

Pilger on the US and terrorism

AN interview with Tony Jones, Australian Broadcasting Corporation

TONY JONES: Now to the issue which has divided the political left and the Iraq anti-war movement. Now that the die has been cast, the regime deposed and the coalition forces are occupying the country, how should they regard those who are still attacking the occupiers and targeting anyone they consider to be assisting the United States?

The veteran journalist John Pilger has no doubts. He claims that, what he calls “the resistance” is “incredibly important” and that the world now “depends” on it to win. “I think,” he says, “if the US military machine” and the Bush administration can suffer something like a defeat “in Iraq, they can be stopped.”

By which he means stopped from invading other countries.

Mr Pilger is in Australia at the moment speaking regularly at political rallies and at screenings of his film *Breaking the Silence*.

I spoke to him earlier this evening.

TONY JONES: *John Pilger, do you still maintain that the world depends on what you call “the Iraqi resistance” to inflict a military defeat on the coalition forces?*

JOHN PILGER: Well, certainly, historically, we’ve always depended on resistances to get rid of occupiers, to get rid of invaders. And what we have in Iraq now is I suppose the equivalent of a kind of Vichy Government being set up.

And a resistance is always atrocious, it’s always bloody. It always involves terrorism. You can imagine if Australia was occupied by the Japanese during the Second World War the kind of resistance there would have been, and so on.

We’ve seen that all over the world.

Now, I think the situation in Iraq is so dire that unless the United States is

JOHN PILGER | ON THE US AND TERRORISM

defeated there that we're likely to see an attack on Iran, we're likely to see an attack on North Korea and all the way down the road it could be even an attack on China within a decade, so I think what happens in Iraq now is incredibly important.

TONY JONES: *You mean defeated militarily?*

JOHN PILGER: Yes.

TONY JONES: *What does that mean in terms of the resistance, and who is the resistance? Are we talking about the remnants of the Baathist regime, or are we talking about foreign mujahadeen? Are we talking about anyone that's prepared to pick up a gun or set off a bomb?*

JOHN PILGER: Why do we have a different standard of looking at what a resistance is in Iraq as it is anywhere else?

TONY JONES: *Well, what do you compare it to?*

JOHN PILGER: There are 12 groups. Only three of them – and we went through the nonsense that they were all Saddam remnants for a long time, now Saddam has been captured, the resistance has actually intensified.

There are 12 groups, they're all very different, there are groups within the Shia, but what they're all united about, quite clearly, is getting rid of a foreign invader and occupier from Iraq. And as I say, historically, be it in Algeria or in Vietnam, or France during the Second World War, it is going to be atrocious and bloody.

Now, are they Baathist? Well, there's a greet irony here because what the United States is doing now is retraining, or rather rehiring, 10,000 of Saddam Hussein's most vicious security people.

The CIA are training these people to actually put the finger on who the resistance are, so you have – what you have going on in Iraq now is a kind of re-Nazification, the same sort of thing that went on in Germany after the Second World War.

TONY JONES: *On that score, let me ask you this – is it legitimate for the resistance then to target young Iraqi men queuing up to join the Iraqi police, which you describe as a sort of Gestapo?*

JOHN PILGER: You know, all resistances have said if you're going to collaborate, then you are a target. Well, of course, the killing of innocent people can't be condoned under any circumstances. But in all resistances, it happens.

TONY JONES: *It sounds, however, like you were saying these young men, about to join this Gestapo-like police force, are not innocent?*

JOHN PILGER | ON THE US AND TERRORISM

JOHN PILGER: Well, they're not ... It's nice that you call them 'these young men'. They're among some of the most vicious creatures. I mean, most of them will be led by people who the Americans would have slapped into Guantanamo Bay had they – if they didn't have another duty to perform for them.

The United States has singled out all of Saddam Hussein's top security and intelligence people. He ran one of the most effective security, yes, Gestapo's in the Middle East. hey've taken them and these people are now training 10,000, paid for by the CIA, to effectively do unto the Americans what they did under Saddam Hussein. That's what they did in Vietnam...

