

Tony Blair Forced to Testify on His War Crimes

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Former prime minister Tony Blair's testimony was streamed live at 4:30 a.m. ET at the [Iraq Inquiry](#) website and on other sites, such as the UK newspaper [the Telegraph](#) which allowed viewers to rank Blair's responses on a "Lie Meter". Telegraph readers' top desired questions pre-hearing were:

- * What was the real motivation for invading Iraq?
- * Why did you not act like a Statesman and stand up to Bush?
- * Do you think the world is a safer place after our illegal Iraq crusade/mission for regime change?
- * I would like Tony Blair to tell us what he knows about the death of Dr Kelly

Try to imagine a U.S. media outlet proposing such questions to Blair's senior partner in crime! But the Inquiry itself did not put these questions to Blair in any effective way.

In the lead up to Blair's testimony, a London protest was planned [here](#).

[Documents were thought to be the key](#), and while the existing evidence more than proves the case of the war's illegality, this Inquiry, it was feared, might be barred from asking Blair about the public (and still secret) evidence. Bizarrely, this could have turned the thing into a whitewash, adding to the general impression that specific evidence is still needed to prove that a war is illegal. Any war not fought in self-defense or through UN authorization simply is illegal. But these fears turned out to be justified. Blair was not confronted with public and undisputed evidence that he knew he was lying about weapons, that he lied about his commitment to making war a last resort, and so forth. And nobody broke out of the whole charade to point out that an aggressive war is still illegal even if the nation attacked has weapons and even if other options have been pursued.

Some recent stories on the ongoing inquiry:

[Elizabeth Wilmshurst](#) is first witness to be applauded by the public.

Now we know: [Blair went to war on an "assumption"](#).

How Alastair Campbell [changed Iraq dossier](#).

Liveblog:

9:40 a.m. GMT The opening question was pretty discouraging: How did Blair view containment of Saddam Hussein? Blair responded that his view changed entirely on 9/11.

This is bizarre, given Hussein's total lack of involvement in 9/11, but it went unchallenged. Blair spoke in terms of the "risk of Saddam reconstituting programs" - quite different from his blatant lies in 2002 and 2003 about his certainty that Hussein had "WMDs" and could attack the UK with them in 45 minutes, a claim already shown in this inquiry to have been a lie. Nobody questioned him on his shift to now talking about a "risk" of SH developing weapons "progams".

9:46 Blair's being allowed to go on and on with fearmongering about the people behind 9/11, whom he identifies only as "they" and nobody explains to him that "they" were not Iraqis, and nobody points out that the attack on Iraq inspired more would-be terrorists, not fewer. Blair says he had to go after North Korea, Pakistan, and "all of this", but he did not of course do so.

9:49 Now the questioner, Sir Roderic Lyne, points out that SH was not behind al Qaeda, but Blair seems not to comprehend the point.

9:51 Blair tries to refer to a document, and Lyne responds that, while it is public he's not sure it's been declassified, resulting in laughter from the audience - first sign of life from them, and only sign of life from them. This is not encouraging in terms of the prospects for bringing in documents.

The Aug 7, 2001, document, an Iraqi Policy Framework or Options Paper, Blair says was declassified yesterday. He drones on about sanctions. He argues that the sanctions might not have "worked," but nobody asks what that means or how the sanctions did not work, given the complete absence of the weapons this was all supposedly about.

9:56 Sir Roderick simply asks again if the sanctions might have worked, whatever that means. Blair says that the sanctions had to be watered down to please the Russians, etc., and weren't working (whatever that means), the implication apparently being that if the UN would not create successful sanctions (whatever that means) it would be necessary to go around the UN with an illegal war (without calling it that).

10:00 am GMT Lyne is trying to soften his softballs. He wants to know whom Blair met with and consulted. Blair names Jack Straw. Blair says the options were:

1. sanctions that worked
2. the UN inspectors doing their job
3. removing Saddam

Blair refers to "WMD".

But how were the sanctions not working?

How did the UN inspectors fail?

Since when is removing a nation's leader a legal "option"?

Maybe someone other than this "Sir" should have been allowed to do this questioning. Here's how [Wikipedia](#) describes him:

"He is an advisor to JPMorgan Chase, who have been chosen to operate the Trade Bank of Iraq, which will give banks access to the financial system of Iraq. He was a special adviser to BP, which currently has major interests in Iraq."

10:05 Lyne points out that by April 2002 Blair was inclined to "regime change". Blair says the key issue was "WMD". But no "WMDs" could legalize an aggressive war. It's tempting to

be frustrated with Lyne for not pointing out that the WMD claims were lies, but the deeper lie here is the concerted pretense that it matters. An illegal war of aggression is simply illegal regardless.

10:10 Blair is insisting on quoting from his 2002 speeches to show that his concern was in fact his and Bush-Cheney's pretenses about "WMD". Nobody even objects to this crazy conflation of various types of weapons, used to suggest a nuclear threat without actually claiming it. Nobody points out that we know they knew no such threat existed. Nobody brings up the [Downing Street Minutes](#) or the [White House memo](#) or any of the dozens of other [smoking guns](#) on this. Presumably they are all "classified".

10:12 Lyne points to Blair's [recent interview](#) (which may turn out to have done a better job than this Inquiry) in which he said he would have favored regime change even were there no WMDs (as of course he knew there were not -DS). Blair lies that what he meant in the interview was purely that you cannot talk about the threat now in the same way, given what we now know. Lyne does not point out that Blair knew it then.

