

DAVID MILLER & MARK CURTIS

**THE
LYING
GAME**

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GOVERNMENT, PROPAGANDA AND THE WAR ON IRAQ

AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK

TELL ME LIES

PROPAGANDA AND MEDIA DISTORTION
IN THE ATTACK ON IRAQ

THE LYING GAME

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TELL ME LIES

Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq

EDITED BY DAVID MILLER

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ABOUT THE BOOK

What did the media tell us in the run up to war on Iraq? Was it all true? Where are the weapons of mass destruction? This book is for everyone who is appalled by the duplicity and misinformation churned out by the media in the lead up to war with Iraq, and is a scathing indictment of the media's role in creating public support for a war which threatens to create further instability and resentment of the US throughout the Middle East. Contributors include John Pilger, Noam Chomsky, Robert Fisk, Edward Herman, Mark Thomas, Mark Steel, Abdul Hadi Jiad (Iraqi journalist sacked by the BBC before the war), Mark Curtis, John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton (Authors of the bestselling *Weapons of Mass Deception*), Norman Solomon, Nancy Snow and Yvonne Ridley (Aljazeera.net).

David Miller is a member of the Stirling Media Research Institute, at Stirling University in Scotland. His most recent books are *Open Scotland?: Journalists, Spin Doctors & Lobbyists* (co-authored with Philip Schlesinger and William Dinan) and *Market Killing: What The Free Market Does And What Social Scientists Can Do About It* (with Greg Philo).

Mark Curtis is the author of *Web Of Deceit: Britain's Real Role In The World*, *The Great Deception: Anglo-American Power and World Order* and *The Ambiguities Of Power: British Foreign Policy Since 1945*.

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PART 1

Psychological warfare against the public: Iraq and beyond

BY DAVID MILLER



SINCE SEPTEMBER 11 2001 THE PROPAGANDA machine in the US (and UK) has been cranked up to levels not seen outside the 1939-45 war. It should be no surprise that the content of the propaganda cranked out quietly to selected journalists or with fanfare in the form of several dossier or grandstanding appearances before the United Nations, should be riddled with deception. Governments have long believed that – to misquote Wilfred Owen – *dulce et decorum est pro patria decipio*. But it does remain difficult to find a straightforward espousal of this thesis in the mainstream media. Much of the media continue to assume that the statements of government officials and politicians are characterised by what Mark Curtis calls a 'basic benevolence'. They may lie here or there, or they may act in a foolish or misguided way, but to advance the proposition that they are calculating liars, in full consciousness of the outcomes of their policies is beyond the pale. Thus discussions of propaganda strategy and deliberate deception remain rare.

For the sake of clarity, let us say a few words about lies – to combat the accusation of erecting a mirror image propaganda from the margins. Lies are falsehoods the status of which the liar is aware. Of course it is difficult to prove intention in these matters even in personal relations. In governmental circles it is more difficult as there is always someone else who can take the rap: 'I didn't know that this information was false. I took it in good faith from Alastair Campbell, MI6, the Office of Special Plans, Italian intelligence, Iraqi defectors (delete according to taste)'. A

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further muddying element in official misinformation is that the system of relations between journalists and government in and out of war is based on confidence and trust. Off the record briefing, disguised sources, and the like are a fundamental part of the system and are fully exploited by government in the US and UK. One of the most insidious – because least checkable – ways of exploiting the system is when propaganda stories are planted on willing journalists, who disguise their origin from their readers. The key to this is that the stories are deniable. That is to say that – since the source will not be identified – government can deny any role in the information. This is a system of insitutionalised lying which deliberately seeks to cover its tracks.

A further question is the distinction between big and little lies. Was the justification for war 'an honourable deception' as former Cabinet Minister Clare Short has said of Tony Blair's state of mind. Or was it, as Paul Wolfowitz of the Pentagon, has put it for reasons of 'bureaucracy [that] we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on'. The size of the lie will depend in part on the status of the liar and in part on the consequences of the lie. But little lies have a way of meshing together. Little lies can become webs of deceit especially when they are directed to some overall purpose such as presenting the military and the government in a favourable light and attempting to promote – or at least not undermine – big lies.

