

Not in Our Name

John Pilger

How dare George Bush preach peace to Israel when he met Blair to plan war on Iraq and the deaths of thousands more innocent people?

President Bush called on Israel to withdraw from the Palestinian cities occupied by its forces. He excused Israel's violence, but lectured the Palestinians and the rest of the Middle East on the need for restraint and a lasting peace. 'The storms of violence cannot go on,' said Bush. 'Enough is enough.'

What he neglected to say was that he needs a lull in the present crisis to lay his own war plans; that while he talks of peace in the Middle East, he is secretly planning a massive attack on Iraq. This historic display of hypocrisy by Bush was on show at his ranch in Texas, with Tony Blair, his collaborator, in admiring attendance. Yes, enough is enough. It is time Tony Blair came clean with the British people on his part in the coming violence against a nation of innocent people.

As the crisis in Israeli-occupied Palestine deepened, Tony Blair met George W Bush to plan an attack on Iraq. Their decision may condemn to death more than 10,000 civilians. That is the 'medium case scenario' drawn up by the Pentagon. If the Americans implement their current strategy of 'total war' and target Iraq's electricity and water, the consequences will be even more horrific. There is no mandate in any United Nations resolution for this invasion. It will be as lawless as Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland, which triggered the Second World War. Indeed, it may well trigger a Third World War, drawing in nations of the region and beyond.

As Blair arrived at Bush's Texas ranch the question begged: Why did he condemn Iraq, but remain silent on Israel's current bloody and illegal rampage through Palestine? Why has he not demanded that the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon comply with United Nations Security Council resolutions, to which Britain is a signatory, and withdraw from the Occupied

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Territories? Why has Blair said nothing as Sharon has sent tanks and gunships and snipers against civilians — a government targeting innocent people, like the deaf old lady shot by an Israeli sniper as she tried to get to hospital? Why has Blair not called at least for military sanctions against Israel, which has 200 nuclear weapons targeted at Arab capitals?

Blair's culpable silence is imposed by the most dangerous American administration for a generation. The Bush administration is determined to attack Iraq and take over a country that is the world's second largest source of oil. The aim is to get rid of America's and Britain's old friend, Saddam Hussein, whom they no longer control, and to install another compliant thug in Baghdad. *That* is why Bush now tells Israel to withdraw from the Palestinian cities it recently occupied while continuing to replenish the Israeli war machine. The Americans want a rampant Israel guarding their flank as they attack Iraq and expand their control across the Middle East, whose oil is now more critical than ever to United States military and economic dominance.

For almost two months, Downing Street, through the discredited system of unattributable briefings that are secret to the public, have spun two deceptions. The first is that the Prime Minister was to play a vital role at the meeting with Bush on his Texas ranch in 'counselling caution.' The second is that Blair has a 'dossier of detailed evidence' that 'proves' that Saddam Hussein has 'a nuclear capability' and is 'investigating a way to launch unsophisticated nuclear bombs' and is also building chemical and biological weapons. The fiction of Blair as a steadying hand on his Texas buddy is to be read in Blair's unrelenting bellicose statements, and his attempts, against the wishes of his senior military advisers, to send thousands of British troops into the quagmire of Afghanistan, where his 'cautionary influence' on Bush saw as many as 5,000 civilians bombed to death while the Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders got away.

While remaining silent on Israel, Blair is alone in Europe in his promotion of an attack on Iraq, a nation of 22 million people with whom the British have no quarrel. Mysteriously, the 'dossier of proof' of the dangers posed by the Iraqi regime has now been 'shelved.' This is because no such proof exists and because, suddenly, more than 130 Labour Members of Parliament are in revolt, including Cabinet and former Cabinet members. It must be dawning on many of them that so much of this government's 'spin' during the 'war on terrorism' has been a farrago of lies and half-truths provided by an American intelligence apparatus seeking to cover its failure to provide warning of the attacks of September 11.

Lie Number One is the justification for an attack on Iraq — the threat of its 'weapons of mass destruction.' Few countries have had 93 per cent of their major weapons capability destroyed. This was reported by Rolf Ekeus, the chairman of the United Nations body authorised to inspect and destroy Iraq's arsenal following the Gulf War in 1991. United Nations inspectors certified that 817 out of the 819 Iraqi long-range missiles were destroyed. In 1999, a special panel of the Security Council recorded that Iraq's main biological weapons facilities (supplied originally by the United States and Britain) 'have been destroyed and

rendered harmless.’

As for Saddam Hussein’s ‘nuclear threat,’ the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that Iraq’s nuclear weapons programme had been eliminated ‘efficiently and effectively’. The Agency’s inspectors still travel to Iraq and in January reported full Iraqi compliance. Blair and Bush never mention this when they demand that ‘the weapons inspectors are allowed back’. Nor do they remind us that the United Nations inspectors were never expelled by the Iraqis, but withdrawn only after it was revealed they had been infiltrated by United States intelligence.

Lie Number Two is the connection between Iraq and the perpetrators of September 11. There was the rumour that Mohammed Atta, one of the September 11 hijackers, had met an Iraqi intelligence official in the Czech Republic last year. The Czech police say he was not even in the country last year. On February 5, a *New York Times* investigation concluded: ‘The Central Intelligence Agency has no evidence that Iraq has engaged in terrorist operations against the United States in nearly a decade, and the Agency is convinced that Saddam Hussein has not provided chemical or biological weapons to al-Qaeda or related terrorist groups.’

