

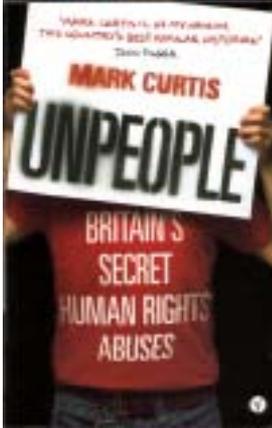
"Mark Curtis is, in my opinion, the country's
Best Popular Historian" – John Pilger

SECRET HISTORY

An excerpt from
UNPEOPLE:
Britain's Secret Human
Rights Abuses

Mark Curtis

ColdType



An excerpt from

UNPEOPLE

BRITAIN'S SECRET HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Published by Vintage, a division of Random House, London

ISBN 0 099 46972 3

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The Excerpt

This excerpt consists of the *Introduction* and Chapters 4 and 5 – *The new Ministry of Offence* and *Massacres in Iraq: The Secret History* – from the first section of *Unpeople*. *Unpeople* also has sections on *Propaganda, Reality; Terror, Aggression;* and *Coups, Dictators*. Each of the chapters has full notes for reference (the notes have been omitted from this excerpt)

Introduction

Unpeople is an attempt to uncover the reality of British foreign policy since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. It also analyses several major episodes in Britain's past foreign policy, exploring in detail formerly secret government files which have been ignored by mainstream commentators. They expose the truth behind British governments' supposed commitment to grand principles such as human rights, democracy, peace and overseas development.

Britain is bogged down in an unpopular occupation in the Middle East, the state has become widely distrusted by the public, accusations of spying on the UN have further undermined its international role, while Britain has effectively been marginalised in the EU. Seen from within the establishment, Tony Blair has become the greatest public liability since Anthony Eden, whose mistake was not his invasion of a foreign country (normal

British practice) but his defeat, in the Suez crisis Of 1956.

Massive public opposition to the invasion of Iraq has troubled the government and may prove to have deterred it from other ventures. Yet the course of New Labour's foreign policy since the invasion has been disastrous in terms of human rights, and is continuing to occur outside, any meaningful democratic scrutiny. British foreign policy is guided by a tiny elite – not just the handful of ministers in successive governments, but the civil servants, ambassadors, advisers and other unaccountable Whitehall mandarins around them, who set the country's agenda and priorities, and define its role within the world. Since March 2003, these decision-makers have been implementing a series of remarkable steps: first, Britain is deepening its support for state terrorism in a number of countries; second, unprecedented plans are being developed to increase Britain's ability to intervene militarily around the: world; third, the government is increasing its state propaganda operations, directed towards the British public; and fourth, Whitehall planners have in effect announced they are no longer bound by international law.

The principal victims of British policies are Unpeople – those whose lives are deemed worthless, expendable in the pursuit of power and commercial gain. They are the modern equivalent of the 'savages' of colonial days, who could be mown down by British guns in virtual secrecy, or else in circumstances where the perpetrators were hailed as the upholders of civilisation.

The concept of Unpeople is central to each of the past and cur-

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rent British policies considered in this book. Through its own intervention, and its support of key allies such as the United States and various repressive regimes, Britain has been, and continues to be, a systematic and serious abuser of human rights. I have calculated that Britain bears significant responsibility for around 10 million deaths since 1945 (see table), including Nigerians, Indonesians, Arabians, Ugandans, Chileans, Vietnamese and many others. Often, the policies responsible are unknown to the public and remain unresearched by journalists and academics.

In this book, I aim to document for the first time the secret record of certain episodes in government planning. The declassified files to which I refer are instructive not only for the light they throw on the past. They are also directly relevant to current British foreign policy surrounding Iraq, military intervention and the 'war against terror'. British interests and priorities have changed very little over time; essentially, the only variation has been in the tactics used to achieve them.

Of the basic principles that guided the decisions taken in these files, there are three which seem particularly apposite when considering current events.

The first is that British ministers' lying to the public is systematic and normal. Many people were shocked at the extent to which Tony Blair lied over Iraq; some might still be unable to believe that he did. But in every case I have ever researched on past British foreign policy, the files show that ministers and officials have sys-

tematically misled the public. The culture of lying to and misleading the electorate is deeply embedded in British policy-making.

A second, related principle is that policy-makers are usually frank about their real goals in the secret record. This makes declassified files a good basis on which to understand their actual objectives. This gap between private goals and public claims is not usually the result, in my view, of a conscious conspiracy. Certainly, planned state propaganda has been a key element in British foreign policy; yet the underlying strategy of misleading the public springs from a less conscious, endemic contempt for the general population. The foreign-policy decision-making system is so secretive, elitist and unaccountable that policy-makers know they can get away with almost anything, and they will deploy whatever arguments are needed to do this.

The third basic principle is that humanitarian concerns do not figure at all in the rationale behind British foreign policy. In the thousands of government files I have looked through for this and other books, I have barely seen any reference to human rights at all. Where such concerns are invoked, they are only for public-relations purposes.

Currently, many mainstream commentators would have us believe that there is a 'Blair doctrine', based on military intervention for humanitarian purposes. This is an act of faith on the part of those commentators, a good example of how the public proclamations of leaders are used unquestioningly to set the framework of analysis within the liberal political culture. If there

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is a Blair doctrine, it does indeed involve an unprecedented degree of military intervention – but to achieve some very traditional goals. The actual impact of foreign policies on foreign people is as irrelevant now as it ever has been.

The new Ministry of offence

It is rarely difficult to discover plausible reasons for government actions; the invasion of Iraq is no exception. A good starting point is to ignore official explanations and the media commentary they provoke and to look at what the government is saying elsewhere. Two important documents have recently been produced by the government, which help to explain possible reasons for the invasion. Both have been virtually ignored in the mainstream media. Together they offer a worrying insight into the current thinking of British foreign policy planners.

Securing foreign energy supplies

As Tony Blair, Jack Straw and others were swearing that war with Iraq could not possibly have anything to do with oil, the government published a document in February 2003, just weeks

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before the invasion began, showing how concerned it is with securing foreign energy supplies.

The document is the Department of Trade and Industry's white paper called *Our energy future Creating a low carbon economy*. Tony Blair's foreword to the document notes that Britain faces 'new challenges' and that 'our energy supplies will increasingly depend on imported gas and oil from Europe and beyond'. The document then outlines the central dilemma that 'as a country we have been a net exporter of energy . . . but this will change.' Britain, it says, is set to become a net importer of gas by around 2006 and of oil by around 2010:

By 2010 we are likely to be importing around three-quarters of our primary energy needs. And by that time half the world's gas and oil will be coming from countries that are currently perceived as relatively unstable, either in political or economic terms.

