

Britain: Hutton inquiry whitewashes Blair government over Iraq war

Chris Marsden, Julie Hyland
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The report by Lord Hutton has exonerated the British government of any responsibility for the death of whistleblower Dr. David Kelly and cleared Prime Minister Tony Blair of having manipulated and falsified intelligence in order to drag the country into an illegal war against Iraq.

Hutton has produced a whitewash, delivering a ruling that is virtually bereft of criticism of the actions of Blair, his Director of Communications Alastair Campbell, Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, and the Ministry of Defence, the civil service, the Joint Intelligence Committee and the intelligence services. Yet his report was made public at a time when all the lies used to justify war with Iraq have unravelled.

In the week leading up to its publication, the United States own chief weapons inspector, David Kay, resigned his position after stating that he did not believe Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. And his admission has been all but accepted by the Bush administration. Even the group responsible for providing the intelligence which Blair used to make the case that Iraq represented an immediate danger to world security, the Iraqi National Alliance, has now admitted it was false (See: Blair's 45-minute WMD claim refuted by Iraqi group that supplied the intelligence).

In order to avoid any political embarrassment for the government and Britain's security services, Hutton proclaimed that the veracity of the intelligence on which the government made its case for war and the failure to uncover evidence that Iraq possessed any weapons of mass destruction were "not within my terms of reference".

The government's claim in its September 2002 intelligence dossier that Iraq could deploy weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes was also "not within my terms of reference", the judge stated.

Having ruled out any consideration of the objective truth of the case for war, Hutton said that all that need be proved was that the government and the security services believed their intelligence to be true at the time. No case could be made refuting such a claim without examining the mountain of misinformation leading up to the war and measuring this against what is now known about Iraq's lack of WMDs. But this would bring into question not only the actions of the government, but those of the entire state apparatus and the

media which conspired to legitimise a predatory war of conquest waged by British and US imperialism.

Hutton insisted that the government must be judged to have acted honestly because it used intelligence that had been accepted as solid by MI6, MI5, and the Joint Intelligence Committee. And he rejected any allegation that "impugned the integrity" of the JIC, which he described as "the most senior body in the United Kingdom responsible for intelligence".

Hutton found that the government had not embellished the September dossier and that Campbell and the head of JIC, John Scarlett, had acted correctly in discussing between them its formulations. It was not improper for the JIC to take into account suggestions made by the government to strengthen the dossier. It could not be ruled out that "the desire of the prime minister to make the dossier as strong as possible may have subconsciously influenced the JIC to make it stronger than it would have been". Nevertheless the dossier was "consistent with the intelligence available" and had been signed off on by the JIC. It was this body, representing all the heads of the security services, that had fully approved the dossier's findings, Hutton said.

He levelled his fire exclusively at the BBC and its reporter for the *Today* programme, Andrew Gilligan. Kelly's death on July 18 came after he was named as the source of a report by Gilligan that there was widespread disquiet within the intelligence services as to the quality of the government's September 2002 intelligence dossier. In May 2003 Gilligan had said that his source (Kelly) had said the government had included the 45-minute claim, "probably" knowing it to be false, in order to "sex up" its dossier, and that Campbell was responsible.

On every issue, Hutton found the BBC at fault and the government blameless. It was not possible to draw a definite conclusion as to what Kelly had told Gilligan, Hutton said, and he may have told him that Campbell was responsible. But, "I am satisfied Dr Kelly did not say the Government probably knew or suspected the 45-minute claim was wrong before the claim was inserted in the dossier". He added, "the allegation reported by Mr Gilligan that the government probably knew the claim was wrong or questionable was unfounded".

The BBC was "remiss" for not having checked Gilligan's

story and responding to the complaints made by Campbell and the government. Its editorial procedures were “defective” and both its managers and governors were at fault.

Kelly was criticised for having spoken to Gilligan and breaching civil service rules, and was partly responsible for creating a grave situation.

The government was cleared of any responsibility for Kelly’s death and Blair of playing any “deceitful, underhand or duplicitous” role in identifying the scientist as a whistleblower.

Hutton was satisfied Kelly took his own life and that no third party was involved. He was also satisfied that none of those involved in the events leading up to his death would have believed that anything they did would lead Kelly to commit suicide.

The decision to name Kelly as the source of Gilligan’s reports was judged to be correct, as otherwise the government could have been accused of a cover-up. Geoff Hoon and the MoD, for which he is responsible, had behaved properly.

The assault on the BBC is fully in line with the inquiry’s purpose. Kelly’s discussion with Gilligan did reflect disquiet within the security services, as the reporter had maintained. Blair’s readiness to support the Bush administration’s drive to war had raised considerable concern within sections of the ruling elite, who feared that he was endangering Britain’s own interests by aligning himself too closely with Washington’s aggressive unilateralist stance—thus alienating Europe and possibly destabilising the Middle East.

Such divisions were troubling for the British ruling class, particularly because they erupted against a background of massive and sustained public opposition to war that had seen millions take to the streets in protest. The danger was that a tactical dispute within the bourgeoisie might enable the more fundamental opposition towards war within the working class to find expression.

The Hutton inquiry, therefore, not only diverted attention from the broader issues under dispute. It was aimed at enforcing a consensus across the official political spectrum. This was exemplified by Blair’s speech in parliament after the findings were issued, in which he stressed that differences over war were entirely legitimate but there should never again be a public questioning of anyone’s political motives or personal integrity.

Hutton’s verdict is meant to serve as a warning that differences within the ruling class must be contained and that it is time to close ranks. At one point in his summary he explained that he had been concerned as to why it had not been possible to resolve the differences between the BBC and the government and “batten down the hatches”.

The BBC’s defence of Gilligan’s story had threatened to undermine not only the government, but the entire machinery of the state. Hutton’s verdict sets out to extract a high price for this error and to make sure that neither the BBC nor any other news outlet oversteps the bounds again.

Within two hours of the report being made public Gavyn Davies resigned as chairman of the BBC’s governors. The government has already made clear that the BBC’s charter will be looked at and that it will be brought under greater official scrutiny.

Blair was clearly well pleased with the inquiry, stating in parliament that he was “immensely grateful to Lord Hutton” and that the report “leaves no room for doubt or interpretation. We accept it in full”.

In the short term he may indeed have secured a political victory, but it will turn out to be pyrrhic. Outside of the rarefied environs of parliament, Hutton’s report will convince no one of the government’s innocence of the charge that it led Britain to war on false pretexes.

The fundamental issue—one that affects the lives of millions of people throughout the world—is that the Iraq war was mounted on the pretext that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. Whatever Hutton says, this claim has been proved to be entirely false. The 45-minute claim was only one example of a mass of intelligence that has since been discredited. Lies were told on an almost unprecedented scale. Yet the only criticism levelled by Lord Hutton is against the BBC and Gilligan for a news item drawing attention to the liars and their lies.

It is indicative that Hutton’s report was leaked to the *Sun* newspaper, which is published by the billionaire Rupert Murdoch. This meant that the first comment made on Hutton came from the most strident supporter of the war against Iraq and Blair’s alliance with Washington, as was clearly the intention.

The Hutton inquiry is emblematic of a fundamental political shift that has taken place within Britain. It is not the first judicial inquiry to exonerate a government. But the brazen and naked character of the whitewash indicates that there no longer exists any real commitment to democracy within ruling circles. Just as in the United States, government is no longer accountable in any form to the people. Politics has become the exclusive preserve of a financial oligarchy whose interests are defended by government and opposition parties alike. To this end all methods are deemed permissible and no democratic check is considered acceptable.



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