Lie Number Three is that Saddam Hussein, not the United States and Britain, ‘is blocking humanitarian supplies from reaching the people of Iraq.’ (Foreign Office minister Peter Hain). The opposite is true. The United States, with British compliance, is currently blocking a record \$5billion worth of humanitarian supplies from the people of Iraq. These are shipments already approved by the United Nations Office of Iraq, which is authorised by the Security Council. They include life-saving drugs, painkillers, vaccines, and cancer diagnostic equipment.

This wanton denial is rarely reported in Britain. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, mostly children, have died as a consequence of an American and British driven embargo on Iraq that resembles a medieval siege. The embargo allows Iraq less than £100 with which to feed and care for one person for a whole year. This a major factor, says the United Nations’ Children’s Fund, in the deaths of more than 600,000 infants.

I have seen the appalling state of the children of Iraq. I have sat next to an Iraqi doctor in a modern hospital while she has turned away parents with children suffering from cancers that are part of what they call a ‘Hiroshima epidemic’ — caused, according to several studies, by the depleted uranium that was used by the United States and Britain in the Gulf War and is now carried in the dust of the desert. Not only is Iraq denied equipment to clean up its contaminated battlefields, but also cancer drugs and hospital equipment.

I showed a list of barred drugs given to me by Iraqi doctors to Professor Karol Sikora who, as chief of the cancer programme of the World Health Organisation, wrote in the *British Medical Journal*: ‘Requested radiotherapy equipment, chemotherapy drugs and analgesics are consistently blocked by United States and British advisers (to the United Nations Sanctions Committee). There seems to be a rather ludicrous notion that such agents could be converted into chemical

and other weapons.’ He told me: ‘Nearly all these drugs are available in every British hospital. It seems crazy they couldn’t have morphine. When I was in Iraq, in one hospital they had a little bottle of aspirin pills to go around 200 patients in pain.’ No one doubts that if the murderous Saddam Hussein saw advantage in deliberately denying his people humanitarian supplies, he would do so; but the United Nations, from the Secretary General himself, has said that, while the regime could do more, it has not withheld supplies.

Denis Halliday, the assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, resigned in protest at the embargo which he described as ‘genocidal’. Halliday was responsible for the United Nation’s humanitarian programme in Iraq. His successor, Hans Von Sponeck, also resigned in disgust. Last November, they wrote: ‘The death of 5-6,000 children a month is mostly due to contaminated water, lack of medicines and malnutrition. The United States and United Kingdom governments’ delayed clearance of equipment and materials is responsible for this tragedy, not Baghdad.’

Those who speak these facts are abused by Blair’s ministers as apologists for Saddam Hussein — so embroiled is the government with the Bush administration’s exploitation of America’s own tragedy on September 11. This has prevented public discussion of the crime of an embargo that has hurt only the most vulnerable Iraqis and which is to be compounded by the crime of attacking the stricken nation. Unknown to most of the British public, RAF and American aircraft have been bombing Iraq, week after week, for more than two years. The cost to the British taxpayer is £800million a year. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the United States and Britain faced a ‘dilemma’ because ‘few targets remain’. ‘We’re down to the last outhouse,’ said a Pentagon official.

In any attack on Iraq, Saddam Hussein’s escape route is virtually assured — just as Osama bin Laden’s was. The United States and Britain have no wish to free the Iraqi people from a tyranny the Central Intelligence Agency once described as its ‘greatest triumph’. The last thing they want is a separate Kurdish state and another allied to the Shi’ite majority in neighbouring Iran. They want another Saddam Hussein: one who will do as he is told. On March 13, the Foreign Office entertained Brigadier-General Najib Salihi, a former commander of Saddam Hussein’s Republican Guard and chief of the dreaded military intelligence who took part in the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Now funded by the Central Intelligence Agency, the general ‘denies any war crimes’. Not that he would ever face arrest in the West. At the Foreign Office, he is known as a ‘rapidly rising star’. He is their man, and Washington’s man.

The British soldiers who take part in an invasion have every right to know the dirty secrets that will underpin their action, and extend the suffering of a people held hostage to a dictatorship and to international power games over which they have no control. The Americans have made clear they are prepared to use ‘low yield’ nuclear weapons, a threat echoed here by Defence Secretary Geoffrey Hoon.

When will Europe stand up? If the leaders of the European Union fall silent,

too, in the face of such danger, what is Europe for? In this country, there is an honourable rallying cry: Not In Our Name. Bush and Blair must be restrained from killing large numbers of innocents in our name — a view, according to the polls, shared by a majority of the British people. An arms and military equipment embargo must be enforced throughout the region, from Saddam Hussein's Iraq to Ariel Sharon's Israel. Above all, the siege of both the Iraqi and Palestinian peoples must end now.



ASLEF sends Mayday greetings to all members of the trade union and Labour movement

Say yes to an immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories

Support Palestine by demanding the implementation of UN resolutions 242 and 338

Say no to any attempts to invade Iraq