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Condi's creative chaos

A hundred beats

By Fatima Bhutto

On summer trips to Lebanon, we pass by Naher al Bared all the time. The Palestinian refugee camp turned mini-city lies halfway between Tripoli and Akkar, my Jiddo's ancestral village, and on our way to spend a few days in the sleepy hamlet of Akkar we would break at Naher al Bared and load up on supplies. The camp, 'Cold River' in English, was wholly unremarkable until May 20th.

On the surface it seems quite simple. A bank robbery gone awry leads the Lebanese army into a gunfight with the supposed perpetrators, members of the shadowy Fatah al Islam. The gunfight escalates into the worst internal fighting Lebanon has witnessed since the end of its civil war 17 years ago as the refugee camp of Naher al Bared, home to 3,000 civilians, becomes ground zero for a protracted fire fight between the Lebanese army and a novice militant group.

Due to a longstanding convention that the Lebanese army cannot enter any of Lebanon's 12 Palestinian refugee camps, the two armed sides are exchanging machine gun and shell fire over a civilian population that is being held hostage by the recent outbreak of violence. Humanitarian aid has been blocked from entering the camp and according to the International Committee of the Red Cross the refugees of Naher al Bared now face the threat of unexploded munitions, obstructing both outward mobility and the inflow of aid supplies.

Two Lebanese Red Cross workers have been killed as they struggled to evacuate civilians, two off-duty Lebanese soldiers have been beheaded -- if that doesn't reek of Al Qaeda I don't know what does. It's their signature calling card -- and the danger of war is fast spreading across the country. Beirut has been rocked by four explosions, one in a relatively calm Christian area, and the Ain el Hilweh ('a sweet water stream') refugee camp in Southern Sidon has been hit by an eruption of bloodshed similar to Naher al Bared's.

There is no shortage of people that the Lebanese government is willing to point fingers at for backing Fatah al Islam - the Syrians, the Palestinians, Hamas, and so on and so forth. But it's never that simple. Not these days. In an investigative report published in the New Yorker in March, Seymour Hersh claimed that as per an agreement between Dick Cheney, Elliot Abrahams the Deputy National Security Advisor, and the simian Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, the Saudi National Security Advisor, it was decided that the Saudi government would provide covert funding to the Sunni Fatah al Islam as a means of defeating the Shiite Hizbollah party.

The Lebanese government, according to Hersh, supported the plan. Dr Franklin Lamb, professor at the American University of Beirut and a researcher on the politics of Hizbollah, furthered Hersh's allegations by adding that the American Assistant Secretary of State David Welch negotiated the deal to funnel arms and aid to the Sunni terror group through the Saudis and Saad Hariri, the son of assassinated premier Rafic Hariri who seems bent on wreaking havoc under his father's name. Hizbollah released a statement this past week saying "We feel that there is someone out there who wants to drag the Lebanese army into this confrontation and bloody struggle to serve well-known projects and aims." There you have it -- sponsored terror, courtesy of the United States and their friends at Al Qaeda: the most efficient means of destabilising developing countries.

It cannot be a coincidence that all the ongoing conflicts in the world are now internal. This is nothing if not the "creative chaos" of Ms Condoleeza Rice; this is the birthing pangs of her "new" Middle East and rest assured, the Middle East that Ms Rice and her cohorts feebly imagine is one most certainly conceived out of terror. The violence that plagues the Middle East today is one of factionalism and convenient internal strife. In Palestine the violence of Israel's continued occupation is being undermined by infighting among Hamas and Fatah. In Iraq the brutality of America's illegal occupation is undercut by quarrelling among Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds.

The formula applies not only to Lebanon, but to us too. This past month has proven that the way to really shake the foundations of Pakistan is by sowing the seeds of provincial and ethnic hate -- Sindhi versus Mohajir versus Pathan.

The violence of May 12 is evidence of just how simple it is to capture the prize, how easy it is to destroy and confuse. The potential of explosive antagonism is only furthered by the continually asinine and distracting actions of various establishment actors. Lodging UK court cases may be lauded for bravado, but surely not for sense or deep intelligence.

But it is not as dark as it seems. We are shortsighted, that is the problem. Muhammad Hassanein Haikal, the great Egyptian journalist and Al Jazeera commentator, calls this the fight between the defeated and the exhausted. America is being defeated at home, with every soldier that comes home in a body bag America is one step closer to losing the game. But unfortunately our leaders cannot see that from here so they continue to act as the lap dogs of America in her fight against "terrorism", a fight which she has already lost in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Make no mistake, this last surge of soldiers sent to Iraq is simply a last ditch effort. It's over. Condi's euphemistic and heartless "creative chaos" is at the end of its rope. This is how the Soviet Union crumbled. This is how we fell with them as we sent our men to fight in the jihad against the Russians, which was at best a bleeding giant in Afghanistan.

As Marx said, when history happens the first time it tends to be dramatic. The second time it's impressive. By the third repetition it becomes a mockery. It's no longer history repeating itself, but the people stupidly repeating their own mistakes.