

Tony Blair uses CNN interview to cover for his lies on Iraq

Chris Marsden
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Former Prime Minister Tony Blair's interview by CNN's Fareed Zakaria was a pre-emptive move in response to the UK government's inquiry, led by Sir John Chilcot, into the 2003 Iraq war.

Blair is an unindicted war criminal. He spoke to Zakaria, a personal friend, only in order to issue a partial apology for specific aspects of his role in the Iraq conflict. This was designed to divert from the central issue of his joining with President George W. Bush in launching an illegal war of aggression to bring about regime change.

Asked whether the decision to go to war had been a mistake, Blair replied, "I can say that I apologise for the fact that the intelligence I received was wrong. Because even though he [Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein] had used chemical weapons extensively against his own people against others, the programme in the form we thought it was did not exist in the way that we thought. So I can apologise for that.

"I can also apologise, by the way, for some of the mistakes in planning and certainly our mistake in our understanding of what would happen once you had removed the regime. But I find it hard to apologise for removing Saddam. I think even from today 2015 it's better that he is not there than he is there."

Pressed on whether the war was the "principal cause" of the rise of Islamic State (ISIS), he replied, "I think there are elements of truth in that... Of course you can't say that those of us who removed Saddam in 2003 bear no responsibility for the situation in 2015. But it's important also to realise—one, that the Arab Spring which began in 2011 would also have had its impact on Iraq today. And two—ISIS actually came to prominence from a base in Syria and not in Iraq."

Blair only replied in an ostensibly self-critical fashion to the run-up to the war and its aftermath, while

continuing to defend an intervention that has cost hundreds of thousands of lives, destroyed Iraq, created untold human suffering and destabilised the entire Middle East to this day.

The specificity of his replies is made necessary by the need to justify his actions, and made possible by the fact that Blair, and all those who face possible criticism in Lord Chilcot's inquiry into the Iraq War, has been given full access to its findings and the right to respond prior to publication.

The inquiry was set up in 2009 and the release of its findings has been repeatedly delayed for several years now as a result of this provision. When it is finally published, possibly next year or in 2017, there is no direct possibility of prosecutions flowing from it. However, the evidence it will uncover still poses a threat to Blair. Hence his slippery formulations on CNN.

Blair admits only supposed errors of judgement on his own part, but these are all lies. Blair did not support war because of faulty intelligence. The intelligence agencies MI5 and MI6 gathered in the Joint Intelligence Committee, with the support of the CIA, assembled evidence they knew to be false in order to further war aims already decided upon in consultation with Washington.

"Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government", published in September 2002, supposedly contained proof that Iraq possessed chemical and biological WMD and had reconstituted its nuclear weapons programme. Blair famously claimed in the foreword that Saddam's "military planning allows for some of the WMD to be ready within 45 minutes of an order to use them."

Major General Michael Laurie, who was involved in producing the dossier, told Chilcot in 2011, "[T]he

purpose of the dossier was precisely to make a case for war, rather than setting out the available intelligence, and that to make the best out of sparse and inconclusive intelligence the wording was developed with care.”

“Iraq—Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidation”, the “Dodgy Dossier”, was published in February 2003 as a briefing paper to justify war. Much of it was plagiarised from a thesis by graduate student Ibrahim al-Marashi but it was praised by Blair and US Secretary of State Colin Powell as high quality intelligence proving the threat posed by Iraq.

This month, the *Mail on Sunday* discovered an email from Powell among declassified US State Department documents while they were searching through a cache of Hillary Clinton’s recently released emails. Written in March 2002, the report to Bush makes clear that Blair had agreed to assume the role as propagandist for war in Iraq while posing as a voice of caution.

One week prior to a planned meeting at Bush’s ranch in Crawford, Texas, Powell states that Blair, “will present to you the strategic, tactical and public affairs lines that he believes will strengthen global support for our common cause... [A redacted passage follows] On Iraq, Blair will be with us should military operations be necessary. He is convinced on two points: the threat is real; and success against Saddam will yield more regional success.”

Noting that “Blair’s Cabinet shows signs of division” and that “the Labour Party and the British public are unconvinced that military action is warranted now,” Powell continues, “Blair may suggest ideas on how to (1) make a credible public case on current Iraqi threats to international peace; (2) keep Iraq’s neighbors on our side; (3) handle calls for a [United Nations Security Council] blessing that can increase support for us in the region and with UK and European audiences; and (4) demonstrate that we have thought through ‘the day after.’”

Powell concludes, “Blair knows he may have to pay a political price for supporting us on Iraq, and wants to minimize it. Nonetheless, he will stick with us on the big issues.”

Prior to the publication of this presidential briefing document, the former UK ambassador to the US, Sir Christopher Meyer, had only told Chilcot that at Crawford he felt Blair’s views on regime change had “tightened”, while Blair’s ex-adviser Sir David

Manning said he had signalled that he would be willing to back regime change, but only if the issue was first put to the United Nations.

Already by June, the UK defence secretary’s office had drawn up three possible scenarios for UK participation in a war for regime change, including “the discreet UK package” that would have offered the US 20,000 British troops.

Blair’s situation is made worse by the efforts of his former cabinet colleagues to distance themselves from the Iraq War. Former Home Secretary David Blunkett told the *Mail on Sunday* that he challenged Blair during cabinet meetings prior to the war about the level of post-conflict planning for Iraq, but Blair instead placed his faith in US Vice President Dick Cheney and Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

Turning to Chilcot, Blunkett added, “I would have thought that over the six years since the £10 million inquiry was established, Sir John would have found the time to ask the then-Home Secretary what he knew... Given that it looks as if we will have to wait until at least 2017 for his report, I think it would be useful if Sir John could set out now the basic parameters of what he has established—or risk his entire exercise being totally discredited.”



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