

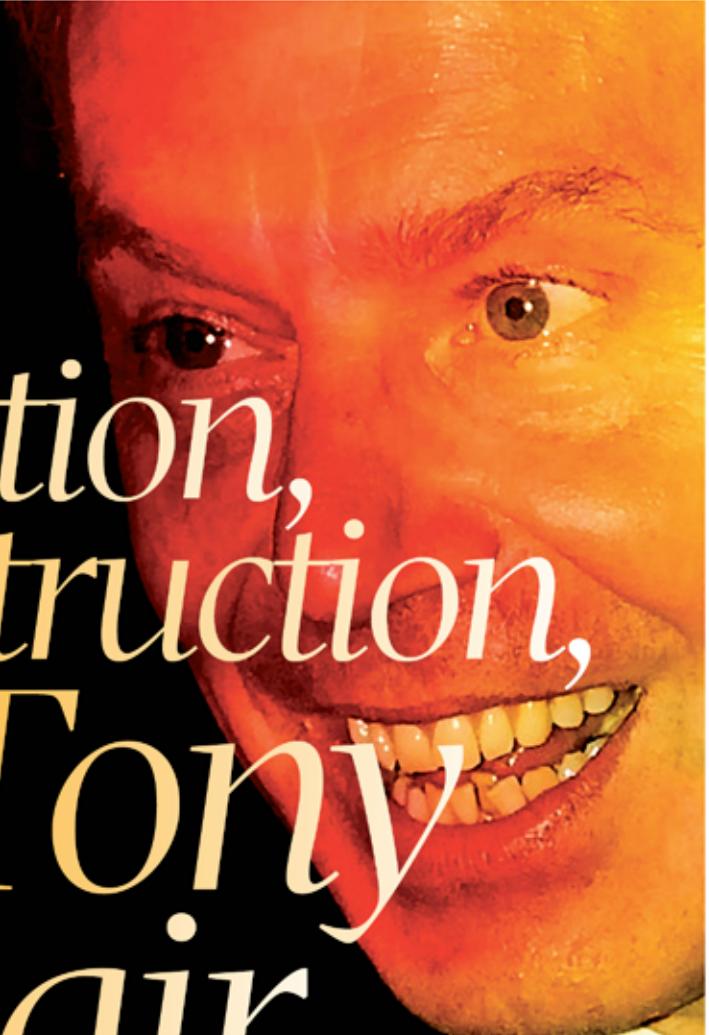
THE AGE OF DISINTEGRATION | PATRICK COCKBURN
THE MYTH OF AN UNELECTABLE LEFT | DANIEL MARGRAIN
IMAGES OF A LIFE IN EXILE | ALBERTINA D'URSO

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WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

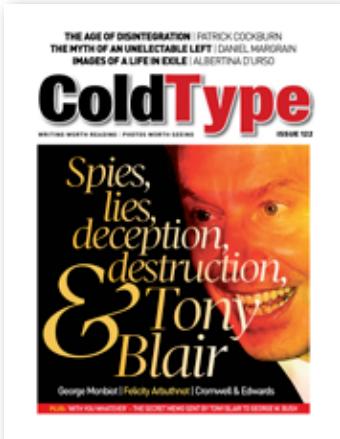
ISSUE 122

*Spies,
lies,
deception,
destruction,
& Tony
Blair*



George Monbiot | Felicity Arbuthnot | Cromwell & Edwards

PLUS: 'WITH YOU WHATEVER' – THE SECRET MEMO SENT BY TONY BLAIR TO GEORGE W. BUSH



ColdType

Issue 122 / Mid-July 2016

- 3. **LEGALISED MURDER AND THE POLITICS OF TERROR**
- 6. **NOT JUST BOORS AND BIGOTS OPPOSE TRADE DEALS**

CHRIS HEDGES

LINDA McQUAIG

COVER STORY - TONY BLAIR AND THE IRAQ REPORT

- 9. **THE JUDGMENT OF HISTORY**
- 11. **A LONELY AND WRETCHED FIGURE**
- 14. **'WITH YOU WHATEVER'**
- 20. **THE GREAT IRAQ WAR FRAUD**

GEORGE MONBIOT

FELICITY ARBUTHNOT

BLAIR'S SECRET MEMO

DAVID CROMWELL & DAVID EDWARDS

- 26. **THE AGE OF DISINTEGRATION**
- 32. **AMRO'S VICTORY**

PATRICK COCKBURN

BEN EHRENREICH



- 36. **A LIFE IN EXILE**
- 42. **HAS BREXIT TRIGGERED A UK 'COLOUR REVOLUTION'**
- 45. **THE MYTH OF AN UNELECTABLE LEFT**
- 48. **FAST TIMES WITH GRACE IVEY**
- 51. **WHY DO CONSPIRACY THEORIES ABOUND NOWADAYS?**

ALBERTINA D'URSO

KIT KNIGHTLY

DANIEL MARGRAIN

DELL FRANKLIN

PHILIP KRASKE

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Legalised murder and the politics of terror

Chris Hedges shows how legalised murder has become normal in the United States – with black people as its victims



Police can stop citizens at will, question and arrest them without probable cause, kick down doors in the middle of the night on the basis of warrants for non-violent offence

Protesters gather outside the Minnesota Governor's mansion the day after a Philando Castile was shot by a St Anthony, Minnesota, police in a traffic stop.

Photo: Fibonacci Blue, via Flickr.com

Police officers in the United States carry out random acts of legalised murder against poor people of colour not because they are racist, although they may be, or even because they are rogue cops, but because impoverished urban communities have evolved into miniature police states.

Police can stop citizens at will, question

and arrest them without probable cause, kick down doors in the middle of the night on the basis of warrants for non-violent offences, carry out wholesale surveillance, confiscate property and money and hold people – some of them innocent – in county jails for years before forcing them to accept plea agreements that send them to prison for decades. They can also, largely with im-

AMERICAN INJUSTICE

The murder of the five Dallas police officers allows the state to deify its blue-uniformed enforcers, demonise those who protest police killings and justify greater measures of oppression, often in the name of reform

punity, murder them.

Those who live in these police states, or internal colonies, especially young men of colour, endure constant fear and often terror. Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colourblindness*, calls those trapped in these enclaves members of a criminal “caste system.” This caste system dominates the lives of not only the 2.3 million who are incarcerated in the United States but also the 4.8 million on probation or parole. Millions more are forced into “permanent second-class citizenship” by their criminal records, which make employment, higher education and public assistance, including housing, difficult and usually impossible to obtain. This is by design.

The rhetoric of compassion, even outrage, by the political class over the police murders in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and near St. Paul, Minnesota, will not be translated into change until the poor are granted full constitutional rights and police are accountable to the law. The corporate state, however, which is expanding the numbers of poor through austerity and deindustrialisation, has no intention of instituting anything more than cosmetic reform.

Globalisation has created a serious problem of surplus or redundant labour in deindustrialised countries. The corporate state has responded to the phenomenon with state terror and mass incarceration. It has built a physical and legal mechanism that lurks like a plague bacillus within the body politic to be imposed, should wider segments of society resist, on all of us.

The physics of human nature dictate that the longer the state engages in indiscriminант legalised murder, especially when those killings can be documented on video or film and disseminated to the public, the more it stokes the revenge assassinations we witnessed in Dallas. This counterviolence serves the interests of the corporate state. The murder of the five Dallas police officers allows the state to deify its blue-uniformed enforcers, demonise those who protest police killings and justify

greater measures of oppression, often in the name of reform.

