

LETTER TO SENATOR HILLARY CLINTON

Ms. Amal Bouhabib
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Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton
780 Third Ave
Suite 2601
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Dear Senator Clinton,

I read with dismay your comments regarding the ongoing conflict in Lebanon, as printed in the New York Times, Monday July 17, 2006. As a New York constituent I feel it is my duty to write you and express my concern. In particular I was perplexed by the following comments:

“We will stand with Israel because Israel is standing for American values as well as Israeli ones;” and

“I want us here in New York to imagine, if extremist terrorists were launching rocket attacks across the Mexican or Canadian border, would we stand by or would we defend America against these attacks from extremists?”

With regards to the first statement, I am truly confused as to what you are referring when you say “American values,” unless by that you mean the use of aggressive, disproportionate force against “terrorists” without any regard for consequence or collateral (i.e. innocent civilians.) I don’t suppose, by “American values,” you are referring to the indiscriminate targeting of whole villages simply because they are “Hezbollah territory;” the obliteration of the international airport (as far as I know, not a Hezbollah-run operation); the destruction of sea ports, dozens of bridges, every exit and entrance route in and out of the country, the bombing of wheat silos and of cars full of families trying to escape bombardment; the explosion of the electricity plants; the targeted attacks on Muslim areas, and the constant air strikes of major cities such as Beirut, Tyre and Tripoli.

I can’t imagine that by “American values,” you mean the entire destruction of people’s homes, livelihoods, and all their worldly possessions, simply because they live in a Muslim area. It was never taught to me that the American way was to knowingly target innocent civilians and to consciously wish to demolish a nation’s infrastructure with the stated aim of “setting the country 20 years back.” I wonder if you are aware that of the 227 people who have been killed thus far, no more than 24 of them have been affiliated with Hezbollah and the majority of them have been children.

Senator Clinton, this is not a war between Israel and Hezbollah. It is not about the West and the East, or Christians and Jews and Muslims. This is a war between politicians. This is a game in which all the innocent citizens of Lebanon are the victims. You cannot possibly believe, in your heart, that any of the grandmothers, sons, wives, mothers or uncles or aunts, or shopkeepers, or tailors, or teachers, who are being killed, maimed or displaced, have anything to do with this crisis. Or that they deserve to bear the brunt of Israel "defending itself." Even the most liberal interpretation of "self-defense" could not justify the mass killing and destruction of individuals who have nothing to do with this conflict.

And if I had to imagine being attacked by Mexico and Canada, I pray with all my deepest convictions, that America would not react by bombing Toronto, targeting towns based on their religious affiliation, destroying exit routes for fleeing refugees, all in the name of self-defense. If these are the new American values, then I fear that America is lost.

I grew up fearing and hating war. As a Lebanese-American, born and raised here, cut off from my family there for most of my childhood, I grew up keenly aware of the utter futility and indiscriminate inhumanity of war. I cannot think of a time when bombing civilians and civilian infrastructure makes sense, I cannot think of any reason good enough to justify it – whether carried out by "extremists," as you put it, or state-sponsored. I can't imagine how you get up in the morning and tell yourself that any attack on civilians is a legitimate answer to the world's conflicts. I can't imagine how you, or any of the other politicians running this country and others, ever got so far in life that you felt you could and should justify such destruction. Aside from the physical, real, tangible annihilation these attacks are responsible for – what about the destruction to our humanity? Our ability to seek the moral high ground? And to hope for a better, peaceful future for our children? If the new American values eschew such values as peace and negotiation, I have truly lost all hope for this country, and for the world my children will inherit.

I ask you to please reconsider your statements and to call for a ceasefire. Whatever political games must be played, let them be played without the senseless destruction of a nation and its people.

Sincerely,

Amal Bouhabib

FACT SHEET: ONE WEEK

- Every airport has been attacked and rendered unfit for travel. All three runways of the Beirut International Airport were destroyed.
- Every port from the south to the north has been attacked: these include the three main sea ports of Beirut, Tripoli and Jamil Gemayel. For the first time, the port of Jounieh was bombed.
- A total of 38 roads have been cut off by bombs or shells, and 42 bridges have been destroyed, severely curtailing the ability to travel even within the country.
- More than 100 homes and residential buildings have been destroyed in the areas surrounding Beirut, Tripoli and in the South.
- Several important public buildings have also been destroyed, including hospitals and a number of schools. A church in Rmeish and a mosque in Tiri were also severely damaged.
- Fuel containers across the country and 12 service stations were destroyed, threatening a fuel shortage.
- At least 36,800 residents have fled Beirut's southern suburbs for more secure areas. About 14,500 are being housed in 65 schools across Beirut alone. Some 100,000 around the country have fled their homes.
- At least 227 people have been killed, some of them entire families. Only 24 of those killed have been affiliated with Hezbollah. Hezbollah is only claiming three of the victims as their own. Over 500 have been wounded.
- The Lebanese finance minister has estimated that the damage to the country amounts to \$.5 billion so far. This does not include the inevitable economic shortfall caused by the decimation to the tourism industry and the continued attacks.
- Reuters listed a dairy factory, a lighthouse, civilian buses and a medical truck as some of the “more puzzling targets” of Israeli attacks.
- The British daily, the Independent, described Israel’s attack on the south this way: “Israeli jets came first to the little village of Dweir near Nabatiya in southern Lebanon where an Israeli plane dropped a bomb on to the home of a Shia Muslim cleric. He was killed. So was his wife. So were eight of his children. One was decapitated. All they could find of a baby was its head and torso which a young villager brandished in fury in front of the cameras. Then the planes visited another home in Dweir and disposed of a family of seven.”