

Rogue Statism

Ragged Statelessness

anon.

2006

“The man without a country is a free man. ‘Country’ is a tenfold chain forged around our necks and feet by our forefathers, a prison and a pit.”

–Herman Bang, *Denied a Homeland* (1906)

There is a traditional Arabic curse that translates into something like, “May their homes be demolished.” But, as a friend in Beirut said recently, one look at what happened in Israel’s war of destruction against Lebanon this summer is enough to make any decent human refrain from wishing that upon their worst enemy.

Thanks to Israeli war crimes, ones documented by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, thousands of Lebanese lost everything in a nation reduced to rubble. The total number of civilians killed will probably never be known, and the stench of the putrefying dead lingered in the smoky rubble for weeks as the refugees returned to their crushed villages.

Lebanon has been criticized for years for not protecting its sovereignty from Hezbollah, a heavily-armed social and military movement that emerged during the resistance to Israel’s previous 18-year military occupation of the country. Aided and armed by Syria and Iran, Hezbollah (whose name translates to “Party of God”) is the reigning power in southern Lebanon. Its fate was sealed—not only because of a small incursion into contested territory claimed by Israel—but because of its refusal to be integrated into the formal Lebanese state and its intractable opposition to Israeli occupation of Arab land.

The Lebanese state needs centralized authority, so-called reasonable commentators insist, in order to neutralize “subnational” or “transnational” threats like Hezbollah. In the Western political model, the state is the only acceptable form of organization—you must have a centralized, hierarchical government with an identifiable executive, an army, a flag, national anthem, and so on to be considered legitimate.

Often referred to as a state within a state, Hezbollah ultimately covets the authority of the centralized government where it already has delegates to the national assembly and one cabinet minister. Israel’s disastrous invasion has probably only accelerated what it fears the most: the ascendancy of a militant Shiite movement to state power on its border.

At least twenty varied ethnic and religious communities within Lebanon identify themselves primarily through affiliations with religious sects although most now project a national identity, as well. The country is another artificial post-colonial construction much like Iraq—except with more groups, within territorial borders created from the former Ottoman Empire by French colonial administrators following the First World War.

The fifteen-year-long civil war that began in 1975 and shredded Lebanon made it one of the best examples of the worst that can happen when an artificial paradigm of the state is forced onto people. By failing to loyally align themselves primarily and exclusively with the fiction of Lebanon, the rival sects undermined the holy integrity of the state by each trying to bring it under its own dominance. After all sides virtually exhausted themselves and

destroyed the country in the process, a period of successful reconstruction followed. In just over a month of warfare, Israel sent it back to the type of devastation the country experienced during the 15-year civil war.

When the imperial president George W. Bush crowed in late July that mounds of slaughtered Lebanese children could be “turned into a moment of opportunity”—an outlook typical of authoritarians and their apologists who lustily revel in the state’s jealous monopoly on violence—most of the world’s people reacted in horror to the images inconveniently broadcast on television.

But, so long as states are viewed as natural, normal, and inevitable, they will continue to violently abstract individuals into extinction. From Jenin and Gaza to Falluja and Haditha to Beirut and Qana, the Anglo-US-Israeli axis of atrocity keeps turning to keep this monopoly exclusive.

One widely held speculation is that Israel’s invasion of southern Lebanon was a combination of proxy war and pre-emptive assault for the US. In theory, the strategy was to have the Israel Defense Force (IDF) do the dirty work: disarm, dismantle, and defang Hezbollah. Some assert that this war was a rehearsal for a US strike against Iran.

If true, this plan would explain, in part, why US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice pressured Israel to ignore the global outcry for a cease-fire, instead, cheering on the slaughter, insisting that the industrialized destruction and displacement of a million people was part of the “birth pangs of a new Middle East” that the Bush-Cheney regime has been trying to midwife and broker.

When two Israeli soldiers were taken prisoner by the Hezbollah militia on July 12 and held for a POW swap, Israel had the provocation necessary to invade Lebanon. However, thanks to a rare level of short-sightedness, arrogance, incompetence, and unexpected resistance from their enemy (reminiscent of Bush’s war in Iraq), the vaunted IDF failed to destroy the lesser armed but highly disciplined guerrilla force.

Not only has Hezbollah survived, it has increased its political power in Lebanon, and is hailed throughout the Arab world as having defeated the hated Israel. Despite its undeniable complicity in this utterly stupid war (both sides overplayed their hands), the solidarity and charity work done by Hezbollah to restore civilian life following the cease fire, increased its base of support. Katrina victims in the US can only dream of a similar response by the Bush regime to tend to their still unmet needs.

Stripped of its miserabilist militant ideology and grotesque religion—and judged by only its actions—one can see Hezbollah’s appeal both indigenously and to anti-Israel leftists internationally. When the organization’s rebuilding and relief efforts have gained media attention, the stories are told in a poetic and heroic language reminding one of everything from the Zapatistas to the Black Panthers to the Common Ground collective in post-Katrina New Orleans.

