

Blair's new weapon of mass deception

IN the wake of the Hutton fiasco, one truth remains unassailed: Tony Blair ordered an unprovoked invasion of another country on a totally false pretext, and that lies and deceptions manufactured in London and Washington caused the deaths of up to 55,000 Iraqis, including 9,600 civilians.

Consider for a moment those who have paid the price for Blair's and Bush's actions, who are rarely mentioned in the current media coverage. Deaths and injury of young children from unexploded British and American cluster bombs are put at 1,000 a month. The effect of uranium weapons used by Anglo-American forces – a weapon of mass destruction – is such that readings taken from Iraqi tanks destroyed by the British are so high that a British Army survey team wore white, full-body radiation suits, face masks and gloves. Iraqi children play on and around these tanks. British troops, says the Ministry of Defence, “will have access to biological monitoring”.

Iraqis have no such access and no expert medical help; and thousands are now suffering from a related catalogue of miscarriages and hair loss, horrific eye, skin and respiratory problems.

Neither Britain nor America counts its Iraqi victims, and the fact, let alone the extent of the human carnage and material devastation is not even acknowledged by a government that says it is “vindicated” by Lord Hutton, whose report most British people clearly regard as a parody worthy of the Prime Minister's resignation.

Blair has now announced an inquiry into the “failure of intelligence” that has mysteriously denied him evidence of weapons of mass destruction, which he repeatedly said were his “aim” in attacking Iraq. Just as the brawl with the BBC and the Hutton inquiry were quite deliberate distractions, so this latest inquiry is another panic measure. It is clear that George W Bush, as one American journalist put it, “is now hanging Tony Blair out to dry”.

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Blair has, as ever, followed Bush. In announcing at the weekend his own inquiry into an "intelligence failure", Bush hopes to cast himself as an innocent, aggrieved member of the public wanting to know why America's numerous spy agencies did not alert the nation to the fact, now confirmed by Bush's own weapons inspector, David Kay, that there were no weapons of mass destruction and probably weren't any since before the 1991 Gulf War, and that the premise for going to war was "almost all wrong". "It was", Ray McGovern told me, "95 per cent charade". McGovern is a former high-ranking CIA analyst and one of a group of ex-senior intelligence officers, several of whom have described how the Bush administration demanded that intelligence be shaped to comply with political objectives, and the role of Britain in the charade.

"It was intelligence that was crap," a former intelligence officer told the New Yorker, "...but the brits wanted to plant stories in England and around the world". He described how "inactionable" (unreliable) intelligence reports were passed on to British intelligence, which then fed them to newspapers.

Former chief UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter says this false information was spread systematically by British intelligence. The clue to this secret operation was given by the weapons expert David Kelly the day before his suicide and which Hutton later ignored. Kelly told the Prime Minister's intelligence and security committee: "I liaise with the Rockingham cell."

As Ritter reveals, this referred to the top secret "Operation Rockingham" set up within British intelligence to "cherry pick" information that might be distorted as "proof" of the existence of a weapons arsenal in Iraq. It was an entirely political operation, whose misinformation, says Ritter, led him and his inspectors "to a suspected ballistic missile site. We...found nothing. However, our act of searching allowed the US and the UK to say that the missiles existed."

Ritter says Operation Rockingham's bogus intelligence would have been fed to the Joint Intelligence Committee. The committee was behind the two "dossiers" in which Blair government claimed Saddam Hussein was a threat. Ritter says that Rockingham officers were acting on political orders "from the very highest levels".

How high? Right up to Blair himself? It was Blair, after all, who made such a personal "mission" of finding weapons of mass destruction. The question of how high needs urgently to be answered. Will Scott Ritter be called to Blair's inquiry? And will Blair explain to the inquiry why the February 2003 British "arms dossier", which Hutton chose to ignore, was so bogus that it plagiarised an American student's theses, lifting it word for word including the spelling

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mistakes?

The truth is that the Blair government has known, almost from the day it came to office in 1997, that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction were almost certainly destroyed following the 1991 Gulf War – just as Bush's weapons expert, David Kay, has now confirmed.

What else did Blair know?

In February last year, a transcript of a leaked United Nations debriefing of Iraqi general Hussein Kamel, revealed that both the US and British governments must have known that Saddam Hussein no longer had weapons of mass destruction. General Kamel was no ordinary defector; he was Bush and Blair's star witness in their governments' case against Saddam. A son-in-law of the dictator, he had overall authority for Iraq's weapons' programmes, and defected with crates of documents.

When Secretary of State Colin Powell made the Anglo-American case for an attack on Iraq before the UN Security Council, he relied on and paid tribute to the reliability of General Kamel's evidence. What he did not reveal, as the transcript of the general's debriefing reveals, was this categorical statement by Kamel: "I ordered destruction of all chemical weapons. All weapons – biological, chemical, missile, nuclear – were destroyed."

The CIA and Britain's MI6 of course knew about this; and it beggars belief that Bush and Blair were not told. But neither of them let on – just as Colin Powell suppressed his informant's most sensational information, which would have contradicted all his spurious claims. General Kamel (who was later murdered by Saddam Hussein) corroborated Scott Ritter's statement that Iraq had been disarmed "90 to 95 per cent".

Iraq was attacked so that the United States and Britain could claim its oil and its assets. Only Mary Poppins would believe otherwise. For the latest in a catalogue of evidence, turn to the Wall Street journal, the paper of America's ruling elite, which has obtained copies of the Bush administration's secret plan to privatise the country by selling off its assets to western corporations while establishing vast military bases.

The plan was drafted in February last year, just as Tony Blair was assuring the British people that the only reason was Saddam Hussein's "threat".

The Bush/Blair attack on Iraq has brought death, destruction and great bitterness to Iraq. Every indication is that most Iraqis now regard their lives as immeasurably worse than during Saddam Hussein's rule. More than 13,000 people are held in concentration camps in their own country.

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This is many more than were incarcerated in Saddam's political prisons in recent years. None has been charged; most cannot see their families; the allegations of torture and brutality by the occupiers grow by the day. As the US-based Human Rights Watch reported last week, the worst atrocities were in the 1980s – when he was backed by America and Britain.

The uprising in Iraq has accelerated and almost certainly strengthened since the capture of Saddam. Drawn from 12 different groups, including those that were always anti-Saddam, the resistance is well organised and will not stop until the “coalition” leaves. The setting up of a puppet “democracy” will merely increase the number of targets. As Blair's knowledge of imperial history will tell him, this is precisely what happened in Britain's other colonies before they threw out their occupiers, and in Vietnam.

One piece of intelligence which was true and which we know Blair received is a report that warned him that an attack on Iraq would only increase worldwide terrorism, especially against British interests and citizens. He chose to ignore it.

Two weeks ago a panel of jurists called on the International Criminal Court to investigate the British government for war crimes in Iraq. Whether or not that succeeds, it is clear the Prime Minister will need to find another Hutton, and quickly. **JP**