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Lindy McDowell: Doesn't Bush care about our victims?

Saturday, 2 August 2008

What was going through Maggie Thatcher's head that day back in April, 1986, when she took the momentous decision to allow American fighter planes to take off from British bases to bomb the terror regime of Colonel Gaddafi?

Like the president of France who had been asked to allow the planes French airspace for the same attack, she could so easily have said no. But Thatcher believed in what she called the "special relationship" between the UK and the US. And whatever fears she may have had about retaliation from Mad Dog Gaddafi, she apparently believed it was the right thing to do.

And there was indeed retaliation. Bloody, murderous retaliation. For it was this attack that prompted Gaddafi to arm the Provisional IRA. He sent them thousands of tons of armaments and Semtex explosives. He bankrolled them to the tune of many millions.

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And in return they did his dirty work for him.

Gadaffi saw the IRA as the means to get back at the British and the Americans. And in that respect the Provos did not disappoint ?

Thousands of innocent civilians in Northern Ireland, elsewhere in the UK and in Europe were massacred by the weapons and explosives supplied by the Libyan regime and put to savage use by the Provos. Among those who died, significantly were a small number of Americans.

Now, all these years later, some of those American citizens are among a group of several hundred IRA victims who have been attempting to take a class action against the Libyan regime in the US courts. (It is because Americans are involved that the case can be taken there.)

Recently, however, the US State Department has been working on a deal which would see the lifting of diplomatic sanctions on the Libyan state.

In return, Gadaffi would settle all outstanding cases with American victims.

But despicably (some might say, typically) the Bush administration appears to be happy to exclude UK victims of Libyan-fuelled terror from any such settlement.

The people who died at the hands of terrorists here as a direct follow-on to Maggie's decision to help America fight terror — are they really to be so callously, so shabbily traduced by George Bush?

So much for so-called American integrity. So much for so-called American honour. So much for the so-called "special relationship".

And this latter is a point that has not escaped the families of some of those victims. By poignant twist of fate some of the family members of those who died in the IRA's Libyan funded terror campaign are currently serving in Iraq. They are fighting side by side with American soldiers in George Bush's self-proclaimed war against terror.

But it has been reported that a number of them have threatened they will leave the army if the American administration does indeed betray local victims involved in the court action against Libya. You could hardly blame them if they did.

But this is itself raises the obvious question — where is the British government in all this? Why isn't the British government fighting for the local victims?

Given Britain's back-up role for the US in both Iraq and Afghanistan surely it is entitled to ask, indeed demand, that UK victims of Gadaffi's terror be treated the same as US victim's of Gadaffi's terror.

In the end we all know the Libyan settlement comes down to one thing. Oil. The Libyans have it. The US wants it.

But in order to get it, can George Bush really be about to put the boot into those victims in Northern Ireland who paid such a terrible price for Maggie Thatcher's decision to help his nation?

Does the "special relationship" only work one way?

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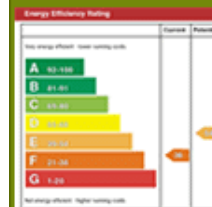
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