

Tony Blair: Iraqis ‘Disgusted’ at Knighthood Being Offered to War Architect

A petition calling for the former prime minister to have his knighthood withdrawn has collected almost three quarters of a million signatures

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Iraqi campaigners and politicians have expressed their “disgust” at the decision by the British government to award a knighthood to former Prime Minister Tony Blair, citing his involvement in the 2003 invasion and subsequent occupation.

The anger comes as a [petition](#) launched in the UK calling for the former Labour leader to have the honour withdrawn reached over 700,000 signatures.

Blair has been accused of war crimes over his role in the invasion of Iraq, which toppled longtime ruler Saddam Hussein and led to hundreds of thousands of deaths, widespread internecine violence and ongoing instability in Iraq and beyond.

There was further anger on Wednesday after it was [claimed](#) by Blair’s former defence secretary Geoff Hoon that he had been told to “burn” a memo from the British attorney general which cast doubt on the legality of the Iraq war.

Rami al-Sakini, an Iraqi MP and member of the Foreign Relations Committee, told Middle East Eye that the knighthood should be withdrawn.

“Of course this is neither appropriate nor correct,” said Sakini, who is an MP for the southern city of Basra, which fell under British administration following the invasion.

“Especially for Tony Blair, who participated in the occupation of Iraq and was a major reason for wasting the resources of this country.”

Sakini, whose Sairoun party won the largest number of seats in Iraq’s parliamentary elections last October, said giving Blair the title was effectively “honouring the violation” that was the Iraq war.

The actions of British forces in Basra have [repeatedly](#) come in for criticism with claims of willful killings, detainee abuse, and what the International Criminal Court has deemed “credible allegations of torture and rape”.

Apart from the initial violence, many have argued that the subsequent chaos provoked by the invasion led to the rise of the Islamic State group, who capture vast swaths of Iraq and Syria in 2014 and have launched terror attacks around the world that have led to thousands of deaths.

Ali al-Baroodi, a teacher and campaigner in the former IS stronghold of Mosul – which was obliterated in 2017 in a foreign-backed campaign to defeat the militant group – told MEE that honouring Blair was “disgusting” referring to him as “B-Liar” as many anti-war campaigners have done.

“It’s horrendous news to be honest,” he said.

‘A crime against humanity’

On Tuesday, Blair’s successor as Labour Party leader, Keir Starmer, said that the former prime minister “deserves” to be knighted and cited a number of domestic reforms he introduced during his time in office, 1997-2007.

Speaking to ITV, Starmer said he understood many held “strong views” about the Iraq war, but said that this did “not detract from the fact that Tony Blair was a very successful prime minister of this country and made a huge difference to the lives of millions of people in this country.”

But for Iraqis, and many others across the globe, the 2003 invasion has come to be seen as an outrage.

Kamal Jabir, a politician with the Civil Democratic Alliance, and a former freedom fighter against Saddam Hussein in the 80s and 90s, said: “With millions of caring world citizens I stood firm in objecting the 2003 war against Iraq – I was hoping that Tony Blair as one of the young leaders of the Labour Party would have the courage and the wisdom not to follow [US President] George Bush’s wrong decision to invade Iraq using false and fabricated intelligence to justify an ugly and unfair war that paved the way to the rise of the present corrupt and Islamic extremist parties and gangs in Iraq.”

Although Blair was leader of the Labour Party through three UK election victories, his reputation since leaving office has slumped heavily and continued scrutiny has been poured on the justification for the war.

The new revelations by Hoon, which come from his recently published memoirs, [suggest](#) that a “very long and very detailed legal opinion” from Attorney General Peter Goldsmith indicated that the invasion was on shaky legal ground.

“It was not exactly the ringing endorsement that the chief of the defence staff [Mike Boyce] was looking for, and in any event, I was not strictly allowed to show it to him or even discuss it with him,” wrote Hoon.

“Moreover, when my principal private secretary, Peter Watkins, called [Blair’s chief of staff] Jonathan Powell in Downing St and asked what he should now do with the

document, he was told in no uncertain terms that he should ‘burn it’.”

He said the legal document was not burned, but eventually locked away in a Ministry of Defence safe and is “probably still there.”

A poll [released](#) by the British polling agency YouGov on Tuesday suggested the UK public was overwhelmingly opposed to the former premier being knighted.

According to the poll, 62 percent of the public either “tend to” or “strongly” disapprove of Blair receiving the honour, with only 14 percent in favour.

Meanwhile, 56 percent of Labour Party voters also disapproved.

Jabir told MEE that virtually the entire political establishment in the UK and US now accepted that the war had been wrong and that the damage caused in “wasted” lives had been incalculable.

“The 2003 war against Iraq was a crime against humanity – therefore Blair should be tried instead of getting rewarded,” he said.

“Looks like the moral compass among the leaders in the UK is fading away like every other country in the world.”

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