



## HIDDEN TRUTHS: JOHN PILGER AND THE POWER OF DOCUMENTARY

# Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia + Breaking the Silence: Truth and Lies in the War on Terror

### Year Zero:

#### **The Silent Death of Cambodia**

*Produced & Directed by:* David Munro

*Reporter:* John Pilger

*©/Production Company:* ATV

*Production Assistant:* Julie Stoner

*Researcher:* Nicholas Claxton

*Photography:* Gerry Pinches

*Editor:* Jonathan Morris

*Assistant Editors:* Keith Lakhani,

Nigel Mercer

*Sound:* Steve Phillips

*Dubbing Mixer:* Peter Rann

ITV tx 30.10.1979 53 mins

Contains many images of human remains

### Breaking the Silence:

#### **Truth and Lies in the War on Terror**

*Written/Reported/Directed by:* John Pilger

*Co-director:* Steve Connolly

*©/Production Company:* Carlton Television

*Executive Producer:* Richard Clemmow

*Producer:* Christopher Martin

*Production Manager:* Julie Stoner

*Afghanistan Location Fixer:* Hanif Sherjah

*Researcher (USA):* Gil Shochat

*Cinematographer:* Preston Clothier

*Photography:* Bruno Stevens

*Editor:* Andrew Denny

*On-Line Editor:* Michael Sanders

*Composer:* Nick Russell-Pavier

*Sound Recording:* Grant Roberts

*Dubbing Mixer:* Damian Reynolds

*Special Thanks:* Nick Lockett,

John Manthorpe

*Archive Film:* Al Jazeera, Atlantic Celtic

Films, BBC TV, Big Noise Films, Cable

News Network, ITN Archive, N.A.S.A.,

NBC News Archive, The Labour Party

*Archive Consultants:* Alison McAllan,

Brian Sanderson

*Interviewees:*

Orifa, Rita Lasar, Omar Zakhilwal

(*Afghan Rural Affairs Ministry*)

Dr Sima Samar

Margaret Ladner (*Amnesty International*)

Ray McGovern (*former CIA analyst*)

William Kristol

(*editor, 'The Weekly Standard'*)

Reed Brody (*Human Rights Watch*)

Denis Halliday

(*ex UN Asst. Secretary General*)

Charles Lewis (*Center for Public Integrity*)

John Bolton (*Under Secretary of State*)

Colonel Rod Davis (*US Army, Afghanistan*)

Taj Mohammad (*nurse*)

Andrew Wilkie

(*ex Australian intelligence officer*)

General Wesley Clark

(*ex NATO Commander*)

Douglas Feith

(*Under Secretary of Defense*)

Jo Wilding

(*human rights observer, Baghdad*)

Richard Overy (*Professor of Modern*

*History, Kings College, London*)

*Archive Footage:*

George W. Bush, Tony Blair

ITV tx 22.9.2003 52 mins

John Pilger's shocking 1979 documentary *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia* alerted the world to the horrors wrought by Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge, who had come to power in the turmoil following Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger's secret bombing campaign of the early 1970s. Two million people, or between a quarter and a third of Cambodia's population, were missing – either murdered or having died from starvation. Torture and slave labour had been routine. John Pilger found an eerily empty country and reported on the suffering of a small Southeast Asian nation denied aid by an international embargo imposed against its liberators – it was the Vietnamese who had finally driven out Pol Pot.

The film was originally broadcast on commercial television in Britain and Australia without advertising, which was unprecedented. The BFI lists *Year Zero* as one of the 10 most important documentaries of the 20th century.

*Year Zero*'s broadcast in Britain had a phenomenal public response. Forty sacks of post arrived at the ATV studios in Birmingham, with £1 million in the first few days. 'This is for Cambodia,' wrote an anonymous Bristol bus driver, enclosing his week's wage. An elderly woman sent her pension for two months. A single parent sent her savings of £50.

