

Australian parliament embraces Blair's lies and hypocrisy

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The address by Tony Blair to the joint-sitting of the Australian parliament on Monday underscored the fact that the British prime minister functions as one of the most cynical defenders of the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. The reaction to his speech, however, demonstrated once again that no section of the Australian political and media establishment is prepared to challenge the lies used to legitimise these criminal acts.

In the course of his 20-minute speech, Blair made no mention of the original *casus belli* for the invasion of Iraq—the false claim that the regime of Saddam Hussein possessed stockpiles of “weapons of mass destruction”. Blair played a crucial role in both manufacturing and propagating this campaign. One need only recall the British dossier of September 2002, in which the British prime minister alleged that Iraq “could deploy nuclear weapons within 45 minutes”.

At the time, Blair knew this statement to be nonsense. As the Downing Street memos demonstrated, Blair was advised by his foreign secretary in July 2002 that Iraq's WMD capacity was “less than that of Libya, North Korea and Iran”—none of which had nuclear weapons—and he was informed by Richard Dearlove, head of MI6, that the Bush administration was intent on war and that the “intelligence and facts were being fixed” around this decision.

Listening to Blair on Monday, however, someone who had just awoken from a coma could be forgiven for believing WMDs had never been an issue in 2002 and early 2003. The US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were presented to the Australian parliament as part of a struggle by a “global alliance”, headed by the United States, fighting for the “universal values” of “democracy”, “the rule of law”, and “justice” against the “immediate threat of Islamic extremism”.

Numerous strategic documents dating back to the 1970s testify to the long-held US and British ambitions to establish direct control over the oil resources of Central Asia and the Middle East. But Blair attempted to portray the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq as motivated by the noblest of

aims—aiding long-suffering people to free themselves from a “legacy of oppression, stagnation and servitude”. He made no mention of the US-vetted constitutions in both countries, which elevate Islamic law at the expense of secular rights and, in the case of Iraq, obliges all future governments to open up the state-owned oil industry to the free market and foreign ownership.

Instead, Blair referred to the US-led occupations as enjoying the “full support of democratically elected governments”. The reality is that the regimes in Kabul and Baghdad are puppet states made up of individuals who are prepared to serve as local collaborators for Washington. They remain in power solely due to the presence of foreign troops, who are carrying out the brutal repression of the popular resistance to their presence. To describe such regimes as “democratic” is the same as labeling the various governments installed by the Nazis in occupied Europe as legitimate representatives of the population.

The occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq have produced nothing resembling democracy. Tens of thousands of people have been killed and the countries left in ruins. In Iraq, sectarian divisions, directly encouraged by the Bush administration, threaten to trigger a civil war.

Moreover, in the three years since the Iraq invasion, the hysteria over terrorism consciously whipped up by the Blair government has been used to push through unprecedented inroads into the democratic rights and civil liberties of the British population and erect the legislative framework for a police-state.

As for the “rule of law”, the elaborate fabrication of a case that Iraq had WMDs was carried out precisely because an unprovoked invasion to overturn the government of a sovereign state was a direct violation of international law. Blair was advised in July 2002 by his attorney general that the “desire for regime change was not a legal base for military action”. Against the will of the British people, Blair nevertheless deployed forces in an illegal war of aggression. To put it bluntly, the British prime minister, his cabinet and his key advisors are war criminals.

There was nothing new in the content of Blair's speech to the Australian parliament or in the sanctimonious tone with which it was delivered. In the nineteenth century, defenders of the British Empire justified imposing colonial rule and the capitalist market on much of the world as the "white man's burden" to bring "civilisation" to backward peoples. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Blair has repackaged this ideology to portray the so-called western democracies as fighting a global struggle for progress. The essential difference is that, whereas Britain was the predominant world power in the past, the British ruling elite today is desperately seeking to protect its global financial and corporate interests by serving as a junior partner to the US.

Thus the greatest danger, Blair told the Australian parliament, was not that the agenda of the Bush administration was to intervene anywhere in the world where its interests were threatened, but the prospect of the United States deciding to "pull up the drawbridge and disengage". Blair denounced "anti-Americanism" in Europe and elsewhere as "madness" when "set against the long-term interests of the world we believe in". Behind this statement lay Blair's recognition that without US backing, Britain and other American allies such as Australia would carry little weight on the international arena. The role of the US, he declared, was vital to achieving beneficial agreements on climate change and a "decent trade round" to open up world markets.

In the context of rising international tensions over access to energy and markets, Blair's "struggle for values" amounts to a blanket justification for future wars. It provides the ruling elite in countries such as Britain and Australia with the necessary propaganda to justify aligning with US aggression and concealing their real predatory motives.

In the Australian parliament, Blair's rhetoric found a receptive audience. The main reason is that the government of Prime Minister John Howard is no less guilty of war crimes than the US and British administrations. On the basis of the same lies about WMDs, Australian troops were dispatched to the 2003 invasion of Iraq in order to guarantee US backing for Australian interests. Australian forces remain in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Howard welcomed Blair to the joint sitting of parliament as a "man of courage, of moral purpose, of high intelligence and of a capacity to articulate with great clarity the challenges of the contemporary world".

Blair was embraced in equally sycophantic terms by the Labor opposition and the Greens. Labor leader Kim Beazley told Blair that "we stand shoulder to shoulder with you and with Britain in the war against fundamentalist terror" and hailed him as a "man who put values at the centre of your public life".

Greens leader senator Bob Brown told the media prior to the parliamentary session that there was "a very big difference" between Bush and the British leader because "Tony Blair doesn't have a prison camp with Australians held illegally against global laws", referring to Guantánamo Bay. Brown went as far as to describe Blair as a "very good example to our weak-kneed prime minister [Howard]" as he had secured the release of British citizens from Guantánamo and was "pulling 400 troops out of Iraq".

Blair's litany of lies and falsifications in the parliament was not challenged at any point by any Labor or Green parliamentarian. Instead, it was greeted with a standing ovation. In 2003, the two opposition parties raised certain limited tactical differences with the Iraq invasion. Labor declared that Australian military forces should only be deployed with explicit UN support, while the Greens argued Australian troops should not be sent because they might be needed for operations closer to home, in the Asia-Pacific region. Three years on, they openly welcome Blair's call for wars for "progress" and "democracy" as the means by which they can finally abandon their token opposition.

The reaction to Blair in the so-called liberal press was no less contemptible. The *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Melbourne Age* both published his speech without editorial comment and confined their coverage to uncritical reports.

By contrast, the pro-war Murdoch-owned *Australian* hailed Blair as a powerhouse of world politics. Paul Kelly, the editor-at-large, gushed that the British leader had offered "eloquence, vision and guts" and described him as a champion of "democracy, diversity, tolerance and open markets". The paper's foreign editor Greg Sheridan labelled him "the most articulate neo-conservative in the world" who "believes that the promotion of democracy internationally is the key to long-term security".

The refusal of any Australian politician or journalist to take a public stand against Blair's demagoguery constitutes a sharp warning that the entire official establishment is preparing to line up with the next act of great power aggression—whether against Iran, Syria or some other target. In order for the widespread antiwar war sentiments of millions of Australian workers and youth to find genuine expression, an independent and socialist political movement must be developed.



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