

Colin Powell said Iraq was no threat

Exactly one year ago, Tony Blair told Parliament: “Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction programme is active, detailed and growing. “The policy of containment is not working. The weapons of mass destruction programme is not shut down. It is up and running now.”

Not only was every word of this false, it was part of a big lie invented in Washington within hours of the attacks of September 11 2001 and used to hoodwink the American public and distract the media from the real reason for attacking Iraq. “It was 95 per cent charade,” a former senior CIA analyst told me.

An investigation of files and archive film for my TV documentary *Breaking The Silence*, together with interviews with former intelligence officers and senior Bush officials have revealed that Bush and Blair knew all along that Saddam Hussein was effectively disarmed.

Both Colin Powell, US Secretary of State, and Condoleezza Rice, President Bush’s closest adviser, made clear before September 11 2001 that Saddam Hussein was no threat - to America, Europe or the Middle East.

In Cairo, on February 24 2001, Powell said: “He (Saddam Hussein) has not developed any significant capability with respect to weapons of mass destruction. He is unable to project conventional power against his neighbours.”

This is the very opposite of what Bush and Blair said in public.

Powell even boasted that it was the US policy of “containment” that had effectively disarmed the Iraqi dictator - again the very opposite of what Blair said time and again. On May 15 2001, Powell went further and said that Saddam Hussein had not been able to “build his military back up or to develop weapons of mass destruction” for “the last 10 years”. America, he said, had been successful in keeping him “in a box”.

Two months later, Condoleezza Rice also described a weak, divided and militarily defenceless Iraq. “Saddam does not control the northern part of the

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country,” she said. “We are able to keep his arms from him. His military forces have not been rebuilt.”

So here were two of Bush’s most important officials putting the lie to their own propaganda, and the Blair government’s propaganda that subsequently provided the justification for an unprovoked, illegal attack on Iraq. The result was the deaths of what reliable studies now put at 50,000 people, civilians and mostly conscript Iraqi soldiers, as well as British and American troops. There is no estimate of the countless thousands of wounded.

In a torrent of propaganda seeking to justify this violence before and during the invasion, there were occasional truths that never made headlines. In April last year, Condoleezza Rice described September 11 2001 as an “enormous opportunity” and said America “must move to take advantage of these new opportunities.”

Taking over Iraq, the world’s second biggest oil producer, was the first such opportunity.

At 2.40pm on September 11, according to confidential notes taken by his aides, Donald Rumsfeld, the Defense Secretary, said he wanted to “hit” Iraq - even though not a shred of evidence existed that Saddam Hussein had anything to do with the attacks on New York and Washington. “Go massive,” the notes quote Rumsfeld as saying. “Sweep it all up. Things related and not.” Iraq was given a brief reprieve when it was decided instead to attack Afghanistan. This was the “softest option” and easiest to explain to the American people - even though not a single September 11 hijacker came from Afghanistan. In the meantime, securing the “big prize”, Iraq, became an obsession in both Washington and London.

An Office of Special Plans was hurriedly set up in the Pentagon for the sole purpose of converting “loose” or unsubstantiated intelligence into US policy. This was a source from which Downing Street received much of the “evidence” of weapons of mass destruction we now know to be phoney.

Contrary to Blair’s denials at the time, the decision to attack Iraq was set in motion on September 17 2001, just six days after the attacks on New York and Washington.

On that day, Bush signed a top-secret directive, ordering the Pentagon to begin planning “military options” for an invasion of Iraq. In July 2002, Condoleezza Rice told another Bush official who had voiced doubts about invading Iraq: “A decision has been made. Don’t waste your breath.”

The ultimate cynicism of this cover-up was expressed by Rumsfeld himself only last week. When asked why he thought most Americans still believed Saddam

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Hussein was behind the attacks of September 11, he replied: "I've not seen any indication that would lead me to believe I could say that."

It is this that makes the Hutton inquiry in London virtually a sham. By setting up an inquiry solely into the death of the weapons expert David Kelly, Blair has ensured there will be no official public investigation into the real reasons he and Bush attacked Iraq and into when exactly they made that decision. He has ensured there will be no headlines about disclosures in email traffic between Downing Street and the White House, only secretive tittle-tattle from Whitehall and the smearing of the messenger of Blair's misdeeds.

The sheer scale of this cover-up makes almost laughable the forensic cross-examination of the BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan about "anomalies" in the notes of his interview with David Kelly - when the story Gilligan told of government hypocrisy and deception was basically true.

Those pontificating about Gilligan failed to ask one vital question - why has Lord Hutton not recalled Tony Blair for cross-examination? Why is Blair not being asked why British sovereignty has been handed over to a gang in Washington whose extremism is no longer doubted by even the most conservative observers? No one knows the Bush extremists better than Ray McGovern, a former senior CIA officer and personal friend of George Bush senior, the President's father. In *Breaking The Silence*, he tells me: "They were referred to in the circles in which I moved when I was briefing at the top policy levels as 'the crazies'."

"Who referred to them as 'the crazies'?" I asked.

"All of us... in policy circles as well as intelligence circles... There is plenty of documented evidence that they have been planning these attacks for a long time and that 9/11 accelerated their plan. (The weapons of mass destruction issue) was all contrived, so was the connection of Iraq with al Qaeda. It was all PR... Josef Goebbels had this dictum: If you say something often enough, the people will believe it." He added: "I think we ought to be all worried about fascism (in the United States)."

The "crazies" include John Bolton, Under Secretary of State, who has made a personal mission of tearing up missile treaties with the Russians and threatening North Korea, and Douglas Feith, an Under Secretary of Defence, who ran a secret propaganda unit "reworking" intelligence about Iraq's weapons. I interviewed them both in Washington.

Bolton boasted to me that the killing of as many as 10,000 Iraqi civilians in the invasion was "quite low if you look at the size of the military operation."

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For raising the question of civilian casualties and asking which country America might attack next, I was told: “You must be a member of the Communist Party.”

Over at the Pentagon, Feith, No 3 to Rumsfeld, spoke about the “precision” of American weapons and denied that many civilians had been killed. When I pressed him, an army colonel ordered my cameraman: “Stop the tape!” In Washington, the wholesale deaths of Iraqis is unmentionable. They are non-people; the more they resist the Anglo-American occupation, the more they are dismissed as “terrorists”.

It is this slaughter in Iraq, a crime by any interpretation of an international law, that makes the Hutton inquiry absurd. While his lordship and the barristers play their semantic games, the spectre of thousands of dead human beings is never mentioned, and witnesses to this great crime are not called.

Jo Wilding, a young law graduate, is one such witness. She was one of a group of human rights observers in Baghdad during the bombing. She and the others lived with Iraqi families as the missiles and cluster bombs exploded around them. Where possible, they would follow the explosions to scenes of civilian casualties and trace the victims to hospitals and mortuaries, interviewing the eyewitnesses and doctors. She kept meticulous notes.

She saw children cut to pieces by shrapnel and screaming because there were no anaesthetics or painkillers. She saw Fatima, a mother stained with the blood of her eight children. She saw streets, mosques and farmhouses bombed by marauding aircraft. “Nothing could explain them,” she told me, “other than that it was a deliberate attack on civilians.”

As these atrocities were carried out in our name, why are we not hearing such crucial evidence? And why is Blair allowed to make yet more self-serving speeches, and none of them from the dock? **JP**