

No substance to Blair's new evidence against Al Qaeda

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Last week, Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair, announced that the dossier of evidence supposedly linking Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network with the September 11 terrorist attacks had been updated and strengthened.

The dossier had initially been presented on October 4 in an attempt to justify the bombing of Afghanistan in the face of widespread opposition in Muslim countries and considerable disquiet in Britain itself.

The *World Socialist Web Site* subjected the original document to a detailed critique and found that it contained nothing of substance proving a link between bin Laden, Al Qaeda or the Taliban to the September 11 outrages. It was not simply that the document fell short of the standards of proof required in a court of law; it did not even come close. It was made up largely of claims regarding Al Qaeda's past involvement in terror attacks against the US, quotes relating to bin Laden's anti-American views and the unsubstantiated assertion that three of the hijackers had proven links with the Al Qaeda network.

Anyone demanding more concrete proof was told that this existed, but to reveal it may threaten national security by endangering agents or exposing informers. We concluded that Britain's dossier should be viewed as providing a pretext for a decision to bomb Afghanistan that had already been taken and for reasons unrelated to September 11—the desire to establish US dominion over Central Asia and its reserves of oil and gas.

Fully seven weeks later, the update of the original document contains nothing that requires a revision of the position originally taken by the *World Socialist Web Site*. No fresh evidence is presented, merely fresh assertions and an extended quotation that proves nothing.

Blair claimed in parliament that a hitherto unpublicized videotaped interview with bin Laden showed him claiming responsibility for the terror attacks and even gloating over them. In emotive language, he declared, "Far from hiding their guilt, they gloat about it."

He went on to claim British intelligence now had proof that a majority of the 19 hijackers were linked to Al Qaeda, as opposed to the earlier claim of three confirmed conspirators.

British officials said the video was recorded on October 20, but not broadcast on Al Jazeera, the Arabic-language television network based in Qatar. Instead it had been circulated as a recruiting and propaganda device amongst Al Qaeda's supporters.

Once again, there is no evidence cited to back up the claim that an unspecified number—now a majority—of the hijackers had links with Al Qaeda. We are asked to take this on trust.

The language used is vague: "Many of them had previous links with Al Qaeda or have so far been positively identified as associates of Al Qaeda." What is meant by "many", "previous links" and "associates" is not specified.

Again the claim is made, "There is evidence of a very specific nature relating to the guilt of bin Laden and his associates that is too sensitive to release." And further, "The document does not contain the totality of the material known to HMG [Her Majesty's Government], given the continuing and absolute need to protect intelligence sources."

In contrast to Blair's assertion in parliament that bin Laden had admitted responsibility for September 11, the actual document is more guarded. It states in point 63, "In addition, Osama bin Laden has issued a number of public statements since the US strikes on

Afghanistan began. The language used in these, while not an open admission of guilt, is self-incriminating.”

There follows a list of rhetorical excesses by bin Laden that prove little other than his pedigree as an Islamic fundamentalist and hostility to the US.

In the un-broadcast October 20 interview, bin Laden is supposed to have said, “It is what we instigated for a while, in self-defence. And it was in revenge for our people killed in Palestine and Iraq. So if avenging the killing of our people is terrorism, let history be a witness that we are terrorists.”

He adds later, according to British intelligence, “The battle has been moved inside America, and we shall continue until we win this battle, or die in the cause and meet our maker.”

Not only does bin Laden not directly admit responsibility for September 11, as Blair claimed he did, but the three sentences are presented in isolation so that it is impossible to judge precisely what he is speaking of.

In the end, all that we are left with is yet another bald assertion: “No other organisation has both the motivation and the capability to carry out attacks like those of the 11 September—only the Al Qaeda network under Osama bin Laden.”

To paraphrase the old song, “Is that all there is” to proving bin Laden’s guilt?

Yet Blair’s parliamentary speech and the documents additions were dutifully and uncritically reported by the US and British media and presented as good coin. Not one newspaper saw fit to challenge the validity of Blair’s claims, let alone question the government’s motives in issuing the revised document.

In this regard, one of the most sinister aspects of the dossier is the repeated insistence that substantive evidence cannot be made public due to the possible impact on national security.

As this web site has pointed out, the recently proposed anti-terror legislation in Britain and the US cites this same consideration as a pretext to withdraw the legal right to a fair trial for people accused of a connection with terrorist groups or offenses.

In Britain, once new legislation is passed, the home secretary will be able to issue an international terrorist certification against a foreign national thought to be involved in planning or conducting terrorist offences or having links with terrorist groups. Those so identified

can be interned without charge for up to six months, and then brought before a Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC), held in secret with the suspects denied the right to hear the evidence against them. They then face being deported.

Last week President Bush issued an executive order allowing for the use of special military courts to try suspected terrorists. The trials will be held in secret and the military prosecutors will not be required to reveal any information about proceedings, that can end in the execution of the defendant, to the public. Just as with the bin Laden dossier, proof of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt is not required and the tribunals will not be obliged to follow established rules of evidence.

In both cases, the standard of proof one can expect to apply is indicated by Britain’s published efforts to excuse a war that has already led to the deaths of thousands of innocent men, women and children.



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