

In all the coverage of London bombing, a basic truth struggled to be heard. It has been said quietly, politely, guardedly, as if it might somehow dishonor the dead, instead of speaking truth to the cause. While not doubting the atrocious inhumanity of those who planted the bombs (as if anyone could), no one should doubt that these were "Blair's bombs"; and he ought not to be allowed to evade culpability with yet another unctuous Bush-inspired speech about "our way of life".

The bombers struck because he and Bush attacked Iraq, having been warned by the Joint Intelligence Committee that the "by far the greatest terrorist threat" to this country would be "heightened by military action against Iraq".

Indeed, this was the one reliable warning from British intelligence in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq. A House of Commons committee has since verified this warning. Had Blair heeded it instead of conspiring to deceive the nation that Iraq offered a threat the Londoners who died on Thursday might be alive today, along with tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis.

Four weeks ago, a classified CIA report revealed that the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq had turned that country into a focal point of terrorism. None of the intelligence agencies regarded Iraq as such a flashpoint before the invasion, however tyrannical the regime. On the contrary, in 2003, the CIA reported that Iraq "exported no terrorist threat to his neighbours" and that Saddam Hussein was "implacably hostile to Al-Qaeda".

Blair's and Bush's invasion changed all that. In invading a stricken and defenceless country at the heart of the Islamic and Arab world, their adventure became self-fulfilling. Denial of that by those who supported the invasion insults the memory of all those who have died as a result. Blair's epic irresponsibility has brought the daily horrors of Iraq home to Britain and he is not (to paraphrase one of the few challenging questions put to him before the



A woman writes a message after laying flowers for the victims of the London bombings, July 13. (Reuters File Photo)

Lest We Forget: These Were 'Blair's Bombs'

invasion by John Humphries) fit to be prime minister.

For more than a year, he has urged the British to "move on" from Iraq, and last week it seemed that his move-oners and good fortune had joined hands.

The awarding of the 2012 Olympics to London created the fleeting illusion that all was well, regardless of messy events in a faraway country.

Moreover, the G8 meeting in Scotland and its accompanying "Make Poverty History" campaign

and circus of celebrities served as a temporary cover for what the greatest political scandal of modern times: an illegal invasion conceived in lies which, under the rule of international law established at Nuremberg, represented a "paramount war crime".

Over the past three weeks, the contrast between the coverage of the G8, its marches and pop concerts, and another "global" event has been striking. The World Tribunal on Iraq in Istanbul has had virtually no coverage, yet the evidence it has produced, the most damning to date, has been the silent spectre at the Gelfoff extravaganza.

The tribunal is a serious international public inquiry into the invasion and occupation, the kind governments dare not hold. Its expert, eyewitness testimonies, said the author Arundathi Roy, a tribunal jury member, "demonstrate that even those of us who have tried to follow the war closely are not aware of a fraction of the horrors that have been unleashed in Iraq." The most shocking was given by Dahr Jamal, one of the best un-embedded reporters working in Iraq. He described how the hospitals of besieged Fallujah had been subjected to an American tactic of collective punishment, with US marines assaulting staff and stopping the wounded entering, and American snipers firing at the doors and windows, and medicines and emergency blood prevented from reaching them. Children, the elderly, were shot dead in front of their families, in cold blood.

Imagine for a moment the same appalling state of affairs imposed on the London hospitals that received the victims of Thursday's bombing. Unimaginable? Well, it happens, in our name, regardless of BBC's suppression of the Fallujah and other atrocities. When will someone draw this parallel at one of the staged "press conferences" at which Blair is allowed to emote for the cameras stuff about "our values outlast (ing) theirs"? Silence is not journalism.

John Pilger
TWF.ORG

Nepal at Tipping Point

For 10 years, the remote Himalayan kingdom of Nepal has been slipping nearer and nearer to the edge of collapse; the tipping point is now close at hand.

At issue is who will rule the country—the Maoist insurgents who have gained control of large swaths of the countryside by force, the political parties who seem more intent on quarrelling than on solving problems, or King Gyanendra and his fellow autocrats who seek to govern with an iron hand.

According to reports last week, Maoist leader Prachanda has called for a dialogue among the country's seven political parties, or with the United Nations or other parties, to find a democratic way out of the kingdom's stalemate.

The American ambassador to Katmandu, James Moriarty, told a small group in Honolulu. "The next year will be absolutely critical for Nepal. Within the next 12 to 14 months, Nepal is clearly going to be going down one of two paths."

