

Who are the extremists?

The “liberation” of Iraq is a cruel joke on a stricken people. The Americans and British, partners in a great recognised crime, have brought down on the Middle East, and much of the rest of the world, the prospect of terrorism and suffering on a scale that al-Qaeda could only imagine.

That is what this week’s bloody bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad tells us. It is a “wake-up call”, according to Mary Robinson, the former UN Humanitarian Commissioner.

She is right, of course, but it is a call that millions of people sounded on the streets of London and all over the world more than seven months ago - before the killing began. And yet the Anglo-American spin machine, whose minor cogs are currently being exposed by the Hutton Inquiry, is still in production.

According to the Bush and Blair governments, those responsible for the UN outrage are “extremists from outside”: Al-Qaeda terrorists or Iranian militants, or both. Whether or not outsiders are involved, the aim of this propaganda is to distract from the truth that America and Britain are now immersed in a classic guerrilla war, a war of resistance and self-determination of the kind waged against foreign aggressors and colonial masters since history began.

For America, it is another Vietnam. For Britain it is another Kenya, or indeed another Iraq.

In 1921, Lieutenant-General Sir Stanley Maude said in Baghdad: “Our armies do not come as conquerors, but as liberators.” Within three years 10,000 had died in an uprising against the British, who gassed and bombed the “terrorists”.

Nothing has changed, only the names and the fine print of the lies.

As for the “extremists from outside”, simply turn the meaning around and you have a succinct description of the current occupiers who, unprovoked, attacked a defenceless sovereign country, defying the United Nations and the opposition of

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most of humanity. Using weapons designed to cause the maximum human suffering – cluster bombs, uranium-tipped shells and firebombs (napalm) – these extremists from outside caused the deaths of at least 8,000 civilians and as many as 30,000 troops, most conscripted teenagers. Consider the waves of grief in any society from that carnage.

At their moment of “victory”, these extremists from outside - having already destroyed Iraq’s infrastructure with a 12-year bombing campaign and embargo - murdered journalists, toppled statues and encouraged wholesale looting while refusing to make the most basic humanitarian repairs to the damage they had caused to the supply of power and clean water.

This means that today sick children are dying from thirst and gastro-enteritis, that hospitals frequently run out of oxygen and that those who might be saved can not be saved.

How many have died like this?

“We count every screwdriver,” said an American colonel during the first Gulf war, “but counting civilians who die along the way is just not our policy.”

The biggest military machine on earth, said to be spending up to \$5billion-a-month on its occupation of Iraq, apparently can not find the resources and manpower to bring generators to a people enduring temperatures of well over the century – almost half of them children, of whom eight per cent, says UNICEF, are suffering extreme malnutrition. When Iraqis have protested about this, the extremists from outside have shot them dead.

They have shot them in crowds, or individually, and they boast about it.

The other day, Task Force 20, an “elite” American unit murdered at least five people as they drove down a street. The next day they murdered a woman and her three children as they drove down a street. They are no different from the death squads the Americans trained in Latin America.

These extremists from outside have been allowed to get away with much of this – partly because of the web of deceptions in London and Washington, and partly because of those who voluntarily echo and amplify their lies.

In the current brawl between the Blair government and the BBC a new myth has emerged: It is that the BBC was and is “anti-war”. This is what George Orwell called an “official truth”. Again, just turn it around and you have the real truth; that the BBC supported Blair’s war, that day after day it broadcast and “debated” and legitimised the charade of weapons of mass destruction, as well as nonsense such as that which cast Blair as a “moderating influence” on Bush – when, as we now know, they are almost identical warmongers.

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Who can forget the BBC's exultant Chief Political Correspondent Andrew Marr, at the moment of "coalition" triumph. Tony Blair, he declared, "said that they would take Baghdad without a blood bath, and that in the end the Iraqis would be celebrating. And on both those points he has been conclusively proved right."

If you replace "right" with "wrong", you have the truth. To the BBC's man in Downing Street, up to 40,000 deaths apparently does not constitute a "blood bath".

According to the independent American survey organisation Media Tenor, the BBC allowed less dissent against the war than all the leading international broadcasters surveyed, including the American networks. Andrew Gilligan, the BBC reporter who revealed Dr David Kelly's concerns about the government's "dodgy dossier" on Iraq, is one of the very few mavericks, an inconvenient breed who challenge official truth.

One of the most important lies was linking the regime of Saddam Hussein with al-Qaeda. As we now know, both Bush and Blair ignored the advice of their intelligence agencies and made the connection public. It worked. When the attack on Iraq began, polls showed that most Americans believed Saddam Hussein was behind September 11.

The opposite was true. Monstrous though it was, Saddam Hussein's regime was a veritable bastion against al-Qaeda and its Islamic fanaticism. Saddam was the West's man, who was armed to the teeth by America and Britain in the 1980s because he had oil and a lot of money and because he was an enemy of anti-Western mullahs in Iran and elsewhere in the region.

Saddam and Osama bin Laden loathed each other. His grave mistake was invading Kuwait in 1990; Kuwait is an Anglo-American protectorate, part of the Western oil empire in the Middle East.

The killings in the UN compound in Baghdad this week, like the killing of thousands of others in Iraq, form a trail of blood that leads to Bush and Blair and their courtiers. It was obvious to millions of people all over the world that if the Americans and British attacked Iraq, then the fictional link between Iraq and Islamic terrorism could well become fact.

The brutality of the occupation of Iraq – in which children are shot or arrested by the Americans, and countless people have "disappeared" in concentration camps – is an open invitation to those who now see Iraq as part of a holy jihad.

When I travelled the length of Iraq several years ago, I felt completely safe. I was received everywhere with generosity and grace, even though I was from a country whose government was bombing and besieging my hosts.

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Bush's and Blair's court suppressed the truth that most Iraqis both opposed Saddam Hussein and the invasion of their country. The thousands of exiles, from Jordan to Britain, said this repeatedly. But who listened to them? When did the BBC interrupt its anti-Christ drumbeat about Saddam Hussein and report this vital news?

Nor are the United Nations merely the "peacemakers" and "nationbuilders" that this week's headlines say they are. There were dedicated humanitarians among the dead in Baghdad but for more than 12 years, the UN Security Council allowed itself to be manipulated so that Washington and London could impose on the people of Iraq, under a UN flag, an embargo that resembled a mediaeval siege. It was this that crippled Iraq and, ironically, concentrated all domestic power in the hands of the regime, thus ending all hope of a successful uprising.

The other day I sat with Dennis Halliday, former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, and the UN in New York. Halliday was the senior UN official in Iraq in the mid-1990s, who resigned rather than administer the blockade.

"These sanctions," he said, "represented ongoing warfare against the people of Iraq. They became, in my view, genocidal in their impact over the years, and the Security Council maintained them, despite its full knowledge of their impact, particularly on the children of Iraq.

"We disregarded our own charter, international law, and we probably killed over a million people. It's a tragedy that will not be forgotten... I'm confident that the Iraqis will throw out the occupying forces. I don't know how long it will take, but they'll throw them out based on a nationalistic drive.

"They will not tolerate any foreign troops' presence in their country, dictating their lifestyle, their culture, their future, their politics. This is a very proud people, very conscious of a great history. It's grossly unacceptable. Every country that is now threatened by Mr Bush, which is his habit, presents an outrage to all of us.

"Should we stand by and merely watch while a man so dangerous he is willing to sacrifice Americans lives and, worse, the lives of others." **JP**