

# What they don't want you to know

**T**he disaster in Iraq is rotting the Blairite establishment. Blair himself appears ever more removed from reality; his latest tomfoolery about the “discovery” of “a huge system of clandestine weapons laboratories”, which even the American viceroy in Baghdad mocked, would be astonishing, were it not merely another of his vapid attempts to justify his crime against humanity. (His crime, and George Bush’s, is clearly defined as “supreme” in the Nuremberg judgment.)

This is not what the guardians of the faith want you to know. Lord Hutton, who is due to report on the Kelly affair, will provide the most effective distraction, just as Lord Justice Scott did with his arms-to-Iraq report almost ten years ago, ensuring that the top echelon of the political class escaped criminal charges. Of course, it was not Hutton’s “brief” to deal with the criminal slaughter in Iraq; he will spread the blame for one man’s torment and death, having pointedly and scandalously chosen not to recall and cross-examine Blair, even though Blair revealed during his appearance before Hutton that he had lied in “emphatically” denying he had had anything to do with “outing” Dr David Kelly.

Other guardians have been assiduously at work. The truth of public opposition to an illegal, unprovoked invasion, expressed in the biggest demonstration in modern history, is being urgently revised. In a valedictory piece on 30 December, the Guardian commentator and leader writer Martin Kettle wrote: “Opponents of the war may need to be reminded that public opinion currently approves of the invasion by nearly two to one.”

A favourite source for this is a Guardian/ICM poll published on 18 November, the day Bush arrived in London, which was reported beneath the front-page headline “Protests begin but majority backs Bush visit as support for war surges”. Out of 1,002 people contacted, just 426 said they welcomed Bush’s visit, while the majority said they were opposed to it or did not know. As for support

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for the war “surging”, the absurdly small number questioned still produced a majority that opposed the invasion.

Across the world, the “majority backs Bush” disinformation was seized upon – by William Shawcross on CNN (“The majority of the British people are glad he [Bush] came...”), by the equally warmongering William Safire in the New York Times and by the Murdoch press almost everywhere. Thus, the slaughter in Iraq, the destruction of democratic rights and civil liberties in the west and the preparation for the next invasion are “normalised”.

In “The Banality of Evil”, Edward S Herman wrote, “Doing terrible things in an organised and systematic way rests on ‘normalisation’... There is usually a division of labour in doing and rationalising the unthinkable, with the direct brutalising and killing done by one set of individuals... others working on improving technology (a better crematory gas, a longer burning and more adhesive Napalm, bomb fragments that penetrate flesh in hard-to-trace patterns). It is the function of the experts, and the mainstream media, to normalise the unthinkable for the general public.”

Current “normalising” is expressed succinctly by Kettle: “As 2003 draws to its close, it is surely al-Qaeda, rather than the repercussions of Iraq, that casts a darker shadow over Britain’s future.” How does he know this? The “mass of intelligence flowing across the Prime Minister’s desk”, of course! He calls this “cold-eyed realism”, omitting to mention that the only credible intelligence “flowing across the Prime Minister’s desk” was the common sense that an Anglo-American attack on Iraq would increase the threat from al-Qaeda.

What the normalisers don’t want you to know is the nature and scale of the “coalition” crime in Iraq – which Kettle calls a “misjudgement” – and the true source of the worldwide threat. Outside the work of a few outstanding journalists prepared to go beyond the official compounds in Iraq, the extent of the human carnage and material devastation is barely acknowledged. For example, the effect of uranium weapons used by American and British forces is suppressed. Iraqi and foreign doctors report that radiation illnesses are common throughout Iraq, and troops have been warned not to approach contaminated sites. Readings taken from destroyed Iraqi tanks in British-controlled Basra are so high that a British army survey team wore white, full-body radiation suits, face masks and gloves. With nothing to warn them, Iraqi children play on and around the tanks.