In the first week of the attack on Iraq there were numerous examples of little lies. The *Daily Mirror* counted thirteen separate cases often made up of more than one deception. These included the alleged firing of Scud missiles, the 'discovery' of a chemical warfare factory, the 'liberation' of Umm Qasr, the 'uprising' in Basra and others. Later, British Army press officers with the Forward Press Information Centre claimed that as civilians were attempting to leave Basra 'the local militia engaged... the civilians with possibly the inference that they should all get back in, which was exactly the reaction that they got'. This claim was picked up on television news that evening as fact: 'This is one of the bridges where today civilians scattered as Iraqi fighters opened fire on

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them' (BBC1, *News at Ten*, 28 March 2003). Later the UK Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon announced the story in the House of Commons as yet another example of 'brutal suppression' by the Iraqi regime. Yet – according to the eyewitness reports of BBC journalists filming a documentary titled *Fighting the War* – the Iraqis were in fact engaging the British Army: 'It's the British soldiers who are being fired at... It's not until the bridge is clear of people that [Iraqi] mortar rounds are fired towards it... In reality it is the British who are controlling movement across the bridge, both in and out of the city.'

But these little lies – even cumulatively – pale in comparison with the really big lie, which elements of the US government and MI6 have reportedly been building through 'I/Ops' or Information Operations, since at least 1997. This is the notion that Iraq posed a threat to the west by virtue of its programme on Weapons of Mass Destruction and (latterly) by virtue of its links with international terrorism. Both of these justifications were categorically false. The question is only whether those at the top knew that they were false.

One of the key claims – mentioned four separate times in the September 2002 dossier *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government* – was that WMD could be 'ready within 45 minutes of an order to use them'. This was not the only false claim made by the US and UK governments in the attempt to justify war. Glen Rangwala has produced a briefing paper identifying some 36 separate falsehoods. But it illustrates the key point. The dossier claimed the 'much information about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction is already in the public domain from UN reports and from Iraqi defectors. This points clearly to Iraq's continuing possession, after 1991, of chemical and biological agents'(p. 5) and Iraq has 'continued to produce chemical and biological agents'. The problem with these statements is not just that they are false but that they are fundamental misrepresentations of the sources cited by the government, notably UN reports and evidence from the key defector, Hussein Kamel, Saddam Hussein's son-in-law. Briefly these sources indicate that the Iraqi government had destroyed

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90-95 per cent of their chemical and biological agent and that any that remained (with the single exception of mustard gas) was in a form which would have degraded to uselessness within 10 years. In the case of the mustard gas, if any actually remained, the quantity was so small that it would only effectively poison an area of some 5.2 square kilometres. The sources also indicate a complete lack of evidence that new production had occurred.

So the notion that there was any significant threat from Iraq from chemical and biological attack was wrong and they knew it was wrong. On the possibility of using the weapons within 45 minutes, the dossier noted that Iraq 'can deliver chemical and biological agents using an extensive range of artillery shells, free-fall bombs, sprayers and ballistic missiles... The Iraq military are able to deploy these weapons within 45 minutes of a decision to do so' (p. 17). This neatly conflates the alleged 'intelligence' on 45 minutes with long range ballistic missiles. In fact, Iraq did not have any such missiles and the original intelligence assessment was only, according to John Scarlett of the Joint Intelligence committee, that 'battlefield mortar shells or small calibre weaponry' could be deployed in 45 minutes. Again, both Blair and Campbell were in a position to know this since it was their own intelligence. (Blair, as Prime Minister sees all intelligence reports). In other words, the 45 minute claim involved at least three separate deceptions: on the existence of the agent in weaponised form; on the existence of the delivery mechanism; and on the application of the 45 minute claim to long range delivery systems. Weaving these various deceptions into a wholly false picture of a 'current' Iraqi threat required deliberate deception, but deception with a purpose; the purpose was to present the deception in such a way as to encourage the media to draw the obvious conclusion. That it did so is more than evident in the headline in the London \ that day '45 minutes from Attack' (24 September 2003) or in the *Daily Express* the next day 'Saddam can strike in 45 minutes' (25 September 2003).

