

## *Opinion*

### **Has Syria been 'Blixed'?**

**By Linda S. Heard**

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October 26, 2005—Detlev Mehlis, head of the UN commission charged with investigating the assassination of Rafik Hariri, has told the German magazine Der Stern that he knew his report would grease the US-led campaign against Syria and now understands how Hans Blix, former UN weapons inspector, must have felt in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq.

Though, unlike Blix, whose reports on Iraq's chemical and biological weapons were consistently inconclusive and who later wrote a book outlining the pressure that had been put upon him by the powers that be, Mehlis maintains he was given a free hand to reach his own conclusions.

Let's take a look at the German prosecutor's report, which US President George W. Bush has found "deeply disturbing" to see how impartial it really is.

Paragraph 8 of the report Executive Summary reads: "... there is converging evidence pointing at both Lebanese and Syrian involvement in this terrorist act." This is interesting on two levels.

First, because the US and the UK are studiously avoiding pointing the finger at the Lebanese authorities when dancing their sanctions/war jig against Syria and secondly the use of the word "terrorist" is subjective in the context of the UN when members have yet to agree on its definition.

Indeed, John Bolton, the new US ambassador to the UN, pushed hard to exclude violent actions committed by states as opposed to individuals being defined as "terrorist" during the UN's recent 60th anniversary meet.

Paragraph 9 concludes that the Lebanese judiciary and security services should continue the investigation, yet US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Britain's Foreign Secretary Jack Straw are both calling for international action.

Like a pair of shy brides they are being reticent on what kind of action they're seeking just as they were when warming up their respective publics over Iraq.

At the same time Hariri's son is calling for his father's killers to be brought before an international court, which seems to imply he does not trust the Lebanese judiciary, even though Syria along with its army and intelligence agents have long exited from his country.

In that case, shouldn't Lebanon be sharing the dock with its neighbour?

Turning now to the report's "Conclusions" section forgotten during the sound bite reporting of much of the Western media is this snippet: "... the likely motive of the assassination was political.

"However, since the crime was not the work of individuals but rather of a sophisticated group, it very much seems that fraud, corruption and money-laundering could also have been motives for individuals to participate in the operation."

In other words, Hariri could have been the victim of a mafia-type gang.

Paragraph 210 reads: "... the Commission is of course of the view that all people, including those charged with serious crimes should be considered innocent until proven guilty following a fair trial."

To protect innocents, Mehlis personally deleted the names of potential suspects from the report an admirable move. Yet, not so admirable was the fact those names were leaked to newspapers and can now be found all over the Internet.

Yet, as the report admits in its preface, "Because the Commission credits the concern that these individuals [witnesses] have for their safety, this report will not reveal the identity of those interviewed."

So witnesses remain anonymous while the names of suspects, including members of the Syrian president's own family, are out there.

How convenient!

The report also finds that "through the constant wire-tapping of Mr Hariri's telephone lines, the Syrian and Lebanese security and intelligence services were kept informed of his movements and contacts." That said, and if Syria is involved, then it is surely guilty of abject stupidity.

If Syrian officials knew every move that Hariri made and wanted him out of the way, then given the anti-Syrian climate in much of the West and Bush's lust for preemptive warfare, why on earth wasn't a lone sniper used?

Why would Syria prefer to make a song-and-dance out of Hariri's death, entailing complex planning and the use of highly sophisticated equipment, while leaving behind a convoluted evidentiary trail when a single bullet would have sufficed? What say you, Mr Mehlis?

Why am I so sceptical? With all the dissemination of misinformation, forged documents and downright lies that preceded Iraq's invasion and the fact that Syria has long featured large on the neocons' "must do" list, anyone who isn't must be deluded.

Furthermore, one must surely wonder why those powers involved with the occupation of Iraq and the UN, eager to regain its credibility after the oil-for-food debacle, are involved in investigating the death of a former Lebanese politician.

Why, for example, was there no UN commission set up to investigate the mysterious deaths of Yasser Arafat, Anwar Sadat, Jamal Abdul Nasser, Salvadore Allende or the poisoning of the Ukrainian leader, Victor Yushenko, among a host of other leaders? Answer: Because in each case it was not in the West's interests to do so.

The Lebanese should take note and despite the natural emotion and justifiable bitterness many of them feel towards those responsible for the death of a beloved personality, they should not allow themselves to be sucked into this suspect political game ... and especially when the stability of both Lebanon and its neighbour hang so precariously in the balance.

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