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by Ricki Hollander

Countering Propaganda: Focus on Diana Buttu

His [Palestinian chief of staff's] spokesperson is a lovely lady who is a very well-educated person, went back to Palestine to try to serve what she hopes will be a country. I was impressed by these young, dynamic, capable, peace-loving people. (U.S. President George W. Bush, in an interview with Al Arabiya television, Oct. 24, 2005)

The lovely young lady who so impressed the President is Diana Buttu, legal advisor to President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority, and the head of the PA's negotiations affairs department. A Canadian of Palestinian descent, Buttu holds undergraduate, graduate, and law degrees from the University of Toronto, Ontario's Queen's University and California's Stanford University. In addition to serving in a legal capacity, Buttu is media advisor and spokesperson for the PA and is frequently interviewed and quoted in the Western media as an authority on international law and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Intelligent and articulate, Buttu adeptly sidesteps or reframes challenging questions to bring the discussion to her own turf. She glibly dispenses figures to bolster her points and often inverts Palestinian and Israeli actions.

For example, she insists that the Palestinians never rejected a valid Israeli peace offer, but that Israel has repeatedly repulsed Arab peace proposals. She contends that those Palestinians who advocate the destruction of the Jewish state are in opposition to the mainstream, while Israelis who call for "the annihilation of Palestinians" operate from within.

On Palestinian Terrorism

Buttu blames Palestinian terrorism on Israel's "military occupation" of the Palestinians. As "proof" she alleges that during 1997-2000, no Israelis were killed in suicide bombings within Israel. For example, on *USA Today's* "Talk Today," she claimed:

The root cause is Israel's 36-year military occupation and denial of justice Hamas gets its support because, for 36 years, Israel has denied the Palestinians their freedom and the world has done nothing to stop Israel's military occupation.

Hamas's support dropped significantly during the period of the Oslo peace process because the Palestinians were promised (and believed) that by 1999 they would be free and no longer living under Israel's military rule. That is why, from 1997 to 2000 not a single Israeli died of a suicide bombing inside of Israel. (June 18, 2003)

Likewise, on Link TV's "Mosaic Special," she erred:

. . . during the period of the Oslo peace process, from the year 1997 until the year 2000, not a single Israeli died of a suicide bombing inside Israel, not a single one. (Aug. 20, 2003)

FACTS: Both Buttu's claim and the statistics she presents to back it up are blatantly false.

Buttu's insistence that no Israelis died in suicide attacks from 1997 until 2000 is simply not true. In fact, 24 Israeli civilians were killed in six Palestinian suicide bombings in Israel during this time. (And pipe bombs, stabbings, and shootings by Palestinian terrorists claimed the lives of 14 others.) A Palestinian suicide bombing at Tel Aviv's Café Apropó on March 21, 1997 killed three young Israeli women; 16 Israeli civilians were killed in two consecutive Palestinian suicide bombings in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market on July 30, 1997; and three Palestinian suicide bombings on Sept. 4, 1997 at Jerusalem's Ben-Yehuda pedestrian mall claimed the lives of five Israeli civilians.

Moreover, Arab terrorism against Jews predates Israeli control over the West Bank and Gaza as well as the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. More than 500 Jewish residents of Mandatory Palestine were killed by their Arab neighbors. And during the 1950s and early 60s, more than 50 Arab terrorist attacks in Israel claimed the lives hundreds of Israeli civilians. Thus, Buttu's allegation that Israel's "occupation" is the cause of terrorism is incorrect.

On Palestinian Refugees & Right of Return

Buttu alleges that Israel "ethnically cleansed" 75 percent of Palestinians in 1948 because of their religion. For instance, on CNN's "Q&A with Jim Clancy," she avered:

Let's remember that 75 percent of the Palestinian Christian and Muslim population were ethnically cleansed from their homelands back in 1948 and have never been allowed to return for one reason and only one reason, and that is because they are the wrong religion, they're not Jewish. If they were Jewish, they'd be allowed to return to their homes, but because they're not Jewish, Israel continues to bar them from returning to their homes... Palestinians will simply not acquiesce to being ethnically cleansed from their homes. (May 26, 2003)

FACTS: Buttu combines several fraudulent claims. The term "ethnic cleansing," which refers to the forcible expulsion of an ethnic group, is used by anti-Israel and anti-Jewish propagandists to suggest racism by the Jewish state.

But, by and large, the Palestinians refugees were not forcibly expelled, and certainly

none were sent to concentration camps. They became refugees as they fled—often despite the counsel of their Jewish neighbors to stay—a war launched by their Arab brethren and leaders.

On May 14, 1948, the day the British Mandate expired, the Jewish People's Council approved a proclamation declaring the establishment of the State of Israel. The declaration included the following appeal to the non-Jews living there—something hardly suggestive of a nation planning to "ethnically cleanse" another population because of its religion:

We appeal—in the very midst of the onslaught launched against us now for months—to the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions.

