

A few more Notes on

## *Stupidity and Western Barbarism*

[see column 64A]

### 1 Aristotle was right about stupidity

Now that Eve and Adam have procured for the human race the knowledge of good and evil, we are under an obligation to use the knowledge well. The retreat from judgement is not the road back to Eden. Stupidity is always evil. True stupidity is not the absence of capacity. If I just can't do sums or if I am slow on the uptake I am not necessarily stupid. Real stupidity is taking comfort from, finding refuge in, bad judgement. Clichés are stupid in this sense because they are the easy route away from thought.

Try to find a sentence by a contemporary politician and including the word *democracy* that is not a cliché.

19 March 2011

Who can tell what the outcome will be in Libya? but a quite likely result of the beneficent bombing will be to turn an insurrection into a civil war, and then prolong the civil war indefinitely. In that case there will be much bloodshed on all sides except that of the International Community. Those killed on the "opposition" side will be martyrs. What will the International Community call those killed in the course of doing their duty in the Libyan armed forces? Will there be a veto if a war memorial is erected in Tripoli to the defenders of the homeland against the aggression of the International Community? If so on what grounds?

[Later: it emerged that without the air attacks on Libyan army units the insurrection would have been put down on 21 March.]

23 March: to the *Daily Telegraph*

SIR – Our war aim in Libya, we are told, is to protect Libyan civilians. You report today that the crew of an American helicopter sent to rescue the crew of a crashed plane opened fire indiscriminately on Libyan civilians. One young man had to have a leg amputated. May I ask whether it is the common opinion that this, as you report, was "a potential propaganda disaster" rather than a war crime?

30 March 2011

Régime-change is denied as the war aim of NATO in Libya, because it is not permitted by the Security Council resolution which is supposed to legalise the bombing. But this morning the British Foreign Secretary says that he is considering supplying arms to the "Opposition"—*strictly for use in self-defence*. How stupid does he think *we* are?

In the old days of hot metal we used to keep a Linotype slug ready-made for a number of occasions:

*Who is kidding whom about what?*

27 May 2011

After three months there is no knowing what the real war aim is, but to judge from events it seems to be to keep the war going come what may. There has been gross failure to achieve the only stated war aim, the avoidance of civilian casualties. In fact NATO has been causing civilian casualties. Any fool knows that a battle fought in a city will cause civilian casualties. Bombing military installations in cities will also cause civilian casualties. NATO has ensured that this war will be fought in cities.

The news this morning, according to BBC Text, is that we are to send to the war zone four Apache attack helicopters which "will allow for swifter attacks on a wider range of smaller

targets in urban areas.” Does Mr Cameron still think he will protect civilians by attacks in cities? When others launch attacks in cities it is called terrorism. Helicopters are more vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire than fixed-wing aircraft, so let us hope we don’t have to start adding our own war dead to the Libyan war dead and to our casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan.

So . . . the situation develops in accordance with the stupid logic. One suggestion is the assassination of the Libyan head of state. Another is the extension of the bombing to the “infrastructure”. As roads are not easily destroyed by bombing this presumably means power stations and waterworks. Defend civilians by cutting off power and water.

Direct invasion by ground forces is not yet discussed, but unless the Libyan government cracks, that comes next.

In either eventuality, then what? Just like the Americans in Iraq, nobody has any idea of what will replace the Gadaffi régime, except that it is sure to be *democracy*. Why anybody should think so is quite obscure. (What would the International Community do if it organised a plebiscite in Libya and Colonel Gadaffi won?) The sure thing is that somebody will have to repair the war damage.

Messrs Cameron and Sarkozy are not babes and sucklings. They are more foolish than any fool. The comfort of stupidity to a politician is that it can be lethal without producing any twinges of conscience.

## 2 Rough Justice

13 May 2011

The first reliable witness of the death of Osama bin Laden was his twelve-year-old daughter, the wife being unconscious. The daughter had seen her father shot dead then shot again to make sure, with the kind of bullets that make such a mess that the Americans daren’t release photographs. Barbarous! The Western policy of protecting civilians, which has taken in Libya the form of prolonging shoot-outs in city streets, seems not to apply to friends and relations of Western targets. (Guilt by association?) Last week it was a son and *grandchildren* of Gadaffi, this week they were lucky not to have killed bin Laden’s wife.

It is said that if an arrest had been attempted, bin Laden might have detonated a suicide bomb and taken the Americans with him. Well, he might, though he didn’t take the chance of killing himself during a three-quarters-of-an-hour “fire fight” as they call these gangster-like shootings. But how much did the Americans want him alive anyway? They would have had to put him on trial. Sometimes they regard him as an enemy combattant (which he wasn’t: a private individual with a private army) and so there could have been a court martial. Other times he was thought of correctly as a suspected criminal. Either way, he should have been taken alive if possible. In war a combattant unable to resist can be taken prisoner but not killed. Even more so in civil life: the police have no right to kill anybody if it is practicable to arrest them. A trial would surely have been better. But it might then have been difficult to get a death sentence. Shooting him was the only way of being certain of his death.

Justice has been done, said President Obama. In a very primitive way it very likely has been. Lynch mobs often inflicted a primitive just punishment. Lynch law is still unjust. (President Obama turned down the offer of a life professorship in law, at Harvard, wasn’t it? He must understand these matters.)

Perhaps we should be grateful that the Archbishop of Canterbury said he was “not entirely comfortable” about it all. But what has his comfort to do with it? Why did he not simply explain why it was barbarous? Simplicity is much less likely to be stupid than anything said in the contemporary diction of Western politics.

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