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War Comes Home to Britain

by John Pilger

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Freedom is being lost in Britain. The land of Magna Carta is now the land of secret gagging orders, secret trials and imprisonment. The government will soon know about every phone call, every email, every text message. Police can willfully shoot to death an innocent man, lie and expect to get away with it. Whole communities now fear the state. The foreign secretary routinely covers up allegations of torture; the justice secretary routinely prevents the release of critical cabinet minutes taken when Iraq was illegally invaded. The litany is cursory; there is much more.

Indeed, there is so much more that the erosion of liberal freedoms is symptomatic of an evolved criminal state. The haven for Russian oligarchs, together with corruption of the tax and banking systems and of once-admired public services such as the Post Office, is one side of the coin; the other is the invisible carnage of failed colonial wars. Historically, the pattern is familiar. **As the colonial crimes in Algeria, Vietnam and Afghanistan blew back to their perpetrators, France, the United States and the Soviet Union, so the cancerous effects of Britain's cynicism in Iraq and Afghanistan have come home.**

The most obvious example is the bombing atrocities in London on 7 July 2005; no one in the British intelligence mandarinat doubts these were a gift of Blair. "Terrorism" describes only the few acts of individuals and groups, not the constant, industrial violence of great powers. Suppressing this truth is left to the credible media. On 27 February, the *Guardian's* Washington correspondent, Ewen MacAskill, in reporting President Obama's statement that America was finally leaving Iraq, as if it were fact, wrote: "For Iraq, the death toll is unknown, in the tens of thousands, victims of the war, a nationalist uprising, sectarian infighting and jihadists attracted by the US presence." Thus, the Anglo-American invaders are merely a "presence" and not directly responsible for the "unknown" number of Iraqi deaths. Such contortion of intellect is impressive.

In January last year, a report by the respected Opinion Research Business (ORB) revised an earlier assessment of deaths in Iraq to 1,033,000. This followed an exhaustive, peer-reviewed study in 2006 by the world-renowned John Hopkins School of Public Health in the US, published in *The Lancet*, which found that 655,000 Iraqis had died as a result of the invasion. US and British officials immediately dismissed the report as "flawed" – a deliberate deception. Foreign Office papers obtained under Freedom of Information disclose a memo written by the government's chief scientific adviser, Sir Roy Anderson, in which he praised *The Lancet* report, describing it as "robust and employs methods that are regarded as close to 'best practice' given [the conditions] in Iraq." An adviser to the prime minister commented: "The survey methodology used here cannot be rubbish, it is a tried and tested way of measuring mortality in conflict zones." Speaking a few days later, a Foreign Office minister, Lord Triesman, said, "The way in which data are extrapolated from samples to a general outcome is a matter of deep concern."

The episode exemplifies the scale and deception of this state crime. Les Roberts, co-author of the *Lancet* study, has since argued that Britain and America might have caused in Iraq "an episode more deadly than the Rwandan genocide." This is not news. Neither is it a critical reference in the freedoms campaign organized by the *Observer* columnist Henry Porter. At a conference in London on 28 February, Lord Goldsmith, Blair's attorney-general, who notoriously changed his mind and advised the government the invasion was legal, when it wasn't, was a speaker for freedom. So was Timothy Garton Ash, a "liberal interventionist." On 9 April, 2003, shortly after the slaughter had begun in Iraq, a euphoric Garton Ash wrote in the *Guardian*: "America has never been the Great Satan. It has sometimes been the Great Gatsby: 'They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things'" One of Britain's jobs "is to keep reminding Tom and Daisy that they now have promises to keep." Less frivolously, he lauded Blair for his "strong Gladstonian instincts for humanitarian intervention" and repeated the government's propaganda about Saddam Hussein. In 2006, he wrote: "Now *we* face the next big test of the west after Iraq: Iran." (I have italicized *we*). This also adheres precisely to the propaganda; David Milliband has declared Iran a "threat" in preparation for possibly the next war.

Like so many of New Labour's Tonier-than-thou squad, Henry Porter celebrated Blair as an almost mystical politician who "presents himself as a harmonizer for all the opposing interests in British life, a conciliator of class differences and tribal antipathies, synthesizer of opposing beliefs." Porter dismissed as "demonic nonsense" all analysis of the 9/11 attacks that suggested there were specific causes: the consequences of violent actions taken by the powerful in the Middle East. Such thinking, he wrote, "exactly matches the views of Osama bin Laden ... with America's haters, that's all there is – hatred." This, of course, was Blair's view.

Freedoms are being lost in Britain because of the rapid growth of the "national security state." This form of militarism was imported from the United States by New Labour. Totalitarian in essence, it relies upon fear mongering to entrench the executive with venal legal mechanisms that progressively diminish democracy and justice. "Security" is all, as is propaganda promoting rapacious colonial wars, even as honest mistakes. Take away this propaganda, and the wars are exposed for what they are, and fear evaporates. Take away the obeisance of many in Britain's liberal elite to American power and you demote a profound colonial and crusader mentality that covers for epic criminals like Blair. Prosecute these criminals and change the system that breeds them and you have freedom.