This downward spiral of violence and counterviolence will not be halted until the ruling ideology of neoliberalism is jettisoned and the corporate state is dismantled. Violence and terror, as corporate capitalism punishes greater and greater segments of the population, are, and will remain, the essential tools for control.

No one, with the exception of the elites, champions neoliberal policies. Citizens do not want their jobs shipped overseas, their schools and libraries closed, their pension and retirement funds looted, programmes such as Social Security and welfare cut, government bailouts of Wall Street, or militarised police forces patrolling their neighbourhoods as if they were foreign armies of occupation – which in many ways they are. These policies have to be forced on a reluctant public. This is accomplished only through propaganda, including censorship, and coercion.

Unfortunately, all the calls by the political class for reform in the wake of recent murders by police will make things worse. Reform has long been a subterfuge for expanded police repression. This insidious process is documented in Naomi Murakawa’s book, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America*.

Murakawa wrote that lawmakers, especially liberal lawmakers, “confronted racial violence as an administrative deficiency.” Thus, they put in place “more procedures and professionalisation” to “define acceptable use of force.” They countered the mob violence of lynching, she points out, with a system of state-sanctioned murder, or capital punishment. “The liberal’s brand of racial criminalisation and administrative deracialisation legitimised extreme penal harm to African-Americans: the more carceral machinery was rights-based and rule-bound, the more racial disparity was isolatable to ‘real’ black criminality.” In other words, the state was “permitted limitless violence so long as it conformed to clearly de-

AMERICAN INJUSTICE

fined laws, administrative protocol, and due process,” while those who were the victims of this violence were said to be at fault because of their supposed criminal propensities.

The so-called “professionalisation” of the police, the standard response to police brutality, has always resulted in more resources, militarised weapons and money given to the police. It has been accompanied, at the same time, by less police accountability and greater police autonomy to strip citizens of their rights as well as an expansion of the use of lethal force.

If the state of siege of our inner cities were lifted, if prisoners were allowed to return to their communities, and if evictions, which destroy the cohesion and solidarity of a neighbourhood, were to end, the corporate state would face a rebellion. And the corporate state knows it. It needs to maintain these pod-like police states if it is to continue the relentless drive to further impoverish the country in the name of austerity. The continued cutting or closing of the few social services that keep people from facing total destitution, the massive unemployment that is never addressed, the despair, the hopelessness, the retreat into drugs and alcohol to blunt the pain, the heavy burden of debt peonage that sees families evicted, the desperate struggle to make money from the illegal economy and the forced bankruptcies are all about social control. And they work.

The state insists that to combat the “lawlessness” of those it has demonised it must be emancipated from the constraints of the law. The unrestricted and arbitrary subjugation of one despised group, stripped of equality before the law, conditions the police to employ brutal tactics against the wider society.

“Laws that are not equal for all revert to rights and privileges, something contradictory to the very nature of nation-states,” Hannah Arendt wrote. “The clearer the proof of their inability to treat stateless people as legal persons and the greater the extension of arbitrary rule by police decree, the more difficult it is for states to resist the temptation to de-

prive all citizens of legal status and rule them with an omnipotent police.”

The miniature police states are laboratories. They give the corporate state the machinery, legal justification and expertise to strip the entire country of rights, wealth and resources. And this, in the end, is the goal of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism, like all utopian ideologies, requires the banishment of empathy. The inability to feel empathy is the portal to an evil often carried out in the name of progress. A world without empathy rejects as an absurdity the call to love your neighbour as yourself. It elevates the cult of the self. It divides the world into winners and losers. It celebrates power and wealth. Those who are discarded by the corporate state, especially poor people of colour, are viewed as life unworthy of life. They are denied the dignity of work and financial autonomy. They are denied an education and proper medical care, meaning many die from preventable illnesses. They are criminalised. They are trapped from birth to death in squalid police states. And they are blamed for their own misery.

Disenfranchised white workers, also the victims of deindustrialisation and neoliberalism, flock to Donald Trump rallies stunted by this lack of empathy. The hatred of the other offers them a sense of psychological protection. For, if they saw themselves in those they demonised, if they could express empathy, they would have to accept that what is being done to poor people of colour can, and perhaps will, be done to them. This truth is too hard to accept. It is easier to blame the victims.

Our political elites, rather than addressing the crisis, will make it worse. If we do not revolt, the savagery, including legalised murder, that is the daily reality for poor people of colour will become our reality. We must overthrow the corporate state. We must free ourselves from the poisonous ideology of neoliberalism. If we remain captive we will soon endure the nightmare that afflicts our neighbour.

If the state of siege of our inner cities were lifted, if prisoners were allowed to return to their communities, and if evictions, which destroy the cohesion and solidarity of a neighbourhood, were to end, the corporate state would face a rebellion

Chris Hedges, spent nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. He has worked for The Christian Science Monitor, National Public Radio, The Dallas Morning News and The New York Times, for which he was a foreign correspondent for 15 years. This article originally appeared at www.truthdig.com

CT

Not just boors and bigots oppose trade deals

Globalisation pacts, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, give too much power to corporations over elected officials, says **Linda McQuaig**

These rights – which go beyond anything that exists in domestic or international law – enable wealthy foreigners to sue governments over policies the foreigners don’t like, and to have their lawsuits decided by closed tribunals

The decision of British voters to leave Europe has been treated as evidence that they’re intolerant xenophobes keen to seal themselves off from the world. That Donald Trump is on their side only helps make the case that they represent a boorish throwback, a desire to make the English-speaking world great again by turning it into a giant gated community surrounded by sky-high walls.

Having such a collection of bigots and boors opposing globalisation may turn out to be a boon for those promoting globalisation – that is, the laws that govern the global economy.

This is unfortunate, since these laws – and the international trade deals that enforce them – have delivered benefits almost exclusively to those at the top in recent years, and should be thoroughly overhauled.

But with neanderthal wall-builders lurking in the background, it may be easier for the Trudeau government to convince Canadians to accept these badly flawed and increasingly unpopular trade deals as part of living in an open, modern world.

US President Barack Obama helped make this case in his address to Canada’s parliament at the beginning of the month, when he urged us to resist “sealing ourselves off from the world,” as he derided opposition to foreigners and opposition

to international trade deals with the same broad brush.

But whoa, Nelly! Let’s not lump Trump’s scurrilous Muslim ban in with legitimate resistance to trade deals such as NAFTA, as well as the highly contentious new Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the sweeping 12-nation trade deal Obama is keenly promoting.

There’s a litany of reasons why any sensible person would resist these trade deals.

But the most outrageous aspect of them has always been the special set of legal rights they bestow on foreign corporations and investors. These rights – which go beyond anything that exists in domestic or international law – enable wealthy foreigners to sue governments over policies the foreigners don’t like, and to have their lawsuits decided by closed tribunals.

The TPP, rather than removing this indefensible, anti-democratic set of rights for wealthy foreigners, actually extends them.

Indeed, the TPP could open a floodgate of new claims by wealthy foreigners, according to a powerful report by Osgoode Hall law professor Gus Van Harten, released last month, but ignored by the media.

“With the TPP, many more such claims will become possible,” notes Van Harten, an expert in international law and investment treaties.

POWER TRANSFER

The report documents how corporations and wealthy investors have taken advantage of the bizarrely generous legal rights available to them under NAFTA, suing Canada 39 times and winning more than \$190-million in compensation from Canadian taxpayers. There is no cap on how high the compensation can be, and the vast majority of it goes to the ultra-rich – corporations with annual revenues over \$1-billion and individuals with net wealth above \$100-million.

