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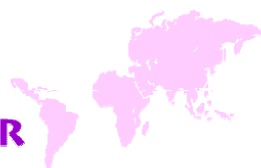
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## Bush and Blair's hidden agenda

International Socialist Review, November-December 2001

[http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Central\\_Asia\\_watch/Bush\\_Blair\\_Agenda.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Central_Asia_watch/Bush_Blair_Agenda.html)

The Anglo-American attack on Afghanistan crosses new boundaries. It means that America's economic wars are now backed by the perpetual threat of military attack on any country, without legal pretense. It is also the first to endanger populations at home. The ultimate goal is not the capture of a fanatic, which would be no more than a media circus, but the acceleration of Western imperial power. That is a truth the modern imperialists and their fellow travelers will not spell out, and which the public in the West, now exposed to a full-scale jihad, has the right to know.

In his zeal, Tony Blair has come closer to an announcement of real intentions than any British leader since Andhony Eden. Not simply the handmaiden of Washington, Blair, in the Victorian verbosity of his extraordinary speech to the Labour Party conference, puts us on notice that imperialism's return journey to respectability is well underway. Hark, the Christian gentleman-bomber's vision of a better world for "the starving, the wretched, the dispossessed, the ignorant, those living in want and squalor from the deserts of northern Africa to the slums of Gaza to the mountain ranges of Afghanistan." Hark, his unctuous concern for the "human rights of the suffering women of Afghanistan" as he colludes in bombing them and preventing food from reaching their starving children.

Is all this a dark joke? Far from it. As Frank Furedi reminds us in *The New Ideology of Imperialism*, it is not long ago "that the moral claims of imperialism were seldom questioned in the west. Imperialism and the global expansion of the Western powers were represented in unambiguously positive terms as a major contributor to human civilization." The quest went wrong when it was dear that fascism, with all its ideas of

racial and cultural superiority, was imperialism, too, and the word vanished from academic discourse. In the best Stalinist tradition, imperialism no longer existed.

Since the end of the Cold War, a new opportunity has arisen. The economic and political crises in the developing world, largely the result of imperialism, such as the bloodletting in the Middle East and the destruction of commodity markets in Africa, now serve as retrospective justification for imperialism. Although the word remains unspeakable, the Western intelligentsia, conservatives and liberals alike, today boldly echo Bush and Blair's preferred euphemism, "civilization." Italy's prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, and the former liberal editor Harold Evans share a word whose true meaning relies on a comparison with those who are uncivilized, inferior and might challenge the "values" of the West, specifically its God-given right to control and plunder the uncivilized.

If there was any doubt that the World Trade Center attacks were the direct result of the ravages of imperialism, Osama bin Laden, a mutant of imperialism, dispelled it in his videotaped diatribe about Palestine, Iraq, and the end of America's inviolacy. Alas, he said nothing about hating modernity and miniskirts, the explanation of those intoxicated and neutered by the supercult of Americanism. An accounting of the sheer scale and continuity and consequences of American imperial violence is our elite's most enduring taboo. Contrary to myth, even the homicidal invasion of Vietnam was regarded by its tactical critics as a "noble cause" into which the United States "stumbled" and became "bogged down." Hollywood has long purged the truth of that atrocity, just as it has shaped, for many of us, the way we perceive contemporary history and the rest of humanity. And now that much of the news itself is Hollywood-inspired, amplified by amazing technology and with its internalized mission to minimize Western culpability, it is hardly surprising that many today do not see the trail of blood.

How very appropriate that the bombing of Afghanistan is being conducted, in part, by the same B-52 bombers that destroyed much of Indochina 30 years ago. In Cambodia alone, 600,000 people died beneath American bombs, providing the catalyst for the rise of Pol Pot, as CIA files make clear. Once again, newsreaders refer to Diego Garcia without explanation. It is where the B-52s refuel. Thirty-five years ago, in high secrecy and in defiance of the United Nations, the British government of Harold Wilson expelled the entire population of the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean in order to hand it to the Americans in perpetuity as a nuclear arms dump and a base from which its long-range bombers could police the Middle East. Until the islanders finally won a high court action last year, almost nothing about their imperial dispossession appeared in the British media.

