



Swatting Beelzebub

Lewis R. Scudder, Jr.
Apaasia Village, Cyprus
May-June 2008

We sit under our grape arbor in the summer and swat flies. It is our casual sport, you see, a diversion on a warm summer's day. Even our most skittish yard cat, Lucy, has learned only to twitch a little when she hears a swat nearby. She no longer dives for cover. Now, Chucky, our big gray, is laid back. You can bring a swatter down full force three inches from where he's catching his sixth catnap of the day and all he'll do is raise his head and look at you with the eloquent expression of, "Oh really, must you?" Chicky (Chicklette, that is), our most recent addition, is learning how to cope.

My son John mocks me as I pass around the swatters. "There's no end to flies," he says. "Swat one and three take its place."

Actually, John's wrong. Flies come in finite numbers. I must admit that I've yet to discover how finite that number actually is, but, hey! like all creatures flies *must* come in limited quantities. And I do feel that energetic and ever more artful swatting reduces the number of flies at least in my immediate vicinity. If we pull together, each one swatting away, there's got to be an impact upon wider 'flydom'.

This is how I explain it to the uninitiated: "I am doing battle against the Prince of Demons, Lord of the Flies, the Great Deceiver, Beelzebub. Each fly down diminishes his lordship. I see it as my duty." When I say that I must admit William Golding's grim narrative on sin and the loss of innocence is never far from my mind. But, in the end as I said, it is a diversion on a hot day — not at all profound, really. It is just that sometimes one thought leads on to another.

There is a kind of moral application to this ... this ... parable of fly swatting, this battle against Beelzebub. He is, after all, not just Lord of the Flies but also the Father of Lies.

And, mind you, lies like flies must be finite in number because there is a finite number of liars, even though that number has not yet been defined. And I do hear my son: "Swat one and three more take its place." Like flies lies have a way of cutting loose from their creators. They take on lives of their own and mysteriously multiply. The task remains: 'Swat Beelzebub!' Some who are trapped in lies may yet be liberated. Just pass around the swatters.

*

My daughter, Beth, some time ago suggested that there's the issue of the media. And before going any further I must confess that Nancy and I are not media buffs. We have no TV hookup. As on September 11th, 2001, we are frequently dependent upon our friends calling up and asking, "Have you heard ...?" and then expatiating on what we ought to have heard. So maybe I'm not the person best qualified to comment upon whether the media tells the truth or not even though we can observe their impact upon

people. Of course, by and large BBC World Service radio still tends to be rather atypically reliable as a news source, and we do listen to that.

But, I grant, we are always just a bit out of phase with the way most people of our acquaintance are being conditioned toward the world. Is that good or bad? Does that compromise our participation and the authenticity of our observations? I don't know the answer to that, but I do know that, for our part, we at least feel we have a bit more mental and spiritual space than many of our friends. Avoiding information over-load, we certainly feel less bombarded.

We did hear immediately, however, about Hillary Clinton's grudging concession to Barak Obama on Saturday, June 7th, and we rejoiced. But almost in the same instant we heard that Obama had graced with his presence the meeting of AIPAC (American-Israel Political Action Committee), and what he said there made my heart fail me. His spin-doctors have since tried slathering it gobbledygook, but I saw a man drop his 'lie swatter' and buy into the 'liedom' of the Zionist fiction hook, line and sinker. It was (and *is*) horribly depressing. It was for me a Golding moment.

*

In what was perhaps her last major work, Barbara Tuchman (1912-1989) — of *August 1914* and *The Proud Tower* fame — wrote about *The March of Folly* through human history. She begins with a long introduction to what she means by 'folly' and supplies a variety of illustrative vignettes, including how Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor, managed to alienate the ten tribes of Israel, split his kingdom and pave the way for Judah's disaster. Then, in closer detail, she deals with the Fall of Troy as a prototype and, in a series of giant temporal leaps, analyzes the cupidity and stupidity of the Renaissance Popes that led into the Protestant Reformation, goes on to how the British foolishly botched relations with their American colonies precipitating thereby the American Revolution, and concludes with the 28 year long debacle of America's engagement in Vietnam in the course of which the nation lost international respect and inner integrity. Her main thesis is that the greed for power breeds self-delusion (the most insidious kind of lie) and that self-delusion horribly applies itself to costly, self-injuring and tragic folly. The question she raises is how long can a lie sustain itself in the teeth of all evidence of its folly?

Tuchman, an innovative micro-historian was a person of her time, focused upon western civilization just prior to our global awakening. She was not particularly capable when dealing with cultures beyond that of the West. She seems to have had no serious exposure to Middle East history beyond the occasions when Muslim powers and the West clashed as in Spain and in Eastern Europe. But it did disappoint, in her tally of follies, that she avoided Zionism and its outworkings in the tangled skein of skewed western (especially American) foreign policy, gigantic economic wastage, self-defeating military adventures and botched global strategy.

Zionism is a political doctrine born in the late 19th century based upon then-current western theories about the racial foundations of nationhood. The Jewish 'race', it was said, was misanthropic in Europe because it had no state. But by the mid-20th century such doctrines were being hastily cast aside in the West. Nazism, the apotheosis of the racial state, had seen to that. But Zionism anachronistically persisted

with its basic doctrine intact, and founded the State of Israel in Palestine in 1948, ethnically cleansing it of its indigenous inhabitants.

The Zionist governing elite did attempt to blend their nationalist ambitions with secular socialism but Israel's Labor Zionists were finally expelled from the Socialist International. The propaganda coup of 1967, however, was in the long term more important than the actual military victory. Israel managed to tap into a funding torrent that shows little sign of letting up. It flows out of a clever (not to say, devious) intertwining of the Israeli kibbutz myth with the American frontier myth. But since 1967, in spite of their formidable track record, the Israeli secular Left has steadily lost ground to an ever more aggressive religious Zionism that has melded the old doctrine with a new core element that is fervently and even fanatically religious, and has no qualms about engaging in what can only be called 'state terrorism'. And this too is western (specifically, American) in origin. And the shift in dynamic is ominous.

Through its various permutations Zionism, withal, has been a very western folly inflicted upon the Middle East that can only end badly. Had Tuchman applied her razor wit and sharp mind to that agonizingly self-destructive folly, we would have been much enlightened. The only very oblique allusion she makes to it is when she remarks that the folly of Rehoboam has "exacted a long revenge that has left its mark for 2800 years."

Was this uncharacteristic timidity intentional? Surely it could not have passed her by that in the Israel-Palestine conflict there lay a whole minefield of folly that could have illustrated her prime thesis in spades. On the other hand, as a historian she may have held back because the folly was still playing itself out and had yet to reach its final defining moment. For my part, I do not buy 'the other hand'. My suspicion is that even the most incisive minds among us can set aside their 'swatter of lies' when we feel personally at odds with our own most rigorous principles. In Tuchman's case, then, silence seems to have been golden.

But not so Obama. Are we then to hold him to account for abandoning his principles, and doing so publicly and blatantly, before his history has even properly begun?

*

A great many hopes have been fixed on Barak Obama. The world longs for an American president who will break out of the straightjacket designed by John Foster Dulles, refined by Henry Kissinger and fitted onto every American president since. Were the world to vote for the American president, Obama would win by a landslide. Obama seemed to hold such a promise. But now, after June 2008, the Arab world would abstain. Obama's performance at the AIPAC conference, when he accepted, as Uri Avneri put it, "the worst old-style Washington routine," conjured up the debacle of 41 years ago virtually to the day when Israel completed its long-contemplated and carefully prepared conquest of the rest of Palestine.

So, are we to hold Obama to account for compromising his principles? Yes. I think it will be difficult for him to buy back his 'lie swatter'. It is now lost to him. And I leave the summing up to the Israeli battle-scared veteran peacenik, Uri Avneri:

How is it that a man like Obama, the son of an African father, identifies so completely with the actions of former generations of American whites? It shows again the power of a myth to become rooted in the consciousness of a person, so that he identifies 100% with the imagined national narrative. To this may be added the unconscious urge to belong to the victors, if possible.

Therefore, I do not accept without reservation the speculation: "Well, he must talk like this in order to get elected. Once in the White House, he will return to himself."

I am not so sure about that. It may well turn out that these things have a surprisingly strong hold on his mental world.

Of one thing I am certain: Obama's declarations at the AIPAC conference are very, very bad for peace. And what is bad for peace is bad for Israel, bad for the world and bad for the Palestinian people.

If he sticks to them, once elected, he will be obliged to say, as far as peace between the two peoples of this country is concerned: "No, I can't!"

*

For our part, we will continue to wield our 'lie swatters' as best we can. Beelzebub yet demands our attention with or without Barak Obama's help. But by what many now feel to have been his betrayal, we do feel a deep sense of loss. *Yâ li-l-hasrah!* (Oh! but the heart constricts!)

And I greet you from the lands of the morning.