"One is the path of reconciliation between the palace and the parties to come up with a functioning government plan to get the country back to democracy and also to deal with the insurgency," he said at the East-West Center, a research and educational institute.

The other path is bleaker, he cautioned. There would be no reconciliation, larger demonstrations would erupt in Katmandu, and the Maoist rebels would mount more violent attacks outside the capital. More than 12,000, including large numbers of civilians, have been killed in the fighting between insurgents and government soldiers and police.

A critical question: Why should anyone outside this small, poverty-stricken nation of 26 million people sandwiched in the high mountains between China and India be concerned with its fate?

A Maoist victory, Moriarty said, would be a "humanitarian disaster" of enormous proportions and bring to power a brutal

regime that would collectivize agriculture, alter the Hindu social order, and send millions of refugees across the border into neighboring India.

"India recognizes that the increasing instability in Nepal has become an increasing threat to stability in India," Ambassador Moriarty said.

After more than a century of monarchy, Nepal held an election in 1991 in which the Congress Party and the Communist Party received the most votes. No party, however, held power for more than two years and attempts at reform failed. Corruption was widespread.

In 1996, the Maoists began seeking to overthrow the parliamentary government and to replace it with a socialist republic. Over the next decade, they recruited 15,000 to 20,000 fighters, including women and children pressed into service as soldiers. Their tactics have been largely guerrilla warfare and terror.

In an unconnected event in June 2001, Crown Prince Dipendra killed his parents, brother and sister, two uncles and three aunts before committing suicide, evidently because his parents refused to accept his choice of a wife. The late king's brother, Gyanendra, was proclaimed king.

King Gyanendra mounted a palace coup in February this year, claiming that Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba had failed to foster parliamentary government and had been unable to defeat the Maoist insurgency. So far however, the king appears to have made little progress in restoring control outside of the capital.

Human rights, in particular, continue to suffer. An editorial in the Katmandu Post noted that international groups have urged the government and rebels alike to cease torture and other violations of human rights. "Unfortunately," the newspaper said, "no parties to the conflict have paid any heed to the plea made by the rights organizations."

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Invisible Foot Soldiers of Globalization

By all accounts Dubai, the most flamboyant of the seven states that make up the United Arab Emirates, has reinvented itself as one of the most globalized corners of the world, where education, a favorable business climate, and internet access count for more than geography. But unlike other success stories for enthusiasts of globalization, the important players giving Dubai an extreme makeover are largely hidden from public view in a land whose wealth now comes more from business and tourism than oil and natural gas. They are the invisible foot soldiers of globalization.

Largely hidden behind the glitz of the shopping malls and fancy resorts are hundreds of thousands of unskilled South Asian workers who toil in the hope their labor will benefit home and family.

Blue-collar Indian workers in the UAE, including Dubai, amount to an exploited underclass with no rights, no unions, and no stake in country's burgeoning wealth, say human rights groups. In neighboring Saudi Arabia, a recent Human Rights Watch report says many of the country's more than one million Indian migrants live in "conditions resembling slavery." The document highlights the widespread practice of forced, around-the-clock confinement of Indian maids, often in unsafe conditions. And a US State Department report on worldwide human trafficking faults the UAE and other Persian Gulf states for commonplace labor abuses like withholding pay and passports.

Employers usually confiscate passports and residence permits when workers arrive at Dubai International Airport, mak-

ing it virtually impossible for laborers to seek better jobs or quit and go home. Migrants typically cannot obtain exit visas without the approval of their sponsor or employer. The story of these faceless men and women, who live in labor camps and seedy apartments, is gaining attention in the usually self-censored UAE press, which now regularly reports on worker protests over delayed pay and substandard living conditions.

Since the flush 1970s, when global energy prices began to soar, the earnings of these foot soldiers of globalization have financed much of India's trade deficit, according to a recent study by the British Department of International Development and the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh. And Indians working in the Middle East—mostly in the UAE and Saudi Arabia—amount

to only one percent of the country's total labor force.

The some 3.1 million Indians working in the Persian Gulf send home about US\$7 billion a year, according to the most recent figures available, a 2003 report by the Indian Bureau of Foreign Employment. Neighboring Bangladesh has about 1.8 million workers in the Persian Gulf who send home US\$2.9 billion annually, followed by Pakistan with a million workers who remit US\$1.3 billion.