Screened in 50 countries and seen by 150 million viewers, *Year Zero* was credited with raising more than \$45 million in unsolicited aid for Cambodia, which helped rescue normal life: it restored a clean water supply in Phnom Penh, stocked hospitals and schools, supported orphanages and reopened a desperately needed clothing factory, allowing people to discard the black uniforms the Khmer Rouge had forced them to wear.

*Year Zero* won many awards, including the Broadcasting Press Guild's Best Documentary and the International Critics Prize at the Monte Carlo International Television Festival. Pilger himself won the 1980 United Nations Media Peace Prize for 'having done so much to ease the suffering of the Cambodian people'.

Pilger went on to make four more documentaries on Cambodia with director David Munro, exposing the shocking role of the West and the UN, which continued to recognise the ousted Pol Pot regime, and exposing the fraud of so-called 'aid'. Munro, his close friend and collaborator, died in 1999 (see below). For more information on the Cambodia films, see [www.johnpilger.com](http://www.johnpilger.com)

### From John Pilger's book *Heroes* (Jonathan Cape, 1986)

*Phnom Penh, August 1979.* The aircraft flew low, following the unravelling of the Mekong River west from Vietnam. Once over Cambodia, what we saw silenced all of us on board. There appeared to be nobody, no movement, not even an animal, as if the great population of Asia had stopped at the border. Whole towns and villages on the riverbanks were empty, it seemed, the doors of houses open, chairs and beds, pots and mats in the street, a mangled bicycle. Beside fallen power lines was a human shadow, lying or sitting; it had the shape of a child, though we could not be sure, for it did not move.

Our plane made its approach towards a beaconless runway and a deserted control tower. At the edge of the forest there appeared a pyramid of rusting cars piled one on top of the other; some of the cars had been brand new when their owners were forced to throw away the ignition keys and push them to the pile, which included ambulances, a fire engine, police cars, refrigerators, washing machines, hairdryers, generators, television sets, telephones and typewriters, as if a huge Luddite broom had swept them there. 'Here lies the consumer society', a headstone might have read, 'Abandoned April 17, Year Zero'.

During my 22 years as a journalist, most of them spent in transit at places of uncertainty and upheaval, I had not seen anything to compare with what I saw in Cambodia in the summer of 1979.

## HIDDEN TRUTHS: JOHN PILGER AND THE POWER OF DOCUMENTARY

### I Am Not Your Negro

Sat 26 Oct 20:35; Sat 9 Nov 15:30;

Thu 21 Nov 18:30

### Seniors' Free Talk: The Quiet Mutiny + intro and Q&A with author Anthony Hayward

Mon 28 Oct 11:45

### Seniors' Free Matinee: The Last Day + intro with author Anthony Hayward

Mon 28 Oct 14:00

### The Pilger Effect

Mon 28 Oct 18:15

### The War You Don't See

Mon 28 Oct 20:35; Sat 16 Nov 18:10

### Death of a Nation: The Timor

### Conspiracy + Palestine Is Still the Issue

Sat 2 Nov 15:00

### The Golden Dream La Jaula De Oro

Tue 5 Nov 20:45; Thu 14 Nov 18:10;

Sun 24 Nov 15:30

### Lousy Little Sixpence + Utopia

Sun 10 Nov 14:50

### Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia + Breaking the Silence: Truth and Lies in the War on Terror

Mon 18 Nov 18:10

### Burp! Pepsi v Coke in the Ice Cold War + Flying the Flag: Arming the World

Sat 23 Nov 17:45

### The Coming War on China

Sat 23 Nov 20:10; Fri 29 Nov 18:15

### The Ballymurphy Precedent

Tue 26 Nov 18:10 (+ intro by director  
Callum Macrae); Sat 30 Nov 12:20

**The documentaries in this season  
contain distressing scenes of both  
violence and racism related to the  
events they cover**

### With thanks to

John Pilger, Jane Hill, Sam Pilger,  
Christopher Hird, Matt Hird,  
David Boardman, Marcus Prince

Programme texts compiled by John Pilger,  
Jane Hill, Sam Pilger, Christopher Hird,  
Matt Hird, David Boardman, Maggi Hurt  
and David Somerset

Selections from Hidden Truths can be  
found on **BFI Player**

For more information about John Pilger's  
films go to [johnpilger.com](http://johnpilger.com)

## John Pilger: A tribute to David Munro (1999)

On our first day in a ghostly Phnom Penh, David wrote in his diary: 'I don't know what to do to film what we're seeing, because all we're seeing is silence... No one is going to believe us.'