But almost immediately, five neighboring Arab armies invaded and attacked the new country. Hundreds of thousands of local Arabs fled, many at the behest of their leaders. Only in very few cases, primarily due to military exigencies, were any of them forced out of their homes.

Estimates of the total number of Arab refugees vary from 472,000 (1948 Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine) to 726,000 (1949 U.N. Economic Survey Mission), with the most reliable estimate, 550,000, obtained by comparing pre-and post-1948 census figures. (All estimates constitute a considerably lower percentage of the total non-Jewish population than the figure of 75 percent that Buttu alleges.)

Buttu's argument that Palestinian refugees cannot return to their homes because they are "the wrong religion" is similarly false. Israel offered to repatriate 100,000 Palestinian refugees during the 1949 Lausanne negotiations even prior to official discussion of the refugee question, but the Arab states rejected the offer because it would have implicitly recognized Israel's existence. Nevertheless, Israel allowed over 50,000 refugees to return to Israel under a family reunification program, and after 1967 allowed a further 165,000 to return to the West Bank and Gaza.

Buttu argues that the Palestinians' right to return to Israel's borders is guaranteed under international law and is in violation of U.N. Resolution 194 to which she claims Israel was bound. On USA Today's "Talk Today," she claimed:

All civilians who flee during war are entitled, under international humanitarian law, to return to their homes. Israel agreed to this in UN Resolution 194 but, of course, has NEVER allowed Palestinian refugees to return to their homes because they are the wrong religion. Anywhere else in the world, this would be considered intolerable discrimination. But, not in Israel. (May 2, 2002)

FACTS: The key document on which Buttu bases her claim, U.N. Resolution 194, was rejected by all the Arab states representing the Palestinians specifically because it did not establish a "right of return," and because it implicitly recognized Israel. It is

therefore disingenuous and hypocritical for those same Arab states and Palestinian representatives to reverse their position now that it suits them.

Moreover, the Arab states continually violated the resolution's central provision, which called for the creation of a Conciliation Commission and:

... establishment of contact between the parties themselves and the Commission at the earliest possible date ... to seek agreement by negotiations [and thereby reach] a final settlement of all questions between them. (paragraphs 4 and 5)

The Arab states, however, consistently refused even to meet with Israel, much less try to reach a peaceful settlement. In fact, the only clause the Arab side ever acknowledged was paragraph 11, which *suggested* (it could not "require," since it was a General Assembly rather than a Security Council resolution) that:

refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date ... [R]epatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of refugees and payment of compensation [should be facilitated]. (emphasis added)

This *recommendation* that refugees be "permitted" to return can hardly be characterized as creating a "right"—even more so, because returnees were required to first accept living "at peace with their neighbors," something very few were willing to do. Furthermore, the recommendation did not even hint at any return rights for descendants of refugees.

On International Law and Disputed Territories

Buttu claims that under international law, all territory captured by Israel in the 1967 war legally belongs to the Palestinians. As she said on MSNBC's "Alan Keyes Is Making Sense":

...What we're supposed to control is Areas A, B, and C, which is the entire West Bank and the entire Gaza Strip. This is land that was occupied by Israel in 1967, land that the entire international community has said that Israel must return back to the Palestinians. (April 30, 2002)

The "entire international community" did not envision Israel's ceding all of the West Bank. U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 was worded deliberately to indicate that Israel was not expected to withdraw from all the territories that had come under its control in the self-defensive war of 1967. Although it was expected to withdraw from some "territories," according to the resolution, any Israel withdrawal would be predicated on its "right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force." As American U.N. Ambassador at the time, Arthur Goldberg, noted, "the resolution speaks of withdrawal from occupied territories without defining the extent of withdrawal" to indicate "less than a complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied territory, inasmuch as Israel's prior frontiers had proved to be notably insecure."

On U.S. Aid to Israel

Buttu contends that the U.S. grants Israel over 3.6 billion dollars a year to finance settlements. For instance, on CNN's "Your World Today," she stated:

The United States government gives Israel \$10 million a day. And that \$10 million is going to build not only settlements, but bypass roads, and maintain a dual system of laws. We've asked the United States government in the past to stop funding—funding Israel's—Israel's colonization, and yet it continues to do so... (Aug. 17, 2005)

FACTS: Buttu's statistics are absurd. Her claim of \$10 million a day—\$3.65 billion a year allegedly used to build settlements—vastly exceeds the total amount of U.S. aid granted to Israel, two thirds of which is military. Under an Israeli-U.S. agreement, economic assistance is being phased out while military aid is being increased. H.R. 4818, the FY2005 foreign operations appropriations bill, provided Israel with \$2.202 billion in military aid and only \$357 million in economic assistance. Even if Israel were to use the entirety of the economic assistance package to construct settlements, it would amount to less than a tenth of Buttu's alleged \$10 million a day. In fact, none of this money is earmarked to settlements.

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