

Meacher: terrorism a pretext for conquest

British official charges US “stood down” on 9/11

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A senior member of the ruling British Labour Party has 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.

Michael Meacher, who until he was removed in a cabinet reshuffle last June served as Blair’s environment minister, wrote an article published in the September 6 issue of the *Guardian* [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1036571,00.html>] entitled “The war on terrorism is bogus: the 9/11 attacks gave the US an ideal pretext to use force to secure its global domination.”

Citing the failure of the US military and intelligence apparatus to either act on numerous warnings of impending attacks or to respond in timely manner when four passenger airliners were hijacked simultaneously on September 11 itself, Meacher writes: “Was this inaction simply the result of key people disregarding or being ignorant of the evidence? Or could US air security operations have been deliberately stood down on September 11? If so, why, and on whose authority?”

The article prompted an angry response from the US Embassy in London, which issued a statement declaring that Meacher’s “assertions that the US government knowingly stood by while terrorists killed some 3,000 innocents in New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia would be monstrous, and monstrously offensive, if they came from someone serious or credible.”

For its part, major US media outlets blacked out any reference to Meacher’s explosive charges.

The claim that Meacher is not “serious or credible” has no foundation. He is not a back-bench maverick or a member of what the right-wing British press likes to refer to as the “loony left.” On the contrary, he was the Labour Party’s most experienced cabinet minister, having served in Parliament for 33 years, holding various cabinet posts going back to the Wilson and Callaghan administrations in the 1970s. He served in Blair’s cabinet as environment minister for six years until he was removed in June amid the mounting crisis of the Labour government over the Iraq war. He played a prominent role in the negotiation of the Kyoto accords on the environment and was long considered a contender for the position of Labour Party leader.

That someone with these political connections charges in print that elements within the US administration knew that a terrorist attack was coming on September 11 and allowed it to happen to further their war plans represents an extremely dangerous development for the Bush White House. He speaks not just for himself. The thesis he advances is indicative of what is assumed and is being said behind the scenes among much wider circles within the sole major government to have backed Washington in its invasion of Iraq.

It is doubtless that the article was motivated by the deepening crisis of

the Blair government itself over the exposure of the lies it used to promote the Iraq war. With continuing revelations from within the government’s own intelligence agencies about the fabrication of evidence against Iraq, recent polls have shown a majority of Britons in favor of Blair’s resignation.

The questions Meacher raises have never been answered by anyone in the US government. On the eve of the second anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the American public knows almost nothing more about what happened that day—and how it was allowed to happen—than it knew two years ago. The Bush White House has made every effort to derail or stonewall any independent investigation into these tragic events. To this day, no one has explained how suspected terrorists, under the surveillance of the FBI and the CIA, were allowed to enter the US, commandeered commercial aircraft and fly them unhindered until striking their targets.

Meacher’s article pursues many of the same themes that have been raised over the past two years by the *World Socialist Web Site* concerning the way the September 11 events were seized upon by the Bush government to drive forward its longstanding plans for military aggression, as well as the ample evidence that the government was repeatedly warned about the impending attacks, yet failed to take even routine actions to counter them.

Meacher rejects the official explanation that the successive US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq represented Washington’s response to the attacks on the Pentagon and New York City’s Twin Towers, declaring, “The truth may be a great deal murkier.”

He begins by citing a document issued in 2000 by the right-wing Washington think tank, the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), an outfit that served as the Republican administration’s national security establishment-in-waiting until its ideas could be implemented following the installation of Bush as president in 2001.

Entitled, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses,” the central plans of this document were incorporated directly into Bush’s “National Security Strategy of the United States” issued in September 2001, which advanced the strategy of “preventive war.”

Describing the document as a “blueprint for the creation of a global Pax Americana,” Meacher writes: “The plan shows Bush’s cabinet intended to take military control of the Gulf region whether or not Saddam Hussein was in power. It says ‘while the unresolved conflict with Iraq provides justification, the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein.’”

The document, he notes, includes the warning that it would be difficult to win public support for a military campaign to transform the US into “tomorrow’s dominant force” without “some catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor.” With September 11, the administration

had just such an event: “The 9/11 attacks allowed the US to press the ‘go’ button for a strategy in accordance with the PNAC agenda which it would otherwise have been politically impossible to implement.”

Having established the political motive for welcoming some form of terrorist provocation on US soil, Meacher goes on to raise substantive questions about the official US response to the ample warnings of impending acts of terrorism as well as to the attacks themselves. He carefully documents each of his charges with specific references to reports that appeared in the mainstream media.

“First, it is clear the US authorities did little or nothing to pre-empt the events of 9/11,” writes the British Parliament member. “It is known that at least 11 countries provided advance warning to the US of the 9/11 attacks. Two senior Mossad experts were sent to Washington in August 2001 to alert the CIA and FBI to a cell of 200 terrorists said to be preparing a big operation (*Daily Telegraph*, September 16, 2001). The list they provided included the names of four of the 9/11 hijackers, none of whom was arrested.”

