

Blair is a coward

John Pilger

Tony Blair is about to commit crimes that the Nuremberg judges considered to be the most grave - unprovoked invasion and the murder of civilians. Bush and Blair will not see the awful effect of their actions on ordinary lives, and neither will we. The media won't show it.

William Russell, the great correspondent who reported the carnage of imperial wars, may have first used the expression "blood on his hands" to describe impeccable politicians who, at a safe distance, order the mass killing of ordinary people.

In my experience "on his hands" applies especially to those modern political leaders who have had no personal experience of war, like George W Bush, who managed not to serve in Vietnam, and the effete Tony Blair. There is about them the essential cowardice of the man who causes death and suffering not by his own hand but through a chain of command that affirms his "authority".

In 1946 the judges at Nuremberg who tried the Nazi leaders for war crimes left no doubt about what they regarded as the gravest crimes against humanity. The most serious was unprovoked invasion of a sovereign state that offered no threat to one's homeland. Then there was the murder of civilians, for which responsibility rested with the "highest authority".

Tony Blair is about to commit both these crimes, for which he is being denied even the flimsiest United Nations cover now that the weapons inspectors have found, as one put it, "zilch". Like those in the dock at Nuremberg, he has no democratic cover.

Using the archaic "royal prerogative" he did not consult parliament or the people when he dispatched 35,000 troops and ships and aircraft to the Gulf; he consulted a foreign power, the Washington regime. Unelected in 2000, the Washington regime of George W Bush is now totalitarian, captured by a clique whose fanaticism and ambitions of "endless war" and "full spectrum dominance" are a matter of record. All the world knows their names: Bush, Rumsfeld, Rice, Wolfowitz, Cheney and Perle, and Powell, the false liberal.

To call Blair a mere "poodle" is to allow him distance from the killing of innocent Iraqi men, women and children for which he will share responsibility. He is the embodiment of the most dangerous appeasement humanity has known since the 1930s. The current American elite is the

Third Reich of our times, although this distinction ought not to let us forget that they have merely accelerated more than half a century of unrelenting American state terrorism: from the atomic bombs dropped cynically on Japan as a signal of their new power to the dozens of countries invaded, directly or by proxy, to destroy democracy wherever it collided with American “interests”, such as a voracious appetite for the world’s resources, like oil.

When you next hear Blair or Straw or Bush talk about “bringing democracy to the people of Iraq”, remember that it was the CIA that installed the Ba’ath Party in Baghdad from which emerged Saddam Hussein.

When you next hear Blair and Bush talking about a “smoking gun” in Iraq, ask why the US government last December confiscated the 12,000 pages of Iraq’s weapons declaration, saying they contained “sensitive information” which needed “a little editing”. Sensitive indeed. The original Iraqi documents listed 150 American, British and other foreign companies that supplied Iraq with its nuclear, chemical and missile technology, many of them in illegal transactions.

As a reporter of many wars I am constantly aware that words on the page like these can seem almost abstract, part of a great chess game unconnected to people’s lives. The most vivid images I carry make that connection. They are the end result of orders given far away by the likes of Bush and Blair, who never see, or would have the courage to see, the effect of their actions on ordinary lives: the blood on their hands.

Let me give a couple of examples. Waves of B52 bombers will be used in the attack on Iraq. In Vietnam, where more than a million people were killed in the American invasion of the 1960s, I once watched three ladders of bombs curve in the sky, falling from B52s flying in formation, unseen above the clouds. They dropped about 70 tons of explosives that day in what was known as the “long box” pattern, the military term for carpet bombing. Everything inside a “box” was presumed destroyed. When I reached a village within the “box”, the street had been replaced by a crater.

I slipped on the severed shank of a buffalo and fell hard into a ditch filled with pieces of limbs and the intact bodies of children thrown into the air by the blast. The children’s skin had folded back, like parchment, revealing veins and burnt flesh that seeped blood, while the eyes, intact, stared straight ahead. A small leg had been so contorted by the blast that the foot seemed to be growing from a shoulder. I vomited.