TONY JONES: *But are you saying that those men, outside police stations, looking to be recruited to get a job in a dire economic climate, are legitimate targets?*

JOHN PILGER: No, I'm not saying they're legitimate targets but, to a resistance, they are legitimate targets, yes.

TONY JONES: *But the resistance is a resistance you say we should be backing?*

JOHN PILGER: Ah, no, c'mon. I'm not saying we should be backing. I'm saying that we depend. If the rest of us watching this, those who worry about what a rampant United States is going to do next – and we should all be worried about that. The evidence is there, it's all clear – if we're concerned about that, we ask ourselves, and millions of people all over the world have asked themselves: how can that be stopped?

Well, one place where it is going to be stopped, or at least entrapped, or something will deter it, is, unfortunately, and I repeat unfortunately, in Iraq, because although Americans will be killed, most of the people killed, as you rightly point out, are going to be Iraqis, and that happened in Algeria, it happened in Vietnam, especially in Vietnam.

It's happened all over the world when there has been a powerful invader, has come into the country. It's not the invader that – well, the invader has suffered as the Americans clearly are – but it is the local people who will suffer.

TONY JONES: *But you're saying, effectively, that the rest of the world now must depend upon a resistance which is prepared to send a truck bomb into the United Nations, which is prepared to bomb civilians who are celebrating on their holiest day in holy cities like Karbala, Shiites, which is prepared to condone, indeed to promote, the whole concept of a civil war in Iraq. Why do you appear to be suggesting that that resistance is a good thing?*

JOHN PILGER: But you missed out the source of all this violence. In that litany,

JOHN PILGER | ON THE US AND TERRORISM

that's very interesting, you're quite right. But the source of all this is the invasion, an unprovoked and illegal invasion, and a bloody invasion, by the US and Britain which has caused the deaths of, in the latest conservative estimate, is between 21,000 and 55,000, which causes the deaths every month of 1,000 children from cluster bombs, which is causing the most pervasive contamination from a variety of toxic weapons such as depleted uranium, which has destroyed people's lives.

That's the source, that is the main violence in Iraq. Yes, there is that violence, but the violence that you describe is a reaction to that.

Haven't you got it round the wrong way?

TONY JONES: *Well, you can put it that way and you're making your case but what I'm saying is how can anyone back a resistance which resorts to the killing of innocent people? How can anyone suggest the world, in fact, depends on such a resistance which resorts to the killing of innocent people, as you say, mostly Iraqis?*

JOHN PILGER: A lot of people depended on a resistance movement to get rid of invaders, virtually since the beginning of history. When Caesar went up to Gaul, when finally they crossed the Rubicon – which the Americans have done in modern terms – there was a dependence on a resistance.

TONY JONES: *There are other forms of resistance. There is peaceful resistance, to start with. Mahatma Ghandi did not resort to bombing?*

JOHN PILGER: Tony, do tell me – how do you mount a peaceful resistance to an invading force, which Human Rights Watch this week described as out of control, as rapacious, which has bought a kind of murderous street fighting, which is – and I've just said – has killed, you know, in their 'Shock and Awe', they killed up to 55,000 people.

Robert Fisk, the independent correspondent, reckons that something like between 500 and 1,000 Iraqis are killed indirectly as a result of the American presence every week in that country. Now, how do you say they should all sit down and say to the Americans: "You must go. It should be a peaceful resistance."

There are a lot of people actually opposing it peacefully and, if it was reported ... You know, I follow the reports of a number of human rights observers in Baghdad. There's an enormous amount of peaceful resistance but on the other side of the resistance – and it's one resistance – there is also fire being fought with fire. I don't think one has to approve that.

In fact, you can't approve, under any circumstances, in my opinion, the killing

JOHN PILGER | ON THE US AND TERRORISM

of innocent people. But you have to understand why it happens. In the same way that we have to understand why September 11 happened.

TONY JONES: *Can you approve in that context the killing of American, British or Australian troops who are in the occupying forces?*

JOHN PILGER: Well yes, they're legitimate targets. They're illegally occupying a country. And I would have thought from an Iraqi's point of view they are legitimate targets, they'd have to be, sure.

