

Power, propaganda and 'our' terrorism

On 20 March, the first anniversary of the Anglo-American attack on Iraq, John Pilger addressed a rally in Sydney, Australia – part of a 'day of action' in cities and towns around the world – in which he described the carnage in Iraq: up to 55,000 dead, including 10,000 civilians; more than 1000 children killed or injured every month from exploding cluster bombs; and the contamination of uranium-tipped weapons

Let us be clear on the facts of what happened one year ago today. The United States, aided by Britain and Australia, attacked a sovereign country, unprovoked, and in breach of the most basic principles of international law. By the most conservative estimates, up to 55,000 people were killed, including *at least*, 10,000 civilians: men, woman and children, a figure confirmed this week by Amnesty International.

More than 1,000 children are killed or injured in Iraq every month by exploding cluster bombs, left by the Americans and the British. According to the Uranium Medical Research Centre, the main cities of Iraq are poisoned with radiation from uranium-tipped shells and missiles, fired by the Americans and the British.

Indeed, so *contaminated* are sections of Baghdad and Basra that coalition troops are not allowed to go anywhere near where their own shells have fallen – streets where children play, oblivious to the danger. In one report, Iraq is described as a “silent Hiroshima”. What this means is that the people of Iraq, and the occupying soldiers, perhaps including Australians, are left to get sick, many of them fatally. Listen to the American soldiers and their families who are now speaking out. Untold thousands of them have gone home sick, or deeply disturbed. Many have committed suicide.

This is the scale of the crime committed ‘in our name’. By every meaning of the word terrorism, the invasion of Iraq was a massive act of terrorism. If we are to

JOHN PILGER | POWER, PROPAGANDA AND 'OUR' TERRORISM

get to the truth and understand momentous events in the world, we have to look critically at our countries and our own governments. We have to think in terms of *our* terrorism. Not just the terrorism the media wants us to know about, which relentlessly blames the Islamic world. This officially approved threat is racist; it ignores the fact that most of the *victims* of terrorism are people in Muslim countries: Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine.

Yes, Al-Qaeda is a threat and a serious one, now thanks largely to Bush and Blair and Howard. If there is a terrorist attack in this country and Australians are killed, John Howard will share the responsibility – just as Jose Avnar, the former prime minister of Spain, brought bloodshed to his people, 90 per cent of whom wanted nothing to do with Bush's imperial adventure.

That's why Howard and his spin doctors this week silenced the Federal Police Commissioner, Mick Keelty, who merely stated the obvious – that by joining the attack on Iraq, the Australian government has all but invited retaliation against this country. Last year, in Washington, I interviewed Ray McGovern, one of the CIA's most senior analysts, a man so close to the American establishment that he was a personal friend of George Bush Senior. He told me, 'The invasion of Iraq was 95 per cent charade. And they all knew it: Bush, Blair and Howard.'

Take just one speech by John Howard on February 4th last year. In less than an hour, he referred 30 times to the 'threat' posed by Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. He was quite specific. He declared, and I quote, 'Iraq has an intact arsenal of chemical and biological weapons'. Everything he said was false.

What a disreputable bunch they are, these machine politicians in Canberra who take their orders from a foreign power *against* the interests of us: orders that endanger *us*. By any measure of the truth, we ought not to believe a word that Howard and Downer says; and yet we have to put up with front pages and lead items on the TV news that amplify their deceit. Five years ago, as the people of East Timor struggled to gain their independence, Alexander Downer told the Australian people that the government knew nothing about the Indonesian terrorism that was about to engulf East Timor. But he knew. We now know he saw the intelligence; and the Australian SAS had trained Kopassus, Suharto's storm troopers who committed the worst crimes in East Timor.

So it is not surprising that our heroic SAS should have gone into Iraq guns blazing, *before* March 20th last year. The retired diplomat and whistleblower, Tony Kevin, has produced evidence that the SAS may have killed hundreds of people. He describes the SAS attack as a 'turkey shoot'; he is still awaiting a reply from Downer.

