

BUSH, BLAIR AND THE END OF THE EMPIRE



My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!

As George W Bush looks down at the ruins of his presidency he must be wondering if there is anything more he could have screwed up. The answer is 'yes'. And, reassuringly for most of us, he will almost certainly go on to do so.

Victory for the Democrats, in both the Senate and Congressional mid-term elections, has already seen the departure of some of Bush's most trusted hatchet men. Moreover, the Democrats know they have two years in which they can have a field day of inquiries that will trash every aspect of the duplicitous case for war that the Bush machine lied its way into. It will be a duck shoot all the way through to the next Presidential election.

Far from being the only game in town, Bush has become the kiss of death; a close friendship with him is now a terminal condition. This is how it will end for Tony Blair.

In a supine display of its own shallowness, the British parliament recently voted against a root and branch inquiry into the causes and consequences of the Iraq war. Some MP's argued that the time was not right for such an inquiry. Others refused to say whether there would ever be a right time. But the US electorate has ensured there will be no end of inquiries, and no shortage of all the information Downing Street desperately wants to conceal.

Ultimately, we will find out whether Blair and Bush had agreed to go to war by the time they had their hoe down at the Texas ranch. All the gory details about the of this spotlight. The scale of the dishonesties may well suffice for reference on to manufacture of disinformation will emerge. And those who knew the truth, but went on to berate sceptical civil servants or to hound David Kelly to his death, will all be seen in a very different light.

Blair will stand in the centre the International Criminal Court. It will not be enough that history remembers him as the man who took Iraq from tyranny to anarchy in the vicarious pursuit of weapons that didn't exist. If there is a case to be answered on war crimes charges, it should be answered in a court, not in a committee designed to cover it up.

My own interest into an inquiry on Iraq is, however, rooted as much in the present as in the past. The more I look at it, the more certain I am that it was the cynicism of the post-war occupation that has lost the peace, far more than the brutality of the war.

As we account for the deaths of British troops in Iraq, we need to look hard at the impossible backcloth to their role as peacemakers, or the bringers of reconstruction and prosperity. The greatest of Al Qaida' activists in Iraq was undoubtedly Paul Bremer, the first US Administrator of post-war Iraq. Bremer was responsible for all of the Orders (laws) that ultimately made the army's task impossible.

How do troops win hearts and minds when Bremer's Orders were sacking thousands of teachers, privatising all 200 of Iraq's state enterprises, giving 98% of the re-construction contracts to foreign (mainly US) firms, granting foreign companies complete immunity from Iraqi law, allowing companies to re-patriate all profits (tax free) and even making it illegal for Iraqi farmers to save their own seeds?

Politicians pretended that the role of the troops was to promote the peace. In truth, they were being asked to police the biggest act of theft Iraq had ever seen. According to the Auditors, at least \$9 billion of Iraqi reconstruction funds disappeared in fraud and corruption. Iraq's oil production was rapidly restored, but not the meters to measure how much the West was taking. Oil was sold at a set price, well below the market level, largely to and through US companies.

How many countries or communities would stand round and 'thank' an army for presiding over such wholesale theft of everything that used to be theirs? Oh, and just to add a little spice to the soup, Bremer banned all the trade unions who might be critical of the occupation, closed down the Al Hawza newspaper and disbanded the entire Iraqi army (putting 400,000 Iraqi soldiers on the streets).

These decisions were not being made by Generals in the field, but by ideologues in the White House. The question is why did Britain say nothing that challenged the avarice that underpinned the occupation? It was an avarice that would ultimately destroy the occupation and many of the lives thrown into it. It was an avarice that may yet give Iraq to Al Qaida.

Within this catalogue of unmitigated disasters, the only silver lining is that Bush has also destroyed the neo-cons' plans for global domination. The US is no longer a leader of anything. The memory of 9-11 evokes sympathy, but no longer loyalty. No one will follow Bush into an adventurist war on Iran, nor spring to the defence of an Israel, driven by the same arrogant militarism against the Lebanese and Palestinians. The whole edifice begins to crumble.

In Britain and America, military families mourn their dead. In Iraq millions of civilians mourn hundreds of thousands of others who have died in the 'peace' that followed the war. These are the human issues that inquiries have to address.

Somewhere, out there, a bigger inquiry is waiting: an inquiry in which Bush and Blair may yet be forced to look at their works...and despair.