TONY JONES: *So Australian troops you would regard in Iraq as legitimate targets?*

JOHN PILGER: Excuse me but, really, that's an unbecoming question. I've just said that any foreign occupier of a country, military occupier, be they Germans in France, Americans in Vietnam, the French in Algeria, wherever, the Americans in Latin America, I would have thought, from the point of view of the local people – and as I mentioned, be they Australians in Australia – if Australia had been invaded and occupied by the Japanese, then the occupying forces, from the point of view of the people of that country, are legitimate targets.

TONY JONES: *The Shiites have so far refused to engage in this crusade against the United States, by and large. They have huge militias who are armed and quite well trained whom they could turn against the Americans if they so wished. They have not done so because they're looking for a peaceful solution. They're looking still for a role in a new government in Iraq. Why not back them, rather than the resistance which is killing their civilians?*

JOHN PILGER: Well, my... you're interested into why I would back the Shia. What the Shia are doing I think is far more interesting actually. The Shia have long been a very patient group. And you only have to look at Iran, under the shah of Iran, it took a long time during that whole period of oppression in Iran before it exploded in 1979 in a revolution.

And my understanding of what the Shia are doing in Iraq is something very similar, that they, yes, are building a militia army and they're doing it patiently and they're doing it in a very ordered way.

There is a certain commitment to a peaceful resistance among the Shia actually, and they're the majority in the country.

But when you have such daily provocation coming from the invader, coming from the Americans, who are the principal force in that country, when you have the kind of murderous presence, the use of well, just simply, the very fact of a military and violent occupation, when you have that provocation, day upon day,

JOHN PILGER | ON THE US AND TERRORISM

then the whole notion of a peaceful resistance, whether it will come from the Shia with their patience or from the Sunni or anywhere else, really goes out the window, I would have thought.

TONY JONES: *Do you acknowledge that huge human rights abuses, not perhaps on the same scale as Pol Pot, but quite close to it, happened under Saddam Hussein's regime ...*

JOHN PILGER: Absolutely.

TONY JONES: *... that hundreds of thousands of mass graves have since been unearthed ...*

JOHN PILGER: Well, I can tell you when they ...

TONY JONES: *... in the south of Iraq?*

JOHN PILGER: I'm glad you've raised that.

TONY JONES: *But just let me finish that question. Can there not be a moral case made for deposing the dictator who was killing hundreds and thousands of his opponents?*

JOHN PILGER: Absolutely. By the Iraqi people. And I believe had there not been 10 years of a medieval siege imposed on Iraq by the United States, effectively, with Britain, that has caused the death, according to two Assistant Secretary-Generals of the United Nations who were in charge of humanitarian aid up to 1 million people in Iraq - had there not been that extraordinary pressure, that actually strengthened the regime in Baghdad - then, almost certainly, there would have been the kind of uprising that happened in early 1991, and I think we might have had the parallel we might be drawing, would have been with Romania.

The Romanians got rid of their tyrant who was very similar to the tyrant of Saddam Hussein. They did it by themselves.

Now, we stopped them. When I say "we" I'm talking about the West.

TONY JONES: *The United States in particular ... there is a strong point to be made there, they were betrayed.*

JOHN PILGER: In 1991, they stopped them. And the other point you made about that Saddam Hussein is guilty of the most terrible human rights abuses, the great majority of the reign of terror of Saddam Hussein and the worst human rights abuses were committed by him when he was being supplied by us, when he was being supported by the United States with biological weapons and weapons of mass destruction in the 1980s. It's rather important actually, because ...

JOHN PILGER | ON THE US AND TERRORISM

TONY JONES: *We're nearly out of time, that's all. Please continue.*

JOHN PILGER: Saddam Hussein's strength – he drew his strength principally from Washington, also from London, and the hypocrisy talked about Saddam Hussein being the great tyrant that we have the moral right to overthrow I would have thought is now evident to most people.

TONY JONES: *John Pilger, we will have to leave it there. The clock has beaten us. We thank you for coming in to have your ideas tested at least. **JP***