An examination of the language used in official pronouncements shows that ministers and officials – in this case Alastair Campbell and

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Tony Blair – took considerable care not to be caught out lying. But at the same time they stretch language so that words appear to mean the opposite of their dictionary definitions. This can be seen in their use of off the record and confidential briefings and leaks, but also in the extreme care taken in the use of language in set piece – on the record – encounters.

One thread in the web of deceit, exposed at the Hutton inquiry, illustrates the seeming inability of those in power to do anything but dissemble. Campbell claimed before the Foreign Affairs Committee that the first draft of the September dossier had been seen by him on September 9 and had included the controversial 45 minutes claim. At Hutton, it emerged that he had chaired the meeting on September 5, at which an earlier draft was discussed. Asked to explain, Campbell replied simply that the previous draft was a different document.

That is not what I define as the WMD dossier... these were different products that were being prepared in different parts of Government. The one that mattered was the one that John Scarlett was putting together... I think in my mind, certainly, they were always separate.

This playing with words characterises the whole affair.

Blair, too, was very careful in his use of language which exploited the media thirst for dramatic threats. In a key address to the House of Commons Liaison Committee, Blair said: 'I think it is important that we do everything we can to try to show people the link between the issue of weapons of mass destruction and these international terrorist groups, mainly linked to al-Qaeda'. Seconds later, in the House of Commons, Blair acknowledged that 'I know of nothing linking Iraq to the September 11 attack and I know of nothing either that directly links al-Qaeda and Iraq to recent events in the UK.'

The final position seemed to be that although there was no connection it was dangerous to leave weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Hussein in case at some future date these ended up with terrorists. The 'link' in other words is a hypothetical one. Via the medium of spin this is deliberately translated into a 'real' link. As Blair put it in

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the House of Commons: *'at some point in a future not too distant, the threat will turn into reality*. The threat therefore is not imagined. The history of Saddam and weapons of mass destruction is not American or British propaganda. The history and the present threat are real'. Note the dishonesty of the language here as Blair appears to say the threat is both 'real' and 'present' while at the same time a potential threat in the 'not too distant' future which will 'turn into' reality.

On the strength of this hypothetical future risk, up to 40,000 Iraqis were killed. The ability of the US and UK governments to get away with these killings, depends in part on their ability to muddy the waters by means of propaganda and deceit. The attack on Iraq shows the integration of propaganda and lying into the core of government strategy. It shows how such a strategy, planned and executed by a relatively small cabal (in Downing St, the White House and Pentagon), in the face of opposition from within their own ranks, to invade and occupy a sovereign country, can be successful. This does seem to me to elevate the Iraqi threat story into the premier league of big lies.

But we also need to explain the seeming inability of a large majority of the political elite to see through the lies. Some of this is easily explained in terms of political calculation and in terms of fear. But, there is a further element in the psychosis of government which is that members of the elite come to believe their own lies and seem unable to break free of the operating assumptions of the system. Even outside the charmed circle of ministerial office, they come to believe that the world seen through the distorting lens of their own self interest is how the world really is. Of course this will change with the relative strength of the forces of opposition. We cannot explain the pathetic evasions and misunderstandings contained in both the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Intelligence and Security Committee reports on Iraq, together with their occasional glimpses of truth, without understanding that perceptions of the world can be markedly

distorted by ideology – the moulding of perceptions by interests – and by political circumstance.

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Most crucially the Iraq lie shows the immense gulf between the democratic wishes of the population and the priorities of the political elite. The elite can simply ignore the will of the people of the UK and the majority of global opinion. It can control or bypass the institutions for democracy such as Congress or the House of Commons by means both of deception and the long term sapping of their practical democratic power. It shows that democracy in both the US and UK is institutionally corrupt, and that there is a need for fundamental changes in the system of national and global governance for them to be objectively recognisable as democratic. The most important legacy of the attack on Iraq then, may be to expose to the world the crisis of liberal democracy and this may well prove in the longer term to be the biggest chink in the armour of the American empire and its UK vassal.

