

Universal justice is not a dream

The invasion of Iraq, now in its second year, was “organised with lies”, says the new Spanish prime minister. Does anyone doubt this any more? And yet these proven lies are still dominant in Australia. Day after day, their perpetrators seek to obfuscate and justify an unprovoked, illegal attack that killed up to 55,000 people, including at least 10,000 civilians: that every month causes the death and injury of 1,000 children from exploding cluster bombs: that has so saturated Iraqi towns and cities with uranium that American and British soldiers are warned not to go where Iraqi children play, for fear of contamination.

Set that carnage against the Madrid atrocity. Terrible though that act of terrorism was, it was small compared with the terrorism of the American-led “coalition”. Yes, terrorism. How strange it reads when it describes the actions of “our” governments. So saturated are we in the west in the devilry of third world tyrants (most of them the products of Western imperialism) that we have lost all sense of the enormous crime committed in our name.

This is not rhetoric. In 1946, the judges who tried the German leadership at Nuremberg called the unprovoked invasion of a sovereign country “the supreme international war crime”. That principle guided more than half a century of international law, until Bush and Blair and Howard tore it up, covering their actions with a litany of lies. On February 4 last year, in a speech lasting less than an hour, John Howard referred more than 30 times to the “threat” posed by Saddam Hussein. He offered authoritative detail: that Iraq’s “arsenal of chemical and biological weapons [was] intact” and was a “massive program”. All of this was false.

Ray McGovern, one of the CIA’s most senior analysts and a personal friend of George Bush Senior, told me: “It was 95 per cent charade. And they all knew it: Bush, Blair, Howard”. Set that truth against the present carnage in Iraq, and set it against the wilful destruction that preceded it, which was barely reported in

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Australia. The UN's two senior officials in Iraq in the 1990s, Denis Halliday and Hans Von Sponeck, both assistant secretaries general of the United Nations, have described a "genocidal embargo" imposed by America under a UN flag of convenience, aided and abetted by Australia. "Almost a million Iraqis died as a direct result," Halliday told me, "including at least half a million children. The UNICEF studies are on the record. It was US policy to destroy the infrastructure of Iraq, such as the water supply, which killed thousands of infants. By the time Bush invaded, a once prosperous country was a stricken nation."

In fact, UN records show that up to July 2002, more than \$US5 billion worth of humanitarian aid, approved by the UN Security Council and paid for by Iraq, was blocked by the United States.

How many Australians are aware of this and their government's complicity? Howard sent RAN ships to police what in reality was a medieval-style siege. Who dared listen to Halliday, Von Sponeck and other distinguished witnesses that it was this terrible siege that actually reinforced Saddam's rule and prevented the Iraqi people from getting rid of him? Who, among those who point almost gleefully to the mass graves of Saddam's tyranny, ever tell their readers that the greatest mass graves are those of Iraqi forces in the south whose uprising in 1991 was encouraged by the Americans, who then denied them minimum support, even access to their own arsenals, and watched from aircraft as they were slaughtered? President Bush senior decided he wanted to keep Saddam Hussein in power at his pleasure, and the bravest Iraqis paid with their lives.

All this has been suppressed in Australia while the latest lies are channelled and amplified by journalists. I am not referring to the usual far-right windbags in the press, but those broadcasters who believe sincerely they are being objective. When a dissenting voice such as mine (representing the views of a great many Australians) was allowed a fleeting appearance on ABC television on March 10, absurd protests the next day by both the foreign minister and the deputy prime minister and their tut-tutting media court underlined the sheer rarity of genuine debate in the Australian media. Yesterday's Insiders on the ABC excelled itself with interviews with Alexander Downer (Tweedledum) and Gerard Henderson (Tweedledee). How frightened of informed opinion they are. By constantly framing the national debate in the terms and cliches of mendacious power, journalists collude with it, censoring by omission.

Do they ever consider that the very notion of a "war on terror" is absurd when the power in Washington claiming to combat terror has run an empire of terror: Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua and now Haiti,

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again: to name but a few. By comparison Al-Qaeda is a lethal flea. The true danger for the world is where a rampant superpower will strike next: look out Korea, Syria, Iran, Cuba, Venezuela, even China.

As the prisoners begin to struggle home from the American concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay (except for two Australians, deserted by their government), the scale of the crime is emerging. We now know that the British military command virtually refused to send troops to Iraq until Blair gave them a guarantee they would not be prosecuted by the newly constituted International Criminal Court. Blair's guarantee was worthless. And that frightens the British establishment, and the Australian establishment, too. Unlike the United States, Britain and Australia are signatories to the ICC.

The times are changing; Washington-manipulated show trials of third world dictators are giving way to the promise of universal justice, however tenuous that may seem. The dock may well await those westerners who bring mass terrorism to faraway countries, then watch it blow back in our faces. Like Al-Qaeda, they should not be allowed to get away with it. **JP**