

Britain: Blair government caught out in plagiarism and lies over latest Iraq dossier

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The February 6 edition of Channel Four news led with an exposure of extensive plagiarism by the Blair Labour government in its latest intelligence dossier on Iraq released on February 3.

The document was singled out for praise by US Secretary of State Colin Powell during his February 5 address to the United Nations Security Council, where he presented Washington's own intelligence claiming Iraqi possession of weapons of mass destruction and alleged efforts to thwart UN inspectors.

Powell cited the British dossier, *Iraq—its infrastructure of concealment, deception and intimidation* as additional proof of Iraqi non-compliance, stating, "I would call my colleagues' attention to the fine paper that the United Kingdom distributed ... which describes in exquisite detail Iraqi deception activities."

The 19-page document is presented as a product of up-to-the-minute British intelligence gathering. It says it is compiled from intelligence material "and other sources" and is an "up-to-date intelligence-led dossier". But it is nothing of the sort. The bulk was plagiarised from just three articles, one of which was written by an American graduate student, all of which are months and even years old.

So sloppy is the plagiarism that typographic mistakes in the original articles are repeated, indicating that they were scanned in or cut and paste from the Internet.

One of the articles copied was published in the *Middle East Review of International Affairs* last year and is the work of Ibrahim al-Marashi, a postgraduate student from Monterey in California who is now a research associate at the Center for Nonproliferation Studies. Large sections, as much as six paragraphs long, appear verbatim.

Changes that are made are in order to dress Iraqi

actions up in more sinister mode. Thus "monitoring" foreign embassies becomes "spying" on them and "aiding opposition groups in hostile regimes" becomes "supporting terrorist organisations in hostile regimes".

To make matters worse, the plagiarised article is based on intelligence gathered as long ago as the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991 and is meant as a description of the build up to the last Gulf War.

The author told the press, "The primary documents I used for this article are a collection of two sets of documents, one taken from Kurdish rebels in the north of Iraq—around 4 million documents—as well as 300,000 documents left by Iraqi security services in Kuwait. After that, I have been following events in the Iraqi security services for the last 10 years."

Yet in the government dossier, this information is presented as a contemporary description gathered by British intelligence. The document claims that UN weapons inspectors are outnumbered by 200 to one by Iraqi agents trying to deceive them, and that it provides "up to date details" of Iraq's security organisations.

Glen Rangwala, a lecturer in politics at Cambridge University, first spotted the plagiarism. He told Channel Four news, "The British Government's dossier is 19 pages long and most of pages 6 to 16 are copied directly from [al-Marashi's] document word for word, even the grammatical errors and typographical mistakes."

"Apart from passing this off as the work of its intelligence services," Dr Rangwala said, "it indicates that the UK really does not have any independent sources of information on Iraq's internal policies. It just draws upon publicly available data."

Six more pages—sixteen of the 19 total—rely heavily on articles by Sean Boyne and Ken Gause that appeared

in *Jane's Intelligence Review* in 1997 and last November. None of these sources is acknowledged. No attribution is made. The authors of the dossier were instead initially named as four Whitehall officials, P Hamill, J Pratt, A Blackshaw and M Khan, but their names were removed from the government's web site on February 3.

Defence and foreign policy analysts were scathing in their criticism of the government's black propaganda. Dan Plesch of the Royal United Services Institute said on Channel Four news, "This appears to be obsolete academic analysis dressed up as the best MI6 and our other international partners can produce on Saddam."

He added, "The word 'scandalous' is, I think, greatly overused in our political life but it certainly applies to this."

The government has dismissed criticisms from the media and the opposition parties, with a spokesman declaring that the report was accurate and that there had never been a claim of "exclusivity of authorship." But given the government's self-appointed role as purveyors of war-propaganda in the guise of various "intelligence dossiers", the revelations are a serious blow to its credibility.



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