Oh, and let's not forget what it is these foreign interests are objecting to: laws passed by democratically elected governments to protect the public. For instance, Philip Morris challenged anti-tobacco regulations in Australia, Lone Pine Resources challenged fracking regulations in Canada. Just last month, TransCanada sued the United States for \$15-billion to compensate for Obama's decision not to approve the Keystone pipeline.

And the cases are decided by private sector lawyers acting as arbitrators. Unlike regular judges, these arbitrators, paid exorbitant hourly rates, have a direct financial interest in encouraging foreign investors to bring claims and to stretch them out, and have so far earned “well over \$1-billion in

fees,” Van Harten says.

OK, so the TPP offers sweetheart legal protection for some of the richest people on earth, making it easy for them to sue us for uncapped amounts, in closed tribunals adjudicated by lawyers with a financial interest in siding with the rich foreigners.

But surely there's also got to be something in the TPP for foreign banks?

Yes, there is: the TPP goes beyond NAFTA in creating new opportunities for foreign banks to sue for compensation. Who would have thought of that?

Last February, Trade Minister Chrystia Freeland flew to New Zealand to sign the TPP. While Canada still must ratify the deal, Freeland sure sounded keen as she told reporters, “We are a party that believes in trade, and a government that believes in free trade.”

The Trudeau government will no doubt fill us with dark Brexit and Trumpian images to warm us up to the TPP. But not even revulsion for Donald Trump will provide enough lipstick to pretty up this pig. **CT**

Unlike regular judges, these arbitrators, paid exorbitant hourly rates, have a direct financial interest in encouraging foreign investors to bring claims and to stretch them out



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Cover Story | Tony Blair & the Iraq Report

The Chilcot report is utterly damning, but it's still not justice, writes **George Monbiot**

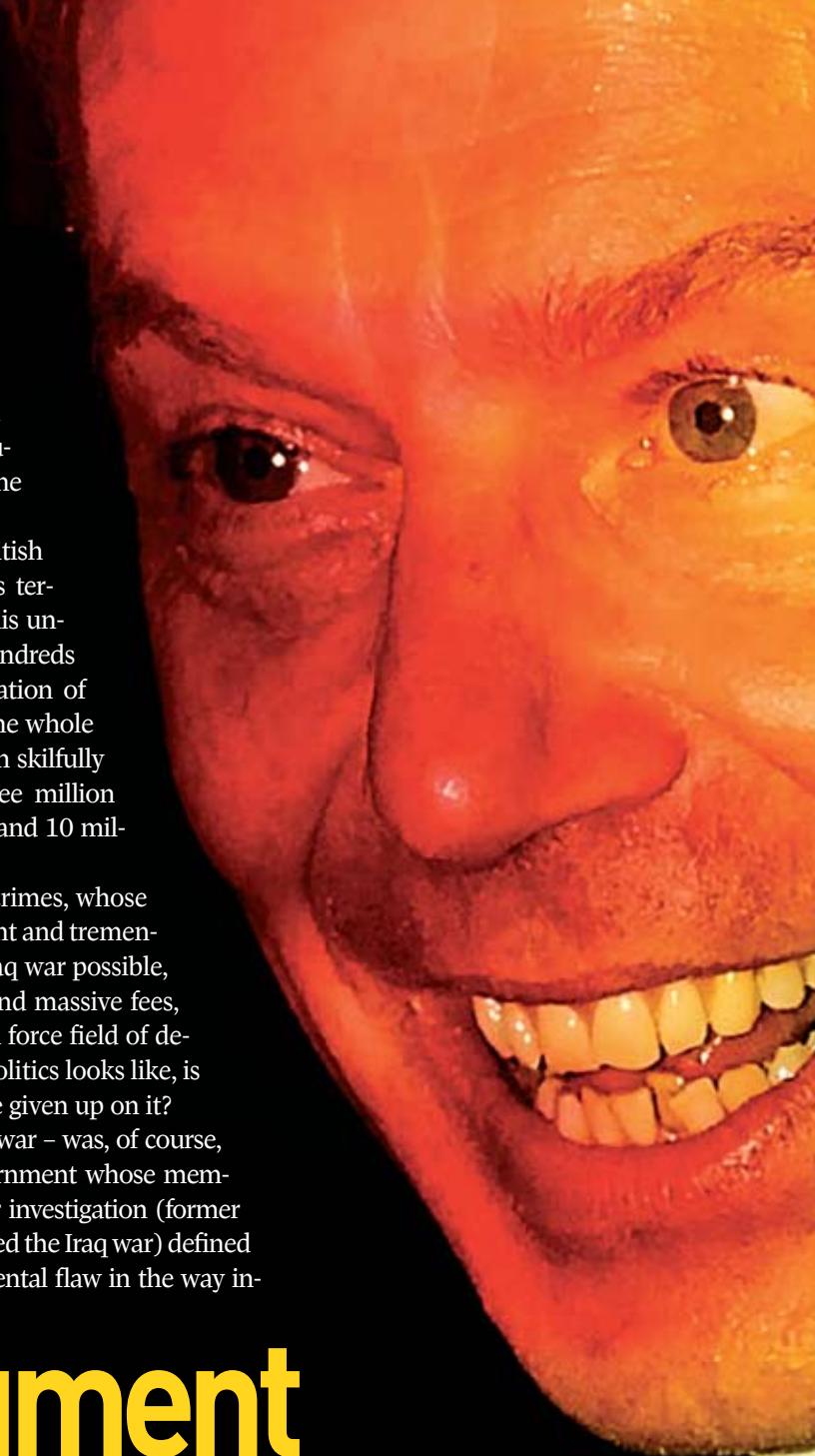
Little is more corrosive of democracy than impunity. When politicians do terrible things and suffer no consequences, people lose trust in both politics and justice. They see them, correctly, as instruments deployed by the strong against the weak.

Since the First World War, no British prime minister has done something as terrible as Tony Blair's invasion of Iraq. This unprovoked war caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and the mutilation of hundreds of thousands more. It flung the whole region into chaos, chaos which has been skilfully exploited by terror groups. Today, three million people in Iraq are internally displaced, and 10 million need humanitarian assistance.

Yet Mr Blair, the co-author of these crimes, whose lethal combination of appalling judgment and tremendous powers of persuasion made the Iraq war possible, saunters the world, picking up prizes and massive fees, regally granting interviews, cloaked in a force field of denial and legal impunity. If this is what politics looks like, is it any wonder that so many people have given up on it?

The crucial issue – the legality of the war – was, of course, beyond Sir John Chilcot's remit. A government whose members were complicit in the matter under investigation (former PM Gordon Brown financed and supported the Iraq war) defined his terms of reference. This is a fundamental flaw in the way in-

The judgment of history



Cover Story | Tony Blair & the Iraq Report

**Justice is inseperable from democracy.
If a prime minister can avoid indictment for waging aggressive war, the entire body politic is corrupted**

quiries are established in this country: it's as if a defendant in a criminal case were able to appoint his own judge, choose the charge on which he is to be tried and have the hearing conducted in his own home.

But if Brown imagined Sir John would give the authors of the war an easy ride, he could not have been more wrong. The Chilcot report, much fiercer than almost anyone anticipated, rips down almost every claim the Labour government made about the invasion and its aftermath. Two weeks before he launched his war of choice, Tony Blair told the Guardian: "Let the day-to-day judgments come and go: be prepared to be judged by history." Well, that judgment has just been handed down, and it is utterly damning.