PART 2

Psychological warfare against the public: Iraq and beyond

BY MARK CURTIS



SINCE LATE 2002 THE BRITISH PUBLIC HAS BEEN

subject to a government propaganda campaign of perhaps unprecedented heights in the postwar world. Clare Short, after resigning her position as International Development Secretary, told a parliamentary enquiry of 'a series of half-truths, exaggerations and reassurances that were not the case to get us into conflict [with Iraq] by the spring'. In this chapter, I will review briefly some elements of this propaganda campaign.

Before turning to Iraq, however, let us consider an extraordinary document freely available on the Ministry of Defence website well before the invasion of Iraq. This document, called 'The future strategic context for defence' notes that 'we need to be aware of the ways in which public attitudes might shape and constrain military activity'. It continues: Increasing emotional attachment to the outside world, fuelled by immediate and graphic media coverage, and a public desire to see the UK act as a force for good, is likely to lead to public support, and possibly public demand, for operations prompted by humanitarian motives.

Therefore, 'public support will be vital to the conduct of military interventions'. In future, 'more effort will be required to ensure that such public debate is properly informed'.

The meaning of this appears to be: first, government propaganda is key to attaining objectives and we should expect a lot more of it; second,

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this propaganda will tell us that the government is acting from humanitarian, rather than baser, motives. It is interesting to see a government openly committing itself to a strategy of propaganda, especially in its concern to emphasise 'humanitarian motives', because this is precisely what occurred over Iraq. Even before the invasion, and certainly now, there were no excuses for journalists simply to report government statements or opinions at face value, without ridicule.

The propaganda campaign in the pre-war phase was therefore entirely to be expected. It was seriously funny watching the clique around Tony Blair try to work through various pretexts for attacking Iraq. It appears that the population is regarded as a giant focus group to test each new argument, simply a hurdle to be overcome by anything that enables elites to achieve their objectives.

Initially in 2002, ministers were mainly seizing on the argument about making Iraq comply with UN resolutions; however, the problem here was that too many people saw little or no similar pressure being applied to Israel and other allies. Then, Saddam's human rights record was tried; however, the problem was that this appalling record was comparable to that of many regimes supported by Britain and that London had anyway backed Saddam throughout the period of the worst atrocities in the 1980s. So by early 2003, the two favourite pretexts for a full onslaught against Iraq became the regime's alleged development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and a supposed 'link' between it and Al Qaida. Only once these two had been tried (and largely failed) did Blair hit on his bottom line, asserting the 'morality' of a war against Iraq.

The biggest problem to overcome was the fact that Iraq presented no threat. Reporting to the UN Security Council in June, after the invasion, chief weapons inspector Hans Blix stated that his weapons inspections commission, UNMOVIC, 'has not at any time during the inspections in Iraq found evidence of the continuation or resumption of programmes of weapons of mass destruction or significant quantities of proscribed items – whether from pre-1991 or later'. He continued by saying that 'this does not necessarily mean that such items could not exist. They might

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– there remain long lists of items unaccounted for – but it is not justified to jump to the conclusion that something exists just because it is unaccounted for’.

Earlier statements by Blix and the Director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed El Baradei, repeated this conclusion. Baradei said on 7 March, for example, that ‘after three months of intrusive inspections, we have found no evidence or plausible indication of the revival of a nuclear weapon programme in Iraq’. On the same day, Blix told the Security Council that Iraq was taking ‘numerous initiatives... with a view to resolving longstanding open disarmament issues’ and that ‘this can be seen as ‘active’, or even ‘proactive’ cooperation’.

Indeed, it appears that the lack of threat posed by Iraq was also the conclusion of the British and US intelligence agencies, which was dismissed as the wrong line by political leaders committed to war. According to a report in the *Independent* (9 June 2003), No. 10 suppressed a six-page report from the Joint Intelligence Committee saying there was no evidence the Saddam regime posed a significantly greater threat than in 1991. The report was written in March 2003, the same month as Alastair Campbell, Blair’s Director of Communications (ie, head of propaganda) was briefing journalists that the government would present evidence in the next two weeks asserting that the regime was building weapons of mass destruction.

