

Why we should march

Tomorrow will be one of the most important public events in memory will take place in central London. It is not possible to overstate the significance and urgency of the march and demonstration against an unprovoked British and American attack on Iraq, a nation with whom we have no quarrel and who offer us no threat.

The urgency is the saving of lives. First, let us stop calling it a “war”. The last time “war” was used in the Gulf was in 1991 when the truth was buried with more than 200,000 people. Attacking a 70-mile line of trenches, three American brigades, operating at night, used 60-ton armoured earthmovers to bury alive teenage Iraqi conscripts, including the wounded and those surrendering and retreating. Survivors were slaughtered from the air. The helicopter gunship pilots called it a “turkey shoot”.

Of the 148 Americans who died, a quarter of them were killed by Americans. Most of the British were killed by Americans. This was known as “friendly fire”. The civilians who were killed, whose deaths were never recorded by the American military because it was “not policy”, were “collateral damage”.

Today, after 13 years of an economic blockade that has been compared with a medieval siege, Iraq is defenceless, no matter the discovery of an odd missile that can reach barely 90 miles. Its ragtag army is woefully under-equipped and awaiting its fate, along with a civilian population of whom 42 per cent are children. They are stricken. Even the export of British manufactured vaccines meant to protect Iraqi infants from diphtheria and yellow fever has been restricted. The vaccines, say the Blair government, are “capable of being used in weapons of mass destruction”.

This is the nation upon which the Bush gang says it will rain down 800 missiles within the space of two days. “Shock and awe” the Pentagon calls its “strategy”. Meanwhile the weapons inspectors and their morose Swedish leader go about their treasure hunt and a cartoon show is hosted in the UN by General Colin Powell (who rose to the top by covering up the notorious My Lai massacre in Vietnam).

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It is all a charade. The Americans want Iraq because they want to control and reorder the Middle East. Their once-favourite dictator, Saddam Hussein, made the mistake of misreading the signals from Washington in 1990 and invading another favourite American oil tyranny, Kuwait. So belatedly, Saddam must be replaced, preferably by another Saddam, though more reliable and less uppity. There is no issue of “weapons of mass destruction”. That is a distraction for us and the media.

The wider significance of the promised attack is the rapacious nature of the American state. As Tony Blair has confirmed, North Korea is likely to be “next”. I think he is wrong and that Iran will be next. That is what the Israeli regime wants and Israel’s wishes are as important to influential members of the Bush gang as oil. Thereafter, there is China. Says Anatol Lieven of the Carnegie Institute in Washington: “What radical US nationalists have in mind is either to ‘contain’ China by overwhelming military force or to destroy the Chinese Communist state.”

One of the Bush gang’s planners, Richard Perle, has said: “If we let our vision of the world go forth and we embrace it entirely, and we don’t try to piece together clever diplomacy but just wage a total war ... our children will sing great songs about us years from now.”

September 11 2001 was their big opportunity. On September 12 Donald Rumsfeld wanted to use the Twin Towers tragedy as an excuse to attack Iraq, which was temporarily spared only because Colin Powell argued that “public opinion has to be prepared”. Afghanistan was the easier option and they were planning to attack it anyway.

The subsequent American endeavour to encircle al-Qaeda in the eastern mountains of Afghanistan was a fiasco and more than 20,000 people, estimates Jonathan Steele in the Guardian, paid the price of that country’s “liberation”.

Since September 11 America has established bases at the gateways to all the major sources of fossil fuels. The Unocal oil company is to build a pipeline across Afghanistan. Bush has repudiated the Kyoto treaty on greenhouse gas emissions, with the war crimes provisions of the International Criminal Court and the anti-ballistic missile treaty. He has said he will use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states “if necessary” - incredibly Geoffrey Hoon, on Blair’s behalf, has said exactly the same.

Assassination is now legal. Virtually before our eyes, prisoners have been tortured to the point of suicide in an American concentration camp in Cuba.

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Under Donald Rumsfeld a secret group with the Orwellian name of the Proactive Pre-emptive Operations Group has the job of provoking terrorist attacks, which would then require “counter-attack” by the United States. You have to keep reminding yourself this is not fantasy: that the enemy to all our security is not a regional tyrant - there are plenty of those, many created by America and Britain.

And what of Blair? Do he and his craven Ministers understand any of this? It is difficult to know. Such is Blair’s evangelical obsession with Iraq, and perhaps his desperation in the face of overwhelming public opposition, that he is prepared to mislead and deceive not only the public but the armed forces he has sent to pursue his and the mad Perle’s “vision”.

Does anyone believe the Prime Minister any more? During his interview last Thursday with the BBC’s Jeremy Paxman, Blair lied once again that UN weapons inspectors were “thrown out” of Iraq by the regime in 1998. He knows the truth: that they were withdrawn when it was discovered the CIA had planted spies among them in order to gather intelligence for the subsequent Anglo-American bombing of Iraq in December 1998.

“I mean,” said Blair last week, “(the threat of Iraq’s undiscovered weapons of mass destruction) is what our intelligence services are telling us and it’s difficult because, you know, either they’re simply making the whole thing up ...”

Making it up, indeed. On February 7 Downing Street had to apologise when it was revealed that its latest dossier seeking to justify war - “Iraq: its infrastructure of concealment, deception and intimidation” - was lifted word for word, including the grammatical and spelling mistakes, from an article written by an American student 10 years ago. As David Edwards of Media Lens has pointed out, “the only changes involved the doctoring of passages to make the report more ominous: a claim that Iraq was ‘aiding opposition groups’ was changed to a claim that Iraq was ‘supporting terrorist organisations.’” Like Bush, Blair lies that “we do know of links between al-Qaeda and Iraq”. An investigation by America’s National Security Council, which advises Bush, “found no evidence of a noteworthy relationship” between Iraq and al-Qaeda. On February 5 a Ministry of Defence document, leaked to the BBC, revealed that British intelligence had told Blair there was “no current link” between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda. Blair has even denied seeing this crucial report.

As a Christian, Blair says he is helping to build a “secure and hopeful world for all our children”.

The Labour MP Llew Smith recently asked the Education Secretary to explain

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“how we can find billions of pounds to increase our defence budget and go to war with Iraq but cannot find the money to scrap tuition fees?”

There was no intelligible reply.

Last November a report by the School of Public Policy, University of College London, disclosed that “53 per cent of children in inner London are living in income poverty”. Yet Chancellor Gordon Brown puts aside “at least a billion pounds” as “a war chest” with which to attack not poverty but an impoverished people half a world away.

A peaceful solution in the Middle East is only possible when the threat of an attack is lifted and a total ban on so-called weapons of mass destruction and arms sales is imposed throughout the region, on Israel as well as Iraq. The economic blockade on the people of Iraq should end immediately and justice for the Palestinians become a priority.

The power of public opinion, both moral and political power, is far greater than many people realise. That’s why Blair fears it and why, through the inept Tessa Jowell, he tried to ban tomorrow’s demonstration. He fears it because if the voice of the people threatens the house of cards he has built on his obsession with Iraq and America, it may well threaten his political life and make mockery of the Anglo-American “coalition” and deny the Bush gang its fig leaf.

Should that happen, American public opinion, now stirring heroically after the most sustained brainwashing campaign for half a century, may even stop the Bush gang in its tracks. As of yesterday 42 American cities had passed resolutions condemning an attack.

Is all that a cause for optimism? Yes it is. Look at how this week’s French and German “rebellion” almost seemed to change everything; and remember that those governments are speaking out only because of overwhelming pressure from their people. Now that has to happen in Britain. Tomorrow you can begin to make it happen.. **JP**