Blair and his government and security services, Chilcot concludes, presented the severity of the threat posed by Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction with "a certainty that was not justified." In other words, they sexed up the evidence. Their "planning and preparations for Iraq after Saddam Hussein were wholly inadequate." They ignored warnings – which proved to be horribly prescient – that "military action would increase the threat from Al Qaida," and "invasion might lead to Iraq's weapons and capabilities being transferred into the hands of terrorists."

Blair's claim that the catastrophe he caused in Iraq could not have been anticipated was demolished with a statement that could serve as the motif for the whole report: "We do not agree that hindsight is required." All the disasters that came to pass were "explicitly identified before the invasion."

But the most damning and consequential judgment of all was the one with which Sir John's statement began: "We have concluded that the UK chose to join the invasion of Iraq before the peaceful options for disarmament had been exhausted. Military action at that time was not a last resort."

This is as clear a statement as Chilcot was permitted to make that the war was illegal. The language he used echoes Article 33 of

the Charter of the United Nations, which lays out the conditions required for lawful war. He has, in effect, defined the invasion of Iraq as a crime of aggression, which was described by the Nuremberg Tribunal as "the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole".

As Geoffrey Robertson, QC, points out, as a result of the long delays in the incorporation of the crime of aggression into the Rome Statute (which underpins the International Criminal Court), there is no legal basis for prosecuting Tony Blair on this charge, either in Britain or before the ICC. But there might be other means of achieving the same ends. Several weeks ago, an unprecedented trial concluded in Senegal, where the former ruler of another country – Hissene Habre of Chad – was convicted of crimes against humanity.

An academic survey of 90 countries found that around a third of them have, in one form or another, incorporated the crime of aggression into domestic law. Following the precedent of Habre's trial, is there a legal reason why Tony Blair should not face a similar process, if, on his many lucrative stops around the world, he sets foot in such a nation?

Legal reasons, of course, are not the same as diplomatic reasons, and we can expect the UK and US governments to use a wide range of threats and powers to thwart the principle of equality before the law. After all, international law is what powerful nations do to weak ones. Look at the £600,000 Cameron's government has spent so far to block a civil case against the former foreign secretary, Jack Straw, and the former head of MI6, Sir Mark Allen, for the kidnapping and deportation to Libya of dissidents from Gaddafi's regime, who were repeatedly tortured on arrival.

Justice is inseperable from democracy. If a prime minister can avoid indictment for waging aggressive war, the entire body politic is corrupted. In the Chilcot report, there is a reckoning, firm and tough and long overdue. But it's still not justice.

CT

George Monbiot's new book, *How Did We Get Into This Mess?*, is published by Verso. His web site is www.monbiot.com



BLOODYED HANDS: Protesters outside the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in London before Sir John Chilcot delivered his damning report on the Blair government's war on Iraq.

Photo: Alan Denney, via Flickr.com

'A lonely and wretched figure...'

Finally, writes **Felicity Arbuthnot**, Blair tastes history's bitter truth

The banners and placards on display outside London's Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, where the findings of the long-awaited Chilcot report into the Blair government's illegal and catastrophic invasion of Iraq were to be revealed, reflected an anger undiminished since February 15, 2003, when two million people

marched against the war in London, part of an estimated 36 million people who joined in demonstrations around the world.

On "Chilcot Wednesday" – July 6 – as Sir John Chilcot's findings were about to be revealed, the fury still directed towards Tony Blair for the commitments he had made, unknown to Parliament, to then-US

Cover Story | Tony Blair & the Iraq Report

For a man holding main responsibility for the deaths of probably now well over two-million people, so terrified of retribution that he has the round-the-clock protection of 20 police officers

President George W. Bush, and for the lies in documents he had made in his pretexts for war, were palpable.

Two figures wearing Blair masks and with bloody hands walked through the crowd, followed by two “judges” in formal regalia and wigs, passed signs held high: “Blair, now is the time to pay for your crimes,” “Justice for Iraq, The Hague for Blair,” “Tony Blair ‘Peace Envoy’ – What an oxy-Moron,” and – referring to Blair’s fantasy that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction capable of hitting the West in 45 minutes there was: “Forty five minutes from Truth and Justice?”

Nicholas Wood, author of the meticulous book: War Crime Or Just War? The Case Against Blair, had designed a 30-foot long banner with the words, “Blair Must Face War Crimes Trial,” which had been unveiled to the media at 7a.m., outside Blair’s home at 29 Connaught Square, to greet him as he left for the centre.

Blair was also faced by relentless Iraq war protester and actor Michael Culver, wearing a T-shirt reading: “2,000,000 Dead, 4,000,000 Fled, Genocide, Theft, Torture, Starvation.”

For Blair, a man responsible for the deaths of as many as two million people, so terrified of retribution that he has the round-the-clock protection of 20 police officers – all paid-for by the taxpayer – it must have been a very bad start to the day.

Having ambushed Tony Blair, the banner was then carried the mile-plus walk to the Conference Centre to garner much more media exposure.

Green Party MP Caroline Lucas, who had read an advance copy of the Summary of Chilcot’s Iraq Report said it was “Worse than your worst fears . . . diplomatic routes had not been exhausted, intelligence was flawed.” She demanded that those responsible “must be held to account.”

ITV probably carried the most succinct summary of a 2.6 million word document

that will be pored over for months and years:

- Tony Blair’s reputation lies in tatters in the wake of the report into the Iraq War.

- Sir John Chilcot’s inquiry said the six-year conflict was unnecessary and disastrous.

- The ex-prime minister was accused of exaggerating the threat posed by Saddam Hussein.

- A memo also revealed that Blair promised George W Bush: “I will be with you, whatever.”

- An emotional Blair defended the war, saying he would make same decision again

- Families of some of the 179 military personnel killed in described Blair as a “terrorist.”

The memo – see Pages 14 to 19 – referred to, from July 2002, is extraordinary. The first sentence – “I will be with you whatever” – reads like the beginning of a love letter . . . but, although unexpected, the phrase was hardly inconsistent, for hadn’t Blair also stated earlier: “We pray together . . . we use the same toothpaste.”

In the document, Blair then advises the US president on the importance of planning, pointing out that the proposed carnage: “is not Kosovo. It is not Afghanistan. It is not even the Gulf War.” How casually massacres in three countries, including the US 1991 butchery and carnage on the road from Basra, and the burying alive of Iraqi conscripts under US bulldozers, are simply dismissed, erased from the record by Blair.

“Getting rid of Saddam is the right thing to do,” Blair assured Bush. The towering illegality of such an action was not even a consideration. Blair admits that Saddam Hussein “is a potential threat,” suggesting that, “he could be contained,” before adding that Hussein’s “departure would free up the region.”

Free up for what, exactly, I wonder? Ramraids for oil? Further expansion and

Cover Story | Tony Blair & the Iraq Report



Protesters unfurl a giant banner designed by author Nicholas Wood, outside the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, where the release of the Chilcot report fiercely criticised former PM Tony Blair for the war on Iraq.

Photo: Alan Denney

theft of Palestinian lands by the Israeli occupying force when Saddam Hussein would no longer be sending compensation to Palestinian families? Further expansion of war in Syria to impose a client government and take over the oil and gas fields? And what about Iran, awaiting next door?

