

The Politics Of Bollocks

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Growing up in an Antipodean society proud of its rich variety of expletives, I never heard the word bollocks. It was only on arrival in England that I understood its majesterial power. All classes used it. Judges grunted it; an editor of the Daily Mirror used it as noun, adjective and verb. Certainly, the resonance of a double vowel saw off its closest American contender. It had authority.

A high official with the Gilbertian title of Lord West of Spithead used it to great effect on 27 January. The former admiral, who is security adviser to Gordon Brown, was referring to Tony Blair's famous assertion that invading countries and killing innocent people did not increase the threat of terrorism at home.

"That was clearly bollocks," said his lordship, who warned of the perceived "linkage between the US, Israel and the UK" in the horrors inflicted on Gaza and the effect on the recruitment of terrorists in Britain. In other words, he was stating the obvious: that state terrorism begets individual or group terrorism at source. Just as Blair was the prime mover of the London bombings of 7 July 2005, so Brown, having pursued the same cynical crusades in Muslim countries and having armed and disported himself before the criminal regime in Tel Aviv, will share responsibility for related atrocities at home.

There is a lot of bollocks about at the moment.

The BBC's explanation for banning an appeal on behalf of the stricken people of Gaza is a vivid example. Mark Thompson, the director general, cited the BBC's legal requirement to be "impartial... because Gaza is a major ongoing news story in which humanitarian issues... are both at the heart of the story and contentious."

In a letter to Thompson, David Bracewell, illuminated the deceit behind this. He pointed to previous BBC appeals for the Disasters Emergency Committee that were not only made in the midst of "an ongoing news story" in which humanitarian issues were "contentious", but demonstrated how the BBC took sides. In 1999, at the height of the illegal Nato bombing of Serbia and Kosovo, the TV presenter Jill Dando made an appeal on behalf of Kosovar refugees. The BBC web page for that appeal was linked to numerous articles meant to support the gravity of the humanitarian issue. These included quotations from Blair himself, such as "This will be a daily pounding until [Slobodan Milosevic] comes into line with the terms that Nato has laid down." There was no significant balance of view from the Yugoslav side, and not a single mention that the flight of Kosovar refugees began only after Nato had started bombing. Similarly, in an appeal for the victims of the civil war in the Congo, the BBC favoured the regime of Joseph Kabila without referring to the Amnesty, Human Rights Watch and other reports accusing his forces of atrocities. In contrast, the rebel leader Nkunda was "accused of committing atrocities" and was ordained the BBC's bad guy. Kabila, who

represented western interests, was clearly the good guy – just like Nato in the Balkans and Israel in the Middle East.

While Mark Thompson and his satraps richly deserve the Lord West of Spithead Bollocks Blue Ribbon, that honour goes to the cheer squad of President Barack Obama, whose cult-like obeisance goes on and on.

On 23 January, the Guardian's front page declared, "Obama shuts network of CIA 'ghost prisons' ". The "wholesale deconstruction [sic] of George Bush's war on terror", said the report, had been ordered by the new president who would be "shutting down the CIA's secret prison network, banning torture and rendition...".

The bollocks quotient on this was so high that it read like the press release it was, citing "officials briefing reporters at the White House yesterday". Obama's orders, according to a group of 16 retired generals and admirals who attended a presidential signing ceremony, "would restore America's moral standing in the world". What moral standing? It never ceases to astonish that experienced reporters can transmit PR stunts like this, bearing in mind the moving belt of lies from the same source under only nominally different management.

Far from "deconstructing [sic] the war on terror", Obama is clearly pursuing it with the same vigour, ideological backing and deception as the previous administration. George W. Bush's first war, in Afghanistan, and last war, in Pakistan, are now Obama's wars – with thousands more US troops to be deployed, more bombing and more slaughter of civilians. On 22 January, the day he described Afghanistan and Pakistan as "the central front in our enduring struggle against terrorism and extremism", 22 Afghan civilians died beneath Obama's bombs in a hamlet populated mainly by shepherds and which, by all accounts, had not laid eyes on the Taliban. Women and children were among the dead, which is normal.

Far from "shutting down the CIA's secret prison network", Obama's executive orders actually give the CIA authority to carry out renditions, abductions and transfers of prisoners in secret without the threat of legal obstruction. As the Los Angeles Times disclosed, "current and former intelligence officials said the rendition program might be poised to play an expanded role." A semantic sleight of hand is that "long term prisons" are changed to "short term prisons"; and while Americans are now banned from directly torturing people, foreigners working for the US are not. This means that America's numerous "covert actions" will operate as they did under previous presidents, with proxy regimes, such as Augusto Pinochet's in Chile, doing the dirtiest work.