Therefore, the report continues, 'moving from being largely self-sufficient to being a net importer of gas and oil requires us to take a longer term strategic international approach to energy reliability'.

One solution emphasised strongly in the report is to diversify sources of energy and 'avoid the UK being reliant on too few international sources of oil and gas'. The key gas-supplying countries and regions will be Russia, the Middle East, North and

West Africa, and the Caspian Sea region. For oil, which accounts for 40 per cent of global energy consumption, the major producers will be Saudi Arabia, other Gulf states, South and Central America, Africa, Russia and the Caspian region. Of particular importance to ensuring diversity of oil sources, the report notes, are non-OPEC suppliers such as Russia, the Caspian region and West Africa. Therefore, ‘we will continue to promote good relations with existing and new suppliers in the Middle East, Russia, the Caspian and Africa’.

Overall, the report states that ‘we need to give greater prominence to strategic ‘energy issues in foreign policy’ across the government. ‘Our aims are to maintain strong relations with exporting countries’ while ‘in promoting diversity we will also work to minimise the risk of disruption to supplies from regional disputes’.

This document goes a long way to explaining the close relationships between London and the regimes discussed in part three of this book, notably Russia, Colombia, Indonesia and Nigeria – with all of whom Britain is maintaining ‘good relations’, while they exterminate sections of their populations. All are important producers of oil and gas offering alternative sources of supply to the Middle East. Russia, which has the world’s largest gas reserves, is especially important following the recent signing by BP and Shell of investment agreements in the Russian energy sector worth billions of pounds.

Nor is it fanciful to suggest that a factor in the British intervention in Sierra Leone – universally described as ‘humanitarian’

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– was to ensure regional ‘stability’ (i.e., pro-Western governments) partly to ensure continued access to oil in Nigeria and elsewhere in West Africa (see Chapter 7). As regards the Caspian, the desire to secure Western control over the region’s oil and gas reserves, in rivalry with Russia, was a likely factor in the Anglo-American bombing of Afghanistan, as I argued in [my previous book]Web of Deceit.

US strategy could hardly be clearer. In 2003 the Pentagon announced that it was moving 5,000-6,000 troops from bases in Germany to new bases in various countries in Africa. The express purpose was to protect US oil interests in Nigeria, which in future could account for 2.5 per cent of US oil imports. Undersecretary of State for African Affairs, Walter Kansteiner, had previously said that African oil ‘has become a national security strategic interest’. The Bush administration’s national energy policy, released in May 2001, predicted that West Africa would become ‘one of the fastest growing sources of oil and gas for the American market’. Currently the region supplies around 12 per cent of US crude-oil imports; the US National Intelligence Council estimates that this share will rise to 25 per cent by 2015’.

US officials, including Secretary of State Colin Powell, have recently visited African oil-producing countries such as Gabon, Sao Tome and Angola while the US has stepped up military ties to Nigeria at the same time as pressing it to pull out of OPEC. The political advantage of these states to the US (and also to Britain) is that none of them, apart from Nigeria, belongs to

OPEC. As Robert Diwan, a managing director of the Petroleum Finance Company, has noted, 'there is a long term strategy from the US government to weaken OPEC's hold on the market and one way to do that is to peel off certain countries'. US oil companies were set to invest around £10 billion in African oil in 2003.

Documents leaked to the *Guardian* in late 2003 provided further evidence of a joint Anglo-American strategy to 'secure African oil'. A US report to the President and Prime Minister noted that:

We have identified a number of key oil and gas producers in the West Africa area on which our two governments and major oil and gas companies could cooperate to improve investment conditions, good governance, social and political stability, and thus underpin long term security of supply.

These areas included Nigeria, Sao Tome, Equatorial Guinea and Angola. British officials were charged with developing 'investment issues facing Africa that could be ripe for US-UK coordinated attention'.

The report also stated that Britain and the US 'have noted the huge energy potential of Russia, Central Asia and the Caspian' and that 'in our discussions on how to move forward in approaching Russia and the Caspian/Central Asian countries, we have concluded that we have similar political, economic, social

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and energy objectives.'

Many post-war British interventions and policies are rooted in the need to exercise continued control over, or access to, energy supplies. The recent government documents signify a new phase in the ongoing policy defined in the declassified British files.

The issue of control of oil, rather than simply access, is more dearly the motivation for the US, which currently satisfies three-quarters of its energy demand from domestic sources. But control of oil has also been a critical factor for Whitehall particularly given British companies' huge role in the international oil industry and their vast investments in many countries. As Foreign Secretary Rab Butler told the Prime Minister in April 1964:

It is not that we are frightened of oil being cut off by unfriendly local governments, but the profitability of the oil companies' operations and the supply of oil to consumer countries including our own on acceptable terms, is most important for our economy and our balance of payments. This depends in part on the diversity of political control of the main sources of oil (eg, if Iraq controlled Kuwait, we might all be held to ransom). This would be especially dangerous for the UK for we draw 60% of our oil requirements from the area.

Similarly, the Treasury noted in 1956 that, given Britain's dependence on oil:

It is highly desirable that we should not have to rely on oil which is increasingly controlled by other powers, including even the USA, whose interests are not necessarily identical with our own. Further, the large investments of British companies in the Western hemisphere provide a partial insurance against the interruption of supplies from the Middle East.

A Cabinet Office report of 1960 noted that ‘there is a particular United Kingdom interest at stake’ in the Middle East, namely ‘the profits made by the United Kingdom oil companies from their operations in the area’. The overall strategy was therefore to be ‘continued control of sources of oil with consequential profits to United Kingdom’ [sic].

The files show the huge profits made in the past by British oil companies in the Middle East. The Treasury noted in 1956 that the benefit to the British balance of payments generated by British oil companies was around £200 million a year in recent years. In 1964 the Foreign Office similarly noted that ‘our balance of payments depends significantly on oil operations’ in the region. It calculated that British oil companies continued to earn the balance of payments £200 million per year ‘and might be much more’. No wonder that the, British strategy was ‘to preserve as long as possible the advantageous arrangements under which we obtain our oil from the Middle East’.

