost the entire world as a "partner for peace", with the United States virtually the sole exception, Israel has consistently demonstrated a "preference for expansion over security and diplomacy" which "has had dire consequences". (Noam Chomsky, ' "Exterminate all the brutes": Gaza 2009', 20 January, 2010; <http://www.zcommunications.org/exterminate-all-the-brutes-gaza-2009-by-noam-chomsky>).

Moreover, as we noted in an earlier media alert, in its attacks on Gaza and Lebanon, and threats made against Iran, Israel has repeatedly set out to kill, maim and destroy in order to promote terror and to crush any attempt to resist Israeli expansion and strategic aims in the region. (Media Lens, 'The BBC, Impartiality and the Hidden Logic of Massacre', 4 February, 2010; [http://www.medialens.org/alerts/09/090204\\_the\\_bbc\\_impartiality.php](http://www.medialens.org/alerts/09/090204_the_bbc_impartiality.php))

None of this realpolitik made its way into the Independent's interview with Blair.

In short, the piece gave no hint that the West and, in particular, the United States, has been full tilt behind the Israelis in crushing the lives and aspirations of the Palestinians. Macintyre blithely repeated Blair's call for an international solution that "isolates the extremists and helps the people and not one that operates the other way round." But who are the real, large-scale extremists here? That it might be the Israeli government, and their "militant" supporters in Washington, London and other Western capitals, is deemed unthinkable.

An "Extremely Busy" Journalist Warns Of "Misleading Assumptions"

We wrote to Macintyre on June 4:

"It is not clear to what extent you performed the journalist's role of holding power to account; if at all. For example, you note:

"Gilad Shalit, who has been held for almost four years by Gaza militants, was a "huge issue" for the Israeli public. Mr Blair again called for Sgt Shalit's release.'

"The day before the capture of Shalit on the front lines of the Israeli forces attacking Gaza, Israeli soldiers entered Gaza City and kidnapped two civilians, the Muamar brothers, taking them to Israel (in violation of the Geneva Conventions), where they disappeared into Israel's prison population. Are you aware of these facts? Did you put them to Mr Blair? The kidnapping of two civilians is a far more serious crime than the capture of Shalit. But the media, including you and your paper, have given it far less attention. Why is that?

"And what about the [thousands of] Palestinians held without charge in Israeli prisons, often for long periods? Why no mention of them in your interview with a major politician who shares some responsibility for this?

"All of this is 'a "huge issue" for the Palestinian public'; indeed, for most of the world.

"You also ignored the consistent and massive military, financial and diplomatic support given to Israel during its increasing strangulation of Gaza - the US, the UK and its allies are deeply complicit in this terrible crime. But it elicits no comment from you here.

"Why is that?"

Five days later, having received no reply, we gently nudged Macintyre for a response. Surely he was not incapable of responding to the points put to him, we asked. This seemed to provoke him. Within a couple of hours we received the following message:

"Actually, your email is so full of misleading assumptions about journalism in general and mine in particular, that it is

quite hard to know where to start. But since in common with Media Lens policy I assume you intend to publish my response and since I am extremely busy you will have to wait. Because you are right; I am not incapable of replying to your points, though no doubt not to your satisfaction." (Email, June 9, 2010)

We wrote back thanking Macintyre and saying that we looked forward to his promised response. Almost three weeks later, we were still waiting so we wrote again:

"I'm sure you're extremely busy but I would greatly appreciate a reply to the points that were originally put to you on 4 June, please. I'd also be interested to read your argument about that email being 'full of misleading assumptions'. It could be a useful public discussion for readers of Media Lens as well as the Independent's audience." (Email, June 28, 2010)

There has been silence since. More than six weeks after our initial challenge to the Independent's Donald Macintyre, we are still waiting for a response. Perhaps he really does have too much on his plate to reply. Or it may be that he would rather not have his own reporting, and his views about journalism, subjected to public scrutiny. Only he knows. But certainly the public deserves better; not least because biased, power-friendly journalism provides a cover for violent and oppressive Western policies in the Middle East.

#### SUGGESTED ACTION

The goal of Media Lens is to promote rationality, compassion and respect for others. If you do write to journalists, we strongly urge you to maintain a polite, non-aggressive and non-abusive tone.

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Email: [d.macintyre@independent.co.uk](mailto:d.macintyre@independent.co.uk)

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The second Media Lens book, 'NEWSPEAK in the 21st Century' by David Edwards and David Cromwell, was published in 2009 by Pluto Press. John Pilger writes of the book:

"Not since Orwell and Chomsky has perceived reality been so skilfully revealed in the cause of truth."

<http://www.medialens.org/bookshop/newspeak.php>

Our earlier book, 'Guardians of Power: The Myth Of The Liberal Media' (Pluto Books, London), was published in 2006:

[http://www.medialens.org/bookshop/guardians\\_of\\_power.php](http://www.medialens.org/bookshop/guardians_of_power.php)