

Mother of British soldier killed in Iraq demands troop withdrawal

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The mother of 19-year-old Gordon Gentle, the Scottish soldier killed by a roadside bomb on June 28, has launched a petition to demand the withdrawal of all British forces from Iraq.

At a press conference in Glasgow on August 31, Rose Gentle said she was demanding a meeting with Prime Minister Tony Blair so he could personally explain why British troops remain in the country, despite the fact that the pretext on which they were originally dispatched—Iraq's supposed possession of weapons of mass destruction—had been exposed as lies.

"I want to see the top man," she said. Referring to the puppet Iraqi administration installed by the United States she said, "The country has been handed over—so why should our boy be dying for greed and oil?"

Some 65 British soldiers have been killed in Iraq.

In the face of mass opposition to the US-led war, Blair had insisted that if there were no weapons of mass destruction discovered in Iraq, then he would resign, she continued. "So why is he going to be sending more young kids in there?"

The Gentle family has been forthright in their condemnation of the government for the death of their son. Rose had denounced the prime minister for sending a letter of condolence to the family seven week's after Gordon died, and returned it as an insult to her son's memory.

Last month Rose and her 14-year-old daughter, Maxine, walked out of a face-to-face meeting with Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, accusing him of "talking rubbish" over the Iraq war.

Maxine had sent a letter to Blair over her brother's death, which was released to the press. In it she said of Blair that he was, "rubbish at your job. You don't care about the British public, armed forces, or anyone in fact..."

"A war over oil and money, that's what I think the war is all about. There was no such thing as weapons of 'mass destruction', if there were Saddam Hussein would have used them at the start of the war..."

"We are all hurting badly, but I don't just blame Gordon's death on the Iraqis that made the roadside bomb, I blame YOU as well because it is your fault that our soldiers are over there in the first place, by agreeing with George Bush that we HAD to go to war, when we didn't!"

The Gentles intend to sue the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for negligence over Gordon's death. The family argues that he would still be alive if his regiment had been equipped with up-to-date technology that would have stopped the radio-controlled bomb from being detonated. Gordon's regiment, the Royal Highland Fusiliers, received such devices just two days after his death.

The Gentles are pursuing their claim against the MoD through barrister John Cooper, who has represented relatives of soldiers who died in unexplained circumstances at the Deepcut Army Barracks, England.

Cooper has said that if the case is successful, it will be the first time the government has been sued over the death of a soldier in combat.

"The MoD has a duty to provide soldiers with the equipment to protect themselves and carry out their duties with the minimum risk to themselves. If they do not provide that equipment then that is a breach of their duty," he said.

During her press conference, Rose Gentle explained that she had tried to talk her son out of enlisting in the army. But living in an area of Glasgow with high unemployment and poverty, he had decided it was the only way he could learn a trade, she said. Many other young men from the neighbourhood were also serving

in Iraq for the same reason.

Gordon finished his basic training in April 2004, and just weeks later he was sent to Iraq. “Soldiers accept there is a risk, but they should be given the proper training and proper equipment to do the jobs they are asked to do,” she said. “If they are not given that equipment and if the government is not doing its best to protect them then it is murder.”

Rose also hit out at attempts by the media and others to claim that the family had been “hijacked” by antiwar protesters, who were manipulating their grief to further an anti-Blair agenda.

“Comments about me just being a grieving mother with no right to express my views on the Iraq war make me sick,” she said. “Let’s just make this clear. It was my decision to speak out. Nobody is using me. I was totally against the war before my Gordon even left for the Army.”

She was not alone, she continued. “I have had a lot of people phoning me, people stopping me in the street saying, ‘Don’t give up’. There’s a lot of mothers who just don’t want their sons to be sent out there,” she said.

That was one of the reasons why the family had decided to begin a petition campaign for the withdrawal of troops, to be run from her Glasgow home. They also intend to set up a website so people can sign the petition on line, she said.

In a separate campaign, on August 26 a group of MPs announced that they intended to begin parliamentary proceedings to impeach Blair for misleading the public over the Iraq war.

Some eleven MPs—including nine Welsh and Scottish nationalists and two Conservatives—have said they will attempt to use powers last used in 1806 to charge the prime minister with “high crimes and misdemeanours in relation to the invasion of Iraq”.

They intend to table a motion in the House of Commons charging Blair with misleading parliament and the country over Iraq; negligence and incompetence over weapons of mass destruction; undermining the constitution and entering into a secret agreement with US President George W. Bush.

According to the BBC, impeachment powers were primarily used by parliament during the 1640s civil war.



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