Pol Pot had fallen, and in basements, in petrol stations, there were orphaned, very sick children, whom we tried to help. David steered Gerry Pinches, the cameraman, as he filmed rows of opaque eyes, the tears running down his face. Gerry says David held us all together, and it was true. Under duress, he had the capacity to construct extraordinary sequences that honoured the documentary art, yet he never surrendered his compassion, as others do.

Whenever we returned to Phnom Penh, cyclo drivers and one-legged veterans would greet him, remembering some gracious kindness he had shown them, always given with recognition of the heroism of ordinary people.

At times I am asked how I have withstood the emotional perils of having witnessed so much human mayhem and suffering. Part of the answer is that I shared a lot of it with David, whose comradeship was unerring.

John Pilger, *The Guardian*, August 1999

## Breaking the Silence: Truth and Lies in the War on Terror

The events of 11 September 2001 dominate almost everything we watch, read and hear. George Bush and Tony Blair pledged to fight a 'war on terror' against evil itself. In *Breaking the Silence*, John Pilger probes the real aims of this war, asking: 'Who are the most threatening terrorists? Who is responsible for far greater acts of violence than those committed by the fanatics of al-Qaeda – crimes that have claimed many more lives than 11 September, and always in poor, devastated, faraway places, from Latin America to southeast Asia? The answer to these questions is to be found in the United States, where those now in power speak openly of their conquests and of endless war. Afghanistan... Iraq... these, they say, are just the beginning. Look out North Korea, Iran, even China. This film is about the rise and rise of rapacious, imperial power, and a terrorism that never speaks its name because it is 'our' terrorism. Visiting Afghanistan for the first time for the film, John Pilger observes: 'I've spent much of my life in places of upheaval but I've rarely seen such a bombed and blasted and ruined city as Kabul; most of the damage was done, not by the Taliban, but by the Afghan warlords backed and trained and funded by America for more than 20 years – the same warlords who have been effectively put back into power by George Bush.' Out of ten billion dollars spent in Afghanistan in the past two years, more than 80 per cent has been spent on the military and bombing the country. Only three per cent of all international aid has been for reconstruction.

With the Taliban gone, the warlords now control Hamid Karzai's weak government and have re-established the opium trade, source of most of the heroin reaching Britain. In 2001, Dr Sima Samar was welcomed to the new Afghan government as the face of liberation, after she had defied the Taliban by running women's clinics. She was fêted in the United States, but as Pilger observes, 'No sooner had the applause in Washington died away, than she was sacked.' Today she lives in constant fear of her life. She points out, of Afghan women: 'Still the majority doesn't have access to health care, they don't have access to education, they don't have access to job opportunity... even under the Taliban, there was not much pressure on the women in the rural areas.'

Former Australian intelligence officer Andrew Wilkie, who gave evidence to the House of Commons' select committee, says: 'The Iraq war wasn't just governments telling a little fib. It was serious dishonesty, the result of which includes the fact that thousands of Iraqis have died, hundreds of soldiers from our own countries have tragically died.' Former CIA official Ray McGovern says Bush and Blair's decision to go to war with Iraq was '95 per cent charade.' In Washington, Pilger interviews senior Bush officials at both the Pentagon and the State Department. And US television journalist Charles Lewis, a rare critic of the coverage of the move to war, tells Pilger of the paranoia of American journalists who 'can't always report everything they know'.

*Breaking the Silence* production notes (2003)