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It's just a peace of cake, then?

By Lindy McDowell
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HAMAS - with a ballot box in one hand and the detonator for the suicide bomb belt in the other. And now, after this week's election results, Hamas - with the AK47 in one hand and the reins of power in the other.

In Britain and Europe and the US, meanwhile- consternation and shock on one hand.

And on the other, the usual, pathetic, naive assumption that all it will take will be a few encouraging speeches from Western leaders about the need to move the process on, go the extra mile for peace and draw a line under the past, and this party of terrorist mass murderers and child killers will be chivvied into becoming poster boys for democracy.

You'd laugh if it wasn't so horrifyingly familiar.

Northern Ireland is the template for bringing terrorists in from the cold, elevating them to government with their arsenals still intact, and conceding to their every request in the name of peace.

It is the place where the British, Irish and US governments, to enthusiastic applause from the EU, has institutionalised terrorism and rewarded paramilitary violence.

So it's a bit rich now for any of them to express surprise that Hamas, taking a lead from their long-time mates in the Irish republican movement, have sought and acquired a mandate for terrorist murder.

These boys are going into government brandishing their guns and bombs and pledging to wipe Israel off the face of the map. And Tony Blair says: "I think it is important for Hamas to understand that there comes a point where they have to decide between a path of democracy or a path of violence."

In fact, thanks to your best efforts in our own place Tone, they know that it's possible to do both. The Northern Ireland peace process is a dual carriageway down which democracy and terrorism trundle in tandem. That is how you engineered it.

The idea that it's possible to talk the blood-crazed Hamas into eschewing violence is risible. Why should they? This is a movement that, in the past, has sent its pathetic suicidal saps to massacre innocent civilians in Israel confident in the knowledge that its apologists in the West (among them Mr Blair's own wife, no less) would "understand" how they had been "driven" to such barbarity.

Never a word about the money paid to the families of the bombers. Never an inquiry about where this money came from in the first place, nor any debate about the morals of paying vulnerable Palestinians to turn themselves in human bombs.

Will the massive funding the EU annually provides to the Palestine Authority - £330m - continue now that it will pass directly into the hands of a banned terrorist organisation?

Tony Blair, whose government is about to reinstate parliamentary expenses (with back payment) to the political wing of another banned terrorist organisation, may be in two minds about that one.

But I imagine the ordinary people of Israel won't be. With a madman in Iran on one side threatening their complete annihilation and now homicidal Hamas in power in Palestine, they look to Britain and Europe and America for reassurance.

But what will they get? Firm action?

Or just more woolly words, dithering and terrorist toadying from all those governments which have established and endorsed Mr Blair's two tone template for peace in Northern Ireland?

Condemning violence on one hand. Rewarding it with the other.

Grieving mums deserve better than this ...

IN London they spent in excess of £50,000 trying to save a whale in the Thames. In Belfast, a campaign to bring back an old ship with Titanic links back to the city has garnered massive public and official support.

In both cases it's easy to understand the emotion that spurs people to respond to appeals like these.

But in terms of deserving causes connected to the sea, everything has been eclipsed this week by a sight that tears at the heart - the sight of two mothers standing on two separate quaysides, weeping and praying for the return of their sons.

In Ardglass the search for the body of Connor Bogues, missing after the fishing boat Greenhill sank, was being carried out this week by a team of volunteer divers from Dundalk. These divers have taken unpaid leave from their jobs to carry out the search. The PSNI diving team has also been taking part in the search but their efforts have been curtailed by what's described as a lack of resources.

In Belfast where 21-year-old Martin Kelly disappeared four weeks ago, the PSNI team did carry out one underwater search of the docks area close to where he was last seen leaving Pat's Bar on the evening of New Year's Day. But since then, nothing. In fairness, there is no evidence that Martin did actually fall into the water. The police investigation understandably has to look at all other possibilities. But equally understandably his family want the docks area searched.

Which is why, following a request from Martin's mother, the Dundalk team have agreed to continue the underwater search for her son - after they have recovered the body of Connor in Ardglass.

In simple, searing words Martin's mother sums up her despair.

"I just don't want Martin down at the bottom of the water. I have nightmares about him lying down there and I want him brought up so I can hold him and put him to rest."

The big question that events of recent days have raised is why hasn't Northern Ireland got a properly resourced team (PSNI or otherwise) on constant standby for emergencies such as these?

Maybe there is a very good reason why not.

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But in a tiny place almost surrounded by water, with a great blob of water at its centre, with countless rivers and a still (despite what the government has done to it) sizeable fishing industry, it seems crazy that when a diving team is needed to recover bodies, we have to depend on volunteers from across the border, operating through compassion.

If it's a question of money, couldn't Lottery funding be called into play?

Cash (quite rightly) isn't the primary consideration when it's a matter of trying to bring a marooned whale back to the sea. Or to return part of our heritage to its home city.

It shouldn't be a barrier either in a situation like this.

When it's a question of whether we are able return the body of a drowned boy to the arms of his grieving mother.

Reverse gear

BACK in the Seventies they used to drape scantily clad bimbos across cars to help sell them. Of course, the women's movement put paid to all that sexist, demeaning nonsense. And how far we have come in the years since then...

This by the way, is a pic of model Nell McAndrews. In case you're wondering what she's doing, apparently she's "wishing punters good luck" in the Euro Lottery. Progress or what, sisters?

Monkeys do the business

THE Arctic Monkeys are the Harry Potters of popular music. Their fan base was built up on the internet but they're now in the "snowball down a mountain" phase of success. They're just getting bigger and bigger.

Not there to share their success, however, is original band member, Glyn Jones. Glyn, who is being compared in tabloid reports to Pete Best who left the Beatles before they became famous, similarly bailed out before the big time. So is he devastated? Is he bitter?

Says Glyn: "I'm really proud of them all. What they have done is amazing and I doubt, if I had stayed in the band, they would have got this far."

His comments aren't just generous, warm hearted and honest. They also show that Glyn is not a man who's going to let his life be blighted by agonising over what might have been. It's always a wise policy in such circumstances.

As my colleague Davy Gordon is wont to say - build a bridge. Get over it.

- The Narnia movie has brought to cinema screens, CS Lewis's fantasy land of frozen expanses, sub-zero temperatures and people with icicles in their hair. Given their recent massive hike in prices, Phoenix Gas and now the NIE are presumably aiming to recreate something similar in our living rooms.

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