In some circles, disgust with Israel has translated into support for Hezbollah. Given the terrors that Israel unleashed this summer, people already sympathetic to resistance might easily be swayed by the testimonials to the group’s charitable work. Revolutionary nationalists have long preyed on people’s emotions and notions of regional and ethnic unity and self-defense. (This kind of rhetoric is also at work in Israel, where people from the right and left rallied to support war against Hezbollah.)

But the fact that this Party of God has triumphed is nothing to cheer about, even though its survival may have blocked the US neocon plan to bomb Iran for the time being. In fact, the notion that some can even make such an argument is troubling—it’s a symptom of just how bad things have become when you can even begrudgingly acknowledge that some good can be found with the existence of a joyless millenarian Islamic paramilitary organization.

Even though this binary barbarism is catastrophically void of any justification on either side, somehow, just saying “damn them all” doesn’t suffice. What hope do we have that the bloodbaths will not continue? Isn’t the notion of a “new” Middle East promoted by Western powers—like the realities of the “old” Middle East—just a pretext for crusades, jihads, and occupations without end? Has war ever been anything but a struggle of right-wing terror against right-wing terror that achieves only the evisceration of the human spirit?

The wretched montage of racial and religious hatred pervading this bloody mess marks the worst that humanity can muster. Stirring the passions against Hezbollah, critics quote the leader Hassan Nasrallah, detailing his hatred: “If we searched the entire world for a person more cowardly, despicable, weak and feeble in psyche, mind, ideology and religion, we would not find anyone like the Jew. Notice, I do not say the Israeli.”

Such language repels us, as does the language used by the totalitarian nationalist Zionists that control Israel's government and social policy. We can't forget that the Likudnik "territorial maximalism" of today's Zionist Revisionists like Ehud Olmert has its identifiable historical roots in the militarist, statist, and corporatist "Greater Israel" ideology of Uri Zvi Greenberg, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, and Abba Achimeir, all three of whom were unabashed fans of Mussolini, who lamented as late as the mid-1950s that Nazi anti-Semitism had ruined fascism's future in Israeli politics.

But even as we unconditionally reject the rigid dogma of all religious zealots, there is sometimes a glimmer of liberatory cultural and spiritual expression that might be worth salvaging, lying latent in the desert death-cults of the "Big 3" monotheisms:

There are small numbers of activists in the peace and social justice movement who use their religious stories to liberate humanity rather than maintain all of official authoritarian, hierarchical, patriarchal, sky-dog dogmas that are their main definition.

In the current situation, one possibility might be the golem analogy in relation to Israel—because it condemns that state in specifically Jewish terms. The golem is the original Frankenstein story of an inanimate man-made monster fashioned of mud and clay, a creature of great strength—a sort of shambling, semi-conscious zombie without a soul. At the end of the story, it goes berserk, wreaking havoc everywhere in its path. The story is set in the Prague ghetto in the late 1500s.

In order to protect the Jewish people from attack, Rabbi Judah Loew creates a golem out of clay using the occult alchemical practices of kaballah. The threat of attack is real, but the golem, after dutifully defending the ghetto, goes out of control, causing disaster, killing indiscriminately, and so it must be deactivated by its creator by removing the aleph—representing the sacred name for God—from its forehead which is where the Rabbi had placed it to initially bring the golem to life.

Just prior to the First World War, Gustav Meyrink—a colorful Austrian writer who once challenged the entire officer corps of the Hapsburg Empire to a sword duel and spent three months in a government prison for using black magic to further his banking business—remixed this folktale into his horror novel, *The Golem*, a disturbing tale of a young man of ambiguous background who struggles to make sense of what is real and what he is imagining.

"Who can claim to know anything about the golem?" one of the characters in Meyrink's novel muses. "Everyone says it's a myth until one day there's something that happens in the streets which is not especially exciting in itself and yet which creates a sense of horror for which there is no justification nor any satisfactory explanation."

There is little to be hopeful about for the future. Madness is afoot in the world. Capitalism and the state have been devastatingly successful in the centuries old goal to make themselves the only institutions on the planet, and it is very possible that what we see today may be known in the future as "the good old days."

On our part, we will have none of radicals still laboring under the delusion that various armed Islamic sects are forces which can be uncritically supported. This has occurred recently with the neo-leninist version of "anti-imperialism," a stance sadly promulgated by some anarchists who should know better. When two right wings clash, whichever side is victorious, totalitarian statism arises triumphant.

Historically, anarchists and others on the non-totalitarian left have bravely refused to be stampeded into supporting either side in statist conflicts. Correspondingly, what is required of us today, if we seek to both retain our integrity and have a real world positive impact, is to seek out practical solutions and support already existing radical movements in the Middle East which embody our values.

To do otherwise is to condone more of the same.

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