Indian workers at a high-rise construction site in Dubai say the money they send home pays for new houses, better schools, uniforms, and textbooks for their children, and dowries for marriage-age daughters. Others tell of having to repay sizable loans, some at nearly 100 percent interest, to secure jobs and visas for the UAE.

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Fantasy World of Arms Development

The defense establishment is not resting on its laurels. The minds of those entrusted with the security

of the state are once again coming up with fantastic ideas for the development of more and more sophisticated and innovative weapons systems. These weapons systems place Israel's defense industries at the forefront of global technology, and are sources of pride for the engineers, the senior officers and even the entire Israeli public.

The only problem however, is that a fair number of these ideas and developments are superfluous and untenable - and, no less significant, extremely costly. The defense establishment invests billions of dollars in sophisticated weapons systems, including a number of truly revolutionary ones, some of which aren't needed, while others have very little chance, at best, of meeting their said objectives.

Due to the veil of secrecy hanging over a large number of the weapons systems developed in Israel, the public is completely in the dark when it comes to their scope, objectives and budgets. The state comptroller aims his barbs at superfluous and wasteful defense projects from time to time, but due to security constraints, he takes care not to divulge most of the data pertaining to such projects and uses codes shared by only those in the know.

There is, however, one field in which the defense establishment takes pains to expose innovative weapons-systems developments. Every now and then, concerned Israelis are proudly informed of the sophisticated ideas that will guarantee protection against rockets and missiles—the Arrow missile system that is supposed to offer defense against Iran's ballistic missiles; the Nautilus system that will use laser beams to destroy any Katyusha rocket fired from Lebanon; and also a fantastic system that will intercept the Qassams.

These are three projects, in which billions of dollars have been pumped until now. The one, the Arrow, is a

waste of time, and any future enemy will be able to defeat it by means of negligible changes to its ballistic missiles. The second, the Nautilus (about which Shimon Peres promised already back in 1996 that it would very soon be able to intercept Katyushas), has very little chance of being completed within a reasonable time or of meeting its objectives. And the third, an anti-Qassam missile, borders on technological fantasy.

And then we learned that the defense establishment has identified another threat that requires a sophisticated solution and has decided to invest hundreds of millions of shekels in a new defense system—this time, against rockets in the hands of Hezbollah, arms that have a longer range than the Katyushas and that the organization has yet to use against Israel. We'll develop a missile against the rockets, and we'll even call it a mini-Arrow, as a sign of continuity in our strategic thinking.

As expected, the civilian policy-makers in the government and the Knesset will not even try to seriously review the operational concept, the need for the defense system and the proposed technology. And, as usual, they will allow the defense establishment to go about its business without the unnecessary disturbance of civilian control.

It's a shame, because if publicly elected officials were to take the trouble to look over the proposed plan, they would realize that they are obliged to order its immediate cancellation. This system is a lot more expensive than they will be told: the chances of achieving a level of development that will facilitate efficient interception are very low; the Israel Defense Forces already has a defense system designed to intercept similar threats; the system's inherent strategic concept is outlandish; and, primarily, it is a superfluous system in light of the nature of the threat with which it is supposed to deal.

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A Sucker Bet In North Korea

Every single home in this country has two portraits on the wall, one of the Great Leader, Kim Il Sung, who is still present even though he died 11 years ago, and one of his son, the Dear Leader, Kim Jong Il. Inspectors regularly visit homes to make sure the portraits are well cared for.

Every subway car carries those same two portraits as well, and every adult wears a button depicting the Great Leader. And every home (or village, in rural areas) has an audio speaker, which starts broadcasting propaganda at 6 each morning to tell people how lucky they are.

Children spend long hours in day care centers from the age of 6 months, sometimes returning to their parents only on weekends. Men normally perform seven or more years of military service.

And although the national ideology is juche, or self-reliance, the UN World Food Program feeds 6.5 million North Koreans, almost a third of the population. Even so, hunger is widespread and has left 37 percent of the children stunted. Yet North Korea focuses its resources on prestige projects, like an amazing 10-lane highway to Nampo (with no traffic).

Many conservatives in and out of the Bush administration assume that North Korea's population must be seething and that the regime must be on its last legs. Indeed, the Bush administration's policy on North Korea, to the extent that it has one, seems to be to wait for it to collapse.

"I'm afraid that could be a long, long wait. The central paradox of North Korea is this: No government in the world today is more brutal or has failed its people more abjectly, yet it appears to be in solid control and may even have substantial popular support.

Nicholas D. Kristof
NYTIMES.COM

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