Cynical? Perhaps. But recall that when Blair became Middle East “Peace Envoy” soon after slinking out of Downing Street in 2007, he spent most of his time while in the region in Israel. He didn’t offer a bleat of criticism of that country’s bombardment of Gaza during 2008 and 2009, when he was awarded Israel’s Dan David Prize, accepting a \$1-million cash bung, for supposedly being, “one of the most outstanding statesmen of our era.” Nor did he condemn the Israeli commando attack, in international waters, that saw 10 people killed on the aid ship, Mavi Marmara, in 2010, or Israeli onslaughts on Gaza in 2012 and 2014.

Those days now seem a world away. After Chilcot, the families of soldiers killed

in Iraq have vowed to sue Tony Blair for “every penny,” according to a July 8 report in the Independent newspaper.

The same day, Simon Jenkins wrote in the Guardian: “Blair emerges as other Iraq historians have already portrayed him, as a pathetic and self-regarding figure in awe of the transatlantic power. The most culpable participants in the story were his Cabinet colleagues (who) failed to do what they knew to be right and stop him.

“Blair renders his account for Iraq every day. He cuts a lonely and wretched figure. Seemingly scared of the outside world, he is imprisoned by armed guards day and night. He travels the world, living out of suitcases and hotel rooms, attended by a dwindling band of courtiers, sustained by shady friends and ‘consultancies.’ ”

Jenkins might have eloquently written Blair’s political epitaph. There will be many more to follow.

When Blair became Middle East “Peace Envoy” shortly after slinking out of Downing Street in 2007, he didn’t offer a bleat of criticism of that country’s bombardment of Gaza

CT

Felicity Arbuthnot is a London-based political activist and author.

Cover Story | Tony Blair & the Iraq Report

'With you whatever'

The secret memo sent by Tony Blair to George W. Bush, sets out why he believed getting rid of Saddam Hussein was 'the right thing to do'

PM note 28/7/02
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NOTE ON IRAQ

I will be with you, whatever. But this is the moment to assess bluntly the difficulties. The planning on this and the strategy are the toughest yet. This is not Kosovo. This is not Afghanistan. It is not even the Gulf War.

The military part of this is hazardous but I will concentrate mainly on the political context for success.

Getting rid of Saddam is the right thing to do. He is a potential threat. He could be contained. But containment, as we found with Al Qaida, is always risky. His departure would free up the region. And his regime is probably, with the possible exception of North Korea, the most brutal and inhumane in the world.

The first question is: in removing him, do you want/need a coalition? The US could do it alone, with UK support. The danger is, as ever with these things, unintended consequences. Suppose it got militarily tricky. Suppose Iraq suffered unexpected civilian casualties. Suppose the Arab street finally erupted, eg in . Suppose Saddam felt sufficiently politically strong, if militarily weak in conventional terms, to let off WMD. Suppose that, without any coalition, the Iraqis feel ambivalent about being invaded and real Iraqis, not Saddam's special guard, decide to offer resistance. Suppose, at least, that any difficulties, without a coalition, are magnified and seized upon by a hostile international opinion. If we win quickly, everyone will be our friend. If we don't and they haven't been bound in beforehand, recriminations will start fast.

None of these things might happen. But they might, singly or in combination.

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SECRET - PERSONAL

And there is one other point. We will need to commit to Iraq for the long term. Bedding down a new regime will take time. So, without support, the possibility of unintended consequences will persist through and beyond the military phase.

So, I'm keen on a coalition, not necessarily military but politically.

What Coalition?

I am a little alarmed at the report back I've had from our various officials' meetings in the US. They say everyone over on your side is pretty optimistic that we could neutralise or gain support from most of the Arabs; and that the EU, in particular even the French, but certainly the Italians, Spanish and Germans, would be with us. I have to say that's not my reading. The trouble is, everyone says: they will support action, but they add a rider and the rider is not always sufficiently heard or spoken. The Arabs may support but are far less likely to do so, if the MEPP is where it is now. When I met

– and said we would do Iraq, he said: 'fine – just do it with total force'. But when we started later to talk about the MEPP, he said he was far more optimistic about it. 'Why?', I asked. 'Because obviously, with Iraq coming up, the US will put it in a quite different place', he said. When I said, we couldn't guarantee that, he looked genuinely shocked. Then Iraq would be a very different proposition, he said.

In my opinion, neither the Germans or the French, and most probably not the Italians or Spanish either, would support us without specific UN authority.

Again, they express this by saying 'yes' and then adding the rider. But the rider is real. Stoiber might be different from Schroeder, but again I doubt it. In fact, if we launched it in exactly the same state as we are now, there is a chance the French would actively oppose us and start to create real waves inside the EU.

66

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Here is my real point – public opinion is public opinion. And opinion in the US is quite simply on a different planet from opinion here, in Europe or in the Arab world

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I know the French are anxious to escape their anti-American outlook. I know Berlusconi and Aznar personally strongly support you. Stoiber will be desperate to come on board with the US. But some of them are very tied to specific positions about the UN which they will find it very hard to ditch.

And – and here is my real point – public opinion is public opinion. And opinion in the US is quite simply on a different planet from opinion here, in Europe or in the Arab world.

In Britain, right now I couldn't be sure of support from Parliament, Party, public or even some of the Cabinet. And this is Britain. In Europe generally, people just don't have the same sense of urgency post 9/11 as people in the US; they suspect – and are told by populist politicians – that it's all to do with 43 settling the score with the enemy of 41; and various other extraneous issues like steel etc have soured the atmosphere a little.

At the moment, oddly, our best ally might be Russia!

A Strategy for Achieving a Coalition

Here is what could bring opinion round.

(1) The UN.

We don't want to be mucked around by Saddam over this, and the danger is he drags us into negotiation. But we need, as with Afghanistan and the ultimatum to the Taliban, to encapsulate our casus belli in some defining way. This is certainly the simplest. We could, in October as the build-up starts, state that he must let the inspectors back in unconditionally and do so now, ie set a 7-day deadline. It might be backed by a UNSCR or not, depending on what support there was (and I'm not sure anyone, at present, would veto it if Russia was on

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Cover Story | Tony Blair & the Iraq Report

66

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board). There would be no negotiation. There would be no new talks with Annan. It would be: take it or leave it.

I know there will be reluctance on this. But it would neutralise opposition around the UN issue. If he did say yes, we continue the build-up and we send teams over and the moment he obstructs, we say: he's back to his games. That's it. In any event, he probably would screw it up and not meet the deadline, and if he came forward after the deadline, we would just refuse to deal.

Regime change is vital and, in the first instance, it must be one that protects Iraq's territorial integrity and provides stability; and hence might involve another key military figure

(2) The Evidence.

Again, I have been told the US thinks this unnecessary. But we still need to make the case. If we recapitulate all the WMD evidence; add his attempts to secure nuclear capability; and, as seems possible, add on Al Qaida link, it will be hugely persuasive over here. Plus, of course, the abhorrent nature of the regime. It could be done simultaneously with the deadline.

(3) MEPP.

My judgement is this is essential and whatever the Arabs say at one level, at another this is in the very soul of their attitudes. So it is worth a real effort to get a proper negotiation going. but at the moment there is no other option. But this negotiation won't start unless someone takes charge of the detail in the negotiation. But for the Arabs, MEPP doesn't have to be settled. It just has to start in earnest.

(4) Post Saddam

Suppose we were able to say as follows. Regime change is vital and, in the first instance, it must be one that protects Iraq's territorial integrity and provides stability; and hence might involve another key military figure. But it should lead in time to a democratic Iraq, governed by the people. This would be very

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66

Syria and Iran . . .
might be actively
hostile to us as a
means to support
terrorism in Israel

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powerful. I need advice on whether it's feasible. But just swapping one dictator for another seems inconsistent with our values.