The Foreign Office noted in March 1967 that oil supplied 40

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per cent of the world's energy needs and that the international trade in oil was controlled by eight companies, two of which, Shell and BP, were British. It stated that 'the United Kingdom has a stake in the international oil industry second only to that of the United States'. The overseas book value of British investments was £2,000 million. Also:

From our massive stake in the international oil industry, we enjoy two major advantages for the balance of payments: our oil costs a good deal less in overseas payments than it would if we bought it all from foreign companies; we get large invisible earnings from the business of producing and selling oil in other countries.

The Foreign Office estimated that the 'earnings' for the balance of payments in the second category alone were £142 million in 1961, £179 million in 1962, £201 million in 1963, £155 million in 1964 and £158 million in 1965. It also stated in this secret report that 'this information has never been officially published and the calculations and estimates are highly confidential'.

The level of secrecy is unsurprising: these profits resulted from British control of local resources, and were thus a form of plunder of poverty-stricken populations. This was recognised by foreign-policy planners, as was the need to continue the state of affairs. Explicit British policy was to oppose any suggestion that oil resources be used primarily for the benefit of local popula-

tions; the threat of nationalism has always been regarded as the most dangerous one in the Middle East.

Control over Middle Eastern oil was (and is) to be secured through close relations with the repressive feudal families of the Gulf sheikhdoms, in turn aided by British arms exports and military training. Then as now, policy was 'to ensure the maintenance of our oil supplies by defending the rulers of the oil states, particularly Kuwait', as the Cabinet Secretary said in 1963. The 'energy future' document recently produced by the Blair government is merely the latest attempt to promote these basic British goals.

Iraq as mission one

In December 2003 the government produced another extraordinary public document, this time outlining its military strategy. It counts as one of the most worrying pieces of government literature I have ever seen, even including the declassified files. Nine months after the invasion of Iraq, the New Labour government delivered a very clear message: from now on, it will be more of the same.

The document is a Defence white paper, entitled *Delivering security in a changing world* – a formulation worthy of Orwell. It surpasses the military strategy outlined in the government's Strategic Defence Review (SDR) produced in 1998, which stated that the priority in future will be 'force projection' and that 'in the post cold war world we must be prepared to go to the crisis

rather than have the crisis come to us'. This involved plans to buy two larger aircraft carriers 'to power more flexibly [sic] around the world'.

Other new weapons systems would be a new generation of attack helicopters, submarines equipped with cruise missiles, and fighter and bomber aircraft. It stated that 'for the next decade at least' the air defence of Britain would be a low priority but 'long-range air attack will continue to be important both as an integral part of warfighting and as a coercive instrument to support political objectives'. A key aspect was the government's retention of nuclear weapons with which Britain should be 'retaining an option for a limited strike' and which would be able 'to deter any threat to our vital interests'.

A new chapter added to the SDR in July 2002 noted 'the emphasis on expeditionary operations', and the need for 'rapidly deployable intervention forces' And 'force projection and strike capabilities'. Noting that the government spending review in 2002 envisaged 'the biggest sustained real increase in defence spending plans for 20 years', the report states that:

Experience since 1998, and since the 11 September attacks, suggests that we may need to deploy forces further afield than Europe, the Gulf and the Mediterranean (which the SDR identified as the primary focus of our interests) more often than we had envisaged.

In this, ‘we wish to work more closely with our most important ally, the US’. Out of the spending increase, around £1 billion was intended for equipment and capabilities for the ‘additional challenges’.

One especially revealing passage demonstrates very clearly the utility of the ‘war against terrorism’ for achieving these British military goals:

The capability priorities which have emerged from our work on countering international terrorism are entirely consistent with the requirements generated by other likely demands on our forces. They reinforce the thrust of our existing plans. Extra strategic lift and communications, for example, have much wider utility across a range of operations beyond counter terrorism. So it makes sense to think of these as components of all rapid reaction forces, rather than as dedicated counterterrorism capabilities.

Translated: the new intervention capabilities we say are needed for the ‘war against terrorism’ can be used for the wider need to intervene.

This strategy was applied in the invasion of Iraq. The MoD report, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the future*, states that:

The operation in Iraq demonstrated the extent to which the UK armed forces have evolved successfully to deliver

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the expeditionary capabilities envisaged in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review and the 2002 New Chapter.

The latest document, the December 2003 white paper, says that British intervention capability needs to go beyond even that envisaged in these two earlier documents. It states that 'we must extend our ability to project force further afield than the SDR envisaged including in 'crises occurring across subSaharan Africa and South Asia' and arising from 'the wider threat from international terrorism'. 'The threat from international terrorism', it notes, 'now requires the capability to deliver a military response globally'. It calls for the British military to conduct 'expeditionary operations' while 'rapidly deployable forces' are needed for 'a range of environments across the world'. 'Priority must be given to meeting a wider range of expeditionary tasks, at greater range from the United Kingdom and with everincreasing strategic, operational and tactical tempo'.

The forces needed include cruise missiles which 'offer a versatile capability for projecting land and air power ashore', and two new aircraft carriers and combat aircraft which will 'offer a step increase in our ability to project air power from the sea. These are key elements in a 'modern expeditionary strategy'. It reiterates 'the need to confront international terrorism abroad rather than waiting for attacks within the UK'.

In all this, the report states that 'our armed forces will need to be interoperable with US command and control structures'. At

the same time, it notes that ‘we do not believe the world community should accept the acquisition of nuclear weapons by further states’ – only the exclusive club of which Britain is a member has this right.

The report continues:

Whereas in the past it was possible to regard military force as a separate element in crisis resolution, it is now evident that the successful management of international security problems will require ever more integrated planning of military, diplomatic and economic instruments.

Translated: we will increasingly threaten those who do not do what we say with the prospect of military force.

Elsewhere, the report highlights the importance of ‘effects based operations’, which means:

that military force exists to serve political or strategic ends ... Our conventional military superiority now allows us more choice in how we deliver the effect we wish to achieve.

While terrorism is meant to provide the rationale for this increased force-projection capability, the report notes in a section called ‘UK policy aims’ that:

more widely the UK has a range of global interests including economic well-being based around trade, overseas and foreign investment and the continuing free flow of natural resources.

At the same time as the MoD was producing this strategy paper, the Foreign Office released a report on 'UK international priorities', stating that 'our ability to project armed force will be a key instrument of our foreign policy' and that 'early action to prevent conflict' played an important part' in this. The context was the identification of 'eight international strategic priorities' for British foreign policy, one of which was 'security of UK and global energy supplies'. It was also reported that the Prime Minister's strategy unit, based in the Cabinet Office, was conducting a review of 'how to create a consensus on legitimacy of external interventions' in 'failed states'.