I am being purposely graphic. This is what I saw, and often; yet even in that “media war” I never saw images of these grotesque sights on television or in the pages of a newspaper. I saw them only pinned on the wall of news agency offices in Saigon as a kind of freaks’ gallery.

Some years later I often came upon terribly deformed Vietnamese children in villages where American aircraft had sprayed a herbicide called Agent Orange. It was banned in the United States, not surprisingly for it contained Dioxin, the deadliest known poison.

This terrible chemical weapon, which the cliché-mongers would now call a weapon of mass destruction, was dumped on almost half of South Vietnam. Today, as the poison continues to move through water and soil and food, children continue to be born without palates and chins and scrotums or are stillborn. Many have leukaemia. You never saw these children on the TV news then; they were too hideous for their pictures, the evidence of a great crime, even to be pinned up on a wall and they are old news now.

That is the true face of war. Will you be shown it by satellite when Iraq is attacked? I doubt it.

I was starkly reminded of the children of Vietnam when I travelled in Iraq two years ago. A paediatrician showed me hospital wards of children similarly deformed: a phenomenon unheard of prior to the Gulf war in 1991.

More than 300 tons of depleted uranium, another weapon of mass destruction, were fired by American aircraft and tanks and possibly by the British. Many of the rounds were solid uranium which, inhaled or ingested, causes cancer. In a country where dust carries everything, swirling through markets and playgrounds, children are especially vulnerable.

For 12 years Iraq has been denied specialist equipment that would allow its engineers to decontaminate its southern battlefields. It has also been denied equipment and drugs that would identify and treat the cancer which, it is estimated, will affect almost half the population in the south.

Let us be clear about what the Bush-Blair attack will do to our fellow human beings in a country already stricken by an embargo run by America and Britain and aimed not at Saddam Hussein but at the civilian population, who are denied even vaccines for the children.

The Pentagon in Washington has announced matter of factly that it intended to shatter Iraq "physically, emotionally and psychologically" by raining down on its people 800 cruise missiles in two days. This will be more than twice the number of missiles launched during the entire 40 days of the 1991 Gulf War.

A military strategist named Harlan Ullman told American television: "There will not be a safe place in Baghdad. The sheer size of this has never been seen before, never been contemplated before." The strategy is known as Shock and Awe and Ullman is apparently its proud inventor. He said: "You have this simultaneous effect, rather like the nuclear weapons at Hiroshima, not taking days or weeks but minutes."

What will his “Hiroshima effect” actually do to a population of whom almost half are children under the age of 14? The answer is to be found in a “confidential” UN document, based on World Health Organisation estimates, which says that “as many as 500,000 people could require treatment as a result of direct and indirect injuries”.

A Bush-Blair attack will destroy “a functioning primary health care system” and deny clean water to 39 per cent of the population. There is “likely [to be] an outbreak of diseases in epidemic if not pandemic proportions”.

It is Washington’s utter disregard for humanity, I believe, together with Blair’s lies that have turned most people in this country against them, including people who have not protested before.

Blair’s deceptions are too numerous to list here. He has lied about the nature and effect of the embargo on Iraq by covering up the fact that Washington, with Britain’s support, is withholding more than \$5billion worth of humanitarian supplies approved by the Security Council.

He has lied about Iraq buying aluminium tubes, which he told Parliament were “needed to enrich uranium”. The International Atomic Energy Agency has denied this outright.

He has lied about an Iraqi “threat”, which he discovered only following September 11 2001 when Bush made Iraq a gratuitous target of his “war on terror”. Blair’s “Iraq dossier” has been mocked by human rights groups.

However, what is wonderful is that across the world the sheer force of public opinion isolates Bush and Blair and their lemming, John Howard in Australia. The majority of people in the West, including the United States, are against this gruesome adventure and the numbers grow every day.

This article was first published in The Guardian.

Third World Network Features