The lack of a credible threat was also evidenced in a report from the Pentagon’s Defence Intelligence Agency, leaked to the media in June. A summary obtained by CNN said that ‘there is no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons or where Iraq has or will establish its chemical warfare agent production facilities’. This report was produced in September 2002, the same month as the British dossier appeared alleging all manner of threats from Iraq.

Former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook told the Foreign Affairs Committee that by 2001 the government was ‘fairly confident that Saddam did not have a nuclear weapons capability, did not have a long-

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range missile capability and, indeed, at one point in the late 1990s, we were willing to consider closing those files and moving from inspection on to monitoring and verification'. Cook added that 'I was surprised to see allegations of a nuclear programme resurfacing'. He also said after the invasion that 'Frankly, I doubt whether there is a single senior figure in the intelligence services who is surprised at the difficulty in finding a weapon of mass destruction in working order'.

Clare Short said that 'the suggestion that there was the risk of chemical and biological weapons being weaponised and threatening us in the short time was spin. That didn't come from the security services'. When asked by a parliamentary enquiry whether she thought that ministers had exaggerated the use of intelligence material, she replied: 'that is my suggestion, yes'. This was done in order 'to make it [the threat] more immediate, more imminent, requiring urgent action'.

The *Guardian* reported that 'senior officials in the security and intelligence services made it clear that the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's Iraq was not as great as ministers suggested'. This battle within the elite provoked the chiefs of MI6 and MI5 to seek the government's assurance that it will never again pass off as official intelligence information which does not come from them, according to the *Guardian*. One source was quoted as saying that 'there were anxieties about the casual use of intelligence' and that 'it must not be doctored'.

Disagreements occurred between the security services and No.10 on the September 2002 dossier alleging the threat from Iraq. A government memo showed that Alastair Campbell agreed to MI6 demands to drop a conclusion he wanted included, describing the imminent threat posed by Iraq, in exchange for an introduction written by Blair claiming Saddam was 'a serious threat to UK interests'. Friction increased when, despite this deal, Campbell proceeded to brief journalists in the same terms as the removed conclusion.

This September 2002 dossier – the key plank of the British government's case against Iraq – was striking in two respects. First, it

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provided no actual evidence of a threat from Iraq (not surprisingly, since there was none). Robin Cook later noted that 'there is a striking absence of any recent and alarming and confirmed intelligence'. The *Guardian* reported that 'British government officials have privately admitted that they do not have any 'killer evidence' about weapons of mass destruction. If they had, they would have already passed it to the inspectors'. On the day before Blair announced that the dossier would soon be published, a Whitehall source was quoted as saying that the dossier was based on information found up to 1998, when the inspectors withdrew from Iraq, and that there was 'very little new to put into it'.

Second, the specific claims in the dossier were riddled with deceptions. Glen Rangwala, of Cambridge University, notes five key aspects: the sites mentioned as places where Iraq might be developing weapons of mass destruction were not been found by the inspectors to contain any; some claims in the dossier have subsequently been shown to be false (for example, the allegation that Iraq was seeking to procure uranium from Niger, which was based on forged documents, and that Iraq possessed WMD capable of being ready to use within 45 minutes; claims about prohibited weapons that it was highly unlikely that Iraq had (ballistic missiles with a range of up to 650 kms); the claim that Iraq had retained stockpiles of weapons from before 1990, which was highly unlikely; and the prime minister's foreword, stating that Iraq had 'beyond doubt' continued to produce WMD, was an exaggeration and contradicted by the chief weapons inspectors.

A second government report released in February 2003 has become known as the 'dodgy dossier', though hardly seems more or less dodgy than the first. Blair explicitly passed this report off as the work of the intelligence services only for it to be revealed that much of the document had been directly copied from a source on the internet. The 'authors' of the report in government were close to Alastair Campbell, who oversaw the project, which was intended mainly as a briefing for the media. The dossier exaggerates from the original text in a number of places, changing, for example, Iraq's 'aiding opposition groups in hostile

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regimes' to 'supporting terrorist organisations in hostile regimes'.