(5) The Arab/Moslem World

Some will fall into line. But others won't and others still – Syria and Iran to name but two – might be actively hostile or use it as a means to support terrorism in Israel. We need a dedicated effort to woo the Arab world, to offer the hardliners a very hard-headed partnership or put them on the ‘axis of evil’ list. But we shouldn't just leave this to chance and their own (bad) decision-making.

(6) Afghanistan

We need this to be going right, not wrong. It is our one act of regime change so far, so it had better be a good advertisement. My hunch is it needs renewed focus and effort.

It goes without saying that the Turks and the Kurds need to be OK. Strangely, I think they are going to be the easiest, despite the Turkish elections. They both want our help badly and will play ball, if offered enough.

I would be happy to try to put all this together, ie to dedicate myself to getting all these elements (1–6) sorted, including involving myself in the MEPP. But it needs a huge commitment in time and energy. So it's only really worth doing if we are all on the same page.

The Military Plan

Finally, obviously, we must have a workable military plan. I don't know the details yet, so this is at first blush.

The two options are running start and generated start.

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- 6 -

The first has the advantage of surprise; the second of overwhelming force. My military tell me the risks of heavy losses on the running start make it very risky. Apparently it involves around 15-20,000 troops striking inside Iraq, with heavy air support. The idea would be to catch the regime off balance, strike hard and quickly and get it to collapse. The obvious danger is it doesn't collapse. And there is the risk of CW being used.

For that reason, a generated start seems better. It could always be translated into a more immediate option, should Saddam do something stupid. Also, the build-up of forces in such numbers will be a big signal of serious intent to the region and help to pull people towards us; and demoralise the Iraqis. This option allows us to hammer his air defences and infrastructure; to invade from the south and take the oilfields; to secure the north and protect/stabilise the Kurds. Then effectively with huge force we go on to Baghdad.

We would support in any way we can.

On timing, we could start building up after the break. A strike date could be Jan/Feb next year. But the crucial issue is not when, but how.

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The great Iraq war fraud

David Cromwell and David Edwards show how the British media became part of Blair's propaganda machine before and during the war on Iraq

The Americans decided to exploit the dead of September 11 to wage war in the name of power and profit. Blair decided to take part in the crime, come what may, from the start

On June 6, seven years after the Iraq Inquiry was set up, Sir John Chilcot finally delivered his long-awaited report. Although it stopped short of declaring the Iraq war illegal, and although it failed to examine the real motives for war, the report was not the whitewash that had been feared by peace campaigners. Lindsey German, convenor of the Stop the War Coalition, gave a succinct summary of the Chilcot report, listing four of the main findings (each followed by our own comment):

1. There was no imminent threat to Britain from Saddam Hussein, so war in March 2003 was unnecessary.

In reality: utterly devastated by war, bombing and 12 years of sanctions, Iraq posed no threat whatsoever towards Britain or the US. The idea that there was any kind of threat from this broken, impoverished country was simply a lie; a propaganda fabrication by warmongering cynics and corporate hangers-on eager for a piece of the pie.

2. The existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was presented with a certainty that was not justified. It was never “beyond doubt” that the weapons existed. None have been found in the subsequent 13 years.

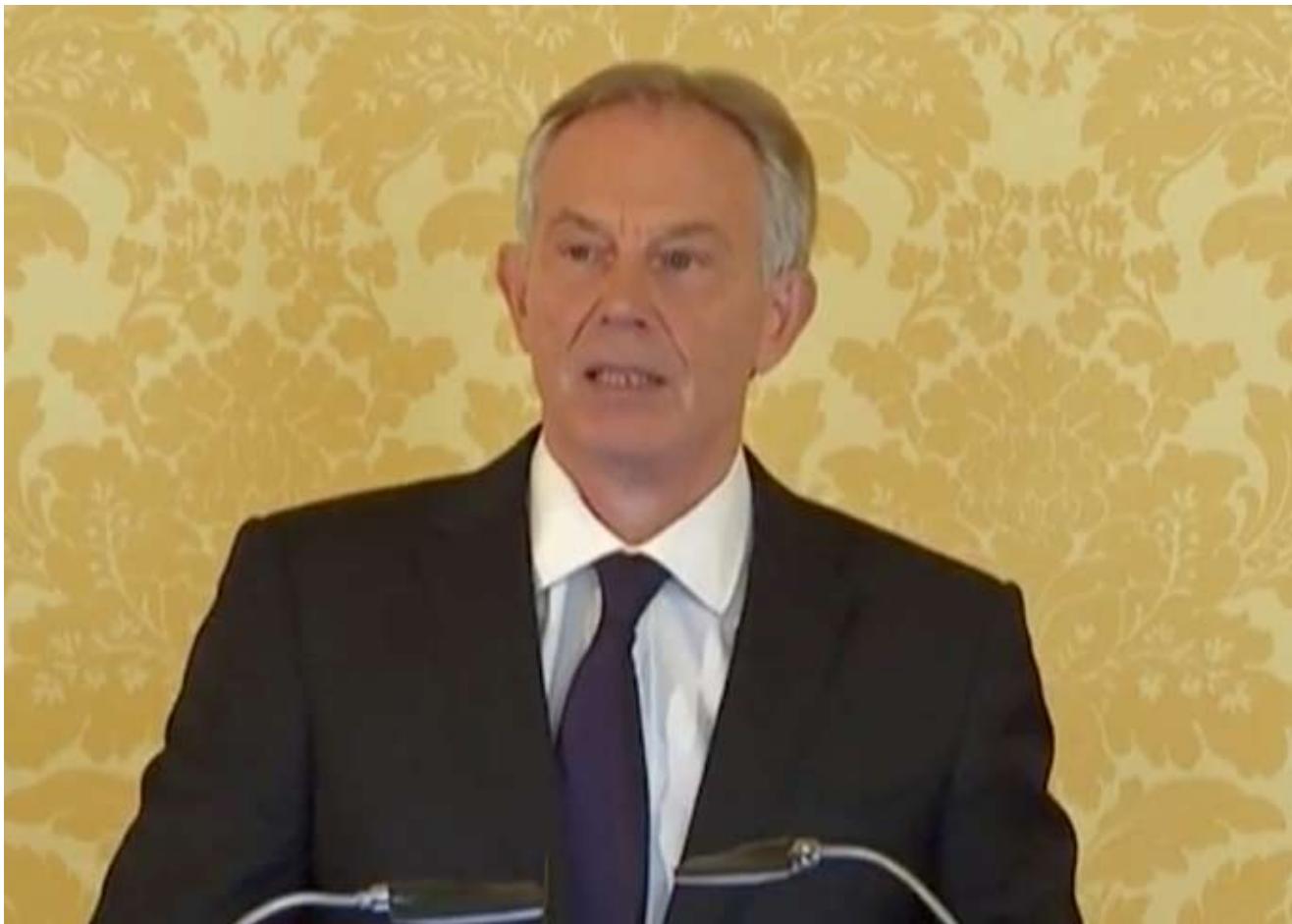
In reality: it was completely clear, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the whole weapons of mass destruction issue was a propaganda fabrication; a way of suggesting

a threat where none existed. Iraq only ever possessed battlefield biological and chemical weapons that were of no conceivable threat to the West. Iraq didn't even use them when the West attacked the country in 1991. Not only that, but UN weapons inspectors had overseen the near-complete destruction of even these tinpot devices between 1991-1998; only ‘sludge’ remained: a known fact. Iraq was of no more threat to the West in 2002-2003 than Thailand or Iceland; that is all that needs to be said. Almost everything else is superfluous: cynical propaganda which was, and is, manipulated by violent Western leaderships that think nothing of smashing other countries to bits for whatever reason they declare necessary.