This strategy of enhanced intervention is confirmed various speeches given by Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, who has said that the British military is being equipped 'for more frequent operations' and 'higher numbers of concurrent smaller operations' in regions beyond Europe. Indeed, Hoon has observed that since the SDR in 1998 there has been 'a new operation arising on average about once a year'.

It was Britain not the US that first committed itself to strategy that is mislabelled 'pre-emption'. A better description would be 'preventive': it means that military force will be undertaken

not in response to an imminent threat, but before a threat materialises. The first is a kind of self-defence; the 'threat' posited in the latter is open to interpretation and can easily be used to justify offence, as in the invasion of Iraq.

Indeed, these documents amount to a reconfiguration of British military strategy to an overt focus on offensive operations; Britain now has a Ministry of Offence. 'Defence' was always a misnomer intended largely for public relations: Britain has always had a strong intervention capability and has conducted numerous offensive operations which have had nothing to do with defending Britain or the interests of the public. But now this is barely even being hidden. Geoff Hoon has said that 'long experience indicates that a wholly defensive posture will not be enough'; the key 'is to take the fight to the terrorist'. This 'terrorist' threat is the cover for greater and more frequent interventions. While the media have been sidetracked by issues such as who named David Kelly when and at what meeting, the Defence Secretary has been pushing ahead with plans for a new 'expeditionary strategy' that envisages more Iraqs all over the world. Presumably, only the current humiliation in Iraq, together with public opposition, is holding the Blair cabal back.

The intellectual justification for this new phase in imperial strategy comes from 'liberal imperialists' such as Robert Cooper, a senior British diplomat close to Tony Blair. Cooper has written, apparently without irony, that 'the challenge to the post-modern world is to get used to the idea of double standards'.

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‘Among ourselves’, he believes, ‘we operate on the basis of laws and open cooperative security’. . .

But when dealing with more old-fashioned kinds of states outside the postmodern continent of Europe, we need to revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era – force, pre-emptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary to deal with those who still live in the nineteenth century world of every state for itself. Among ourselves, we keep the law but when we are operating in the jungle, we must also use the laws of the jungle.

The comparison of declassified files and recent government publications suggests that basic strategies alter very little over time; only the pretexts change. The February 2003 report on securing foreign energy supplies and the December 2003 strategy for enhanced global intervention are two sides of the same coin. The earlier document is a clearly stated rationale for the latter – a new period of global intervention, which provides a more plausible motivation for the invasion of Iraq than the proclamations about ‘humanitarian intervention’, terrorism and WMD parroted by many media commentators and academic analysts.

Massacres in Iraq: The secret History

Britain has long been complicit in aggression and human-rights abuses in Iraq. Indeed, many of the roots of the current crisis in the country can be found in the horrific events of the 1960s. Massacres in Iraq: Formerly secret British files tell the story of British backing for repression and killings by regimes in Baghdad well before the arrival of Saddam Hussein. They reveal stunning levels of complicity in aggression against the Kurds, including in the use of chemical weapons – policies which are the roots of the later Western support extended to Saddam.

At the moment, London and Washington are bent on maintaining in power a friendly regime in Baghdad. It is a policy with a long historical precedent, and a background which does not bode well for the future of Iraq.

The fall of the monarchy

The British-backed monarchical regime of King Faisal and Prime Minister Nuri El Said was 'overthrown in an Arab nationalist revolution on 14 July 1958, which established a republic under Brigadier Abdul Karim Qasim. Said and the royal family were killed and the British embassy, long known to be the power behind the throne, was sacked by a mob with the loss of one British life. British embassy officials described it as 'popular revolution' based on 'pent-up passions of hatred and frustration, nourished on unsatisfied nationalist emotion, hostility to autocratic government, resentment at Western predominance, disgust at unrelieved poverty'.

The regime Britain had supported for so long was one of the most unpopular in the history of the Middle East. The British were well aware of its repressive features. A Foreign Office brief noted, for example, that 'wealth and power have remained concentrated in the hands of a few rich landowners and tribal sheikhs centred round [sic] the Court.'

Three months before the revolution, Sir Michael Wright, Britain's ambassador in Baghdad, had told Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd that 'the constitutional position in Iraq is very like what it was in the United Kingdom at the accession of George III. Political power resided in the palace, the King appointed and dismissed prime ministers at will while 'the opposition may not hold public meetings or express opposition to the regime itself in the press'. Wright also noted that 'the efficiency of the Iraqi secu-

rity service has increased materially in the last year, thanks largely to British assistance with training and equipment'; the situation had been one of 'complete political suppression'. Wright then outlined his opposition to democracy by saying that 'a complete relaxation of present controls on freedom of expression coupled with completely free elections' would 'produce chaos and possibly a revolution'; his recommendations extended no further than to allow the formation of political parties.

In one stroke, the popular nationalist revolution removed a pro-British regime and a key pillar of British imperial policy in the Middle East. Still worse, Qasim was conceded by Whitehall to be personally 'extremely popular'. His rule was certainly autocratic and his police force often savage in its repression, but compared to the previous Said regime, Qasim's was relatively benign. Although in the early days, Qasim was tolerated by Britain, he soon joined the ranks of Sukarno in Indonesia, Jagan in British Guiana and Nasser in Egypt as popular, nationalist enemies to British interests in the Third World.

The threats posed by Qasim were aptly summed up by a British member of the Iraq Petroleum Corporation, which controlled Iraq's oil, in a memo to the Foreign Office just months before the regime was overthrown. Qasim, he wrote:

wished to give Iraq what he considered political independence, dignity and unity, in brotherly cooperation with other Arabs and in neutrality between the World power blocs; he

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wished to increase and distribute the national wealth, partly on grounds of nationalist and socialist principle, partly out of simply [sic] sympathy for the poor; on the basis of economic prosperity and justice he wished to found a new society and a new democracy; and he wished to use this strong, democratic, Arabist Iraq as an instrument to free and elevate other Arabs and Afro-Asians and to assist the destruction of 'imperialism', by which he largely meant British influence in the underdeveloped countries.'

Qasim's policy on oil is the subject of a huge amount of correspondence in the declassified files and a major reason why Whitehall wanted him removed. The background was that in 1961 Qasim announced that the Iraqi government wanted to take more than 50 per cent of the profits from oil exports; he had also complained that the British companies were fixing the oil prices. In a law in December, he purported to deprive the IPC of about 99.5 per cent of its concession, the expropriated areas including valuable proven oil fields. A draft law setting up a new Iraqi National Oil Corporation had been published in October 1962 but had not come into force by the time of the coup that removed Qasim in February 1963.

