

Britain: former top general calls for Blair's impeachment over Iraq war

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General Sir Michael Rose has called for Prime Minister Tony Blair to be impeached over the war against Iraq.

Rose, a former commander of Britain's special services SAS and of United Nations forces in Bosnia, is featured in a documentary series, "Iraq: the failure of war", which begins January 13. The series is made by one-time BBC correspondent and former independent member of Parliament Martin Bell, who has described the military attack on Baghdad as an "ill-considered adventure" whose outcome was potentially more disastrous than that of Vietnam.

Rose is amongst a number of retired soldiers interviewed by Bell. In the programme he states that "politicians should be held to account, and my own view is that Blair should be impeached. That would prevent politicians treating quite so carelessly the subject of taking a country into war."

Rose reiterated his call for action against Blair on BBC radio's "Today" programme and in the *Guardian* newspaper.

Asked on "Today" whether his demand for Blair's impeachment was merely a rhetorical flourish or whether he genuinely believed the prime minister should be "hauled" before the House of Lords on charges of "high crimes and misdemeanours," Rose insisted that Blair should be held accountable.

"Certainly from a soldier's perspective there can't be any more serious decision taken by a prime minister than declaring war. And then to go to war on what turns out to be false grounds is something that no one should be allowed to walk away from."

Rose was questioned as to whether he believed Blair's actions in the run-up to the war were a case of getting the politics "wrong" or acting illegally. Whilst responding somewhat vaguely that they were

"somewhere between the two," the retired general's answer emphasized the issue of illegality.

"The politics was wrong, that he rarely declared what his ultimate aims were, as far as we can see, in terms of harping continually on weapons of mass destruction when actually he probably had some other strategy in mind," he said.

"And secondly, the consequences of that war have been quite disastrous both for the people of Iraq and also for the West in terms of our wider interests in the war against global terror."

Dismissing Blair's claim to have made an honest mistake as regards intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, Rose stressed that intelligence should always be "properly tested" to ensure that it was not "manufactured" or "spun" for concealed purposes.

And in a sideswipe at Britain's military chiefs who had signed off on the US-led war against Iraq, Rose said that he would not have led troops into a war he believed to be wrong.

"You cannot put people in harm's way if you don't believe the cause is right or sufficient," he said.

But for a leading officer to refuse an order would be a "huge step" and "without precedent," he was challenged, that would cast relations between the military and political establishment in a "new light."

Still Rose insisted that faced with a weak case for war, a military leader should resign.

Rose's comments made clear his concern that, in falsifying the grounds for a military attack, the government had undermined any popular political consensus behind the war and simultaneously deprived the army of the resources necessary to see the job through to a successful conclusion.

These factors had weakened the military's position in Iraq. Whilst it was undoubtedly the case that many in

the armed forces felt that an immediate withdrawal from Iraq was not in the cards, there was a recognition that “we would have to get out at some point” and that “our continued presence is not doing much at the moment.”

The prime minister himself had admitted that he had not foreseen the extent of opposition within Iraq to what is “effectively an occupying force,” Rose added.

The former general went even further in his criticisms in the *Guardian* of January 10. Blair’s decision to join the US-led war was made despite the fact that “most of the electorate of this country have consistently opposed the decision to invade,” he explained.

Not only was the intelligence presented as a *casus belli* for war “always embarrassingly patchy and inconsistent,” but Blair’s claim to Parliament that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction that could be used within 45 minutes “was made without being properly validated—for it was decided in Washington and London to launch the invasion of Iraq early, on the basis of the flimsy evidence available.”

“Britain had been led into war on false pretences,” he continued. Having ignored the political wishes of the people, “it should come as no surprise, therefore, that so many of this country’s voters have turned their backs on a democratic system they feel has so little credibility and is so unresponsive.”

If Parliament is to reestablish any credibility amongst the mass of the population, it must hold Blair to account. “The impeachment of Mr. Blair is now something I believe must happen if we are to rekindle interest in the democratic process in this country once again,” Rose concluded.

In his interviews Rose made clear that his criticisms were shared by others, telling the “Today” programme that for the first time “in my experience” there is a “wide debate” within the armed forces over the rights and wrongs of the war against Iraq and a “good deal of criticisms” of it.

British forces in Iraq face a popular insurgency with no viable “exit strategy” in sight. And military top brass are also said to be up in arms over Attorney General Lord Goldsmith’s decision to allow soldiers to be prosecuted for war crimes using the International Criminal Court Act, to which Britain is a signatory.

Leading up to the war, Britain’s defence chiefs had sought categorical assurances from Goldsmith as to the

legality of the attack on Iraq. Goldsmith had informed ministers that war could not be justified on self-defence or humanitarian grounds, and that a war to bring about regime change would be unlawful—hence the government’s reliance on claims that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction to push for a United Nations resolution. The fact that this has been exposed as a tissue of lies presents the possibility that the war could be deemed illegal, opening the way for charges of war crimes against military personnel.

It remains to be seen what impact Rose’s statement will have. Since November 2004 a group of MPs, led by Scottish and Welsh nationalists, have sought support for a parliamentary motion to impeach Blair over the Iraq war. But Parliament overwhelmingly backed war and, despite growing unease at the exposure of Blair’s lies, the impeachment campaign web site lists the names of just 23 MPs in support.

Blair’s official spokesman dismissed Rose’s call, stating that whilst he was entitled to his view he was now retired and that four separate inquiries into the war had backed the government.



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