JOHN PILGER | POWER, PROPAGANDA AND 'OUR' TERRORISM

Australians have a right to know these facts. Recently, on the ABC's Lateline program [See *Pilger on the US and terrorism, previous coldtype column*], I suggested that it was important that Bush's so-called "coalition" in Iraq was driven out. I pointed out they were illegal invaders, who were selling off Iraq to their cronies: effectively stealing a country. I asked: What if the Japanese had occupied Australia, or the Germans had taken over Britain? The next day, Alexander Downer, the Australian Foreign Minister, and John Anderson, the Deputy Prime Minister, issued statements calling on me to apologise for having defamed the honour of Australia and its noble work in Iraq.

This tells us a great deal. These politicians are frightened. One dissenting voice is heard on the ABC, and they panic. Almost all the principal commentators the Australian people have to read are warmongers, but this could not be tolerated. In an international index of press freedom, Australia is fiftieth. How shaming for an allegedly free country. Token appearances by dissenters on the ABC and token critical programs, like the ABC's soft *Media Watch*, do not make up for this disgrace.

That's why Howard and Downer appear so confident they will get away with their deceit. They think they can say what they like, and tell any lie, and silence any critic: be it the Federal Police Commissioner or myself, and no one will object. They know that the ABC is now so intimidated it will channel and amplify their nonsense and call it news.

What about the *real* news? What about the fact that the United States is secretly negotiating with Pakistan to send troops into that country, hoping to find Osama bin Laden before the Presidential election in November? An American invasion of Pakistan, with the connivance of the military regime in that country, will be the biggest recruiting drive for Al-Qaida since the invasion of Iraq.

What about the *real* news from Afghanistan, where the situation of women is, in many parts of the country, worse than under the Taliban, where an American-installed regime of warlords rules with terror; where many more people have died under American bombs than were killed on September 11? We have a right to know the real news from these countries, just as we have a right to know about the secret deals struck in our name; and we have a right to debate the *criminality* of the invasion of one year ago.

The judges who tried the German leadership at Nuremberg in 1946 laid the basis for more than half a century of international law. They described the unprovoked, illegal invasion of a sovereign country as 'the supreme international war crime'.

JOHN PILGER | POWER, PROPAGANDA AND 'OUR' TERRORISM

One year ago, the British military command almost refused to send British troops to Iraq – fearing prosecution in the new International Criminal Court. The same fear is in Australia. Why did the Defence Department in Canberra almost certainly plant a story in the Sunday papers recently, in which RAAF pilots spoke openly about how they had refused to bomb certain targets in Iraq for fear of hitting civilians? I shall make an educated guess as to why. Because Australia and Britain – unlike the United States – are signatories to the rules of the International Criminal Court; and in Canberra they, too, fear being prosecuted as war criminals. That is not an outlandish prospect. International justice, once unleashed, can have a power of its own.

We simply cannot afford to acquiesce in the warmongering corruption of the deputy sheriffs in Canberra. We cannot afford to place our lives in the hands of men like Alexander Downer, who was described by a Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, Denis Halliday, as one of the most wilfully stupid men in high office he had met.

Brian Deegan, the father of one of the Bali bombing victims, Josh Deegan, is so disgusted with Downer that he is considering standing against him at the next federal election. We should give Brian Deegan every support. We should also give Terry Hicks, the heroic father of David Hicks, every support in his lone campaign for justice for his son, David, still held without charge in the concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay.

What Howard and Downer fear is isolation. The so-called coalition of the willing is falling apart. Spain is recalling its troops from Iraq. Even little Honduras is recalling its troops from Iraq. Holland is about to pull out its token contingent. The message is clear: Australia must get out of Iraq while it can.

The only hope for a peaceful world is the neutralisation of the rampant superpower — by the international community. We must tell Washington we shall not tolerate its aggression any more. Can we achieve that? Yes, in time we can. A world resistance is already under way. Who is this resistance? The answer is: People like you. Millions of people like you: in Spain, Brazil, Italy, Uruguay, South Africa, Britain, France.

Yes, there are perhaps greater challenges in Australia, and it may take longer here. But a start has been made; and we have no choice. Remember the words of Mahatma Gandhi: "First, they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win." **JP**