

Tony Blair's Wilful Misrepresentation: Deliberately Manipulated the Facts to Justify the Invasion of Iraq?

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“And he smiled a kind of sickly smile, and curled up on the floor, And the subsequent proceedings, interested him no more.”
(Francis Brett Harte, 1836-1902.)

Charles Anthony Lynton Blair, QC., is set to reappear before the Chilcot Inquiry into the assault on Iraq, on Friday 21st January, with an inside source reported commenting: “There is a feeling ... he wilfully misrepresented the facts.” Goodness, surely not.

Personally, one scene encapsulates the invasion – before it even began. I checked in to a small family hotel, on the corniche, in Mosul, northern Iraq. Mosul is in hauntingly beautiful, ancient, Nineveh province, of which Masefield wrote: “Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir, rowing home to haven, in sunny Palestine, with a cargo of ivory, and apes and peacocks, sandalwood, cedarwood and sweet white wine.” The wine came from Mosul grapes. The romance is undimmed, from the spine tinglingly beautiful remains left by the Assyrian Kings (721 BC-626 BC) to the great flocks of birds, who blacken the sky at dawn and dusk, their song rising and falling, filling the senses. I climbed the steep steps to the entrance and anticipated the beams and the “Welcome, welcome, welcome home ...” The lobby was deserted.

It took a moment, then I looked through to the lounge, the entire staff from the owner/Manager to the kitchen boy, were huddled round the television, aware of nothing but Colin Powell's address to the U.N., making it clear that an attack on Iraq was imminent. He cited cited Downing Street's shameful work of fiction (“Iraq – its infrastructure of concealment, deception and intimidation”) saying: “I would call my colleagues' attention to the fine paper that the United Kingdom distributed... which describes in exquisite detail Iraqi deception activities.” It was 5th February 2003.

I stood behind the group, un-noticed watching in astonishment at purported translated conversations between Iraqi scientists, discussing how to hide their WMDs – a conversation straight out of a Hollywood gangster movie, using expressions utterly alien to the Arab world. Further, there were camps teaching people how to make ricin poisons, numerous munitions bunkers, ballistic missile sites, UAVs (unarmed aerial vehicles) biological weapons, chemical weapons, anthrax. Iraq was a threat to life on earth: “We must not shrink from what is ahead of us”, Powell concluded.

The staff switched off the television, clearly stunned, then noticed me. No greeting, just drawn, desperate faces and: "Madam Felicity, are they really going to bomb us again?" My face must have been the answer. The region had anyway been being (illegally) being bombed for thirteen years, by US and UK planes. Evocative ancient homes, standing a few months before, about an eighth of a mile behind the hotel were no more, the hotel had somehow survived. Bombing had increased dramatically over the previous months. I had driven up from Baghdad along the main highway which had many army bases and an air force academy. Iraq had no planes since 1991 and the tanks were all circa 1950's. All were reduced to rubble. I thought of bombings I had visited over the years, the shoes - it is always the shoes that are left. I remembered the child shepherd (10) who had stepped on munition from 1991, which still littered the country. He silently pleaded through his remaining eye. He had also lost his foot. I pondered the years of recording words from broken hearts.

Three days later the Guardian pointed out that the dossier not only plagiarised an old thesis from an American PhD student, but it : "... appeared to be a journalistic cut and paste job, rather than high grade intelligence analysis."

Yet Blair, whose Faith Foundation : "aims to promote understanding about the world's religions ..." authorised lies of near unprecedented enormity and enjoined Bush's "Crusade", against a crippled country, whose children were dying at an average of seven thousand a month of "embargo related causes", the UN flagged siege driven by the US and the UK. For anyone who has a doubt about the term "Crusade" being a slip of the tongue, "New Yorker" journalist Seymour Hersh cites research for his upcoming book, "The Bush-Cheney Years." After the fall of the regime in 2003: "In the Cheney shop, the attitude was ... 'We're gonna change mosques into cathedrals. And when we get all the oil, nobody's gonna give a damn.' "

However, if Chilcot has no legal authority to prosecute for what former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan finally said was an "illegal" invasion, arguably a war of aggression (Nuremberg's " ... supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole") enough politically weighty rats have plopped over the side of HMS Blair and swum for the shore, to give some hope that they may yet, as in their remit, refer evidence to "the appropriate authorities." The latest to at least damp his fur, is the former Attorney General, The Rt. Hon. the Lord Goldsmith.