The most stark assertion by the government, included in the September dossier, was that Iraq's 'military planning allows for some of the WMD to be ready within 45 minutes of an order to use them'. The government later acknowledged this claim came from a single source, a senior Iraqi army officer. But it had already been contradicted by Blair himself who said, four months before in May, that 'there is no doubt in my mind' that Iraq had concealed its weapons and that it would be 'far more difficult for them to reconstitute that material to use in a situation of conflict'. Clare Short also told the parliamentary enquiry that in the numerous personal and written briefings she received from the intelligence services, the 45 minute allegation was never a feature.

After the invasion, the pretext of an Iraqi threat having served its purpose, ministers tried, in effect, to disassociate themselves from the deception. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told a parliamentary enquiry that 'I do not happen to regard the 45 minute statement having the significance which has been attached to it' – a preposterous assertion in light of Blair's emphasis on it in the foreword to the dossier and associated media briefings. Straw was also asked whether he still stood by the claim. Rather than simply replying yes Straw first said 'it was not my claim. I stand by the integrity of the JIC' [Joint Intelligence Committee], supposedly the original source. The most he could say was 'I accept the claim but did not make it'.

The failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq after the war has completely given the game away as to the government's claims. So the Foreign Secretary produced an intriguing response to this dilemma, by saying that this (ie, the whole pretext on which the war was waged) didn't matter. Straw said in a radio interview in May that it was 'not crucially important' to find WMD because the evidence of Iraqi wrongdoing was overwhelming. Now that the pretext has served its purpose, it can be dropped.

Similarly, US Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz told *Vanity Fair* magazine that WMD was chosen for reasons of political expediency:

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'The truth is that for reasons that have a lot to do with the US government bureaucracy, we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on – which was weapons of mass destruction – as the core reason'. A 'huge' outcome of the war, he noted, was the opportunity for the US to pull troops out of Saudi Arabia.

After the US/British task had been completed, Straw also downplayed the threat posed by Saddam. In the parliamentary enquiry, he said that neither he nor Blair 'had ever used the words 'immediate or imminent' threat' to describe Iraq, but that they had talked of 'a current and serious threat, which is very different'. Straw added: 'Impending, soon to happen, as it were, about to happen today or tomorrow, we did not use that because plainly the evidence did not justify that'. So, we could have waited for inspections, avoiding the deaths of thousands of people: surely a retrospective acceptance of criminal guilt. This has been largely ignored in the mainstream media in favour of more marginal issues such as the intra-elite spat between Alastair Campbell and the BBC.

A further desperate claim by the government was of Iraq's links with Al Qaida, which began to be asserted towards the end of 2002. A truly comic episode then began. Planners were unable to present any evidence of this link whatsoever. In October 2002, before the government appeared to formally seize on the new pretext, the *Guardian* quoted a well-placed source who, asked whether Saddam had any links with Al Qaida, said 'quite the opposite'. The paper noted that 'the clear message from British intelligence' is that far from allying itself with Al Qaida, the Iraqi regime was distancing itself from it. This was the interpretation of the murder in Baghdad of the Palestinian terrorist, Abu Nidal, in August 2002. Indeed, the Iraqi regime had been consistently opposed to Islamic fundamentalist groups (unlike London and Washington, incidentally, who can count many as allies, notably the ruling family of Saudi Arabia, the world's most fundamentalist state).

Planners then hit on a variant of the new formula: 'Terrorism and rogue regimes are part of the same picture', Jack Straw started saying around the turn of the year. The reason was that 'the most likely sources

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of technology and know-how for such terrorist organisations are rogue regimes'. Then, in speech after speech the same message was delivered. The assertion is plainly false since the record shows that the spread of WMD technology is likely to come as much from NATO countries as anywhere else (Germany, for example, probably provided the biggest aid to developing Iraq's WMD). But this mere truth is of course not the issue; simply asserting the link is. The media largely took their cue, generally reporting government assertions as serious, even if with some criticism and, most importantly, failing to ridicule them as simply propaganda.

