Dial M for Murder

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One of the few consolations of having to travel to Geneva practically weekly to deal with yet another British thrust against Sri Lanka is the range of old Alfred Hitchcock movies available en route. One I had not heard of before was ‘Dial M for Murder’, starring Grace Kelly as a rich young lady who married a tennis star who soon tires of her as she does of him. He decides to have her murdered, and blackmails an old acquaintance into attempting this, but the lady manages to fatally stab her assailant during the attempt.
The husband gets back home and makes a few swift rearrangements of the scene so that the police then charge the wife with murder. She is convicted, but a solid police inspector smells a rat and turns the tables on the husband, who is duly arrested while the wife is released and able to marry the other man in her life.The husband was played by Ray Milland, but that was not the only reason I thought of David Miliband in the role, with the wife being either the Tamils of Sri Lanka, or else the Sri Lankan government, depending on which has been placed in greater danger by his current manoeuvres. Most obviously it is the Government that is threatened by his endorsement of ‘the conclusions reached at the European Council on 18 May calling for alleged violations of international humanitarian and human rights law to be investigated through an independent inquiry and for those accountable to be brought to justice.’ When he adds that ‘This could play an important role in the post-conflict reconciliation process’, clearly he is gunning for the Government, believing that this sop to Cerberus, i.e. the ghost of Mr Prabhakaran, as represented by the pro-Tiger Tamil diaspora, will be the route to peace in Sri Lanka.Sops to Cerberus only lead to Cerberus getting fatter, and therefore, from the perspective of promoting peace in Sri Lanka, Mr Miliband’s intervention can only make matters much worse. It is even sadder that this comes hard on the heels of his earlier refusal to request that the LTTE surrender. The logical conclusion is that, having tried to destroy Sri Lanka by resuscitating the LTTE, he now, like Ray Milland, has decided to introduce incriminating evidence to get rid of Sri Lanka through a flawed judicial process.Miliband apologists would claim that he has made clear in his most recent statement his abhorrence of the LTTE. But, firstly, the passing assertion that ‘Our concern has never been whether it was right to defeat the LTTE’ is scarcely categorical condemnation. More horrifyingly, it is only stated now, after the LTTE in its current form has been defeated. Another extenuating claim with regard to the particularly nasty attempt to put Sri Lanka on trial is that he is bound to respond to what is termed the international outcry about possible war crimes. This is arrant nonsense. In the first place, Miliband knows well that the outcry is driven by the Pro-Tiger diaspora, aided and abetted by a few organisations funded by the West that also did their best to attack the Sri Lankan government in the last few months so as to stop its victories against the Tigers. Secondly, we have not heard even a squeak from Miliband about the need for investigating possible war crimes on the part of nations he favours. This is not to say that Sri Lanka believes such investigation is necessary, it is simply to point out the disgraceful double standards exemplified by the Miliband approach to international relations. Finally, when he takes refuge behind a resolution at the European Council, he conveniently forgets that it is the British who were most anxious for such a resolution, as they are anxious now for a Special Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

They failed to get this on May 14th, although evidently it had been promised to the pro-Tiger diaspora who turned up in force for the event. Then the claim had been that a session was required for the sake of the civilians trapped in the conflict zone. Now that those civilians have been brought to freedom, over 70,000 of them, with minimum casualties except those the Tigers fired on as they sought to flee, the goal posts have been changed, and the session is about something else. But only in theory. While what might be termed decent Brits claim, and perhaps believe, that the special session is supposed to be about humanitarian needs, about rehabilitation and resettlement, about a political solution, the Times gave the game away in an article written by Jeremy Page. This is the reporter who has been pushing the British Foreign Office line on Sri Lanka, including attempts to sow suspicions about Chinese support for us in our difficulties. He has written today that ‘Britain, the EU and the UN rights chief are calling for an investigation into whether Sri Lanka committed war crimes by firing on civilian targets, including hospitals. They won an early victory yesterday by persuading the necessary one third of the 47 members of the UN Human Rights Council to convene a special session next week. But the Council has no real power and is still dominated by China, Russia and Middle Eastern and African nations that routinely block scrutiny of each others’ human rights records.’Whilst we are proud of the support given us by the countries Page denigrates, it is interesting that he does not mention the sterling support of India and other Asian nations, the South Americans and East Europeans who stood firm at the hour of greatest danger, until their arms were forcibly twisted. In short, what Page, and his shadowy informants, are trying to do is polarise, and force Sri Lanka into the dock by claiming that anyone who opposes this should be in the dock as well.What is all this for? If the move succeeds, the greatest beneficiaries will be the LTTE, because they will be able to convince other Tamils that they still have the support of the West. This can only lead to a renewal of struggle, in which again the greatest suffering will be for the Tamil people – and also the Tamil politicians who can now work towards a post-LTTE solution, free of the danger of the assassinations the LTTE inflicted on so many other democratic Tamil politicians.It is for this reason that I feel that the murders which the Miliband approach will entail are mainly those of Tamils. Just as his approach last week led the Tigers to assume that they need not surrender, that their taking of hostages would succeed, and so endangered further the lives of those civilians (miraculously rescued for the most part by the skilful operations of the Sri Lankan forces), so the current approach will lead to even further suffering for these victims of international intrigue.But there is another motive to be feared. The Miliband approach will only lead to instability in Sri Lanka, and further attempts to Balkanise. That in turn could lead to threats to India too. It is no coincidence that the loudest claims that Jayalalitha would triumph in Tamilnadu came from British commentators.Fortunately the people of Tamilnadu have shown clearly

that they are no longer interested in parochial considerations, that they know that the Tamils of India can do better for themselves and their country by working within a national framework. The triumph of the current government of India is a triumph for the unifying pluralistic approach that has been the hallmark of mature Indian politicians, and it will lead to an India able to play a leading part on the world stage along with other large Asian countries. It will also lead to better relations in the region, with less danger of sectarian inclinations. That some British politicians believe their sacred place in the world order is threatened by a resurgent India is no secret. Fortunately there are more amongst them who are less obsessed by a zero-sum mentality, and realise that a stable and prosperous South Asia is in everyone’s interests, except those of the arms dealers. And the United States certainly cannot be interested in further instability at this stage.We have to hope then that someone from a country and a government with greater self confidence than the current regime in Britain will play the mature policeman of the Hitchcock film, and put a stop to the murder of the innocent. And perhaps even Gordon Brown will realise that such an adventurist foreign policy should be modified, if Britain is not to end up playing into the hands of terrorists.

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