

The News
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That is not the America I know and love

By Fatima Bhutto

BEIRUT: Today I received a message from a Lebanese-American acquaintance of mine in the States. While we're interested in what's happening over there in the Middle East, could you please not email your articles to us anymore? Sorry to offend, but it's just that they're political. If the government sees them in our inboxes, well... who knows what might happen. We have families, you know.

Though all men are created equal, some are more equal than others. After the passing of the Patriot Act, after the military tribunals set up to try and condemn 'terrorists', after SEVIS — the computer programme that tracks all international students as well as their class schedules and their attendance, and after Guantanamo Bay the American government has finally succeeded in their aims. Their citizens are now self-censoring. They are now mindful of the thought police. Through their fear of everything outside their borders they have become thoroughly de-politicised. This is how fascism works after all; you have to participate in it. And how timely it is that there are those who are no longer asking any questions.

Yesterday House Resolution 921 was introduced into the American Congress. Permit me to give you a sampling: Whereas Israel has "demonstrated its willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of peace" and has suffered "completely unprovoked attacks" while maintaining "great restraint", the House of Representatives "reaffirms its steadfast support for the state of Israel" and "recognises Israel's longstanding commitment to minimising civilian loss and welcomes Israel's continued efforts to prevent civilian casualties" and thus declares its "continued commitment to working with Israel and other United States allies in combating terrorism worldwide".

This was a long time coming. I'm surprised it took the political dynamos in Washington eight days after Israel's gargantuan attacks on Lebanon to put such a resolution together. Yesterday, a generic White House spokesman drew links between Israel's annihilation of Lebanon with America's 'war on terror'. The spokesman said they shared "dimensions" of the same struggle. However, those who intoned that Israel's bombing of southern Lebanon has "dimensions" of a Nazi blitzkrieg were dismissed as anti-Semites. Odd, considering we're all Semites here. America, before passing this monstrous resolution, reaffirmed Israel's right to 'self-defence' and through a US-Israeli joint consensus called for another week of hitting Hizbollah targets.

Let's recap the damage done by this strategy: 70 killed in Lebanon today, all civilians, except for one Hizbollah fighter. Twenty civilians killed in Srifa, near Tyre, with another 30 wounded and 15 houses demolished. Three migrant Indian workers killed in a glass factory in the East Bekaa Valley. Four civilians killed in a woodworking shop in Loussi village, also in the Bekaa, and another three wounded. Two trucks carrying relief goods in the Christian suburb of Achrafieh today were destroyed by an Israeli helicopter strike, prompting the acting Interior Minister Ahmad Fatfat to warn civilians to stay away from all trucks, even those carrying Red Cross

medics, as they were being specifically targeted. Twenty residential buildings were also blown to smithereens around Lebanon. That is the total of so-called Hizbollah targets attacked by Israel today.

The Speaker of the Assembly, Nabih Berri, responded to the day's death toll by holding America responsible. "Like usual, the United Nations kneels down before Israel," he said, reminding people of the American veto power in the Security Council and of America's tremendous financial support of the Jewish state. With every day that passes in Lebanon, Israel is proving itself as an exception. It is under no obligation to follow international resolutions or standards, rather it is given a free reign. Those 30 Israelis killed by Hizbollah rockets are victims of terrorism. The 330 Lebanese who have died are victims of self-defence and should be pleased that they were treated with Israel's famous "great restraint".

It is not just Israel that needs to be held accountable for what amounts to war crimes in Lebanon; the American government needs to stand trial too. Israel is the perpetrator of great violence, there is no doubt in that and no desire to take the heat off them, but America is directly responsible for what is happening in Lebanon today by virtue of its financial dealings with the Jewish state. By pumping Israel so full of monetary assistance — \$3 billion annually in direct assistance according to a paper published by Prof John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, of the University of Chicago and Harvard respectively — America has ensured Israel's permanency as a war machine. Yossi Gordon, the Deputy Budget Director of Israel, assured his citizens today that they had nothing to fear. Israel's finances are in tip-top shape, in fact the best they have been in years; they even ran a surplus over the first half of 2006. On top of all this, the deputy director hinted at the possibility of allocating 100 million shekels (equivalent to about \$22.5 million) to the citizens of northern Israel who have been put out by this current war.

Let me make myself clear. I went to college in the United States. I attended protests, I signed my name on petitions, and I argued politics with classmates and friends. America is where I fell in love with the writings of Thoreau and Malcolm X and where I discovered Seymour Hersh and Howard Zinn. It is where I came of age and where I made many dear friends. I was in New York when 9/11 happened. I was told by almost everyone back home in Karachi not to say I was from Pakistan in the weeks that passed, lest I find myself the victim of a hate crime. But I didn't heed their warnings. I told people I was from Pakistan and the first thing I always heard in response was "How is your family over there? Are they safe?" I was never told to 'go back to where I came from' nor was I ever told that I should silence my beliefs to ensure my safety.

That message I received yesterday stands by itself. Every other message or email I have received from America has been written in solidarity with the Lebanese people and has expressed the immense disgust the people feel over what their government is allowing and condoning. Every single email. My aunt and uncle, also American citizens, have postponed their trip back to the States. They're staying here in Lebanon with the rest of us, ready to take the news of every air strike and every bombing with unparalleled courage and defiance. None of my friends in America will be home much this week; they're attending protests in Washington, New York, California, and Boston. Not all of those friends are naturalised citizens, some are Pakistanis like me. But it's a free country, isn't it? And they are availing of their right to express themselves freely and without fear of persecution. That's the America I know. Not the one that is conducting

itself without a moral or ethical compass and is quickly degenerating into a police state. That is not the America I know and love.