



## Tony and the *Shah of Palestine*

by Yvonne Ridley  
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*"There are fewer checkpoints because the Israelis are grabbing more land and huge swathes of stolen land are merging into other tracts of stolen land, making some checkpoints redundant. That doesn't change the fact that the West Bank is now a series of small islands, cut off by Israel and its Apartheid Wall and settler-only roads, as well as the illegal settlements."*

Ever since a group of ordinary people from more than 40 different countries came together and set sail for Gaza have we seen various world leaders scramble to persuade Israel to lift the blockade on Gaza. Why? To honour the memory of those martyred by Israeli soldiers who shot nine unarmed peace activists at virtually point-blank range? Hell no!

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They realize that people power has achieved more in that one heroic action, than any of them have achieved for the people of Palestine. And, despite that brutal episode, they know that more flotillas and convoys are being planned because people power is achieving more than anything else has over the past 60 years for the people of Palestine.

The so-called Middle East Peace Envoy Tony Blair certainly does not want to see any more flotillas sailing for Gaza. It's not because he lies awake at night thinking about the deaths of those innocent humanitarian activists. No, Blair is afraid - very afraid - that people power will expose him for what he is, probably the most useless peace envoy on this planet. Exactly what has he done for the Palestinians since he took the job? Actually it would be easier to list what he hasn't done:

- HE HAS NOT stopped the land-grabbing Israelis from building ever more illegal settlements in complete defiance of international law.
- HE HAS NOT managed to lift the Siege of Gaza so that the thousands left homeless after last year's invasion can start rebuilding their homes.
- HE HAS NOT been able to push ahead with an independent UN investigation in to the Israeli raid on and hijacking of the Freedom Flotilla.
- HE HAS NOT been able to stop babies dying in the hopelessly under-equipped Gaza maternity units.
- HE HAS NOT stopped or even attempted to expose the corruption of the Palestinian Authority.
- HE HAS NOT been able to make one iota of progress in fulfilling his job description.

Apart from the Shah of Palestine – Mahmoud Abbas – I am struggling to think of a more redundant individual than Tony Blair, but I'll come to Abbas later.

Blair was on television recently boasting about how life is improving in the West Bank for the Palestinians and saying that there's been a reduction in the number of checkpoints. What a stupid, silly, silly little man he is, almost as blinkered as the journalist who was interviewing him. There are fewer checkpoints because the Israelis are grabbing more land and huge swathes of stolen land are merging into other tracts of stolen land, making

some checkpoints redundant. That doesn't change the fact that the West Bank is now a series of small islands, cut off by Israel and its Apartheid Wall and settler-only roads, as well as the illegal settlements.

The inference during the interview was that if the people of Gaza dumped Hamas and put their faith once more in the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority then everyone's lives would be so much easier.

What the journalist failed to ask and Blair failed to address is the fact that even with the horrendous hardships facing the people of Gaza and their children, many Palestinians living in the West Bank are actually worse off.

The truth is, children living in the poorest parts of the occupied West Bank face significantly worse conditions than their counterparts in Gaza, according to a report by Save the Children UK.

The European Commission-funded study found that in "Area C" - the 60 percent of the West Bank under direct Israeli control - the poorest sections of society are suffering disproportionately because basic infrastructure is not being repaired due to Israel's refusal to approve the work. Homes, schools, drainage systems and roads are in urgent need of repair, but instead of work being allowed, families are being forced to live in tents and do not have access to clean water. Restrictions on the use of land for agriculture have left thousands of Palestinian children without enough food and many are becoming ill as a result, the study found.

Conditions in Area C have reached "crisis point", says Save the Children, with 79 percent of the local communities surveyed lacking sufficient food, a greater proportion than in blockaded Gaza, where the figure is 61 percent. Many children living in such communities are showing signs of stunted growth, with the figure running at more than double Gaza's rate, and more than one in ten children surveyed for the study were found to be underweight.

So there you have it - the Shah of Palestine has delivered nothing but more hardship for his own people in the West Bank while lining his own pockets and those of his enforcers. Abbas has been praised by Tony Blair for making friends with Israel and proving he's someone the West can do business with. This might be true but in the process he has well and truly sold his own people down the river and I hope they punish him in the ballot box, should there ever be another free and fair election.

No wonder Mahmoud Abbas has no time for the human rights activists and humanitarian aid workers who put their lives on the line to launch the Gaza-bound Freedom Flotilla. But that's nothing new. I remember in 2008 being slightly crestfallen after arriving on the shores of Gaza on board one of the first boats in the Free Gaza Movement only to learn Abbas had brushed away our efforts with a shrug of the shoulders. Still, none of us were in it for the glory, we just wanted to raise public awareness about the Siege of Gaza, and I think it's fair to say that virtually the whole world now knows about the Siege of Gaza and the brutality of the Israeli government. Why? Because of the efforts of those on board the Turkish-led flotilla, that's why. The reality is that charities like the Turkish IHH and the UK-based Interpal, the Free Gaza Movement, Viva Palestina and other groups such as the International Solidarity Movement, have done so much more for the people of Palestine than the politicians.

That is why we can never leave Palestine to the politicians; if we had done so it would have been wiped off the face of the map completely by now. Instead, thanks to people power, Palestine has a global support movement among hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of ordinary people. We are too many in number to be bought off by the Israeli lobbies, and are too pure in heart to want our palms greased by even greasier individuals. We are people of all faiths and no faith, many cultures, skin colours, nationalities and political beliefs. We are going to cause great pain - as is already evident - through our boycotts of Israeli goods and products and we will continue until the Apartheid State of Israel is a fading memory just like the Apartheid State of South Africa.

It doesn't matter how many corrupt politicians there are in the pay and sway of Tel Aviv, we, the ordinary people of the world, outnumber you and we are growing in number and strength.

There are more flotillas being planned, more land convoys in the making and more ordinary people prepared to step up to the plate to do what it takes to free Palestine. And we will. When the people lead the leaders must follow or they will become irrelevant and redundant. Just like Mr. Tony Blair.

#### **Source:**

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