

July 31, 2010

Robert Fisk: Israel has crept into the EU without anyone noticing

Middle East

The death of five Israeli servicemen in a helicopter crash in Romania this week raised scarcely a headline.

There was a Nato-Israeli exercise in progress. Well, that's OK then. Now imagine the death of five Hamas fighters in a helicopter crash in Romania this week. We'd still be investigating this extraordinary phenomenon. Now mark you, I'm not comparing Israel and Hamas. Israel is the country that justifiably slaughtered more than 1,300 Palestinians in Gaza 19 months ago - more than 300 of them children - while the vicious, blood-sucking and terrorist Hamas killed 13 Israelis (three of them soldiers who actually shot each other by mistake).

But there is one parallel. Judge Richard Goldstone, the eminent Jewish South African judge, decided in his 575-page UN inquiry into the Gaza bloodbath that both sides had committed war crimes - he was, of course, quite rightly called "evil" by all kinds of justifiably outraged supporters of Israel in the US, his excellent report rejected by seven EU governments - and so a question presents itself. What is Nato doing when it plays war games with an army accused of war crimes?

Or, more to the point, what on earth is the EU doing when it cosies up to the Israelis? In a remarkable, detailed - if slightly over-inflated - book to be published in November, the indefatigable David Cronin is going to present a microscopic analysis of "our" relations with Israel. I have just finished reading the manuscript. It leaves me breathless. As he says in his preface, "Israel has developed such strong political and economic ties to the EU over the past decade that it has become a member state of the union in all but name." Indeed, it was Javier Solana, the grubby top dog of the EU's foreign policy (formerly Nato secretary general), who actually said last year that "Israel, allow me to say, is a member of the European Union without being a member of the institution".

Pardon me? Did we know this? Did we vote for this? Who allowed this to happen? Does David Cameron - now so forcefully marketing Turkish entry to the EU - agree with this? Probably yes, since he goes on calling himself a "friend of Israel" after that country produced an excellent set of forged British passports for its murderers in Dubai. As Cronin says, "the EU's cowardice towards Israel is in stark contrast to the robust position it has taken when major atrocities have occurred in other conflicts". After the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, for example, the EU tasked an independent mission to find out if international law had been flouted, and demanded an international inquiry into human rights abuses after Sri Lanka's war against the Tamil Tigers. Cronin does not duck Europe's responsibility for the Jewish Holocaust and agrees that there will always be a "moral duty" on our governments to ensure it never happens again - though I did notice that Cameron forgot to mention the 1915 Armenian Holocaust when he was sucking up to the Turks this week.

But that's not quite the point. In 1999, Britain's arms sales to Israel - a country occupying the West Bank (and Gaza, too) and building illegal colonies for Jews and Jews only on Arab land - were worth £11.5m; within two years, this had almost doubled to £22.5m. This included small arms, grenade-making kits and equipment for fighter jets and tanks. There were a few refusals after Israel used modified Centurion tanks against the Palestinians in 2002, but in 2006, the year in which Israel slaughtered another 1,300 Lebanese, almost all of them civilians, in another crusade against Hizbollah's "world terror", Britain granted over 200 weapons licences.

Some British equipment, of course, heads for Israel via the US. In 2002, Britain gave "head-up displays" manufactured by BAE Systems for Lockheed Martin which promptly installed them in F-16 fighter-bombers destined for Israel. The EU did not object. In the same year, it should be added, the British admitted to training 13 members of the Israeli military. US planes transporting weapons to Israel at the time of the 2006 Lebanon war were refuelled at British airports (and, alas, it appears at Irish airports too). In the first three months of 2008, we gave licenses for another £20m of weapons for Israel - just in time for Israel's onslaught on Gaza. Apache helicopters used against Palestinians, says Cronin, contain parts made by SPS Aerostructures in Nottinghamshire, Smiths Industries in Cheltenham, Page Aerospace in Middlesex and Meggit Avionics in Hampshire.

Need I go on? Israel, by the way, has been praised for its "logistics" help to Nato in Afghanistan - where we are annually killing even more Afghans than the Israelis usually kill Palestinians - which is not surprising since Israel military boss Gabi Ashkenazi has visited Nato headquarters in Brussels to argue for closer ties with Nato. And Cronin convincingly argues an extraordinary - almost obscenely beautiful - financial arrangement in "Palestine". The EU funds millions of pounds' worth of projects in Gaza. These are regularly destroyed by Israel's American-made weaponry. So it goes like this. European taxpayers fork out for the projects. US taxpayers fork out for the weapons which Israel uses to destroy them. Then EU taxpayers fork out for the whole lot to be rebuilt. And then US taxpayers... Well, you've got the point. Israel, by the way, already has an "individual co-operation programme" with Nato, locking Israel into Nato's computer networks.

All in all, it's good to have such a stout ally as Israel on our side, even if its army is a rabble and some of its men war criminals. Come to that, why don't we ask Hizbollah to join Nato as well - just imagine how its guerrilla tactics would benefit our chaps in Helmand. And since Israel's Apache helicopters often kill Lebanese civilians - a whole ambulance of women and children in 1996, for example, blown to pieces by a Boeing Hellfire AGM 114C air-to-ground missile - let's hope the Lebanese can still send a friendly greeting to the people of Nottinghamshire, Middlesex, Hampshire and, of course, Cheltenham.

Independent Print Limited



© 2010 Independent Print Limited. Permission granted for up to 5 copies. All rights reserved.

You may forward this article or get additional permissions by typing http://license.icopyright.net/3.7463?icx_id=opinion/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-israel-has-crept-into-the-eu-without-anyone-noticing-2040066.html?service=PrintICopyright into any web browser. Independent Print Limited and The Independent logos are registered trademarks of Independent Print Limited. The iCopyright logo is a registered trademark of iCopyright, Inc.