Also of major concern to Britain was Iraq's claim to Kuwait. In 1961, Britain landed troops in Kuwait supposedly to defend it from an imminent Iraqi attack. The declassified files, however, show that British planners fabricated the Iraqi threat to justify

a British intervention in order to secure the reliance of the leaders of the oil-rich state on British 'protection', as described in *Web of Deceit*.

The 1963 massacres

The Qasim regime fell, its leader executed, on 8 February 1963 in a coup under General Abdul Arif and Prime Minister General Abdul al-Bakr of the Baath party, which thus secured power for the first time. The coup was the result of substantial CIA backing and organisation and was masterminded by William Lakeland, stationed as an attache at the US embassy in Baghdad. The US had previously actively conspired to murder Qasim, and the CIA's Health Alteration Committee, as it was called, once sent Qasim a monogrammed, poisoned handkerchief, though it either failed to work or to reach its intended victim.

According to author Said Aburish, the US had insisted beforehand on implementing a detailed plan to eliminate the Iraqi Communist party as a force in Iraqi politics, meaning physical extermination of its members. The CIA provided the February coup leaders with a list of names, around 5,000 of whom were hunted down and murdered. They included senior army officers as well as lawyers, professors, teachers and doctors. There were pregnant women and old men among them, many of whom were tortured in front of their children. The eliminations mostly took place on an individual basis, house-to-house visits by hit squads who knew where their victims were and who carried out on-the-

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spot executions. 'The coup is a gain for our side', Robert Komer, a member of the National Security Council, told President Kennedy immediately after.

Saddam Hussein, then a junior Baath party member, was closely involved in the coup. As an Iraqi exile in Cairo he and other plotters had since 1961 benefited from contacts with the CIA arranged by the Iraqi section of Egyptian intelligence. During the coup Saddam had rushed back from Cairo and was personally involved in the torture of leftists during the massacres.

Britain had also long wanted to see the fall of Qasim. The declassified files contain mentions of British willingness to be involved in his ousting, and several of the files from this period have not been declassified. It appears that Britain may have known of the coup in advance, but there is no direct evidence that Britain was in contact with the plotters.

Five months before the February coup, a note by a Foreign Office official refers to the British ambassador's view 'that the sooner Qasim falls the better and that we should not be too choosy about doing things to help towards this end'. The ambassador, Sir Roger Allen, was also reported to be supporting 'a forward policy against Qasim'. One note from Allen five weeks before the coup refers to a plot against Qasim, stating that 'we have been assured that the plot is carefully worked out in detail and that the names of all those destined for key positions has been chosen'; but this note does not suggest that General Arif, who eventually led the coup, would be its figurehead. Allen also

notes the importance of his staff in Baghdad not 'appearing to be aware or mixed up in plotting and I have recently emphasised again to members of the staff, including the new Air Attache, that we must always act with the greatest caution'.

Eleven days before the coup, Ambassador Allen was told by the US charge d'affaires in Baghdad that 'it was time to start building up a credit with Qasim's opponents, against the day when there would be a change of government here'. Allen concluded that 'for the first time since I have been here, I have the feeling that the end may just possibly come in the foreseeable future'. This does seem like a tip-off, at least, from the US, whose embassy was closely conniving with the plotters. Indeed, one day after the coup, on 9 February, Roger Allen cabled the Foreign Office that the new Minister of Defence 'was expected to become Air Force Commander in the event of a coup' - indicating some kind of advance knowledge.

What is indisputable is that British officials in Baghdad and London knew of the massacres and welcomed the new regime carrying them out. The files make clear that Roger Allen and another embassy official were monitoring Iraqi radio reports on the first two days of the coup. Messages from the new regime called on people to 'help wipe out all those who belong to the Communists and finish them off'. They urged people to 'destroy the criminals' and to 'kill them all, kill all the criminals'. These announcements were all repeated several times. Allen told the Foreign Office on 11 February that 'the radio has been exhorting

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people to hound down the communists. Such fighting as had taken place seems to have been directed at any rate in part against communist sympathisers'. He sent a transcript of all these messages to the Foreign Office on 15 February.

Britain's military attache in the Baghdad embassy said in a despatch of 19 February that on 9 February there had been 'firing throughout the city' and the 'rounding up of communists', adding: 'since the embassy is in a communist stronghold area, considerable small arms firing was heard throughout most of the day'. On 10 February the embassy was telling the Foreign Office of the 'rounding up of Communists' and 'some sporadic shooting in various parts of the city'. On the same day, the Foreign Office noted that 'strong action is being taken against the Communists'.

On 11 February, the embassy was reporting 'some firing' in outlying districts where there were believed to be Communists, with 'stories of heavy casualties, presumably among civilians, but these are not confirmed'. By 26 February, the embassy was saying that the new government was trying 'to crush organised communism in Iraq' and that there were rumours that 'all the top communists have been seized and that fifty have been quietly executed', although adding that 'there may be no truth in this'.

The following month, a letter from the Iraq Petroleum Corporation to the Foreign Office referred to 'the hunt for communists' and that 'it remains to be seen how far they will be physically destroyed'. Writing six weeks after the coup Foreign

Office official refers to a 'bloodbath' and 'we should not wish to be seen publicly to advocate such methods of suppressing communism'. 'Such harshness', the official noted, 'may well have been necessary as a short term expedient'.

'The communist menace was tackled with determination,' Britain's ambassador to Iraq reflected in a note to Alec Douglas-Home in May, adding that the Iraqi government said there were now 14,000 political prisoners and that 'the prisons are still overflowing with political detainees'. By June, Foreign Office official Percy Cradock – later to become chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee – noted that 'the Iraqi regime is continuing its severe repression of communists', with executions recently announced.

It was recognised by the Foreign Office that the massacre of the Communists was an entirely offensive operation. It noted on 9 February, for example, that killings were occurring at 'a time when there is no indication of a Communist threat or of any effective opposition to the new government'.

British officials in effect supported these massacres. Roger Allen told the Foreign Office a week after the coup that 'the process of winking out Communists in Baghdad and the towns is continuing' but that 'a Communist problem will remain':

The present government is doing what it can, and therefore it is my belief that we should support it and help it in the long term to establish itself so that this communist threat may gradually diminish.

