

Tony Blair: Orwellian Nightmare. War Criminal becomes Envoy of Peace

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Global Research, June 30, 2007
30 June 2007

Region: [Europe, Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

As Tony Blair left Downing Street, leaving Britain's Prime Ministership to his long time rival and co-leader of the Labour Party, Gordon Brown, the protesters outside Blair's office were greeted with the news that Blair had just been appointed as the new "Middle East Envoy" for the Quartet. (US/EU/UN/Russia)

Looking at the realities of the Middle East today and reviewing Blair's contribution to the current mayhem, one is left wondering whether this decision is born out of delusional thinking, sheer cynicism, or is there any possible constructive utility in this appointment?

During his ten years in office, Tony Blair was, by all accounts, the most media-obsessed Prime Minister Britain has ever seen. Perhaps his decision to put himself forward for this job must also be viewed in that light, as a last attempt by an increasingly unpopular politician to save his face at home rather than a genuine attempt to work towards any real prospect of a safer world.

Perhaps the one major highlight of Blair's negotiation skills was the Good Friday Agreement that he helped bring about in Northern Ireland in 1998. But not only was the groundwork for this laid down by his predecessor, what is also often forgotten, is that this was an isolated problem, in his own backyard; while the Middle East is an entirely different situation with a complicated web of stake holders where problems cannot be viewed in isolation from each other.

The very fact that Blair seems to see himself as 'fit for purpose' shows a lack of understanding of the political situation in the Middle East and the root causes of the ongoing problems.

His conduct and miscalculations in his shameless refusal to call for a ceasefire during Israel's attack on Lebanon last summer, which led to the destruction of southern Lebanon, cost him the little credibility he had previously earned by projecting an image of himself as a restraining force in preventing George W. Bush from attacking Iraq without a second UNSC resolution. Of course that resolution was never passed and they both went ahead with their long time planned invasion.

In any conflict, it is reasonable to expect the mediator to be respected by both parties to the conflict as unbiased and one who will act in competence and honesty to bring about a fair and appropriate resolution. Blair's appointment as an envoy was immediately welcomed by Israel and the US. But is this a view that is shared beyond the 'allied' countries? It is inconceivable to think that Blair and his advisors are not aware of his image in the Middle East. As such one is led to believe that he is quite simply "not bothered" about it. This is

what I refer to as “sheer cynicism”.

If his new title is anything beyond a media spin and if he takes it seriously at all, we should expect that he will most likely follow the same biased agenda that he followed throughout his time in office. There should be no illusion that if his double standards with respect to democracy and human rights in the region were capable of bearing fruit in any way, there would have been a brighter outlook for the Israeli/Palestinian conflict today.

The Middle East is not limited to Palestine and Israel . There are many other local and international players in the region, and more often than not, they are in conflict with one another, an important aspect of which relates to the extent to which they support or defy US policies. Blair’s shadow over the region, following his complicity with the US in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, will no doubt further highlight the differences between those states in the region that practise an independent foreign policy and those effectively implementing American scripts for short-term gains, but to long term detriment of the interests of their own nations.

Blair’s military adventures in the Middle East have also adversely affected Britain ‘s interests and reputation, not only among the people and historians of the region, whose memory of the colonial past has now been sharply revived, but also among some client states too. The Iraqi dictator who was so humiliatingly and horrifically captured and hanged last year, was one of the closest allies of the West until as recently as 1990. Other regimes in the region, who also have developed close relationships with Britain and the US in the hope of ‘security’, will now think of contingency plans for the years or decades ahead when their expiry date comes up and the US may call upon them too to disarm or else.

This goes beyond today. For most countries in the Middle East , with a colonial past, ‘foreign policy’ is a new skill which they have yet to master. Under colonial rule, they interacted with the outside world, only with the blessing of the colonialists; but now they are expected to act independently and to distinguish between being a puppet, and acting as free agents engaged in independent cooperation and liaison at an international level. During this transition, those rulers that choose to accommodate the concerns of foreign entities rather than their own population are bound to come into conflict with their own societies sooner or later.

The history of the Middle East is littered with uprisings against governments who were more loyal to the British or the Americans than to their own people. The Middle East ‘s level of ‘stability’ has often been miscalculated, mainly because the assessments have always been subjective to our own interests in the West, rather than measured against the social and economical welfare of the inhabitants of the region. In 1977 President Carter famously branded Shah’s regime in Iran as “an island of stability in a turbulent sea.” The monarch was forced into exile only a year later following popular grassroots uprisings!

Gordon Brown without causing much controversy has tried to open a new chapter by reshuffling the Labour cabinet and by introducing new ministers who have a record of having been critical of the Iraq war. He has effectively fired the Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett, in favour of David Miliband, who is said to have been critical of Blair for his bias towards Israel . Other major appointments include John Denham who had resigned over the Iraq war in 2003 and Sir Mark Malloch-Brown, again a critic of the war.

But no matter how many changes he makes to distance himself from Blair's legacy, Brown, and the entire country for that matter, for many years to come, will have to deal with the consequences of having waged unprovoked wars against countries and their populations. Not surprisingly, Brown's first day in office on 28th of June, started with news of three British troops killed in Iraq , and on 29th June, with an alleged car bomb plot in London .

In the past ten years, the world has gone through fundamental, largely irreversible changes. Yet despite having been part of the force responsible for this change, Blair's take of the situation so far, has been limited within the boundaries of official channels. Now, however, that he has left office, perhaps he will become more in touch with realities on the ground.

He may notice the occasional pieces of independent commentary in the media. He may google "Blair and Iraq" and see the title "Blair Knew Iraq Had No WMD" or in a rainy day, whilst drinking tea in his recently purchased multimillion pounds house in Connaught Square, he may come across those countless blogs and photo-blogs that have forever documented the role of his servile and interventionist foreign policy in bringing about misery and instability in the world.

The day a war criminal becomes an envoy of peace is an Orwellian nightmare having come true, and a wake up call to us all.

As time goes by, whether he likes it or not, Tony Blair will find out how he is viewed by the real "international community". His 'legacy' will be a lesson for other politicians who rely too much on propaganda to support and protect their agenda, whilst underestimating the power of an increasingly informed public opinion.

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