Of the 10,000 Americans evacuated sick from Iraq, many have “mystery illnesses” not unlike those suffered by veterans of the first Gulf war. By mid-April last year, the US air force had deployed more than 19,000 guided weapons and

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311,000 rounds of uranium A10 shells. According to a November 2003 study by the Uranium Medical Research Centre, witnesses living next to Baghdad airport reported a huge death toll following one morning's attack from aerial bursts of thermobaric and fuel air bombs. Since then, a vast area has been "landscaped" by US earth movers, and fenced. Jo Wilding, a British human rights observer in Baghdad, has documented a catalogue of miscarriages, hair loss, and horrific eye, skin and respiratory problems among people living near the area. Yet the US and Britain steadfastly refuse to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to conduct systematic monitoring tests for uranium contamination in Iraq. The Ministry of Defence, which has admitted that British tanks fired depleted uranium in and around Basra, says that British troops "will have access to biological monitoring". Iraqis have no such access and receive no specialist medical help.

According to the non-governmental organisation Medact, between 21,700 and 55,000 Iraqis died between 20 March and 20 October last year. This includes up to 9,600 civilians. Deaths and injury of young children from unexploded cluster bombs are put at 1,000 a month. These are conservative estimates; the ripples of trauma throughout the society cannot be imagined. Neither the US nor Britain counts its Iraqi victims, whose epic suffering is "not relevant", according to a US State Department official – just as the slaughter of more than 200,000 Iraqis during and immediately after the 1991 Gulf war, calculated in a Medical Education Trust study, was "not relevant" and not news.

The normalisers are anxious that this terror is again not recognised (the BBC confines its use of "terrorism" and "atrocities" to the Iraqi resistance) and that the wider danger it represents throughout the world is overshadowed by the threat of al-Qaeda. William Schulz, executive director of Amnesty International USA, has attacked the anti-war movement for not joining Bush's "war on terror". He says "the left" must join Bush's campaign, even his "pre-emptive" wars, or risk – that word again – "irrelevance". This echoes other liberal normalisers who, by facing both ways, provide propaganda cover for rapacious power to expand its domain with "humanitarian interventions" – such as the bombing to death of some 3,000 civilians in Afghanistan and the swap of the Taliban for US-backed warlords, murderers and rapists known as "commanders".

Schulz's criticism ignores the truth in Amnesty's own studies. Amnesty USA reports that the Bush administration is harbouring thousands of foreign torturers, including several mass murderers. By a simple mathematical comparison of American and al-Qaeda terror, the latter is a lethal flea. In the past

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50 years, the US has supported and trained state terrorists in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The toll of their victims is in the millions. Again, the documentation is in Amnesty's files. The dictator Suharto's seizure of power in Indonesia was responsible for "one of the greatest mass murders of the 20th century", according to the CIA. The US supplied arms, logistics, intelligence and assassination lists. Britain supplied warships and black propaganda to cover the trail of blood. Scholars now put Suharto's victims in 1965-66 at almost a million; in East Timor, he oversaw the death of one-third of the population: 200,000 men, women and children.

Today, the mass murderer lives in sumptuous retirement in Jakarta, his billions safe in foreign banks. Unlike Saddam Hussein, an amateur by comparison, there will be no show trial for Suharto, who remained obediently within the US terror network. (One of Suharto's most outspoken protectors and apologists in the State Department during the 1980s was Paul Wolfowitz, the current "brains" behind Bush's aggression.)

In the sublime days before 11 September 2001, when the powerful were routinely attacking and terrorising the weak, and those dying were black or brown-skinned non-people living in faraway places such as Zaire and Guatemala, there was no terrorism. When the weak attacked the powerful, spectacularly on 9/11, there was terrorism.

This is not to say the threat from al-Qaeda and other fanatical groups is not real; what the normalisers don't want you to know is that the most pervasive danger is posed by "our" governments, whose subordinates in journalism and scholarship cast always as benign: capable of misjudgement and blunder, never of high crime. Fuelled by religious fanaticism, a corrupt Americanism and rampant corporate greed, the Bush cabal is pursuing what the military historian Anatol Lieven calls "the classic modern strategy of an endangered right-wing oligarchy, which is to divert mass discontent into nationalism", inspired by fear of lethal threats. Bush's America, he warns, "has become a menace to itself and to mankind".

