

Blair government sends more troops to Iraq

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10 September 2003

The Blair government has announced that it will send another 1,200 British troops to Iraq. Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion Light Infantry and 1st Battalion Royal Green Jackets are to be stationed in southern Iraq, where they will join more than 10,000 UK troops already there.

Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon said they were likely to be followed by a further 1,000 to 2,000 additional troops in the next weeks. And he indicated the open-ended nature of this commitment by stating, “the full scale of the requirement ... has yet to be developed” and that “appropriate forces” would be stationed in Iraq for “as long as required.”

The government has no political mandate to make such a decision. Opposition to the US/UK war against Iraq, which saw the largest-ever demonstration in British history on February 15, has widened and become more entrenched in its aftermath.

That the government lied in its claims that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction in order to justify a preemptive attack on the country is now patently obvious. Months after occupying the country, no trace has been found of the arsenals of chemical and biological weapons Prime Minister Tony Blair said posed such a danger to the world.

Evidence presented during the opening stages of Lord Hutton’s inquiry into the death of whistleblower Dr. David Kelly has confirmed that the government knew Iraq posed no such threat, but distorted intelligence material in line with its war aims. The picture that has emerged from the inquiry is one of a cabal of handpicked advisers and faceless bureaucrats, led by the prime minister, which trampled on all democratic norms in order to concoct a case against Iraq and, alongside the US, launch a bloody and illegal attack with the aim of seizing control of strategic oil resources in the Persian Gulf.

Hoon himself was revealed as little more than a cipher for Blair and his big business backers, a man with little or no influence or control over his own department, and certainly not a person that should be allowed any say over questions of life and death.

If this were not enough, there is further evidence emerging regarding the criminal conspiracy hatched by the British and US administrations against Iraq and their own people.

On Saturday September 6, leading Labour MP Michael Meacher charged that the Bush administration had advance knowledge of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and allowed them to take place in order to further longstanding plans for the invasion and occupation of Iraq. In the *Guardian* newspaper Meacher, a member of Blair’s cabinet until last June who served as environment minister until he was removed, worked through the numerous questions outstanding around the September 11 attacks and the Bush administration’s failure to prevent them.

He noted in particular a document issued in 2000 by the right-wing Washington thinktank, the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), entitled *Rebuilding America’s Defenses*, which warned that plans to extend US dominance would require “some catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor.”

With the September 11 attacks, Meacher noted, the Bush administration was able to “press the ‘go’ button” on its “blueprint for the creation of a global Pax Americana”, launching first its war against Afghanistan and then Iraq.

Blair dismissed Meacher’s remarks, and within the media generally there was little comment as they attempted to bury the issues he had highlighted. But it is simply no longer possible for the government to proceed in this manner. Whilst Meacher’s arguments are not new, the fact that such a leading politician, and one who supported the war should raise them, is indicative of the concerns being generated within Britain’s ruling elite by the undermining of the government’s pretext for the war and the rising death toll among British troops.

Hoon made his announcement on the extra troops in a written statement to parliament, so as to limit MPs ability to question him on the deployment. He claimed that the new forces were being made available at the request of British military commanders within Iraq, and that their role would be to protect those troops already stationed there and to help in restoring basic amenities.

That British soldiers should require protection underscores the character of their presence in the country. This is not an army of liberation, but of colonial occupation that is galvanising popular opposition across the country. Social

disintegration and hostility to the foreign occupiers has seen a string of four devastating car bombs attacks within the last month and growing fatalities amongst British and US soldiers.

It is a sign of the profound crisis facing the US/British occupation that President George W. Bush is seeking an additional \$87 billion from Congress for its operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Just \$21 billion of this, however, is earmarked for reconstruction. The lion's share is marked for "military and intelligence operations"—a sign that the administration intends to deal with the crisis with ever-more draconian and brutal measures against the Iraqi people, something in which the additional British forces (some of whom were previously stationed in war-torn Sierra Leone) are no doubt expected to participate.

Once again, without any democratic discussion, the government is proceeding against the express wishes of the British people by resort to lies and evasions. This was epitomised by the contradiction between the presentation of the demand for additional troops by Washington and London. Bush justified the demand for more money and his appeal for additional foreign troops as vital because Iraq had become the centre of terrorist operations by enemies of the US and the "free world". Many commentators noted that despite the widely-discredited claims that Saddam Hussein had connections to Al Qaeda and September 11, the killing of US troops only began after the war and not before.

If anything, Hoon's presentation justifying additional troops was even more pathetic. When questioned by the BBC's Jeremy Paxman as to why terrorism had replaced weapons of mass destruction as the US justification for war, he answered that he believed that evidence of WMD "programmes" would still be found, that there was a problem with terrorism but not in the British occupied south. The troops were needed in order to stop looting such as the "stealing of copper wire for sale in Kuwait."

On this spurious pretext British troops are to be dragged further into what even leading representatives of the bourgeoisie are now stating openly is a deadly quagmire. Just one day after Hoon's announcement the *Financial Times*, September 9, demanded, "Policy on Iraq must change course".

Bush's claims in his address to the nation that other countries had a "duty" to come to the aid of the US and its allies in Iraq should be rejected, the newspaper said.

"The US-led occupation authorities face a war of attrition that is becoming daily more lethal and sophisticated. They control neither Iraq's roads nor its frontiers. They have failed to meet the basic needs of the population, such as a regular supply of electricity and water—let alone security."

The series of devastating bombings over the last month, "were hammer blows aimed at demonstrating that American forces, preoccupied almost exclusively with defending themselves, are unable to defend the allies and institutions they need to help rebuild Iraq. It is far from clear, moreover, that the occupation authorities have much idea whom exactly they are fighting".

"To call this a mess is to understate the matter," the paper continued.

Whilst criticising government policy in Iraq, Blair's opponents within ruling circles have no alternative to offer. Having supported the war, they have supported the deployment of extra troops. The *Financial Times* for example still insists that even those who had opposed the war "have a duty to help". It called on the US to allow the UN political authority over Iraq—so as to give a political cover for other countries to send troops—and allow an elected constituent assembly to write the new constitution—so as to "give ordinary Iraqis a stake in the success of the transition".

Whether the *Financial Times* prescription would be acceptable to Washington is another matter. And given that it is essentially a call to continue the occupation by other means, it will certainly not placate the Iraqi people.

A government that is prepared to lie and deceive to suit its own imperialist and mercenary ends can not be entrusted with finding a progressive solution to the catastrophe its policies are creating. Far from deploying extra troops, the demand must be raised for the immediate recall of those already stationed in Iraq, so that the Iraqi people themselves determine the fate of their country and to prevent the further loss of lives. This must be coupled with a demand for a full and independent inquiry into the war against Iraq, so working people in Britain can begin to politically challenge the ongoing and criminal attempt by Washington and London to seize control of the entire Middle East by military force.



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