3. There was a failure of democratic government and accountability, with Blair keeping most of his Cabinet in the dark. This meant that he avoided telling them things which they ought to have known.

In reality: The Americans decided to exploit the dead of September 11 to wage war in the name of power and profit. Blair decided to take part in the crime, come what may, from the start. His whole intention was to make that possible, to trap Iraq into war and to use the UN to apply a veneer of legality to the monstrous crime. A million people paid with their lives, and a whole country was destroyed in the process. Bush at least had an “excuse;” he was, after all, a hard-right

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HAUNTED: An unhappy-looking Tony Blair faces the media after the publication of the Chilcot report. Photo: TV screenshot

president operating out of a notoriously venal, violent and corrupt Republican “party.” (As Noam Chomsky has noted, it is wrong to consider it a legitimate party. It is merely a collection of greedy vested interests, qualifying it as a candidate “for the most dangerous organisation in human history.”) Blair, on the other hand, was prime minister on behalf of a supposedly left-leaning Labour party rooted in supposedly genuine ethical values. His rejection of democracy in the name of war was the perfect culmination of his coup transforming Labour into another power-serving Tory party.

4. George Bush and Blair worked to undermine the authority of the UN.

In reality: Bush and Blair sought to exploit the good name of the UN to provide a cover for their crime. The intention was to

use the appearance of diplomacy as propaganda justifying war. If Saddam could be trapped into appearing intransigent in the face of UN resolutions, so much the better for war. Diplomacy was only ever perceived as a means to achieve war, not peace. The whole weapons of mass destruction fraud had been concocted by conspirators intent on war. Why would those same fraudsters attempt to work through the UN to achieve peace? That was the last outcome they wanted.

In an already infamous phrase, Blair told Bush that: “I will be with you, whatever.” Those words will haunt him to his grave. There is no doubt that his reputation is now in tatters. There have been follow-up calls for him to be punished by being thrown out of the Queen’s Privy Council, impeached and put on trial for misleading Parliament, and

If Saddam could be trapped into appearing intransigent in the face of UN resolutions, so much the better for war. Diplomacy was only ever perceived as a means to achieve war, not peace

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"BBC managers have fallen over themselves to grovel to the government in the aftermath of the Hutton whitewash. . . When will their bosses apologise for conspiring to keep the anti-war movement off the screens? Not any time soon"

charged with war crimes.

Unusually for the mainstream press, Andrew Buncombe of the Independent wrote a piece focusing on the death toll in Iraq. As he notes, a study conducted by Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health, published in the prestigious journal *The Lancet* in 2006, estimated the number of Iraqi dead at around 650,000. Even worse, a report last year by Physicians for Social Responsibility estimated the Iraq death toll as around a million. Added to this ghastly pyramid of corpses, the Bush-Blair War on Terror has led to 220,000 dead in Afghanistan and 80,000 in Pakistan. These appalling figures hardly ever appear in the mainstream media. As Les Roberts, one of the *Lancet* authors, observes, the media is guilty of "failing to report on uncomfortable truths."

Burying the facts and stifling dissent

As well as burying the Iraq death toll, the corporate media have been guilty of hiding or downplaying the following:

- Iraq's people and infrastructure had already been crushed by a genocidal regime of UN sanctions, maintained with especially brutal vigour by Washington and London.
- Iraq had already been essentially disarmed of any WMD, as revealed by relevant experts; notably Scott Ritter, former chief UNSCOM weapons inspector. This was known well in advance of the war.
- In the immediate aftermath of 9-11, there was an agreed-upon Washington strategy to start wars against seven countries (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Iran) in five years, as revealed by US General Wesley Clark.
- The infamous "Downing Street Memo" showed that the intelligence and facts were being "fixed around" the pre-existing policy of invasion. Indeed, this was nothing less than a conspiracy to launch a war. You will struggle in vain to find mainstream commentators linking any of this to Blair's "I'm with you, whatever" pledge to Bush.
- The West's desire to control oil resources

was a key motivating factor for war.

- The role of corporations and financial interests in driving government policy; in particular, the profits demanded by the defence industry and arms manufacturers.
- War crimes committed by US armed forces; for example, in Fallujah.
- The devastating long-term impacts of the invasion in terms of cancer rates and congenital abnormalities.

In 2004, when our organisation, Media Lens, challenged media editors to critique their own abysmal performance on Iraq, we were essentially told: "We have nothing to apologise for." The response from David Mannion, then head of ITV News, summed up media complacency, indeed complicity, in channelling war propaganda:

"The evidence suggests we have no need for a mea culpa. We did our job well."

Today, the body of media evidence that we have accumulated shows precisely the opposite. In particular, the bulk of BBC output on Iraq can be characterised by one word: "Newspeak." In 2003, a Cardiff University report found that the BBC "displayed the most 'pro-war' agenda of any broadcaster" on the Iraq invasion. Over the three weeks of the initial conflict, 11 percent of the sources quoted by the BBC were of coalition government or military origin, the highest proportion of all the main television broadcasters. The BBC was less likely than Sky, ITV or Channel 4 News to use independent sources, who also tended to be the most sceptical. The BBC also placed least emphasis on Iraqi casualties, which were mentioned in 22 percent of its stories about the Iraqi people, and it was least likely to report on Iraqi opposition to the invasion.

On the eve of the invasion of Iraq, Andrew Bergin, the press officer for Stop the War, told Media Lens: "Representatives of the coalition have been invited to appear on every TV channel except the BBC. The BBC have taken a conscious decision to actively exclude Stop the War Coalition people from their programmes, even though everyone

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knows we are central to organising the massive anti-war movement.” (Email to Media Lens, March 14, 2003)

In 2003, Richard Sambrook, then head of BBC News, told staff not to broadcast “extreme” anti-war opinion. His deputy, Mark Damazer, issued an email to newsroom staff “listing which categories of journalist should not attend” the peace march in London in February 2003: “These include all presenters, correspondents, editors, output editors and ‘anyone who can be considered a ‘gatekeeper’ of our output.”

David Miller, then a professor of sociology at Strathclyde University and co-founder of SpinWatch, noted afterwards: “BBC managers have fallen over themselves to grovel to the government in the aftermath of the Hutton whitewash. . . . When will their bosses apologise for conspiring to keep the anti-war movement off the screens? Not any time soon.”

In a speech at New York’s Columbia University, John Pilger commented: “We now know that the BBC and other British media were used by MI6, the secret intelligence service. In what was called ‘Operation Mass Appeal,’ MI6 agents planted stories about Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction - such as weapons hidden in his palaces and in secret underground bunkers. All these stories were fake.”

Pilger’s documentary on the propaganda role played by the corporate media, *The War You Don’t See*, is a must-watch.

