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[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

[Click Here](#)

[Home](#)

Goodbye Condi Left Margin By Carl Bloice

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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Of all the outrageous statements coming out of the Bush Administration over the course of its eight year reign, perhaps the most odious came from the Secretary of State. It was the summer of 2006. Israel troops had entered Lebanon to wage war against the Lebanese Hezbollah movement and the Israeli Air Force was raining bombs on that country and Condoleezza Rice was laboring mightily to justify the Bush Administration's policy of delaying a ceasefire so the Israeli military could continue its assault that was daily claiming Lebanese civilian lives.

Her task "was hardly helped when she explained that the violence that had already killed more than 400 Lebanese and turned more than a half million into refugees represents the 'birth pangs of a new Middle East,'" wrote Tony Karon of *Time* magazine in a report titled, "Condi in Diplomatic Disneyland" "Phrases like that - and her rejection of the call for an immediate cease-fire on the grounds that 'whatever we do, we have to be certain that we're pushing forward to the new Middle East, not going back to the old Middle East' - carry a revolutionary ring that scares the hell out of America's allies in the region."

It should have caused us all to shudder.

Imperial hubris is no stranger to Rice. She calls it "transformational diplomacy." The idea that prolonging a military conflict that nearly all the world community wants ended

- and thus claiming additional innocent lives - could usher in anything good betrays an unvarnished arrogance seldom seen in modern international diplomacy. But it was consistent, Karon noted, with a proclamation she had made the previous year about spreading "creative chaos" in the Middle East.

"Now, for Act 2, the Arabs are being told to sit quietly while Israel tears Lebanon apart, after months of watching it slowly throttle Gaza through a U.S.-backed economic blockade, and then bomb it for weeks on end," Karon wrote, "Hardly surprising that the Arabs - from the U.S.-backed autocrats to the beleaguered liberal democrats and the rising Islamists - see little to cheer in the Bush Administration's 'new Middle East'."

As New Year 2009 came she was at it again. Rice was successfully staving off international diplomatic efforts to prevent an Israeli ground assault on Palestinian Gaza and secure a ceasefire in the deadly conflict between the Israel and the Palestinian movement, Hamas.

Following a meeting with President Bush January 2, she said the Administration would only agree to a ceasefire "that would not allow a re-establishment of the status quo ante where Hamas can continue to launch rockets out of Gaza." She added: "It is obvious that ceasefire should take place as soon as possible, but we need a ceasefire that is durable and sustainable."

It is obvious that what Rice calls a "doable and sustainable" ceasefire is one in which Hamas surrenders. The condition that would be placed on the Palestinians is that their ability to strike inside Israel be eliminated but no conditions would be placed on Tel Aviv to end the brutal siege of Gaza - let alone end the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory that is the root of the larger conflict.

After being briefed by Rice on the situation in Gaza, President Bush was asked if Israel would be justified in launching a ground assault. To which he replied, "Those will be decisions made by the Israelis." Sheer poppycock. Few people would doubt that a phone call from the White House to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert or from Rice to Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni could have prevented the invasion. Moreover, as Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has charged, effective United Nations action is stymied by the threat of a U.S. veto of any resolution it doesn't like, as was the case last Saturday. During the war in Lebanon, the Beirut's *Daily Star* reported, "The international divide over Israel's ongoing assault on Lebanon widened on Thursday as the United States reiterated its demand that any cease-fire be 'sustainable,' while the European Union pressed for an immediate end to the bloodshed."

"Getting anything done diplomatically in the region will require a lot more than talking about President Bush's "vision" of a Palestinian state and a 'road map' that is the functional equivalent of the old Beach Boys song 'Wouldn't It Be Nice' - there is no active process associated with it, nor is there likely to be for the foreseeable future," wrote Karon in 2006. "Without revisiting the kind of peace process that the current Israeli government has sought to avoid, the 'birth pangs of the new Middle East' may be interminable."

"Gaza to be sure, was already a cauldron," the *Financial Times* editorialized last Saturday. "But it got that way in no small part because of flawed western policies: first,

through allowing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to stew; and then attempting to isolate Hamas – which was democratically elected three years ago – and doing nothing to lift the Israeli siege that has turned Gaza into a prison for its 1.5m inhabitants.”

Recall when former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and South African religious leader Desmond Tutu were denounced by the Israeli rightwing and its supporters in the U.S. for comparing the situation in Gaza and the occupied territories to past apartheid rule in South Africa. Seven years ago, in a Boston address, Tutu said that while he condemned suicide bombings by Palestinian militants against Israel, Israeli military action would not bring it security. Israel, he said, must “strive for peace based on justice, based on withdrawal from all the occupied territories, and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state on those territories side by side with Israel, both with secure borders.”

A new administration will take office January 21, a few days before Rice, who previously served as national security adviser to the President (and who played a major role in promoting the invasion of Iraq), would be observing her fourth year as secretary. Her tenure has been nothing to celebrate. Just as George W. Bush is being cited as arguably the worst President in the nation’s history, so too Condoleezza Rice has to be right up there with the worst – perhaps the worst – secretaries of state. Throughout the world, wherever she has reached over the past six years things have turned to ... well... crud. It has amounted to what the *Financial Times* last week called the “Perils of ignoring festering conflicts” – or, in some cases, Rice and company making matters worse. This is particularly true when it comes to the Middle East and the Asia subcontinent.

Take the conflict between India and Pakistan. A potential for a measured rapprochement between Islamabad and New Delhi over disputed Kashmir and the fierce competition between the two countries over influence in Afghanistan has been continually undercut by U.S. efforts to bolster India as a counterweight to emerging China. The recent hypocritical agreement with India allowing it to ignore requirements of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Agreement (which it never signed) has only raised the stakes in the festering conflicts in the region.

Somalia, wrote the *Financial Times* January 3, “imploded into a long night of anarchy and warlordism nearly two decades ago. After the messy failure of US intervention in 1993, it was left to rot – until the Union of Islamic Courts began to provide a rough semblance of Islamist order. That panicked the Bush administration into backing Ethiopia’s devastating invasion two years ago. It was a bit like taking a hammer to a ball of mercury: the Islamists were routed but regrouped under radical leadership, and are taking over swaths of Somalia (and maybe its new business, piracy) as Ethiopia withdraws.”

The common denominator in all of these foreign policy disasters is the decisive reliance on military power, in Iraq at the cost of over 4,000 lives of young women and men from this country and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. Or, in the other cases, giving encouragement – or the “green light” - to aggression by clients, as with the Ethiopians in Somalia, or “allies” as in Israel. The problem people like Rice don’t seem to get through their thick heads is people don’t like foreigners occupying their countries. The British and the Russians learned that in Afghanistan, the U.S. doesn’t seem to have learned it in Vietnam.


"Happily, the superficial muscularity of the Bush-Cheney era – the idea that you can bomb people into moderation and alignment with western interests – is about to end," the *Financial Times* editors concluded. "Barack Obama has the opportunity to approach afresh these unresolved conflicts before they disappear into a lethal stew of rejectionism and radicalism. He looks to be preparing to appoint several special envoys, including for the Middle East and Kashmir. Good. That concentrated focus is needed: to identify and act on tractable grievances before they become the property of jihadis and extremists." That will happen only if they start by rejecting the ruinous policies of the Bush Administration and the mindless bellicosity of its secretary of state.


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[Contents of Issue Menu](#)
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