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The new government, he wrote, 'probably suits our interests pretty well'. In a different despatch on the same day he wrote that since 'communist opposition is likely to continue' and that, in his view, there was no alternative to this government, 'it is therefore essential for it to get consolidated quickly'. It will 'need all the support and money it can get'.

By this time the Foreign Office had already sent round a memo to various embassies explaining the British attitude to the coup. It said that the new regime 'has already taken strenuous action against local communists' and that 'repression of the local communists' will probably be maintained, while one of its other key problems will be 'the pacification of the Kurds'. 'We wish the new regime well, the memo stated, after referring to the deterioration of British relations with the previous Qasim regime.

An internal Foreign Office brief also commented that the new rulers 'have shown courage and steadfastness in hatching and executing their plot' and that they should be 'somewhat friendlier to the West'.

Allen met the Foreign Minister of the new military regime two days after the coup. There is no mention in his record of having raised the subject of the killings; the meeting is described as 'extremely friendly'. Indeed, there is no mention in any of the files that I have seen of any concern whatever about the killings – the only response they prompted from the British government was support for those conducting them.

Thus officials noted that they should 'examine all possible

means of profiting from the present anti-communist climate in Iraq' and to make 'a major effort to establish links with the new rulers'. The Foreign Office recommended various ways 'to make gestures' to the new regime, including 'to be helpful over the supply of arms' and to 'provide military training courses if the Iraqis want them'. This memo was written on the same day that Allen sent the Foreign Office the radio transcripts urging Iraqis to 'kill the criminals'.

The embassy in Baghdad similarly recommended 'some kind of warm-hearted gestures' to 'those who had suffered in the process of dismantling Communism in Iraq' – that is, to those who had suffered in overcoming the Communists, not those who were victims of the massacres. This would be done in 'appreciation of the anti-communist effort here'.

London's policy was to provide diplomatic recognition to the new regime right away and to establish 'a business relationship' with it. It was also to 'make friendly contact as soon as possible with the Baathist and nationalist leaders' and to invite members of the National Guard (that is, the organisation which had helped to carry out the massacres) to London. But this needed to be done 'under some other heading' to keep it secret, so as to avoid being seen publicly to identify with any particular group. The policy was shared with the US, where a senior state department official told the Foreign Office that if the coup 'resulted in a regime of Baathist complexion its policies were more likely to be acceptable to the United States government'.

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It was hoped that one advantage of the new regime was 'a chance for a new period in the oil companies' relations with the government' and to replace Qasim's previous oil policies, which had clearly been threatening the Western oil corporations' domination of the Iraq Petroleum Corporation.

A week after the coup, Roger Allen was happily reporting that things are 'almost back to normal', hoping that the 'period of frustration' under Qasim was now over 'and that there will be scope for relatively constructive work here'. This was in full recognition that 'the problem of the communists and the slum dwellers is not yet, however, by any means removed' – therefore, the repression of Communists by the regime would presumably continue. By April, Allen could refer to 'our record of friendship for the new regime'.

The Foreign Office also mentioned the need to 'keep track' of a new organisation set up by Labour MPs called the British Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Iraq, which had the idea of visiting Iraq and investigating the killings. The embassy also 'warned' the Foreign Office 'of similar human rights activities by Lord Bertrand Russell, described as a 'source of irritation' in Anglo-Iraqi relations.

Another advantage to the British was the new regime's stance towards Kuwait. After Qasim was overthrown the British advised Kuwait to pre-empt any future threat to their independence by the new regime by bribing it. The Kuwaitis paid the new Baath government £50 million which, according to Said

Aburish, goes a long way towards explaining Saddam's attempt to intimidate Kuwait in 1990-1991, before invading, and force it to pay him money to meet Iraq's financial needs.

Armed Aggression

British complicity in violence in Iraq goes well beyond the February coup, however. Also in 1963, Britain supported the same Iraqi government's aggression against the Kurds. The precedent set by this episode plays an important part in understanding how Saddam Hussein got away with a campaign of such horrific violence against the Kurds in the 1980s.

On 10 June 1963, the Iraqi military began a vicious attack on the Kurds, whose struggle for autonomy against Baghdad had been stepped up in 1961. The Kurds were also calling for a share in Iraqi oil and the exclusion of Arab troops from Kurdistan, the northern region of Iraq.

British officials noted the 'Iraqi intention to carry out terror campaign' [sic]. Within ten days of operations, they wrote: 'the army are now apparently engaged in the clearing out and destruction of Kurdish villages in the Kirkuk neighbourhood'. With two-thirds of the Iraqi army deployed in the north, the Office reported that 'the Iraq [sic] government is now clearly making an all-out effort to settle the Kurdish problem once and for all'. 'Ruthless tactics' were being employed by the Iraqi military, including air strikes.

The British embassy in Baghdad reported to London on 22 June:

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The brutality of the methods used by the army is likely to mar Arab/Kurdish relations for some time to come. The army has succeeded in clearing the Kurdish villages in lowland areas around vulnerable points ... The method adopted is to take the villages one by one, shelling them from a safe distance with tank guns and field artillery, giving sometimes little or no warning to the inhabitants. After a safe interval the National Guard or government-paid Kurds move in to loot ... In some cases, eg in the Kurdish quarters of Kirkuk, bulldozers have been used to knock down houses. The result is that the men take to the hills, women and children are often left to fend for themselves and the village is left abandoned and, for the time being, quiet.

The Foreign Office recognised there were certain dangers in this campaign for British interests. These were: that 'unsuccessful hostilities could jeopardise the present Iraq regime'; that fighting might increase the opportunities for Russian trouble-making in Kurdistan; that the Kurdish unrest could spread to Turkey, Iran and Syria; and there was also a risk of damage to the IPC's oil installations and of interruptions in the flow of oil. Glaringly absent from this Foreign Office list was the effect the fighting would have on the Kurdish people. The files indicate that the ambassador encouraged Baghdad to negotiate a settlement with the Kurds, but once the campaign was launched,

Britain provided outright support for the Iraqi government.

Before Baghdad began operations, Britain had already approved major arms exports which they knew would be used against the Kurds. Douglas-Home 'is anxious that in general Iraq's arms requirements should be met as quickly as possible', one file reads. On 11 April, ministers approved the export of 250 Saracen armoured personnel carriers which, it was recognised, were 'possibly for use if needed against the Kurds'. Also approved were exports of artillery ammunition, 22 Hunter fighter aircraft and rockets for Iraq's existing Hunters, 'again possibly for use against the Kurds'. 'There are considerable commercial advantages to be gained', a ministerial committee commented, and 'the scope for military exports is considerable' – the deal was worth £6 million.