Bush's open support for torture, and Donald Rumsfeld's extraordinary personal overseeing of certain torture techniques, upset many in America's "secret army" of subversive military and intelligence operators as it exposed how the system worked. Obama's nominee for director of national intelligence, Admiral Dennis Blair, has said the Army Field Manual may include new forms of "harsh interrogation", which will be kept secret.

Obama has chosen not to stop any of this. Neither do his ballyhooed executive orders put an end to Bush's assault on constitutional and international law. He has retained Bush's "right" to imprison anyone, without trial or charges. No "ghost prisoners" are being released or are due to be tried before a civilian court. His nominee for attorney-general, Eric Holder, has endorsed an extension of Bush's totalitarian USA Patriot Act, which allows federal agents to

demand Americans' library and bookshop records. The man of "change", is changing little. That ought to be front page news from Washington.

The Lord West of Spithead Bollocks Prize (Runner-up) is shared. On 28 January, a national Greenpeace advertisement opposing a third runway at London's Heathrow airport summed up the almost willful naivety that has obstructed informed analysis of the Obama administration. "Fortunately," declared Greenpeace beneath a God-like picture of Obama, "the White House has a new occupant, and he has asked us all to roll back the spectre of a warming planet." This was followed by Obama's rhetorical flourish about "putting off unpleasant decisions". In fact, Obama has made no commitment to curtail the America's infamous responsibility for the causes of global warming. As with Bush and most modern era presidents, it is oil, not stemming carbon emissions, that informs the new administration. Obama's national security adviser, General Jim Jones, a former Nato supreme commander, made his name planning US military control over the exploitation of oil and gas reserves from the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea to the Gulf of Guinea in Africa.

Sharing the Bollocks Runner-up Prize is the Observer, which on 25 January published a major news report headlined, "How Obama set the tone for a new US revolution". This was reminiscent of the Observer almost a dozen years ago when liberalism's other great white hope, Tony Blair, came to power. "Goodbye Xenophobia" was the Observer's post-election front page in 1997 and "The Foreign Office says Hello World, remember us". The government, said the breathless text, would push for "new worldwide rules on human rights and the environment" and implement "tough new limits" on arms sales. The opposite happened. Last year, Britain was the biggest arms dealer in the world; currently it is second only to the United States.

In the Blair mould, the Obama White House "sprang into action" with its "radical plans". The new president's first phone call was to that Palestinian quisling, the unelected and deeply unpopular Mohammed Abbas. There was a "hot pace" and a "new era", in which a notorious name from an ancien regime, Richard Holbrooke, was dispatched to Pakistan. In 1978, Holbrooke betrayed a promise to normalise relations with the Vietnamese on the eve of a vicious embargo that ruined the lives of countless Vietnamese children. Under Obama, the "sense of a new era abroad", declared the Observer, "was reinforced by the confirmation of Hillary Clinton as secretary of state". Clinton has threatened to "entirely obliterate Iran" on behalf of Israel.

What the childish fawning over Obama obscures is the dark power assembled under cover of America's first "post-racial president". Apart from the US, the world's most dangerous state is demonstrably Israel, having recently killed and maimed some 4,000 people in Gaza with impunity. On 10 February, a bellicose Israeli electorate is likely to put Binyamin Netanyahu into power. Netanyahu is a fanatic's fanatic who has made clear his intention of attacking Iran. In the Wall Street Journal on 24 January, he described Iran as the "terrorist mother base" and justified the murder of civilians in Gaza because "Israel cannot accept an Iranian terror base (Gaza) next to its major cities". On 31 January, unaware he was being filmed, Israel's ambassador in Australia described the massacres in Gaza as a "pre-introduction" - dress rehearsal - for an attack on Iran.

For Netanyahu, the reassuring news is that Obama's administration is the most Zionist in living memory - a truth that has struggled to be told from beneath the soggy layers of Obama-love. Not a single member of Obama's team demurred from Obama's support for Israel's barbaric actions in Gaza. Obama himself likened the safety of his two young

daughters with that of Israeli children while making not a single reference to the thousands of Palestinian children killed with American weapons – a violation of both international and US law. He did, however, demand that the people of Gaza be denied “smuggled” small arms with which to defend themselves against the world’s fourth largest military power. And he paid tribute to the Arab dictatorships, such as Egypt, which are bribed by the US Treasury to help the US and Israel enforce policies described by the United Nations Rapporteur, Richard Falk, a Jew, as “genocidal”.

It is time the Obama lovers grew up. It is time those paid to keep the record straight gave us the opportunity to debate informatively. In the 21st century, people power remains a huge and exciting and largely untapped force for change, but it is nothing without truth. “In the time of universal deceit,” wrote George Orwell, “telling the truth is a revolutionary act.”

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