How appropriate that John Negroponte is Bush's ambassador at the United Nations. This week, he delivered America's threat to the world that it may "be required" to attack more and more countries. As U.S. ambassador to Honduras in the early 1980s, Negroponte oversaw American funding of the regime's death squads, known as Battalion 316, that wiped out the democratic opposition, while the CIA ran its "contra" war of terror against neighboring Nicaragua.

Murdering teachers and slitting the throats of midwives were a specialty. This was typical of the terrorism that Latin America has long suffered, with its principal torturers and tyrants trained and financed by the great warrior against "global

terrorism," which probably harbors more terrorists and assassins in Florida than any country on earth.

The unread news today is that the "war against terrorism" is being exploited in order to achieve objectives that consolidate American power. These include: the bribing and subjugation of corrupt and vulnerable governments in former Soviet central Asia, crucial for American expansion in the region and exploitation of the last untapped reserves of oil and gas in the world; NATO's occupation of Macedonia, marking a final stage in its colonial odyssey in the Balkans; the expansion of the American arms industry; and the speeding up of trade liberalization.

What did Blair mean when, in Brighton, he offered the poor "access to our markets so that we practice the free trade that we are so fond of preaching"? He was feigning empathy for most of humanity's sense of grievance and anger, of "feeling left out." So, as the bombs fall, "more inclusion," as the World Trade Organization puts it, is being offered the poor—that is, more privatization, more structural adjustment, more theft of resources and markets, more destruction of tariffs. On Monday, the [UK] Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Patricia Hewitt, called a meeting of the voluntary aid agencies to tell them that, "since September 11, the case is now overwhelming" for the poor to be given "more trade liberation."

She might have used the example of those impoverished countries where her cabinet colleague Clare Short's ironically named Department for International Development backs rapacious privatization campaigns on behalf of British multinational companies, such as those vying to make a killing in a resource as precious as water.

Bush and Blair claim to have "world opinion with us." No, they have elites with them, each with their own agenda: such as Vladimir Putin's crushing of Chechnya, now permissible, and China's rounding up of its dissidents, now permissible. Moreover, with every bomb that falls on Afghanistan and perhaps Iraq to come, Islamic and Arab militancy will grow and draw the battle lines of "a dash of civilizations" that fanatics on both sides have long wanted.

In societies represented to us only in caricature, the West's double standards are now understood so clearly that they overwhelm, tragically, the solidarity that ordinary people everywhere felt with the victims of September 11.

That, and his contribution to the reemergence of xenophobia and racism in Britain, is the messianic Blair's singular achievement. His effete, bellicose certainties represent a political and media elite that has never known war. The public, in contrast, has given him no mandate to kill innocent people, such as those Afghans who risked their lives to clear landmines, killed in their beds by American bombs. These acts of murder place Bush and Blair on the same level as those who arranged and incited the twin towers murders. Perhaps never has a prime minister been so out of step with the public mood, which is uneasy, worried, and measured about what should be done. Gallup finds that 82 percent say that "military action should only be taken after the identity of the perpetrators was clearly established, even if this process took several months to accomplish."

**Among those elite members paid and trusted to speak out, there is a lot of silence. Where are those in parliament who once made their names speaking out, and now shame themselves by saying nothing? Where are the voices of protest from "civil society," especially those who run the increasingly corporatized aid agencies and take the government's handouts and often its line, then declare their "non-political" status when their outspokenness on behalf of the impoverished and bombed might save lives? The tireless Chris Buckley of Christian Aid, and a few others are honorably excepted. Where are those proponents of academic freedom and political independence, surely one of the jewels of Western "civilization"? Years of promoting the jargon of "liberal realism" and misrepresenting imperialism as crisis management, rather than the cause of the crisis, have taken their toll. Speaking up for international law and the proper pursuit of justice, even diplomacy, and against our terrorism might not be good for one's career. Or as Voltaire put it: "It is dangerous to be right when the government is wrong." That does not change the fact that it is right.**