

Britain: more lies over Iraq war

Julie Hyland
14 October 2004

The admission by the Iraqi Survey Group (ISG) that Iraq did not possess any weapons of mass destruction prior to the US-led invasion should have been a body blow to Prime Minister Tony Blair.

After all, Blair defied mass opposition to take Britain into the war against Iraq alongside the Bush administration by claiming that Saddam Hussein constituted an immediate threat to international security.

In his forward to the September 2002 intelligence dossier Blair wrote, “Intelligence has established beyond doubt that Saddam has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons, that he continues to develop nuclear weapons ... some of these weapons can be ready for use in 45 minutes”.

Even after US and British forces had occupied the country, but not turned up a single WMD; even after United Nations weapons inspector Hanx Blix concluded that Iraq had destroyed its weapons capabilities in 1991; Blair continued to insist that he was right and opponents of the war were misguided dupes.

“Wait for the ISG to report,” became his mantra. Given that the ISG was established by the US administration as a more pliant alternative to the UN, Blair obviously hoped its report would provide him with some vindication.

As it became clear that the ISG had uncovered nothing, however, the prime minister began to concede that his “intelligence” may have been wrong whilst defending his decision to go to war.

The ISG’s final report, issued on October 6, confirmed that Iraq’s chemical and biological weapons were destroyed in 1991 and that the country neither possessed nuclear weapons nor was attempting to develop them.

Far from constituting a “serious and current” threat, as the prime minister had claimed, by the time it was invaded Iraq was a severely weakened, defenceless country.

Yet faced with such damning findings, Blair continues to insist that war was justified. Seizing on the ISG’s claim that Iraq would have tried to restart weapons programmes in the event of UN sanctions being lifted, Blair has

asserted that Saddam Hussein “had every intention of reviving his WMD programmes” and that “sanctions weren’t working”.

Foreign Secretary Jack Straw went even further, claiming that the report showed that “the threat from Saddam Hussein in terms of his intentions [was] even starker than we have seen before”.

Straw’s fantastical statement was described by one commentator as a “Lewis Carroll” moment. But the moment is not Straw’s alone. As the criminal character of the US-led attack on Iraq becomes ever more exposed, the political establishment and much of the media are doing their utmost to turn reality on its head.

British aggression against Iraq was never simply a matter of the prime minister’s personal prejudices. It was dictated by the requirements of British imperialism which, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, was determined to assert its geopolitical interests in strategic, oil-rich regions such as the Middle East.

That is why Blair could rely on the Conservative Party and much of the press to support his war-drive, despite the flagrantly trumped-up charges on which it was based. And even amongst those who had criticised the war on the basis that it might leave Britain isolated amongst its European allies, few were prepared to state openly its neo-colonial character lest such objections cut across broader foreign policy considerations.

Blair and Straw could, therefore, present the ISG report as a vindication of their original decision—knowing that they would face little challenge in official political circles that have just as much to hide as the government.

Even those newspapers that had urged more caution on Blair’s part in the run-up to war pulled their punches on the ISG’s findings. The *Independent* newspaper led with the ISG’s report, but whilst thundering that it meant “Bush and Blair’s case for war is demolished”, it merely suggested that “the very least that Mr Blair should offer is a full apology”.

There was no call for the immediate withdrawal of British troops—“the very least” that should be demanded

as Iraq's occupation by foreign troops has no legitimacy whatsoever, given that it was achieved only through an illegal venture.

Others were vociferous in making plain that the ISG report changed nothing. Conservative Party leader Michael Howard said that he would still have voted for war regardless of the absence of WMD's, whilst Tory Defence spokesman Nicholas Soames asserted that Iraq's lack of any military capabilities did not alter "the case for war one way or another".

The *Times* editorialised that the ISG report "will not settle the argument about whether military intervention in Iraq was necessary".

"It is impossible to know what Saddam would have done had he remained in his presidential palaces and awaited a propitious moment to take advantage of his weapons capabilities", it continued, ignoring the fact that he had no such "capabilities".

"Lessons from the work of the ISG plainly do need to be learnt. The character of Saddam and his acolytes should not, though, be forgotten," it concluded.

The *Telegraph* opined that whilst Bush and Blair were "mistaken" as regards WMD, "the real case for war, consistently argued in these pages, depended neither on WMD nor on the al-Qa'eda connection. Saddam had to be deposed for both strategic and moral reasons, which have broadly been vindicated."

The real guilty parties were not the US and Britain, it continued, but those countries that had tried to thwart war.

"If the report is embarrassing for the British and US governments, for those of Russia, France and China, it is damning."

"Saddam used cash stolen from the UN's flawed oil-for-food programme to induce these permanent members of the Security Council to thwart their Anglo-American allies. The motives of those states that went to war emerge as far less tainted than those that opposed it. If the British and Americans were duped by Saddam, the Russians and French had their palms greased by him," it said.

The *Telegraph's* assertions were based on the ISG's claims that Iraq had tried to bribe French, Russian and Chinese officials with "oil vouchers" in a bid to get sanctions lifted. Published on the CIA's web site, the report asserts that amongst the recipients were former French interior minister Charles Pasqua, Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky and Benon Sevan, former head of the oil for food programme.

It also names George Galloway, the former Scottish MP expelled from the Labour Party last year over his

opposition to the war on Iraq. According to reports, Galloway's name was originally blacked out when the ISG's statement was published in America, but was reinstated after demands from London that he be "named and shamed".

There is no doubt that the allegations are aimed at politically discrediting those who had criticised the war and they have been vehemently denied by all concerned. Herve Ladsous from the French Foreign Ministry said that "the accusations ... are unverified either with the persons concerned or the authorities of the countries concerned".

The ISG report does not publish any evidence to back up its claims and does admit that some vouchers were issued legitimately. Moreover, the names of American companies and individuals said to have benefited from similar deals remain blacked out on the CIA web site. According to a leak in the *New York Times*, these include oil giants Chevron, Mobil, Texaco and Bay Oil, who together with three prominent individuals, received vouchers for 111 million barrels of oil between 1996 and 2003.

But the accusations have become a means through which to deflect attention from the criminal actions of Britain and the US.

Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* newspaper was typical, reporting that, "A CESSPIT of international corruption is exposed by the US Senate report on Iraqi oil deals".

Russia, France and China were "lapping up [Saddam's] filthy money," ensuring that, "the evil dictator who brutalised and murdered his own people, was being kept in power by the greed of the collaborators."

The *Guardian* also chose to run the allegations on its frontpage, alongside its coverage of the main findings of the ISG, under the headline "French and Russians 'took cash from Iraq'".



To contact the WWSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact