

Iraq's civil war provokes UK political crisis

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The catastrophe engulfing Iraq—with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) controlling much of its northern and central regions—is as much a crisis for British imperialism as it is for its US ally.

London and Washington were partners in crime in the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, which set in motion the disastrous events now unfolding.

The last thing the British ruling elite needed was for everyone to be reminded of this fact. Yet that is what former prime minister Tony Blair did at the weekend, with an essay published on his web site.

Heaping lie upon lie, Blair denounced as “bizarre” the notion “that ‘we’ have caused this”. Calling for renewed intervention against Iraq and Syria, he insisted, “There is no sensible policy for the West based on indifference. This is, in part, our struggle, whether we like it or not.”

The pious musings of this blood-soaked war criminal led to angry denunciations across the political establishment and the media. But their reaction is just as self-serving as Blair's: All are desperate to conceal their own responsibility for events in order to pave the way for further interventions in the Middle East.

Former deputy prime minister John Prescott accused Blair of going “back to the Crusades,” while former Labour MP Clare Short denounced him as a “complete American neocon.” Both served in the Labour government at the time of the Iraq war, with Short resigning her post as international development secretary only after the invasion.

Others admitted openly that the US and British invasion were directly responsible for the current situation. Sir Christopher Meyer, former British ambassador to the US, said, “We are reaping what we sowed in 2003. This is not hindsight. We knew in the run-up to war that the overthrow of Saddam Hussein would seriously destabilise Iraq after 24 years of his iron rule.”

Retired British Army general Sir Michael Rose accused Blair of being in “complete denial over the disaster he inflicted not only on the people of Iraq, but also on many millions throughout the Middle East as a result of the

2003 invasion.”

Writing in the *Telegraph*, Conservative London mayor Boris Johnson said he had concluded “that Tony Blair has finally gone mad”. Describing the former prime minister's essay as “unhinged”, he continued, “In discussing the disaster of modern Iraq he made assertions that are so jaw-droppingly and breathtakingly at variance with reality that he surely needs professional psychiatric help.”

Johnson's outrage—like that of others—is a calculated pose. He voted for the Iraq war. Now he claims that those like himself who did so were “hopelessly naïve,” even as he admits that regime change was the real goal, writing that he supported the invasion because “I wanted to get rid of Saddam.”

Having recorded the lies, death and destruction visited to achieve this end—which is illegal under international law—Johnson tellingly made no call for Blair to be indicted for war crimes. His real concern is that by refusing to accept that “the Iraq war was a tragic mistake”, Blair “is now undermining the very cause he advocates—the possibility of serious and effective intervention.”

“Yes, we helped cause the disaster in Iraq; but that does not mean we are incapable of trying to make some amends.”

Similar fears were spelt out by former Labour Foreign Office minister Lord Malloch-Brown, who said of Blair, “One wishes someone would tell him to just stay quiet during moments like this, because it does drive a great surge of people in the other direction.”

Blair is a hated and divisive figure. Mass popular opposition to the 2003 invasion was particularly strong in the UK, where 1 million marched in London against war. The invasion and occupation, built on a tissue of lies and fabricated evidence of “weapons of mass destruction,” ultimately led to Blair's downfall. More recently, anti-war sentiment was a significant factor in spoiling the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government's intention to join the US in military intervention against Syria.

The British bourgeoisie are concerned at the reawakening of this opposition, under conditions where it is flailing around trying to work out a response to its crisis while having none.

Foreign Secretary William Hague has said the UK will only send “technical” assistance to Iraq and would sanction the US using British bases to launch air strikes against ISIS. Otherwise it is up to Iraq, and the US, to sort out the mess.

“It is really a time for cooperation and unity,” Hague said, calling on all “Iraqis—Sunni, Shia and Kurds—to work together.” Indicating that he hoped Tehran—formerly part of the “Axis of Evil”—could play a role in defeating the threat from ISIS, he stressed, “We are not planning a military intervention in this situation.”

“I cannot be clearer than that. The US is much more likely to have the assets and capabilities of any outside intervention than the UK.”

Hague announced yesterday that the UK is to reopen its embassy in Iran’s capital, Tehran.

In the meantime, the mantra is that it was not the decision to invade Iraq that was the problem. Hague said, “It is entirely possible to say it was the right thing to remove Saddam Hussein, but that mistakes were made in the aftermath.” The same line was taken by General Rose, who stated, “It goes without saying that if you start a war, you should be sure that the end result will be demonstrably better than the situation prior to the conflict.”

As for Johnson, he complained, “The truth is that we destroyed the institutions of authority in Iraq without having the foggiest idea what would come next.”

The absence of a longer-term plan flowed directly from the fact that the reckless and ignorant gangsters that constitute ruling circles in Washington and London were drunk on their own triumphalist war propaganda and were completely indifferent to anything except grabbing Iraq’s oil.

The whole of Britain’s media were complicit in this crime, especially its nominally liberal components. This accounts for the mealy-mouthed editorial published in the *Guardian* at the weekend.

“If there has to be a hierarchy of blame for Iraq”, it wrote, “it must surely begin with Saddam, who brutalised his own society, embroiled it in a terrible war with Iran, wasted its resources, and provoked the world by his aggression against Kuwait.” This was written even as the *Guardian* admitted in the next paragraph that the “decision to invade was less about Iraq, its plight, or any

threats it posed to its neighbours”, than making a “crushing demonstration of US power....”

The sense of despair in ruling circles was summed up by the *Independent*, which entitled its comment, “Iraq’s dismal choices: At a time when none of the options looks good, it may just be a question of trying to avert the worst scenario.”

The seizure of “large, contiguous chunks of Iraq and Syria” by ISIS, it states, could mean that “the boundaries that the British and French imposed on the Middle East after the First World War will have ceased to exist.”

Others are by no means reconciled to British imperialism being cut out of the Middle East. Under the heading, “Tony Blair may be mad, but he’s got a point”, the *Telegraph*’s Benedict Brogan complained of the absence of any coherent foreign policy and its implications.

“[H]owever much we might enjoy a drawn out discussion about what happened in 2003, Tony Blair’s credibility, and what the origins of this mess might be”, he wrote, “we might more usefully consider what we might do to prevent the West looking even less powerful than it already does.”

Rupert Murdoch’s *Times* was the most vociferous supporter of the Iraq war. Unsurprisingly, it warned that “rehashing yesterday’s debates will not help today’s Iraq.”

“Western adventures in Iraq were indeed a shambles, both in the war’s execution and its prolonged aftermath,” it opined. “Yet it is by no means likely that without it, Iraq would today be at peace.”

“Mr. Blair is also right that, intervention or not, this remains our problem.”



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