

AVI COMMENTARY

Cambodia | 10 August 2023

Western Hypocrisy at Its Finest

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On 17th March 2023, the Pre-Trial Chambers II of the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of the Russian Federation in the context of the situation in Ukraine. The ICC alleged that President Putin is responsible for war crimes for the unlawful deportation of the population (children) and the unlawful transfer of the population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation since February 2022. Moscow has denied those allegations and emphasised that “Russia is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and bears no obligations under it” (Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova).

Many heads of state and governments, including US President Joe Biden, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, the UK government, and the French government, see this as a historic move towards accountability and justice. Suppose these heads of state feel so strongly about upholding the rule of law in the international community and insist on all actors abiding by the Rome Statute of the ICC. In that case, they seem to have overlooked three important individuals that have yet to be held accountable for their roles.

The warrant issued for President Putin by the ICC reignited the burning question for the last 20 years: Why have former US President George W. Bush and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair not been charged by the ICC for crimes of aggression and war crimes in Iraq? Another question that must be asked regarding a mostly forgotten military campaign is: Why has Henry Kissinger been able to enjoy five decades of impunity when he committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Cambodia?

One prominent Western figure, who instigated war crimes and crimes against humanity in multiple countries and who has not only circumvented justice for five decades but has also been celebrated as a decorated diplomat and politician and who even received a Nobel Peace Prize in 1973, is none other than Henry Kissinger. One of the controversies that Kissinger is infamous for is the US bombing of Cambodia between 1969–1973, which resulted in as many as 150,000 civilian deaths, which is six times more non-combatant deaths than the US has killed in airstrikes since 9/11 (Obtained from The Intercept report based on previously unpublished and unreported evidence from the archive of US military documents). Kissinger, a national security adviser at the time, justified the bombing campaign in Cambodia as retaliation to the North Vietnamese forces stationed on Cambodian soil, to which he knew full well that civilian populations were also occupying the territories. Even though evidence had been unclassified that Kissinger and former US President Richard Nixon had lied to the US

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Senate, the American public, and the world about their war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Cambodia, they have not been held accountable for their actions.

To make matters more tragic, Kissinger's illegal bombing campaign in Cambodia had destabilised the country and laid the groundwork for the Khmer Rouge genocidal regime. Initially, the Khmer Rouge forces only numbered around 5,000. The Khmer Rouge relied on the US bombing of Cambodia as their main propaganda theme, helping it grow into around 72,248 troops that plunged Cambodia into years of darkness and killed about 20% of the population. Henry Kissinger has not been held accountable. Instead, he is a celebrated politician in the US and abroad. Although there have been efforts by some actors to try and get various courts to hold Kissinger accountable for his breach of international law, those efforts have been proven fruitless.

What does this tell us about upholding and implementing international law when some individuals are above the law, specifically, when those individuals are from a Western superpower? The case of Henry Kissinger is a vivid example showing the hypocrisy of Western governments and the selective nature of Western-led international justice.

The double standard of the West continues to the present. As we know, in 2003, the US led a coalition of governments, which included the UK, Australia, Poland, Italy, and Spain (only the UK was involved in the post-invasion phase), to invade Iraq as part of the Bush administration's War on Terror and on the grounds that Iraq possessed Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) that posed an imminent threat to the US and its allies. Bush and Blair were heavily lying to the public that Iraq under President Saddam Hussein was a member of the Axis of Evil and that an invasion was the only plausible solution to such a threat.

As a result of those allegations, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) set up inspections with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) under Resolution 1441, which Saddam Hussein had accepted. A few months into the inspection, the IAEA stated that they "found no evidence or plausible indication of the revival of a nuclear weapons program in Iraq", and no other kinds of WMD were ever found. Despite the announcement, the US, with its allies, still invaded Iraq and occupied the country until 2011. Without the WMD grounds, the Iraq war was illegal and a crime of aggression, to which the US and the UK forces committed various war crimes (wilful killing, torture, cruel treatments, outrages upon personal dignity, rape and/or other forms of sexual violence) under the Bush's and Blair's administrations.

Now here in 2023, the US and UK governments have continually accused the Russian government of perpetrating crimes that they committed in Iraq for eight years, but the former two heads of state have not been charged or brought to justice. Since the Russia-Ukraine war started in 2022, the US and its allies have claimed that it has destabilised the region's security and infringed upon Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Furthermore, the US and its allies have claimed that its billions of dollars in military aid to Ukraine are to resist Russian aggression and protect civilians, to which President Zelensky insisted, "It is not charity, it's investment [in] global security and democracy". This is exactly the narrative that the US-led Western powers want to enact onto the international community that the Western powers are here to protect and that, right now, Russia and China are the two biggest threats to the world's security and stability. But who will protect us from the West and its aggressions?

Furthermore, if the security of civilians is the West's priority now, why are they so against a possible China-brokered peace deal for Russia and Ukraine? Since the West has made Russia and Putin into pariahs, no other countries want to be seen as engaging with them (which is what the West has intended). China is the only superpower willing to engage with Putin diplomatically to find a constructive peace plan out of this terrible situation. At the same time, whilst claiming to want to end the war, the West continues to send Ukraine military equipment, further antagonising Russia and prolonging the war. Shouldn't a ceasefire from both parties be a priority so that diplomatic channels can be resumed and utilised? Is it because the West wants to continue this narrative that they are the knights in shining armour protecting us from the evil Putin-led Russian Federation? Or is this another smokescreen they have implemented for the international community while secretly pursuing the real agenda behind this war, which is regime change in Russia and/or expanding their influence into the region?

This article is neither about being pro-Russia nor pro-China but about pointing out Western administrations' double standards and hypocrisy. The ICC was justified to have issued the arrest warrant for Putin for his military campaign and atrocities against Ukraine. Putin should not go unpunished. At the same time, Kissinger, Blair, and Bush should also be held accountable for their actions, and the statute of limitations should not apply when it comes to the nature of their crimes.

The views expressed are the author's own and do not reflect the views of the Asian Vision Institute.