

Irony of Blair's rule of law

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HOW is it that some people can go around the world and talk on how to rule the world even though they have blood on their hands?

Take, for example, Radovan Karadzic, the "Butcher of Bosnia", who is now facing trial in the Hague. Would we listen to him about the rule of law, knowing full well his war crime record and the tortures he has been accused of during the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia-Herzegovina?

Yet, recently former British prime minister Tony Blair, one of the architects of another war, arguably a far worse tragedy, was invited to lecture on "Rule of Law and Good Governance" during a prestigious lecture series locally.

Last year, Sultan Azlan Shah, in his address at the opening of the 14th Malaysian Law Conference entitled "50 Years of Constitutionalism and the Rule of Law", reminded us that the rule of law is the defining feature of democratic government. He said the rule of law means literally what it says. Taken in its broadest sense, this means that people should obey the law and be ruled by it. The ideal of the rule of law in this sense is often expressed by the phrase "government by law and not by man".

He quoted Lord Woolf on the same subject: "The 'rule of law' is the rule by the laws that govern a true democracy. They are the laws that provide for a proper balance between the protection of human rights and the interests of the state. Laws which an independent and responsible judiciary can enforce to protect all members of society from abuse of power."

It is quite obvious from casual observation that someone who has been known to have misled others, including the country's Parliament, has lost the moral authority to preach about the rule of law and good governance.

According to some websites, such as <http://iraqdossier.com/blairslies>, Blair seems to be implicated in many such allegations.

In his lecture, Blair was quoted as saying that the rule of law also meant laws that were clear, could be understood and applicable. "It means rules and procedures that are transparent, and rules of evidence that make sense and are fair. These basic principles apply universally and, without them, the rule of law means little or nothing."

One wonders then what "basic principles" Blair had in mind when he gave an almost unconditional support for the unilateral decision to invade Iraq against the wishes of the international community and without the approval of the UN.

This war had resulted in hundreds of thousands killed senselessly, including women and children.

What about those detained "illegally" against the very basic principles he now advocates?

In the book entitled *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals* (2008), author Jane Mayer, a New Yorker reporter, has this to say about the nefarious deeds of Blair's closest buddy: "For the first time in its history, the United States sanctioned government officials to physically and psychologically torment US-held captives, making torture the official law of the land in all but name."

So much for "rules and procedures that are transparent, and rules of evidence that make sense and are fair". It is even more shocking to find out that almost half of all prisoners tortured were found to be innocent of harming the US in any way, despite being in detention for years without being charged with any crimes.

Indeed, as late as April 2006, when an eminent British former law lord attacked Guantanamo Bay as "a stain on American justice", Blair reportedly refused to follow suit. According to Lord Steyn, who just retired from Britain's highest court: "While our government condones Guantanamo Bay, the world is perplexed about our approach to the rule of law."

"You may ask: how will it help in regard to the continuing outrage at Guantanamo Bay for our government now to condemn it. The answer is that it would at last be a powerful signal to the world that Britain supports the international rule of law."

With this dubious track record, what can we expect from Blair, who is also currently the Middle East representative for the Quartet, namely the United Nations, United States of America, Russia and European Union?

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