Officials decided to delay the supply of some of the rockets since:

We must give the Iraqis some of their requirements in order to enable them to hold their own vis-a-vis the Kurds, but it may be inadvisable to give them too generous supplies, since this might only encourage them to be more intransigent [sic] with the Kurds and, if fighting breaks out and there are indiscriminate rocket attacks, there might be parliamentary and public criticism.

After Baghdad attacked Kurdistan, the British government

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further deliberated on whether to deliver the rockets, a 'sensitive item' since they 'are intended for use against the Kurds'. In the files, there is no consideration of the humanitarian consequences, merely the effect on public relations: 'The news of the fighting may provoke public criticism of our decision to supply Iraq with arms', a briefing for the Cabinet reads.

Two weeks into the campaign, the Foreign Office wrote that 'we are ready to do our best to meet Iraqi requirements in the field of arms and training', though ministers were still keen to delay the supply of rockets, for which the Iraqis were pressing. In July, ministers approved the export of 500 of these 'high explosive rockets'. A senior Iraqi air-force commander, Brigadier Hilmi, had told the British ambassador that he 'needed these weapons now in order to bring their war against the insurgents to a quick and successful conclusion'. When told that Britain would be delivering the rockets, Hilmi was 'genuinely grateful', according to the ambassador, who further commented that the commander 'would be delighted at our gesture'.

A Foreign Office brief to embassies explaining British policy said that 'we have throughout thought it possible that any arms we supply might be used against the Kurds, but we have had to weigh this argument against other factors, which were to develop good relations with the new Iraqi rulers and to wean them away from Soviet military supplies.

By the end of August 1963, the Iraqi air force had collected 500 Hunter rockets, a further 1,000 were to be delivered on 1

September and another 500 on 1 October. A further 18,000 to be provided later. Following this, approvals were given to supply 280,000 rounds of ammunition for Saracen cars, mortar bombs, 25-pounder shells, armed helicopters and sterling submachine guns.”

Britain also agreed to requests to send a team to Iraq to mend the guns on Centurion tanks which had been supplied by Britain. The ‘one tricky political point’, the Foreign Office observed, was the continuation of Iraqi operations against the Kurds. British officers could not be seen to be going near the areas of fighting; therefore, ‘if tanks guns [sic] break down in the North, the tanks would simply have to be brought to Baghdad and repaired there’.

There is no doubt that ministers knew exactly what they were authorising. In October, for example, a Foreign Office official approved the export of demolition slabs on the understanding that these ‘will probably be used not only to destroy captured Kurdish strong points but also for the demolition of Kurdish villages’ This complicity in the destruction of Kurdish villages was the forebear of the same British policies with regard to Iraqi aggression in the 1980s and Turkish terror against Kurds in the 1990s.

Indeed, British officials were aware that the Iraqi aggression they were supporting may have constituted genocide. The Foreign Office noted in a minute in September that ‘Iraq’s methods have been brutal and might sustain a charge of attempting

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to destroy or reduce the Kurds as a racial minority'. The British embassy in Baghdad had told the Foreign Office on 6 July that:

the Kurds tend to be shot rather than taken prisoner. We have had some indications from officials that this may be deliberate policy ... We have since heard reports of an intention drastically to reduce the Kurdish population in the North and to resettle the area with Arabs and of at least one Arab officer's disgust with the methods employed as inhuman and ill-advised in the long term. There is no doubt at all of the government's deliberate destruction of villages ... The government of Iraq ... have resorted to the use of force without the normal civilised safeguards against undue loss of civilian life and perhaps even with some intention of reducing the size of the Kurdish minority in Iraq, or at least cowing it permanently.'

The date of this memo is important: most of the British arms exports to Iraq for use against Kurds were approved after this date; policy was thus similar to the increased British support given to the Saddam regime after the chemical-warfare attacks on Kurdistan in March 1988.

Another similarity between 1963 and 1988 was British attempts to ensure there would be no international action taken against Iraq. In 1963, British officials worked to ensure that the UN would not discuss allegations of genocide in Iraq. A draft

Foreign Office brief dated 12 September 1963 is entitled: 'The policy of genocide carried out by the government of the republic of Iraq against the Kurdish people: Reasons for opposing inscription'. This brief provides instructions for Britain's delegation to the UN, saying: 'it is obviously HMG's wish to get rid of this item as quickly as possible'. Foreign Office official William Morris suggested that if the question of genocide did come up at the UN 'our best line would be to abstain from voting' and to 'avoid saying anything at all if we possibly can'. Morris also explained that raising the charge of genocide meant the UN concerning itself with the internal affairs of member states, which was contrary to its charter and 'would be most unwelcome to us in the context of any trouble in our dependent territories'. British arms exports and training could also help in 'internal security', i.e., supporting the military regime in domestic repression. British help in mending Iraq's Centurion tanks was acknowledged to be specifically for this purpose: 'the two Centurion regiments form the backbone of their internal security in Baghdad'. The supply of Hunter aircraft went ahead in the knowledge that 'it may strengthen the ability of Iraqis to be masters in their own house (the Iraqi air force played an important part in overthrowing Qasim and achieving control of Baghdad).

Indeed, during the February coup, British-supplied Hunter aircraft had been used to attack the Ministry of Defence building where Qasim had taken refuge, a scenario repeated ten years later in Chile when British-supplied Hunters were also used suc-

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cessfully to attack the palace where democratically elected president Salvador Allende was holding out (see Chapter 14).

The offensive against the Kurds continued throughout 1963, before in effect reaching a stalemate. In April 1965, the Iraqis resumed what was to be another year-long offensive with similar levels of brutality, until an agreement was signed in June 1966 giving the Kurds some autonomy. The British embassy noted in July 1965 that 'Kurdish casualties have been mainly among the civilian population who are again being subjected to considerable suffering through indiscriminate air attack'; indiscriminate air attack, that is, from the Iraqi air force's 27 Hawker Hunters, thousands of rockets and other ammunition supplied by the Douglas-Home and Wilson governments. It was also known that napalm was being 'evidently dropped from the Iraqi Hunters'. Villages continued to be razed to the ground along with 'the forcible de-Kurdisation' of some areas in Kurdistan.