10:15 Blair calls SH "a monster" and nobody asks him to define that in terms that do not include himself. He goes on to recommend doing the same thing to Iran that he did to Iraq, thereby establishing more firmly his own monsterhood.

10:18 Now Chilcot announces that only two documents were "declassified" yesterday, including the one Blair brought up, so those two will now (or sometime soon) go on the Inquiry website.

Questioning now will be done by [Lady Usha Prashar](#) who wants to know exactly why Blair wanted regime change, (never mind its illegality).

10:24 More softballs. More details about who was at which meeting. Then she asks about Blair's understanding that regime change could not be done without UN approval. Blair seems to acknowledge that. (So why is he not immediately handcuffed? Why does this thing drag on?)

10:27 She asks what Blair and Bush discussed privately at Crawford. Possibly the softball of all softballs. Why would Blair reveal anything? He doesn't.

The Telegraph's liveblog is pretty useless, but points to better information:

"10.22 It seems that everyone is talking about the #iraquinquiry on Twitter... everyone except Alastair Campbell, whose @campbellclaret account has been silent for 17 hours."

10:34 Blair is now taking credit for having pushed Clinton to bomb Yugoslavia. He's straying off into his OTHER war crimes, given the absence in this Inquiry of any serious confrontation of his Iraq war crimes.

10:39 Lyne questioning again. Blair says that the "UN route" could have succeeded or failed, and either way they (he and Bush) would have to go ahead with the regime change. "Success" here means sanctioning the pre-determined war. (Again, why not handcuff him now and get [the reward?](#))

The Guardian has a better liveblog than the Telegraph's [here](#).

10:49 a.m. GMT TAKING A 15-MIN BREAK having thus far accomplished next to nothing.

Here are what the Guardian considers the key points thus far:

“• Blair strongly denied doing any secret deal with Bush at the meeting in Crawford in April 2002. He said he was quite open about his determination to deal with Saddam Hussein. He insisted that he made this point publicly in the press conference he held with Bush. (See 10.26am)

- He said that did not set conditions when he told Bush that he would support him in his drive to deal with Iraq. Blair said the US/UK relationship was an alliance, not a contract. (See 10.26am)

- He suggested that there was no real difference between wanting regime change and wanting Iraq to disarm. (See 10.20am)

- But he also admitted that he made a misake when he gave an interview to Fern Britton last year and said that he would have wanted to get rid of Saddam even if he had know Iraq had no WMD. (See 10.05am)

- Sir John Chilcot signalled that Blair is likely to be called to give evidence again. (See 9.32am)

- Blair said he was “frustrated” by George Bush’s unwillingness to make more progress on the Middle East in 2002 and 2003. (See 10.39am and 10.43am)”

11:12 a.m. Back to more “questioning” from Baroness Prashar and then Sir Martin Gilbert.

Pales beside the fictional version of Blair’s criminal trial: [video](#).

Pales, indeed, in comparison with the case laid out for Blair’s impeachment in August 2004: [PDF](#).

11:25 Blair trying to tie Iraq to 9/11 via Zaraqawi – is he serious??

Super softballs are from [Sir Martin](#):

“He was appointed in June 2009 as a member of the British government’s inquiry into the Iraq war (Headed by Sir John Chilcot). His appointment to this inquiry was criticised in parliament by William Hague, Claire Short, George Galloway, and Lynne Jones on the basis that Gilbert had once compared George W Bush, and Tony Blair, to Roosevelt and Churchill.”

11:30 Blair claims Iraq was chosen for a war, rather than various other potential victims, because of UN resolutions being breached. Odd, given the UN’s opposition to Blair’s (and Bush’s) crime.

Sir Lawrence Freedman, a [former advisor to Blair](#) is the one now questioning, and he asks also about Blair’s lie regarding an Iraqi ability to attack the UK with WMDs within 45 minutes. Blair tries to evade.

This will be seen as the toughest significant questioning. Blair: Blair the liar, is a big concern to everyone. But how is his aggressive warmaking any more or less illegal because of his lies? Even if Iraq COULD have attacked within 45 minutes, no claim was ever made that it was going to do so.

That it had no such ability, and that Blair was lying, has long been established. But what legal case does he have, regardless? No one has asked Blair about the opinion of his top legal officials that the war would be illegal. He was informed that it would be illegal and went ahead with it. What more do we need to know?

Blair is now asked to explain his claim that SH had chemical and biological weapons beyond doubt. Freedman asks “your doubt or anyone’s doubt?” and Blair evades. He swears he himself had no doubt. And yet — I hate to dwell on this — an aggressive war would not have been made legal even if he really had had no doubt, or even if he had been correct.

11:45 Blair asks what if he had been correct “That was what I was worried about.” He was worried that he might be right. That sounds like he had some doubt.

1:47 I’m having some doubts about watching the rest of this when I have other obligations. Nonetheless, if the United States Congress, in which Democrats pretended to care about this issue up until they gained a majority in 2006, were to even hold this weak a hearing, it would be a dramatic step upward from the hole we’ve sunk into on this side of the pond.

UPDATE: Reactions from the Guardian [here](#). Note the bit on Israel in the last line.

UPDATE 2: [The Times on Blair’s lying](#).

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