The unspoken truth is that Blair, too, is a menace. "There never has been a time," said Blair in his address to the US Congress last year, "when the power of America was so necessary or so misunderstood or when, except in the most general sense, a study of history provides so little instruction for our present day." His fatuous dismissal of history was his way of warning us off the study of imperialism. He wants us to forget and to fail to recognise historically the "national security state" that he and Bush are erecting as a "necessary"

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alternative to democracy. The father of fascism, Benito Mussolini, understood this. "Modern fascism," he said, "should be properly called corporatism, since it is the merger of state, military and corporate power."

Bush, Blair and the normalisers now speak, almost with relish, of opening mass graves in Iraq. What they do not want you to know is that the largest mass graves are the result of a popular uprising that followed the 1991 Gulf war, in direct response to a call by President George Bush Sr to "take matters into your own hands and force Saddam to step aside". So successful were the rebels initially that within days Saddam's rule had collapsed across the south. A new start for the people of Iraq seemed close at hand.

Then Washington, the tyrant's old paramour who had supplied him with \$5bn worth of conventional arms, chemical and biological weapons and industrial technology, intervened just in time. The rebels suddenly found themselves confronted with the United States helping Saddam against them. US forces prevented them from reaching Iraqi arms depots. They denied them shelter, and gave Saddam's Republican Guard safe passage through US lines in order to attack the rebels. US helicopters circled overhead, observing, taking photographs, while Saddam's forces crushed the uprising. In the north, the same happened to the Kurdish insurrection. "The Americans did everything for Saddam," said the writer on the Middle East Said Aburish, "except join the fight on his side." Bush Sr did not want a divided Iraq, certainly not a democratic Iraq. The New York Times commentator Thomas Friedman, a guard dog of US foreign policy, was more to the point. What Washington wanted was a successful coup by an "iron-fisted junta": Saddam without Saddam.

Nothing has changed. As Milan Rai documents in his new book, *Regime Unchanged*, the most senior and ruthless elements of Saddam's security network, the Mukha-barat, are now in the pay of the US and Britain, helping them to combat the resistance and recruit those who will run a puppet regime behind a facade. A CIA-run and -paid gestapo of 10,000 will operate much as they did under Saddam. "What is happening in Iraq," writes Rai, "is re-Nazification ... just as in Germany after the war."

Blair knows this and says nothing. Consider his unctuous words to British troops in Basra the other day about curtailing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Like so many of his deceptions, this covers the fact that his government has increased the export of weapons and military equipment to some of the most oppressive regimes on earth, such as Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Nepal. To oil-rich Saudi Arabia, home of most of the 11 September hijackers

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and friend of the Taliban, where women are tormented and people are executed for apostasy, go major British weapons systems, along with leg irons, gang chains, shock belts and shackles. To Indonesia, whose unreconstructed, blood-soaked military is trying to crush the independence movement in Aceh, go British “riot control” vehicles and Hawk fighter-bombers.

Bush and Blair have been crowing about Libya’s capitulation on weapons of mass destruction it almost certainly did not have. This is the result, as Scott Ritter has written, of “coerced concessions given more as a means of buying time than through any spirit of true co-operation” – as Bush and Blair have undermined the very international law upon which real disarmament is based. On 8 December, the UN General Assembly voted on a range of resolutions on disarmament. The United States opposed all the most important ones, including those dealing with nuclear weapons. The Bush administration has contingency plans, spelt out in the Pentagon’s 2002 Nuclear Posture Review, to use nuclear weapons against North Korea, Syria, Iran and China. Following suit, the UK Defence Secretary, Geoffrey Hoon, announced that for the first time, Britain would attack non-nuclear states with nuclear weapons “if necessary”.

This is as it was 50 years ago when, according to declassified files, the British government collaborated with American plans to wage “preventive” atomic war against the Soviet Union. No public discussion was permitted; the unthinkable was normalised. Today, history is our warning that, once again, the true threat is close to home. **JP**