On the 30th January 2003 he wrote to Blair that the latest UN Resolution (SCR 1441) "...does not authorise the use of military force ... having considered the arguments ... my view remains that a further decision is required." Suggesting he hear the views of his US counterparts, he wrote: "I am not convinced that this will make any difference to my view .." Blair wrote in the margin: "I just don't understand this." On the 17th March, however, Goldsmith produced a short statement opining the invasion legal. However, documents released to the Inquiry show a vein of deep unease over the legality throughout. On the 20th March., the bombing began.

Iraq, had, of course, on 7th December 2002, delivered to the UN., 12,800 pages, accounting for the weapons it did not have, which was, in a word, stolen by the US delegation to the UN. Under 4,000 pages were returned, so heavily redacted as to be "indecipherable", according to UN Ambassadors contacted at the time. Removed entirely was the index of companies who had sold weapons to Iraq over the years, including those of US., UK., France, Germany

and Russia.

In another arguably underhand act, the Cabinet Office has refused the Chilcot Inquiry access to communications between Bush and Blair during the run up to the invasion. Sir John has said: "The Inquiry regards (these) essential to fulfill its terms of reference ..." Indeed. He has written saying that Mr Blair's cross examination would be damaged by withholding the memos.

Blair is appearing in the week that marks exactly twenty years since the forty two day carpet bombing of Iraq in 1991. However, missing evidence or not, there are reports that, like Henry Kissinger, Blair consults his lawyers before he travels, for reassurance that he will not be arrested on arrival.

A little difficulty may arise nearer home soon. On 18th January, Dr Bill Wilson, MSP., convened and chaired a meeting in the Scottish Parliament of: " .. lawyers, academics, MSPs and concerned citizens .. to discuss the incorporation of the International Criminal Court's definition of the crime of aggression into Scots Law. Consensus was reached that the Scottish Parliament is competent in this respect, and that this can and should be done soon.

Robert Manson, founding member of the UK-based Institute for Law, Accountability & Peace and Don Ferencz, an American lawyer and convenor of the recently-organised Global Institute for the Prevention of Aggression, presented detailed historical and legal arguments before answering questions from the audience, which included MSPs and academics from across Scotland. Among these arguments was that the International Criminal Court (Scotland) Act 2001 incorporated the offences in the 1998 Rome Statute for the Establishment of an International Criminal Court into Scots domestic law, with unanimous support, and that this was done the year before the Rome Statute came into force. Consequently there is no impediment to Scotland adopting the June 2010 Kampala definition of the crime of aggression immediately."

Dr Wilson commented: "As an outcome of the meeting, we have sent an open letter to the Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill, asking him to amend the ICC (Scotland) Act 2001, adding the 'crime of aggression'.

"If we did so it would be an excellent example to the rest of the world. It would send the clear message that we respect international law. It would prevent Scotland being dragged into murky and counterproductive military ventures in the future. I call on all MSPs to support such a move. Scotland could lead the fight against illegal war."

When I left Mosul, days before the invasion, Western rhetoric trumpeting Saddam Hussein's ability to launch WMDs in Blair's "forty five minutes", I drove again past the ruined bases, the road near empty, no troop movements, military vehicles. In the circumstances, it was surreal. Suddenly, nearing Baghdad, a convoy of army lorries appeared. We neared and overtook. There were eleven of them, early 1950's Mercedes. The tyres were down to the canvas, they were covered in rust - and the one in front was towing the other ten. Dr Wilson's initiative is a vital step towards ensuring that never again are facts "wilfully disregarded", and that those who try, pay the price.

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