



Column
By George Monbiot,
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Bloodhounds

The media's lust for blood helped march us into the disastrous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It wants us to forget that.

Everyone is to blame for the catastrophe in Afghanistan, except the people who started it. Yes, Joe Biden screwed up by rushing out so chaotically. Yes, Boris Johnson and Dominic Raab failed to make adequate and timely provisions for the evacuation of vulnerable people. But there is a frantic determination in the media to ensure that none of the blame attaches to those who began this open-ended war, without realistic aims or an exit plan, then waged it with little concern for the lives¹ and rights of the Afghan people: George Bush, Tony Blair, John Howard and their entourages.

On the contrary, Blair's self-exoneration² and transfer of blame to Biden last weekend was front-page news, while those who opposed his disastrous war 20 years ago remain cancelled across most of the media. Why? Because to acknowledge the mistakes of the men who prosecuted this war would be to expose the media's role in facilitating it.

Any fair reckoning of what went wrong in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the other nations swept up in the "war on terror" should include the disastrous performance of the media. Cheerleading for the war in Afghanistan was almost universal, and dissent was treated as intolerable. After the Northern Alliance stormed into Kabul, torturing and castrating its prisoners, raping women and children, the Telegraph urged us to "just rejoice, rejoice", while the Sun ran a two-page editorial entitled "Shame of the traitors: wrong, wrong, wrong ... the fools who said Allies faced disaster". In the Guardian, Christopher Hitchens, recently sanctified by his conversion to US hegemony and war, marked the solemnity of the occasion with the words³

"Well, ha ha ha, and yah, boo. It was ... obvious that defeat was impossible. The Taliban will soon be history."

The few journalists and other public figures who dissented were added to the Telegraph's daily list of "Osama Bin Laden's useful idiots", accused of being "anti-American" and "pro-terrorism", mocked, vilified and de-platformed almost everywhere. In the Independent, David Aaronovitch claimed⁴ that if you opposed the ongoing war, you were "indulging yourself in a cosmic whinge".

Everyone I know in the US and the UK who was attacked in the media for opposing the war received death threats.

¹ http://grassrootspeace.org/afghanistan_bombing_081107.pdf

² <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/aug/22/tony-blair-afghanistan-exit-gives-opportunities-to-uks-enemies>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/nov/14/afghanistan.terrorism1>

⁴ <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/david-aaronovitch-stop-trying-stop-war-start-trying-win-peace-9234588.html>

ped secure George Bush's presidency and promote his wars had more in common with the Taliban than with the brave women seeking liberation. In 2001, the newspapers now backcasting themselves as champions of women's rights mocked and impeded them at every opportunity. *The Sun* was running photos of topless teenagers on Page 3; *the Mail* ruined women's lives with its *Sidebar of Shame*; extreme sexism, body shaming and attacks on feminism were endemic.

Those of us who argued against the war possessed no prophetic powers. Twenty years ago, I asked the following questions in the *Guardian*¹⁴ not because I had any special information or insight, but because they were bleeding obvious.

"At what point do we stop fighting? At what point does withdrawal become either honourable or responsible? Having once engaged its forces, are we then obliged to reduce Afghanistan to a permanent protectorate? Or will we jettison responsibility as soon as military power becomes impossible to sustain?"

But even asking such things made you a pariah.

You can get away with a lot in the media, but not with opposing a war, unless it's for purely strategic reasons. If your motives are humanitarian, you are marked from that point on as a fanatic. Those who make their arguments with bombs and missiles are "moderates" and "centrists". Those who oppose them with words are "extremists". The inconvenient fact that the "extremists" were right and the "centrists" were wrong is being strenuously forgotten.

www.monbiot.com

¹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/oct/09/afghanistan.britainand911>