

Killing Australians in Lebanon: Selected Targets, Selective Morality

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The killing of an Australian-Lebanese national Ibrahim Bazzi, his Lebanese wife Shorouq Hammoud, and his brother Ali Bazzi by the Israeli Defence Forces in a missile strike in southern Lebanon, has been an object exercise in selective outrage, selective ethical concern, and, generally speaking, selective morality.

The strike took place on a home in the neighbourhood of Al-Dawra in the town of Bint Jbeil, said to belong to the Bazzi family. On paper, the case demands investigation, explanation, even reparation. But the Australian government has pounced on an opportunity to ignore the killing of Ibrahim and his wife – both civilians and intending to head back to Sydney – and focus on the background of Ali Bazzi instead.

In his December 28, 2023 [press conference](#), the Australian Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus noted "the announcement made by Hizballah claiming links to one of the Australians killed. We are seeking to establish facts." The context to essentially excuse the killings is then sketched: "Hizballah is a listed terrorist organisation under Australian law"; there was "daily military activity in southern Lebanon, including rocket and missile fire, as well as airstrikes"; Australians in Lebanon should leave "while commercial options remain available."

On Ali's connections, Dreyfus could make much of a terrorist link that, were it to be confirmed, would make the killings, more generally, less egregious. "It's an offence [for] any Australian to cooperate with, to support, let alone to fight with, a listed terrorist organisation like Hizballah." But – and here Dreyfus was not drawn – it is not an offence for Australians to serve in the armed forces of a foreign country under Part 5.5 of the [Criminal Code Act 1995 \(Cth\)](#).

Naturally, this would depend on the country in question, and the amoral calculus used when deciding that nonsense called the “national interest”. Australians serving with the IDF is entirely permissible, despite that army’s obliteration of Palestinian civilians in a most cavalier interpretation of international law; Australians serving with their opposite numbers are criminals, buccaneering agents who deserve what they get.

Reserves Captain Lior Sivan, an Australian who served as an IDF tank commander, was killed on December 19 in a Hamas ambush. When news was made public of this fact, his love of Israel and personal attributes [splashed the media outlets](#). Here was a noble human beaming with noble courage, to be garlanded and celebrated. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) [sent](#) its “condolences to his family during this difficult time and stand ready to provide consular assistance.”

When news came of the slain trio in Bint Jbeil, two civilians were forgotten in favour of the supposedly blighting attributes of the alleged Hezbollah fighter.

“Of course,” stated Dreyfus, “there are examples in the past of Australians having had links with Hizballah. One of the reasons why the Australian Government has listed Hizballah, in both its arms, as a terrorist organisation, is because of the potential links to Australia and Australians.”

And what of the destruction of civilian life in this conflict, with thousands of instances of it in Gaza, and a rising toll in Lebanon? The Australian government, Dreyfus insisted, had “consistently called for civilian lives to be protected and we have consistently raised our concerns about the risk of this conflict spreading.”

Peter Cronau, a veteran ABC producer and investigative journalist, makes the point about [the relevant processes](#) that need to take place: an investigation followed by the laying of charges; the collection of forensic evidence by the Australian Federal Police and Australian Defence personnel from the Australian embassy in Lebanon; the gathering of evidence “regarding who issued the orders, selected the targeting, and who fired the weapon, using all the intelligence and resources available to Australian officers working at Pine Gap base.”

The role of Pine Gap, a primarily US-run satellite surveillance base located to the southwest of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, is potentially critical, given its role in furnishing geolocation data to Washington and, in some cases, its allies regarding distant military operations. Targeting data for drone strikes, for instance, has been something of a favourite.

Cronau’s suggestions are credible, and invoking links with Hezbollah by Dreyfus are expedient forms of dismissal. Similar steps of investigation and inquiry were, after all, taken in attempting to identify who and what was used in the shooting down of the Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine in July 2014. The downing of the flight resulted in the loss of 298 lives, including 38 Australians. Much ink and time was expended on identifying the allegedly relevant military personnel involved, the supply chain of the Buk-TELAR missile system, not to mention the repeated insistence on the part of the Australian government that action be taken against the Russian separatists and the Kremlin for their misdeeds.

Canberra [proceeded to impose](#) targeted financial sanctions and travel bans on four of the personnel.

“These sanctions,” Foreign Minister Penny Wong stated in a media release,

“demonstrate the Australian Government’s ongoing commitment to hold to account those responsible for the downing of Flight MH17.”

For all this, Australian nationality is a soupy, thin concept. Its protections are limited, unreliable and arbitrary. When brandished with a certain political preference and bias, it is cherished, a convertible currency in the international stock exchange of diplomacy. We think of the Iranian-detained Australian-British national Kylie Moore-Gilbert who was, for reasons never fully explained, [exchanged](#) for a number of Iranian operatives jailed in Thailand over a miscellany of bungled assassination attempts against Israeli officials and targets. Rarely has an Australian Prime Minister, a Foreign Affairs minister, or DFAT, been so busy over the fate of one of their citizens.

We contrast such extravagant efforts with the treatment offered individuals as David Hicks or Mamdouh Habib, seen by the Australian political class as Islamic refuse (converted or born), and therefore deserving of torture and punishment by *other* powers. To that can be added death by missile strike, as well.

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