British arms exports continued to flow with the change from the Conservative to the Labour government in 1964. The latter defied a mid-1965 call in parliament to stop arms exports to Baghdad while noting that 'Her Majesty's Government had no intention of withholding normal assistance to the Iraq government in the form of arms supplies'. Huge orders were by then in the pipeline, including 17,000 Hunter rockets to be delivered from July, again in the knowledge that they would be used against Kurds. The Wilson government also agreed to supply the Iraqis with 40 Lightning fighter aircraft.

A June 1965 Foreign Office brief noted that ‘we have maintained our arms supplies to Iraq, even during periods of Kurdish fighting’ for the reasons of maintaining links with the military, described as ‘the Iraqi governing class, to reduce Iraqi arms supplies from the Soviet Union and Nasser’s Egypt, and since ‘they bring us considerable commercial benefit’. Meanwhile, ‘we have no official dealings with the Kurds and give them no assistance’.

The declassified files also reveal that the Wilson government provided a more terrifying precedent to the rulers in Baghdad: Saddam Hussein was not the first Iraqi leader to use chemical weapons against the Kurds. – This had also occurred in the middle 1960s.

In August and September 1965, Mustafa Barzani, president of the largest Kurdish group in Iraqi Kurdistan, claimed to the British Prime Minister that Iraq had purchased ‘large quantities of toxic gases for use against Kurdish inhabitants’. Barzani appealed to Wilson to stop arming Baghdad and to intercede with the regime to ‘prevent the latter carrying out their alleged intention of launching gas attacks against the Kurds’. No British reply was sent to this letter, or to others sent by Barzani; the British refused to have any formal contacts with the Kurds.

This refusal came despite the understanding that the Kurds had good intelligence connections in the Baghdad regime. It also came in the knowledge that in September 1964 the Iraqi Ministry of Defence had approached the British, West German, US and Soviet governments with a preliminary enquiry for an

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order of 60,000 gas masks 'for urgent delivery'. Finally, British officials received 'an account which we believe to be reliable, of the Army's plan for putting an end to the Kurdish problem'.

Moreover, the British embassy wrote in September that:

The Iraqis would have little humanitarian compunction about using gas if things were (as they are) going badly for them. They would probably believe they could hush up the incidents and might not worry very much about world opinion. They are certainly showing a strong current interest in chemical warfare. We believe they may well have stocks of some gas (probably of the riot control variety) and likely looking cylinders have actually been seen.

Although the memo went on to say that it was difficult to see the Iraqis using gas in current circumstances, it also stated that, 'on the other hand there is ample evidence that the Kurds are genuinely worried at the possibility that gas will be used'. The interesting revelation from this is British unwillingness to intercede with Baghdad anyway even given major concerns and evidence.

The Baathist regime that came to power in Iraq for the first time in February 1963 was itself overthrown in another military coup in November. By this time, Britain had reduced much of its earlier backing for the regime; but the record clearly states that this was not for humanitarian reasons.

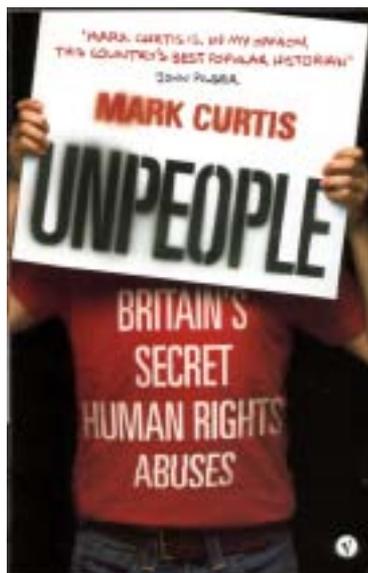
‘They began well’, the British ambassador said in December 1963 after the regime had been replaced. The problem was that the Baathists, eventually pursued similar policies to Qasim, including an Arab nationalist attempt to unite Syria, Egypt and Iraq in the United Arab Republic. Before long, the new regime had ‘alarmed the business community with their hints of nationalisation of industry, banking and trade’.

It was not until 1968 that the Baath party, following a succession of governments through the 1960s, took power again – and this time held it until the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The 1968 coup brought into power the Baathist General Ahmed al-Bakr, who had been Prime Minister after the February 1963 coup. Saddam Hussein became Vice President, before taking over from al-Bakr in 1979. The 1968 coup was also backed by the CIA, which immediately developed close relations with the ruling Baathists.

The Baath regime of 1968 was also immediately welcomed by Britain: ‘The new regime may look to the United Kingdom for military training and equipment and we should lose no time in appointing a defence attache’, the ambassador in Baghdad wrote. The regime’s new Defence Minister, General Tikriti, was invited to the Farnborough Air Show and was told by the ambassador that ‘it seemed to me we now had an opportunity to restore Anglo/Iraqi relations to something of their former intimacy’. In reply, General Tikriti said that during the Baathist regime of 1963 he had greatly, appreciated the cooperative attitude of HMG.

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From these roots emerged the Saddam regime, and Britain's support for it.



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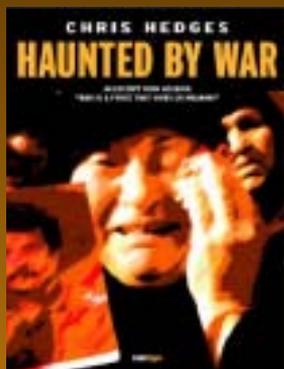
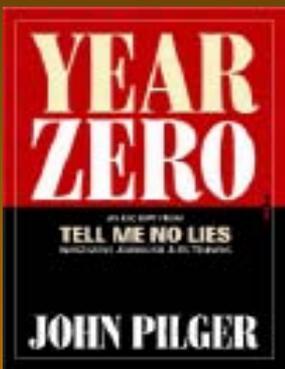
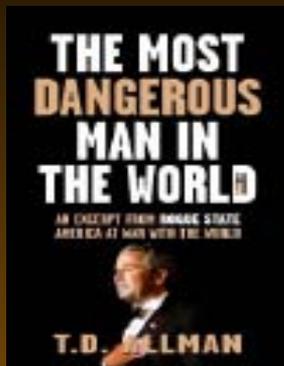
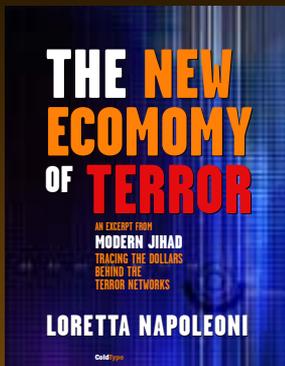
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