

Lest We Forget: These Were 'Blair's Bombs'

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In all the coverage of last week's bombing of London, a basic truth struggled to be heard. It has been said quietly, politely, guardedly, as if it might somehow dishonour the dead, instead of speaking truth to the cause. While not doubting the atrocious inhumanity of those who planted the bombs (as if anyone could), no one should doubt that these were "Blair's bombs"; and he ought not be allowed to evade culpability with yet another unctuous Bush-inspired speech about "our way of life". The bombers struck because he and Bush attacked Iraq, having been warned by the Joint Intelligence Committee that the "by far the greatest terrorist threat" to this country would be "heightened by military action against Iraq".

Indeed, this was the one reliable warning from British intelligence in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq. A House of Commons committee has since verified this warning. Had Blair heeded it instead of conspiring to deceive the nation that Iraq offered a threat the Londoners who died on Thursday might be alive today, along with tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis.

Three weeks ago, a classified CIA report revealed that the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq had turned that country into a focal point of terrorism. None of the intelligence agencies regarded Iraq as such a flashpoint before the invasion, however tyrannical the regime. On the contrary, in 2003, the CIA reported that Iraq "exported no terrorist threat to his neighbours" and that Saddam Hussein was "implacably hostile to Al-Qaeda".

Blair's and Bush's invasion changed all that. In invading a stricken and defenceless country at the heart of the Islamic and Arab world, their adventure became self-fulfilling. Denial of that by those who supported the invasion insults the memory of all those who have died as a result. Blair's epic irresponsibility has brought the daily horrors of Iraq home to Britain and he is not - to paraphrase one of

the few challenging questions put to him before the invasion by John Humphries - fit to be prime minister.

For more than a year, he has urged the British to “move on” from Iraq, and last week it seemed that his spinmeisters and good fortune had joined hands. The awarding of the 2012 Olympics to London created the fleeting illusion that all was well, regardless of messy events in a faraway country. Moreover, the G8 meeting in Scotland and its accompanying “Make Poverty History” campaign and circus of celebrities served as a temporary cover for the greatest political scandal of modern times: an illegal invasion conceived in lies which, under the rule of international law established at Nuremberg, represented a “paramount war crime”.

Over the past two weeks, the contrast between the coverage of the G8, its marches and pop concerts, and another “global” event has been striking. The World Tribunal on Iraq in Istanbul has had virtually no coverage, yet the evidence it has produced, the most damning to date, has been the silent spectre at the Geldoff extravaganzas.

The tribunal is a serious international public inquiry into the invasion and occupation, the kind governments dare not hold. Its expert, eyewitness testimonies, said the author Arundathi Roy, a tribunal jury member, “demonstrate that even those of us who have tried to follow the war closely are not aware of a fraction of the horrors that have been unleashed in Iraq.” The most shocking was given by Dahr Jamail, one of the best un-embedded reporters working in Iraq. He described how the hospitals of besieged Fallujah had been subjected to an American tactic of collective punishment, with US marines assaulting staff and stopping the wounded entering, and American snipers firing at the doors and windows, and medicines and emergency blood prevented from reaching them. Children, the elderly, were shot dead in front of their families, in cold blood.

Imagine for a moment the same appalling state of affairs imposed on the London hospitals that received the victims of Thursday’s bombing. Unimaginable? Well, it happens, in our name, regardless of BBC’s suppression of the Fallujah and other atrocities. When will someone draw this parallel at one of the staged “press conferences” at which Blair is allowed to emote for the cameras stuff about “our values outlast[ing] theirs”? Silence is not journalism. In Fallujah, they know “our values” only too well.

While the two men responsible for the carnage in Iraq, Bush and Blair, were side by side at Gleneagles, why wasn't the connection made between their fraudulent "war on terror" and the bombing in London? When will someone in the political class say that Blair's smoke-and-mirrors "debt cancellation" at best amounts to less than the money the government spent in a week brutalising Iraq, where British and American violence is the cause of the doubling of child poverty and malnutrition since Saddam Hussein was overthrown (Unicef).

The truth is that the debt relief the G8 is offering is lethal. Its ruthless "conditionalities" of captive economies far outweigh any tenuous benefit. This was a taboo during the G8 week, whose theme was not so much making poverty history as the silencing and pacifying and co-opting dissent and truth. The mawkish images on giant screens behind the pop stars in Hyde Park included no pictures of murdered Iraqi doctors with the blood streaming from their heads, cut down by Bush's snipers.

Real life became more satirical than satire could ever be. There was Bob Geldoff on the front pages resting his smiling face on smiling Blair's shoulder, the war criminal and his smitten, knighted jester. There was an heroically silhouetted Bono, who celebrates men like Jeffrey Sachs as saviours of the world's poor while lauding "compassionate" George Bush's "war on terror" as one of his generation's greatest achievements; and there was Paul Wolfowitz, beaming and promising to make poverty history: this is the man who, before he was handed control of the World Bank, was an apologist for Suharto's genocidal regime in Indonesia, who was one of the architects of Bush's "neo-con" putsch and of the bloodfest in Iraq and the notion of "endless war".

For the politicians and pop stars and church leaders and polite people who believed Blair and Gordon Brown when they declared their "great moral crusade" against poverty, Iraq was an embarrassment. The killing of more than 100,000 Iraqis mostly by American gunfire and bombs—a figure reported in a comprehensive peer-reviewed study in the *The Lancet*—was airbrushed from mainstream debate.

Untold numbers of loved ones are missing in Iraq because of the horror Bush and Blair have inflicted on that society. But where do the families post their pictures, as the grieving do in London? If they ask at the American bases, they run the risk of themselves disappearing. In our free-speaking societies, the unmentionable is

that “the state has lost its mind and is punishing so many innocent people”.

As Arthur Miller once wrote, “and so the evidence has to be internally denied.” Not only denied, but distracted by an entire court: Geldoff, Bono, Madonna, McCartney et al, whose “Live 8” was the very antithesis of 15 February 2003, when two million people brought their hearts and brains and anger to the streets of London. Blair will almost certainly use last week’s atrocity and tragedy to further deplete basic human rights in Britain, as Bush has done in America. The goal is not security, but greater control. Above all this, the memory of their victims, “our” victims, in Iraq demands the return of our anger. And nothing less is owed to those who died and suffered in London last week, unnecessarily.

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