After the alleged 'link' was hit upon, all sorts of imminent terrorist threats to Britain arose in the media, apparently the result of the 'security services' leaking unattributable stories. Examples are the supposed London underground nerve gas attack, reported threats to cross-channel ferries and the story of a traces of ricin found in the flat of a group of Algerians, together with numerous high-profile arrests. Much of the media have dutifully covered these stories, with some papers adding racist diatribes against asylum seekers now conveniently lumped into the camp of official terrorist threats. As noted by Mike Berry of the Glasgow University Media Group, Britain's foremost body critically analysing media reporting, these operations usually result in arrests, but few charges or convictions, but by then they 'have already served their purpose in helping to generate a climate of pervasive fear across the country'. The message the public was meant to get loud and clear was that removing Saddam would also remove a terrorist threat to us.

Clare Short also said following her resignation that the 'search for a diplomatic solution' to the crisis over Iraq was a charade, a further deception. While Blair was assuring her of a commitment to secure a second Security Council resolution, Short noted that three 'extremely senior people in the Whitehall system' said that the prime minister had already agreed with President Bush the 'previous summer' to invade Iraq the following February (later extended to March because of Turkey's refusal to accept US troops). 'I think the US wanted to go to war in the

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Spring and the UK, I now think, had pre-committed to that timetable', Short noted. 'We never found out whether Blix could be more successful' because 'I think Britain was never on that route'.

Short also said the effort was made to go through the UN 'for the sake of international public opinion' and that 'they wanted to be free to act, having tried the UN, when they wanted to act'. Crucially, she also stated that even worse than being personally misled was that 'this way of making the decision led to the lack of proper preparation for afterwards and I think that a lot of the chaos, disorder and mess in Iraq flowed from not having made the decision properly and made the preparations properly'.

The wider context of ongoing state propaganda is critical to understand and little known. Judging from the abyss between its rhetoric and the reality of policy, the Blair government may have broken all postwar British records in state propaganda on its foreign policy, and is recognised as a global leader in this area. Everyone knows about 'spin', but this term is itself spin, while the media has only reported some aspects of it: the extent of state propaganda goes much deeper.

The Ministry of Defence has a new name for state propaganda. It used to call it 'psychological operations' but New Labour renamed it 'information support' (a change Orwell would have understood). 'But', the House of Commons Defence Committee has said, 'the concept has changed little from the traditional objective of influencing the perceptions of selected target audiences'. The aim of these operations in Britain is 'to mobilise and sustain support for a particular policy and interpretation of events'.

In the war against Yugoslavia in 1999, the MoD identified four target audiences, according to the Defence Committee: the British public, Milosevic and his supporters; NATO allies and Kosovo Albanians. Thus the government identified the British public and Milosevic as targets: both are enemies, albeit in different ways.

The Defence Committee commented that with the British public 'the prime task was to mobilise and to keep on-side public and political

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support for the campaign'. It said that 'the whole campaign was designed with one and a half eyes on media perceptions' and concluded approvingly that:

'Ministers could not be accused of neglecting the media aspects of the battle. From the top-down, the UK government committed its considerable media operations resources to the campaign and to the task of mobilising international and British public opinion'.

Just before the bombing campaign against Yugoslavia was launched, NATO quadrupled the size of its media operation in Brussels on the advice of Alastair Campbell. The number of ethnic Albanians killed by Milosevic's forces in Kosovo was exaggerated, with the Foreign Office claiming 10,000 at the time, later revising the figure to 2,000. The bombing of Yugoslavia proceeded with an array of propaganda about good versus evil, a moral test for the future and government acting from the deepest humanitarian values (largely taken seriously, and actively promoted, by a willing media).

'The campaign directed against home audiences was fairly successful', the Defence Committee noted approvingly. It outlined Britain's role as NATO's chief propagandist, saying that the 'UK was rightly seen as the most proficient member of a generally underperforming Alliance' in media operations. It also noted that 'if anything, the UK's contribution to the war of perceptions was of more significance than its strictly military contribution'. But 'if anything, the UK's efforts to shape perceptions were less efficient than they could have been'.

So, an all-party group of MPs supported a government strategy to deceive the public, even saying it didn't go far enough – a nice illustration, perhaps, of the degree to which elected elites serve the public.

