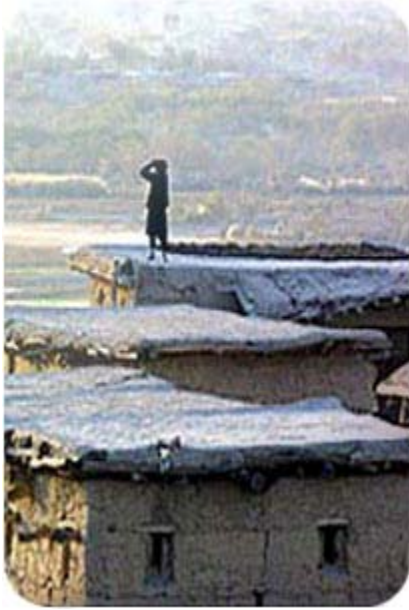


FALSE TRIALS AND PHONEY WARS



'The time for military action has not yet arisen. However, there is no doubt at all that the development of weapons of mass destruction by Saddam Hussein poses a severe threat not just to the region, but to the wider world...After 11 September, we proceeded in a calm and sensible way, and we shall do so again, but we must confront the issue of weapons of mass destruction'.

Consider the words carefully. This was the Prime Minister's first parliamentary answer to questions about Iraq, following his Texas hoedown with President Bush. For all the Downing Street spin that 'nothing has been decided' the language is about 'when' to go to war, not whether war is unavoidable, sensible or legal.

The press who followed Tony Blair to Texas came back in no doubt about American intentions. Bush wants to be in Iraq by the end of the summer. Blair will support him. All else is cake dressing.

The military calculations will doubtless take time. Getting 250,000 troops into the region - let alone the country - will take time. No one, apart from Kuwait, will be on side with the US/UK troops this time and the logistics are going to be a nightmare. But it is the politics of the process that really stink and have to be challenged.

I have little time for Saddam Hussein and believe he should be held to account, particularly for his persecution of Iraqi Kurdish and Shia communities. But then I also believe that Sharon should be tried for war crimes relating to the massacres at Sabra and Chatilla. Both men are heads of state. Both are brutal tyrants. Yet only one is to be 'taken out'. Only one faces sanctions. Only one is to be bombed. It is a matter of hypocrisy and double standards not lost on the Muslim and Arab world.

The more you look at the evidence about Iraq, the stronger is the case for removing the sanctions rather than re-starting the war. For over 10 years since the war officially ended, Britain and America have bombed Iraq as part of the peace. It has cost around 100 million dollars and brought death and suffering to tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians, mostly children. A better way of protecting them would have been in the aid and inclusion programmes of a post-war settlement.

What we have been consistently told is that Saddam's Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) stood in the way of this. But a careful reading of UNSCOM (and other) official reports makes clear how little truth there is to such a claim. It also nails the lie of Downing Street claims that this is still the compelling reason to go to war on Iraq.

As early as 1995 UNSCOM's executive chairman, Rolf Ekeus, and UNSCOM inspector Scott Ritter reported that disarmament of Iraq's chemical weapons was almost complete. In April 1998 the UN Security Council received a report from the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA), which

confirmed that Iraq's nuclear weapons programme had been eliminated 'efficiently and effectively' with Iraqi co-operation. There is no mention of this in British government statements, nor that the IAEA continues to have open access to Iraq and reported that its latest inspection (in January 2002) was carried out with full Iraqi compliance. All that parliament gets is the fatuous claims of tub-thumping ministers that Iraq 'could develop a nuclear weapon within 5 years'. Tissues of deceit cloak ministerial statements about a search for a solution to the debacle of the hidden war on Iraq.

Neither the Prime Minister nor junior lackeys fare much better when they get to biological weapons. In March 1999, the UN Security Council reported that 'the declared facilities of Iraq's BW programme have been destroyed and rendered harmless'. Scott Ritter has gone further than this, claiming in June 2000 that Iraq had never been able to develop an effective delivery mechanism for biological weapons, and had no production capacity to do so.

The only other dimension to the WMD argument went back to the so-called 'Supergun' and long-range missiles. In March 1999 however, UNSCOM also reported that after 817 of its 819 longer-range missiles had been destroyed, 'Iraq does not possess a capability to indigenously produce' any such weapons. Even the Blair/Bush denunciation of Iraqi non-cooperation looks a little shabby against UNSCOM comments that 'the majority of [weapons] inspections were conducted in Iraq without let or hindrance'. Non-cooperation was recorded in only 5 out of the 427 inspections in the round before inspectors were withdrawn on US instructions. And the 5 instances themselves resulted in minor delays - not refusals.

Hard facts will not stand in the way of the war Bush intends to wage. They should, however, determine where the rest of us decide to stand. Iraq is no angel, and should not be dressed up as one. It played cat and mouse with the inspectors during the early 1990's. It would not allow US U-2 spy planes to fly over the country, and only permitted intermittent inspections of presidential sites. Given that the US administration was supplying the data it gathered to Israeli security services being trained for a commando assassination attempt on him, it was unsurprising that Saddam was less than enthusiastic about this degree of co-operation.

Even so, the Briefing Report that went to the US Congress in November last year summed up the current situation - 'there is no hard evidence that Iraq is reconstituting banned WMD programs'. In the absence of a case for war, a new coalition must be formed to put the case for peace. With or without support from the US Administration the West must :

- Open up a direct dialogue with Iraq, with a partial lifting of sanctions immediately and the mapping of a path to full removal in exchange for security guarantees and re-inclusion in the international community
- Ask Russia, China or France to initiate discussions with Middle East countries about a wider framework for security, stability and social justice within the region
- Begin the process of removing the UN headquarters from its detention without trial in the USA, and
- Look at the basis of a new international architecture of rules based justice, independent of (or non-dependent on) the USA

It is clear that the current US Administration has taken the view that international treaties are for

softies. It has withdrawn from the ABM treaty, rejected Kyoto, blocked the Biological Weapons Convention and (with its Star Wars Programme) will soon breach the Outer Space Treaty. It requires the UN to remain silent and supine in the face of its imperial whims.

We stand at the edge of a period of global anarchy rather than global justice. Gun law threatens to overturn international law. The presumptions of an untrammelled military power will unleash an anguish of suicide bombers whose lives cannot be threatened, because they have already lost their meaning.

This is the time to return to genuine internationalism, rather than lurch into the mire of Anglo-Texan Creationism.

*For details of UNSCOM inspections and Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, e-mail Labour Against The War [at latw@gn.apc.org](mailto:latw@gn.apc.org)

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