

Tony Blair Must Be Prosecuted

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In his latest column for the New Statesman, John Pilger writes about the “paramount war crime” defined by the Nuremberg judges in 1946 and its relevance to the case of Tony Blair, whose shared responsibility for the Iraq invasion resulted in the deaths of more than a million people. New developments in international and domestic political attitudes towards war crimes mean that Blair is now ‘Britain’s Kissinger’.

Tony Blair must be prosecuted, not indulged like his mentor Peter Mandelson. Both have produced self-serving memoirs for which they have been paid fortunes. Blair’s will appear next month and earn him £4.6 million. Now consider Britain’s Proceeds of Crime Act. Blair conspired in and executed an unprovoked war of aggression against a defenceless country, which the Nuremberg judges in 1946 described as the “paramount war crime”. This has caused, according to scholarly studies, the deaths of more than a million people, a figure that exceeds the Fordham University estimate of deaths in the Rwandan genocide.

In addition, four million Iraqis have been forced to flee their homes and a majority of children have descended into malnutrition and trauma. Cancer rates near the cities of Fallujah, Najaf and Basra (the latter “liberated” by the British) are now revealed as higher than those at Hiroshima. “UK forces used about 1.9 metric tons of depleted uranium ammunition in the Iraq war in 2003,” the Defence Secretary Liam Fox told parliament on 22 July. A range of toxic “anti-personnel” weapons, such as cluster bombs, was employed by British and American forces.

Such carnage was justified with lies that have been repeatedly exposed. On 29 January 2003, Blair told parliament, “We do know of links between al-Qaida and Iraq ...”. Last month, the former head of the intelligence service, MI5, Eliza Manningham-Buller, told the Chilcot inquiry, “There is no credible intelligence to suggest that connection ... [it was the invasion] that gave Osama bin Laden his Iraqi jihad”. Asked to what extent the invasion exacerbated the threat to Britain from terrorism, she replied, “Substantially”. The bombings in London on 7 July 2005 were a direct consequence of Blair’s actions.

Documents released by the High Court show that Blair allowed British citizens to be abducted and tortured. The then foreign secretary, Jack Straw, decided in January 2002 that Guantanamo was the “best way” to ensure UK nationals were “securely held”.

Instead of remorse, Blair has demonstrated a voracious and secretive greed. Since stepping down as prime minister in 2007, he has accumulated an estimated £20 million, much of it as a result of his ties with the Bush administration. The House of Commons Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, which vets jobs taken by former ministers, was pressured not to

make public Blair's "consultancy" deals with the Kuwaiti royal family and the South Korean oil giant UI Energy Corporation. He gets £2 million a year "advising" the American investment bank J P Morgan and undisclosed sums from financial services companies. He makes millions from speeches, including reportedly £200,000 for one speech in China.

In his unpaid but expenses-rich role as the West's "peace envoy" in the Middle East, Blair is, in effect, a voice of Israel, which awarded him a \$1 million "peace prize". In other words, his wealth has grown rapidly since he launched, with George W. Bush, the bloodbath in Iraq.

His collaborators are numerous. The Cabinet in March 2003 knew a great deal about the conspiracy to attack Iraq. Jack Straw, later appointed "justice secretary", suppressed the relevant Cabinet minutes in defiance of an order by the Information Commissioner to release them. Most of those now running for the Labour Party leadership supported Blair's epic crime, rising as one to salute his final appearance in the Commons. As foreign secretary, David Miliband, sought to cover Britain's complicity in torture, and promoted Iran as the next "threat".

Journalists who once fawned on Blair as "mystical" and amplified his vainglorious bids now pretend they were his critics all along. As for the media's gulling of the public, only the Observer's David Rose, to his great credit, has apologised. The Wikileaks' exposes, released with a moral objective of truth with justice, have been bracing for a public force-fed on complicit, lobby journalism. Verbose celebrity historians like Niall Ferguson, who rejoiced in Blair's rejuvenation of "enlightened" imperialism, remain silent on the "moral truancy", as Pankaj Mishra wrote, "of [those] paid to intelligently interpret the contemporary world".

Is it wishful thinking that Blair will be collared? Just as the Cameron government understands the "threat" of a law that makes Britain a risky stopover for Israeli war criminals, a similar risk awaits Blair in a number of countries and jurisdictions, at least of being apprehended and questioned. He is now Britain's Kissinger, who has long planned his travel outside the United States with the care of a fugitive.

Two recent events add weight to this. On 15 June, the International Criminal Court made the landmark decision of adding aggression to its list of war crimes to be prosecuted. This is defined as a "crime committed by a political or military leader which by its character, gravity and scale constituted a manifest violation of the [United Nations] Charter". International lawyers described this as a "giant leap". Britain is a signatory to the Rome statute that created the court and is bound by its decisions.

On 21 July, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, standing at the Commons despatch box, declared the invasion of Iraq illegal. For all the later "clarification" that he was speaking personally, he had made "a statement that the international court would be interested in", said Philippe Sands, professor of international law at University College London.

Tony Blair came from Britain's upper middle classes who, having rejoiced in his unctuous ascendancy, might now reflect on the principles of right and wrong they require of their own children. The suffering of the children of Iraq will remain a spectre haunting Britain while Blair remains free to profit.

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