Who is the real enemy here? It is quite clearly the public. A former MI6 officer has said that the purpose of MI6's psychological warfare section is 'massaging public opinion into accepting controversial foreign policy decisions'. Blair, Campbell and others are proving their

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commitment to the same end. We are clearly in an era of systematic government psychological warfare against the public.



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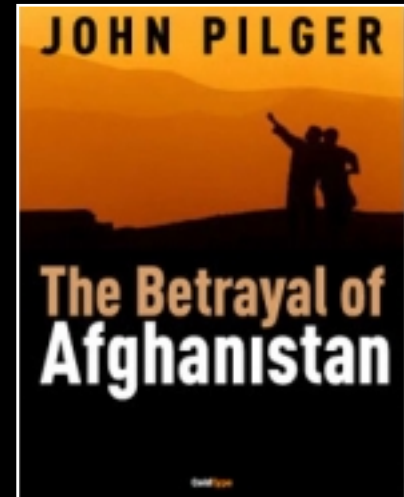
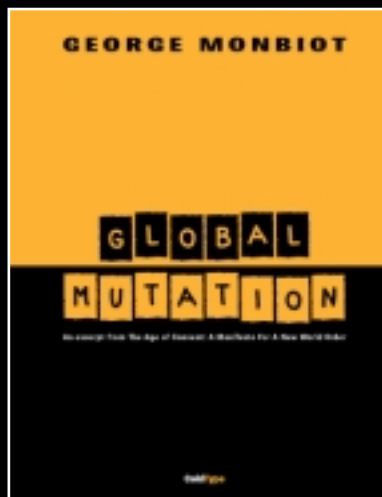
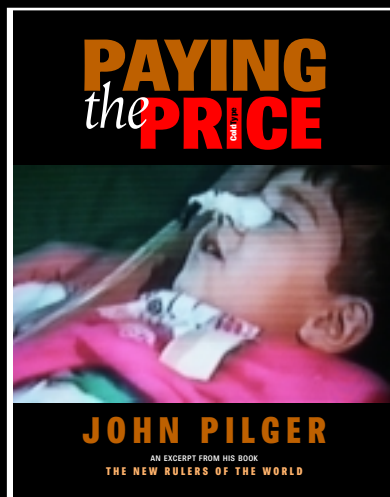
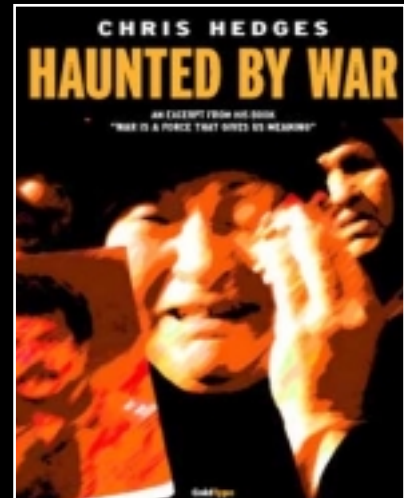
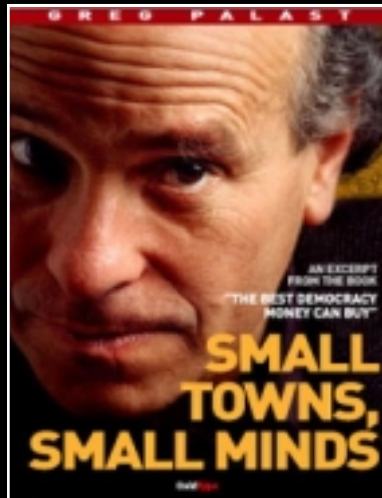
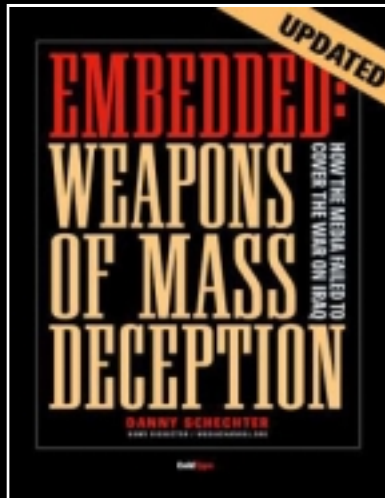
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