

Bush and Blair are in trouble

Shortly before the disastrous Bush visit to Britain, Tony Blair was at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday. It was an unusual glimpse of a state killer whose effete respectability has gone. His perfunctory nod to “the glorious dead” came from a face bleak with guilt. As William Howard Russell of the Times wrote of another prime minister responsible for the carnage in the Crimea, “He carries himself like one with blood on his hands.” Having shown his studied respect to the Queen, whose prerogative allowed him to commit his crime in Iraq, Blair hurried away. “Sneak home and pray you’ll never know,” wrote Siegfried Sassoon in 1917, “The hell where youth and laughter go.”

Blair must know his game is over. Bush’s reception in Britain demonstrated that; and the CIA has now announced that the Iraqi resistance is “broad, strong and getting stronger”, with numbers estimated at 50,000. “We could lose this situation,” says a report to the White House. The goal now is to “plan the endgame”.

Their lying has finally become satire. Bush told David Frost that the world really had to change its attitude about Saddam Hussein’s nuclear weapons because they were “very advanced”. My personal favourite is Donald Rumsfeld’s assessment. “The message,” he said, “is that there are known knowns – there are things that we know that we know. There are known unknowns – that is to say, there are things that we now know we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns ... things we do not know we don’t know. And each year we discover a few more of those unknown unknowns.”

An unprecedented gathering of senior American intelligence officers, diplomats and former Pentagon officials met in Washington the other day to say, in the words of Ray McGovern, a former CIA analyst and friend of Bush’s father: “Now we know that no other president of the United States has ever lied so baldly and so often and so demonstrably ... The presumption now has to be that he’s

JOHN PILGER | BUSH AND BLAIR ARE IN TROUBLE

lying any time that he's saying anything.”

And Blair and his foreign secretary dare to suggest that the millions who have rumbled the Bush gang are “fashionably anti-American”. An instructive example of their own mendacity was demonstrated recently by Jack Straw. On BBC Radio 4, defending Bush and Washington’s doctrine of “preventive war”, Straw told the interviewer: “Article 51 [of the United Nations Charter], to which you referred earlier – you said it only allows for self-defence. It actually goes more widely than that because it talks about the right of states to take what is called ‘preventive action’.”

Straw’s every word was false, an invention. Article 51 does not refer to “the right of states to take preventive action” or anything similar. Nowhere in the UN Charter is there any such reference. Article 51 refers only to “the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs” and goes on to constrain that right further. Moreover, the UN Charter was so framed as to outlaw any state’s claimed right to preventive war.

In other words, the Foreign Secretary fabricated a provision of the UN Charter which does not exist, then broadcast it as fact. When Straw does speak the truth, it causes panic. The other day, he admitted that Bush had shut him out of critical talks in Washington with Paul Bremer, the US viceroy in Iraq. Straw said he was “not party to the talks, not a party to his [Bremer’s] return visit”. The Foreign Office transcript of this leaves out that Straw had complained that “the UK and US [are] literally the occupying powers, and we have to meet those responsibilities”. The US disregard for its principal vassal has never been clearer.

Both are now desperate. The Bush regime’s panic is reflected in its adoption of Israeli revenge tactics, using F-16 aircraft to drop 500lb bombs on residential areas called “suspect zones”. They are also burning crops: another Israeli tactic. The parallels are now Palestine and Vietnam; more Americans have died in Iraq than in the first three years of the Vietnam war.

For Bush and Blair, no recourse to the “bravery” of “our wonderful troops” will work its populist magic now. “My husband died in vain,” read the headline in the Independent on Sunday. Lianne Seymour, widow of the commando Ian Seymour, said: “They misled the guys going out there. You can’t just do something wrong and hope you find a good reason for it later.” The moral logic of her words is shared by the majority of the British people, if not by Blair’s diminishing court. How decrepit the Independent’s warmongering rival the Observer now appears, with its pages of titillation and hand-wringing, having seen off a proud liberal tradition.

JOHN PILGER | BUSH AND BLAIR ARE IN TROUBLE

“Out there”, the Iraqi dead and suffering are still unpeople, their latest death toll not worthy of the front page. Neither is the Amnesty report that former Iraqi prisoners of war have accused American and British troops of torturing them in custody, blindfolding them and kicking and beating them with weapons for long periods. Investigators from Amnesty have taken statements from 20 former prisoners. “In one case we are talking about electric shocks being used against a man ... If you keep beating somebody for the whole night and somebody is bleeding and you are breaking teeth, it is more than beating,” said Amnesty’s researcher, “I think that’s torture.” The Americans hold more than 4,000 prisoners – a higher figure, it is estimated, than those incarcerated at any time by Saddam Hussein.

With Bush in London, Baroness Symons, a Foreign Office minister, postponed a long-planned meeting with families of British citizens held in the American concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. She has made a habit of this. The families and their lawyers want to ask questions about the alleged use of torture, the deteriorating mental health of prisoners and the criminalising of the Muslim community in Britain. Held for two years without any due process, these British citizens have had their rights relegated to the convenience of the American warlord.

Blair’s troubles are only beginning. There are signs that the Shia storm is gathering in southern Iraq, an area for which the British are responsible. A Shia underground army is said to be forming, quietly and patiently, as it did under the shah of Iran. If or when they rise, there will be a great deal more British blood on the Prime Minister’s hands.

For 11 November, Remembrance Day, Hywel Williams wrote movingly in the Guardian about the exploitation of “the usable past – something that can be packaged into propaganda ... [by those] with careers to build and their own causes to advance ... We are now a country draped in the weeds of war ... The remembrance we endure now is no longer a seasonal affair. It is a continuous festival of death as individual souls are press-ganged into the justification of all British-American wars. To this sorrow there seems no end.”

Yes, but only if we allow it. **JP**