

# Lest we forget?

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There is something ironic — if not downright obscene — about the fact that in the UK the Poppy is used as the symbol of remembrance for all those who have died in the UK's countless imperial wars, a symbol that is being used to punt the latest 'adventure', Afghanistan, home of the opium poppy.

The use of the Poppy flower as a symbol of remembrance stems from the fact that the Poppy grew in abundance in the slaughterhouse called Flanders in WWI, due apparently to the fact that the artillery shells exposed the formerly deeply buried seeds to the sun.

'Lest we forget' apparently now reads 'We forgot' as 'our boys' slug it out for the Empire with an enemy they will never defeat, but then the sick thing about this particular imperial war is that it ain't about winning.

In part it's about waging a war for the minds of the British public, thus punting the Poppy, this time in the name of the 'War on Terror' is shoved down our throats every time we turn on the telly and every announcer, every newscaster sports the Poppy badge. And of course, it's also about being there, yet another forward base for launching military strikes at more 'enemies', bases that are intended for military strikes principally against China and Russia. And frankly, it's not even the UK's war, it's entirely made in the USA, that's how far the British Empire has sunk, (ineffectual) hitman for the Empire.

"According to an official UN report, opium production in Afghanistan has risen dramatically since the downfall of the Taliban in 2001. UNODC data shows more opium poppy cultivation in each of the past four growing seasons (2004-2007), than in any one year during Taliban rule. More land is now used for opium in Afghanistan, than for coca cultivation in Latin America. In 2007, 93% of the opiates on the world market originated in Afghanistan. This is no accident." [America's Phoney War in Afghanistan By F. William Engdahl]

The propaganda techniques being used today that link the D-Day Landings (commemorating its 60th anniversary) to the current slaughter in Afghanistan is not new, it was developed during the latter half of the 19th century and used to great effect on the British, namely the ideology of racism used to unite the British people in the name of Empire.

Eric Hobsbawm's excellent trilogy on the British Empire, 'The Age of Capital', 'The Age of Empire' and 'Age of Revolution' go into some detail as to how public pageants that for example sold the Royal Family (not at the top of most people's list in the 19th century) as though it were ours, were used to whip up a patriotic fervour.

"It is impossible to deny that the idea of superiority to, and dominion over, a world of dark

skins in remote places was genuinely popular, and thus benefited the politics of imperialism....At the end of the [19th] century 'colonial pavilions', hitherto virtually unknown, multiplied... No doubt this was planned publicity...[and] it succeeded because it touched a public nerve.

....

"In its great International Expositions bourgeois civilization had always gloried in the triple triumphs of science, technology and manufactures. In the era of empires it also gloried in its colonies.

....

"The sense of superiority which thus united western whites, rich, middle-class and poor, did so not only because all of them enjoyed the privileges of the ruler, especially when in the colonies. In Dakar or Mombasa the most modest clerk was a master, and accepted as a 'gentleman' by people who would not even have noticed his existence in Paris or London; the white worker was a commander of the blacks." [ Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Age of Empire', p.70-71]

And nothing apparently has changed in the intervening century. Led by the BBC and the corporate press a sophisticated propaganda campaign has been mounted, extolling the virtues of 'our boys' as they fight to bring democracy to those Afghani ingrates.

How deeply embedded this is in British society is demonstrated to us all the time through the endless references to dim and distant imperial wars, and of course with the emphasis on the not so-distant. e.g., the 'good war', that is to say WWII (it's about the only 'history' kids get taught at school here these days). A war by the way, that had the UK and France signed the proposed Soviet-Anglo-French mutual protection treaty, could have been avoided.[1]

Of course the UK no longer has an empire, it's little more than a hired gun and a pretty broke one at that.

For around thirty years British capitalism has been living off its North Sea oil and its pivotal role in the global financial circuit, essentially living off the interest earned on investments and loans, but producing nothing of real worth. And having gotten a 'hands-off' government in place which proceeded to do its master's bidding and make the economy a free-for-all, it now exhibits all the characteristics of the age it constantly harks back to, the age of Empire but without the military power to back it up.

Living the good life off its ill-gotten financial gains (all of it is now in the hands of various and sundry private equity funds and banks etc), British capitalism has been brought to its knees. Oh how those generals must be longing for the day when his (or her) imperial majesty's armed forces did as they pleased, where they pleased, when they pleased and had the means to do it. Now they can't even field what amounts to little more than an expeditionary force. (In the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-80), Britain sent 40,000 troops. Oh, and they 'won' that one.)

The role that the ideology of racism plays in selling the illegal occupation of Afghanistan could not be clearer, exploiting feelings of fear and insecurity and of regaining a leading role in a world now long gone.

The outbursts by various military leaders concerning the alleged lack of support for 'our boys over there' is obviously a state-inspired tactic given that the majority of people here do

not support the government's military presence in Afghanistan (56%).

This is how the BBC reported the alleged row over troop numbers but oddly, under the heading of 'Most 'remain against Afghan war'':

"Gen Sir David Richards, the new head of the Army, is believed to want an extra 1,000 troops, according to Michael Codner, director of military sciences at the Royal United Services Institute.

....

"Mr Codner says Britain needs to maintain its influence with the US with a consistent and reliable contribution of military forces.

"There is a financial and human cost in this strategy which the nation must either pay, or accept that it has lost its presumed status and influence and can relax and be a normal European country that does not take hard power seriously," he wrote in an article sent to the BBC. ['Most 'remain against Afghan war', BBC News website, 7 October, 2009]

Note that unless the UK wants to lose "its presumed status and influence" it had better continue sacrificing British lives. No mention of course of the thousands of Afghan lives sacrificed in order to maintain our 'presumed status and influence'.

'Hard power'? A euphemism for murder. And it's hardly surprising that such glib terms roll off the tongues of these 'masters of the universe', so used are they to calling the shots when it comes to attempting to justify their imperial wars. And how neatly it ties into the state propaganda of "making Britain safer", the latest wheeze from Gordon Brown as to why we are slaughtering Afghans.

And clearly even the propaganda onslaught ain't doing the trick with opposition to the war up from 53% when we invaded the place in 2001 to 56% today. The BBC is somewhat bemused by these figures telling us that,

'The increase in opposition to the war is slight, despite the rising number of British soldiers killed in the last 12 months.'

Does it not occur to the propagandists at the BBC that perhaps, just perhaps, endless, bloody war is just not acceptable to more than half the population?

Notes

[1.] See Yuriy RUBTSOV: 'The Moscow talks in 1939: a missed chance'

See also: Obama: Manufacturing A Savior A Case Study In Social Engineering – Fabricating Myths, Mantras, Consent and Dissent, for Imperial Mobilization By Zahir Ebrahim

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