Against the Bush administration’s repeated claims that no one had ever contemplated the use of hijacked airplanes to carry out terrorist attacks, Meacher cites 1996 and 1999 intelligence reports that warned precisely of such a threat.

He also raises the question of whether US intelligence had undisclosed connections with those alleged to have organized the hijacking, dating back to the war against the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan. “Fifteen of the 9/11 hijackers obtained their visas in Saudi Arabia,” Meacher writes. “Michael Springman, the former head of the American visa bureau in Jeddah, has stated that since 1987 the CIA has been illicitly issuing visas to unqualified applicants from the Middle East and bringing them to the US for training in terrorism for the Afghan war in conjunction with Bin Laden (BBC, November 6, 2001). It seems this operation continued after the Afghan war for other purposes. It is also reported that five of the hijackers received training at secure US military installations in the 1990s (*Newsweek*, September 15, 2001).”

The British Labourite points to the well-known decision of the FBI in Washington to suppress an investigation into Zacarias Moussaoui (now dubbed the 20th hijacker by US prosecutors) despite a warning from a local agent that he could be part of a plot to crash a plane into the Twin Towers.

Meacher goes on to review the unexplained delay in US air security responding to the hijackings: “The first hijacking was suspected not later than 8:20 a.m., and the last hijacked aircraft crashed in Pennsylvania at 10:06 a.m.,” he writes. “Not a single fighter plane was scrambled to investigate from the US Andrews Air Force Base, just 10 miles from Washington DC, until after the third plane had hit the Pentagon at 9:38 a.m. Why not? There were standard FAA intercept procedures for hijacked aircraft before 9/11. Between September 2000 and June 2001 the US military launched fighter aircraft on 67 occasions to chase suspicious aircraft (AP, Aug. 13, 2002). It is a US legal requirement that once an aircraft has moved significantly off its flight plan, fighter planes are sent up to investigate.”

All of which leads Meacher to pose his question: who ordered the US national security apparatus to “stand down”?

He further points to extensive evidence of the relative US indifference to pursuing Osama bin Laden, the alleged mastermind of the September 11 attacks, quoting one US official as saying that his capture could result in a “premature collapse of our international effort.”

Meacher argues that Washington’s “‘war on terrorism’ is being used largely as bogus cover for achieving wider US strategic geopolitical objectives.”

“In fact, 9/11 offered an extremely convenient pretext to put the PNAC plan into action,” he writes. “The evidence is quite clear that plans for military action against Afghanistan and Iraq were in hand well before

9/11.” He points to a September 18, 2001 BBC report that US officials warned Pakistan in July 2001—two months before the terrorist attacks—that US “military action against Afghanistan would go ahead by the middle of October.”

Meacher comments: “Given this background, it is not surprising that some have seen the US failure to avert the 9/11 attacks as creating an invaluable pretext for attacking Afghanistan, in a war that had clearly already been well planned in advance.” He suggests that there is a precedent for the Bush administration’s inaction on September 11 in the similar failure of President Roosevelt to heed warnings of an impending Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, an event that fueled sufficient public outrage to achieve his administration’s goal of bringing the US into the Second World War.

The former environment minister argues that motivation for both the Afghanistan and Iraq wars was to seize control of strategic sources of oil and natural gas in both the Caspian and Persian Gulf regions.

Meacher concludes: “The conclusion of all this analysis must surely be that the ‘global war on terrorism’ has the hallmarks of a political myth propagated to pave the way for a wholly different agenda—the US goal of world hegemony, built around securing by force command over the oil supplies required to drive the whole project. Is this myth and junior participation in this project really a proper aspiration for British foreign policy?”

None of the information provided by Meacher is new; it has merely been concealed from the broad public. Increasingly bitter divisions within ruling circles, both in the US and Britain, have brought it to the surface.

The former cabinet minister speaks for sections of the British ruling elite who support distancing London’s policy from that of the Bush administration. Their hand has been considerably strengthened by the mounting catastrophe confronting the US military occupation of Iraq as well as the deep crisis facing Blair, the principal proponent of unconditional British support for US strategic aims.

The unraveling of the Blair government’s fabrication of evidence about alleged Iraqi weapons of mass destruction has opened a Pandora’s box for the Bush administration. The exposure of one set of lies has opened the door to renewed questions about all of the conspiracies and provocations carried out by the gang of criminals that have seized control of the White House.

The Bush administration has exploited the tragedy of September 11 as the justification for launching two wars in the space of a year and a half and for carrying out far-reaching attacks on both the democratic rights and social conditions of the American people. At the same time it has acted ruthlessly to suppress any serious investigation into the 9/11 attacks. As the Meacher article indicates, the administration’s ability to continue this cover-up is being fatally undermined by its own growing political crisis.



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