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**PRESS
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EX-DIPLOMAT CONDEMNS UK AND US MILITARY POLICIES

By Katrine Bussey, Political Reporter, Scottish Press Association.

Both the British and American Governments were today criticised over their policies in the Middle East by a former ambassador to Libya.

Retired diplomat Oliver Miles said the UK and the US should be trying to organise a way to get their troops out of Iraq.

He also criticised the allies' stance over the conflict between Israel and Lebanon, warning that without involving Hezbollah the current ceasefire was 'flimsy'.

Mr Miles added that the two countries had been slow to call for a ceasefire in the region, describing that as being 'very costly'.

The former diplomat, who was the British ambassador to Libya from 1984 to 1985, also said the UK Government had been wrong to allow US weapons flights on route to Israel to land at airports such as Prestwick in Scotland.

Mr Miles was speaking during the Scottish Parliament's Festival of Politics, where he gave a talk on the Middle East alongside his son Hugh Miles, a journalist who has written a book on the Arabic TV channel Al-Jazeera.

Mr Miles spoke out about the current conflict between Israel and Lebanon and said a ceasefire in the area was holding but he warned this was 'flimsy and looks unlikely to last'.

Mr Miles explained: 'To my mind, to try to establish a ceasefire, and then a settlement and then a permanent settlement following a contest between Hezbollah and the Israelis without talking to Hezbollah is just barmy.

'Without talking to Hezbollah it can't possibly work.'

He continued: 'I know the reason why the American Government, the British Government and others are refusing to talk to Hezbollah is because they've been labelled 'terrorists'.'

He was also critical of the British and American Governments over their refusal to call for a ceasefire at the start of the conflict.

The former diplomat explained the allies had taken the stance that any ceasefire had to be based on a long-term solution to the fighting.

However, he said: 'I think that's a cockeyed argument. Most conflicts are settled the other way round. You start with a ceasefire then you work out the principles for a settlement and that's what should have been done.'

He also said the UK Government had been wrong to allow American weapons flights bound for Israel to stop off at UK airports, such as Prestwick.

Mr Miles explained: 'We have a policy of not selling arms to countries which are involved in conflict so we don't sell arms to Israel - but America does.'

'Should we be assisting America to supply Israel with munitions? I think the answer to that is no, simply because we have an arms policy which says that that is not our policy.'

Mr Miles also spoke about the situation in Iraq, which he said was getting 'grimmer and grimmer'.

And he said the American and British Governments must try to come up with a strategy for withdrawing troops, rather than waiting for the newly-formed Iraqi Government to ask them to leave.

Mr Miles said that that Government depended 'almost entirely' on the US military presence and added: 'The day the American army leaves is probably the day the present Iraqi Government will cease to exist.'

But he insisted: 'It would be possible, with the combined efforts of British and American diplomacy and intelligence and military thinking, to produce a plan which would have some chance of working.'

