

WMD will be on Blair's headstone

Such a high crime does not, and will not, melt away; the facts cannot be changed. Tony Blair took Britain to war against Iraq illegally. He mounted an unprovoked attack on a country that offered no threat, and he helped cause the deaths of thousands of innocent people. The judges at the Nuremberg Tribunal following World War II, who inspired much of international law, called this "the gravest of all war crimes".

Blair had not the shred of a mandate from the British people to do what he did. On the contrary, on the eve of the attack, the majority of Britons clearly demanded he stop. His response was contemptuous of such an epic show of true democracy. He chose to listen only to the unelected leader of a foreign power, and to his court and his obsession.

With his courtiers in and out of the media telling him he was "courageous" and even "moral" when he scored his "historic victory" over a defenceless, stricken and traumatised nation, almost half of them children, his propaganda managers staged a series of unctuous public relations stunts.

The first stunt sought to elicit public sympathy with a story about him telling his children that he had "almost lost his job". The second stunt, which had the same objective, was a story about how his privileged childhood had really been "difficult" and "painful". The third and most outrageous stunt saw him in Basra, in southern Iraq last week, lifting an Iraqi child in his arms, in a school that had been renovated for his visit, in a city where education, like water and other basic services, are still a shambles following the British invasion and occupation.

When I saw this image of Blair holding a child in Basra, I happened to be in a hotel in Kabul in Afghanistan, the scene of an earlier "historic victory" of Bush and Blair in another stricken land. I found myself saying out loud the words, "ultimate obscenity". It was in Basra that I filmed hundreds of children ill and dying because they had been denied cancer treatment equipment and drugs

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under an embargo enforced with enthusiasm by Tony Blair.

It was the one story Blair's court would almost never tell, because it was true and damning.

Up to July last year, \$5.4 billion in vital and mostly humanitarian supplies for the ordinary people of Iraq were being obstructed by the United States, backed by Britain. Professor Karol Sikora, head of the World Health Organisation's cancer treatment programme, who had been to the same hospitals in Basra that I saw, told me: "The excuse that certain drugs can be converted into weapons of mass destruction is ludicrous. I saw wards where dying people were even denied pain-killers."

That was more than three years ago. Now come forward to a hot May day in 2003, and here is Blair – shirt open, a man of the troops, if not of the people – lifting a child into his arms, for the cameras, and just a few miles from where I watched toddler after toddler suffer for want of treatment that is standard in Britain and which was denied as part of a medieval siege approved by Blair. Remember, the main reason that these life-saving drugs and equipment were blocked, the reason Professor Sikora and countless other experts ridiculed, was that essential drugs and even children's vaccines could be converted to weapons of mass destruction.

Weapons of Mass Destruction, or WMD, has become part of the jargon of our time. When he finally goes, Blair ought have WMD chiselled on his political headstone. He has now been caught; for it must be clear to the most devoted courtier that he has lied about the primary reason he gave, repeatedly, for attacking Iraq.

There is a series of such lies; I have counted at least a dozen significant ones. They range from Blair's "solid evidence" linking Iraq with Al-Qaeda and September 11 (refuted by British intelligence) to claims of Iraq's "growing" nuclear weapons programme (refuted by the International Atomic Energy Agency when documents quoted by Blair were found to be forgeries), to perhaps his most audacious tale - that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction "could be activated within 45 minutes".

It is now Day 83 in the post-war magical mystery hunt for Iraq's "secret" arsenal. One group of experts, sent by George Bush, have already gone home.

This week, British intelligence sources exposed Blair's "45 minutes" claim as the fiction of one defector with scant credibility. A United Nations inspector has ridiculed Blair's latest claim that two canvas-covered lorries represent "proof" of mobile chemical weapons. Incredible, yesterday he promised "a new dossier".

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It is ironic that the unravelling of Blair has come from the source of almost all his lies, the United States, where senior intelligence officers are now publicly complaining about their "abuse as political propagandists".

They point to the Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz who, said one of them, fed "the most alarming tidbits to the president... so instead of giving the president the most considered, carefully examined information available, basically you give him the garbage. And then in a few days when it's clear that maybe it wasn't right, well then, you feed him some hot garbage."

That Blair's tale about Saddam Hussein being ready to attack "in 45 minutes" is part of the "hot garbage" is not surprising. What is surprising, or unbelievable, is that Blair did not know it was "hot", just as he must have known that Jack Straw and Colin Powell met in February to express serious doubts about the whole issue of weapons of mass destruction.

It was all a charade. Hans Blix, the chief UN weapons inspector, has spoken this truth: the invasion of Iraq was planned long ago, he said, and that the issue of weapons rested largely on "fabricated evidence". Blair has made fools not so much of the British people, most of whom were and are on to him, but of respectable journalists and broadcasters who channelled and amplified his black propaganda as headlines and lead items on BBC news bulletins. They cried wolf for him. They gave him every benefit of the doubt, and so minimised his culpability and allowed him to set much of the news agenda.

For months, the charade of weapons of mass destruction overshadowed real issues we had a right to know about and debate - that the United States intended to take control of the Middle East by turning an entire country, Iraq, into its oil-rich base. History is our evidence. Since the 19th century, British governments have done the same, and the Blair government is no different.

What is different now is that the truth is winning through. This week, publication of an extraordinary map left little doubt that the British military had plastered much of Iraq with cluster bombs, many of which almost certainly have failed to detonate on impact. They usually wait for children to pick them up, then they explode, as in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

They are cowardly weapons; but of course this was one of the most craven of all wars, "fought" against a country with no navy, no air force and rag-tag army. Last month, HMS *Turbulent*, a nuclear-power submarine, slipped back to Plymouth, flying the Jolly Roger, the pirates' emblem. How appropriate.

This British warship fired 30 American Tomahawk missiles at Iraq. Each missile

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cost 700,000 pounds, a total of 21 million pounds in taxpayers' money. That alone would have provided the basic services that the British government has yet to restore to Basra, as it is obliged to do under international law.

What did HMS Turbulent's 30 missiles hit? How many people did they kill and maim? And why have we heard nothing about this? Perhaps the missiles had sensory devices that could distinguish Bush's "evil-doers" and Blair's "wicked men" from toddlers? What is certain is they were not aimed at the Ministry of Oil.

This cynical and shaming chapter in Britain's modern story was written in our name, your name. Blair and his collaborators ought not to be allowed to get away with it. **JP**