Bringing democracy and human rights to Iraq

It is worth reminding ourselves just what some media “gatekeepers” were saying back in 2003. The BBC’s Nicholas Witchell declared of the US invasion, as it steamrollered its way into central Baghdad: “It is absolutely, without a doubt, a vindication of the strategy.” (BBC News at Six, April 9, 2003)

Natasha Kaplinsky, then a BBC breakfast news presenter, beamed as she described how Blair “has become, again, Teflon Tony.” The BBC’s Mark Mardell agreed: “It has been

a vindication for him.” (BBC1, Breakfast News, April 10, 2003)

ITN’s Tom Bradby said: “This war has been a major success.” (ITN Evening News, April 10, 2003)

ITN’s John Irvine also saw vindication in the arrival of US armed forces: “A war of three weeks has brought an end to decades of Iraqi misery.” (ITN Evening News, April 9, 2003)

On Channel 4 News, Jack Straw, then UK foreign secretary, told Jon Snow that he had met with the French foreign minister that day: “Did he look chastened?,” asked Snow wryly. (Channel 4, April 9, 2003)

Snow did not respond when he was asked on Twitter a few days ago by one of our readers whether the Channel 4 News presenter “felt chastened” on being reminded of this.

In 2006, we noted that embedded BBC reporter Paul Wood had asserted that US and British troops had come to Iraq to “bring democracy and human rights.” When we challenged Helen Boaden, then head of BBC News, to explain this propagandistic reporting, she sent us six pages of quotes by Bush and Blair as supposed proof of noble intent. The notion that “we” are the “good guys” is fully embedded in the mindsets of senior media professionals. When Boaden grew exasperated with Media Lens challenges about the BBC’s systematically biased reporting on Iraq, she changed her email address and joked about it to an audience of media professionals.

Boaden was not alone in her ideological fervour, however. Many MPs bought Blair’s rhetoric about “bringing democracy and human rights” to Iraq. Investigative journalist Nafeez Ahmed notes that most of the Labour MPs now opposing Jeremy Corbyn are “stained with the blood of Iraq.” He adds “Nearly 100 percent of the Labour MPs who have moved to oust Jeremy Corbyn voted against an investigation into the Iraq war.”

Ahmed continues: “Amongst the Labour MPs who had voted in 2003 on the Iraq war, an overwhelming majority who voted

Embedded BBC reporter Paul Wood had asserted that US and British troops had come to Iraq to “bring democracy and human rights”

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ITV's Nick Robinson had attempted to justify his lack of scrutiny of government propaganda: "Elsewhere on our bulletins we did report those who questioned the truth of what we were being told"

against Corbyn were in favour of the military invasion of the country, which paved the way for an escalation of sectarian strife, and ultimately the rise of the Islamic State (IS).

"More generally, well over half of the Labour MPs against Corbyn are supportive of British military interventions abroad."

These so-called "chicken coup" plotters attempting to oust Corbyn are now in retreat, pinning "their hopes on a challenge by Angela Eagle, despite many believing that she will not beat Mr Corbyn because of his support among members."

Broken promises, regrets and silences

Cast your mind back to April 9, 2003. US troops had just reached central Baghdad. Recall the footage of Saddam's statue being pulled down in Firdos Square in what is now known to have been a staged public relations exercise to create a "propaganda moment." The US army even admitted as much later.

That night, Andrew Marr, then BBC News political editor, addressed his audience on BBC News at Ten. It is worth recounting in full what he said: "Frankly, Huw, the main mood [in Downing Street] is unbridled relief. I've been watching ministers wander around with smiles like split watermelons."

The fact that Marr delivered this with his own happy smile was a portent of what was to come. He was then asked by BBC news presenter Huw Edwards to describe the significance of the fall of Baghdad: "Well, I think this does one thing. It draws a line under what had been, before this war, a period of... well, a faint air of pointlessness, almost, was hanging over Downing Street. There were all these slightly tawdry arguments and scandals. That is now history. Mr Blair is well aware that all his critics out there in the party and beyond aren't going to thank him – because they're only human – for being right when they've been wrong. And he knows that there might be trouble ahead, as I've said. But I think this is a very, very important moment for him. It gives him a new freedom and a new self-confidence. He con-

fronted many critics.

"I don't think anybody after this is going to be able to say of Tony Blair that he's somebody who is driven by the drift of public opinion, or focus groups, or opinion polls. He took all of those on. He said that they would be able to take Baghdad without a bloodbath, and that in the end the Iraqis would be celebrating. And on both of those points he has been proved conclusively right. And it would be entirely ungracious, even for his critics, not to acknowledge that tonight he stands as a larger man and a stronger prime minister as a result."

This was BBC impartiality in action. Although reading those words today and, especially, watching the clip is jaw-dropping, such propagandist comments about Blair and Iraq were not unusual then on the BBC, and elsewhere in the national news media. The next time BBC News praises itself as "the best news organisation in the world", just think of that clip.

In the wake of Chilcot, we reminded readers about this – arguably now infamous – Marr clip. We asked Marr for his thoughts about it now; he ignored us. However, he responded to someone else who asked him about it. He answered: "It was rubbish but it came after weeks when I'd been predicting Baghdad bloodbath – the Iraqi army gave up."

Gave up? Or were slaughtered under "Shock and awe?" As for the gushing praise for Blair, Marr was silent.

Marr's successor as BBC News political editor was Nick Robinson. We reminded Marr of Robinson's mournful comment: "The build-up to the invasion of Iraq is the point in my career when I have most regretted not pushing harder and not asking more questions" – (Nick Robinson, *Live From Downing Street*, Bantam Books, London).

Robinson had been ITV News political editor from 2002-2005. We asked Marr whether he shared his colleague's regrets. Again, the response was silence. Of course, Robinson had earlier excused himself by saying that in his role as political editor: "It was my job

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to report what those in power were doing or thinking... That is all someone in my sort of job can do."

As the US journalist Glenn Greenwald later remarked: "That'd make an excellent epitaph on the tombstone of modern establishment journalism."

In the same Times column, Robinson had attempted to justify his lack of scrutiny of government propaganda: "Elsewhere on our bulletins we did report those who questioned the truth of what we were being told."

There is scant evidence of that being the case. Those with the expertise, not just to question, but to demolish, Bush and Blair's ludicrous excuses for war were rarely seen.

In his article, Robinson had also made this solemn promise: "Now, more than ever before, I will pause before relaying what those in power say. Now, more than ever, I will try to examine the contradictory case."

To little or no avail, as we have seen in the intervening years. Those with the expertise, not just to question, but to demolish, Bush and Blair's ludicrous excuses for war were nowhere to be seen.

As for Blair, John Pilger had already written back in 2010 that the former Prime Minister should be prosecuted for his shared responsibility for a war of aggression that had led to the deaths of a million Iraqis. But the responsibility does not stop there: "The Cabinet in March 2003 knew a great deal about the conspiracy to attack Iraq. Jack Straw, later appointed 'justice secretary,' suppressed the relevant Cabinet minutes in defiance of an

order by the Information Commissioner to release them."

Also sitting in the Blair Cabinet were Geoff Hoon, the Defence Secretary; Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer who released the finances to fund the war; and John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister. Last Sunday, Prescott tried to dodge his part in the supreme international crime by claiming that he was "forced" to sign up to what he now concedes was an illegal war by the devious, wily Blair. Prescott, we are to believe, was duped by Blair's mendacious charm, even while millions of people saw through the lies and went out to march in protest on British streets.

As Lindsey German of Stop the War sums up: "Thirteen years after the war, the Middle East is in flames, Britain is a more dangerous place than it was and the threat of terrorism across the region is greater. Chilcot makes clear that this was a catastrophe both foretold and avoidable.

"Chilcot would not have happened without the anti-war movement and we should not see it as the end.

"There have to be consequences for those responsible for this terrible war."

Those responsible include not only those politicians who took this country into war, but also the media that facilitated the greatest crime of the century.

CT

David Edwards and David Cromwell are co-editors of media Lens – www.medialens.org – the British media watchdog.

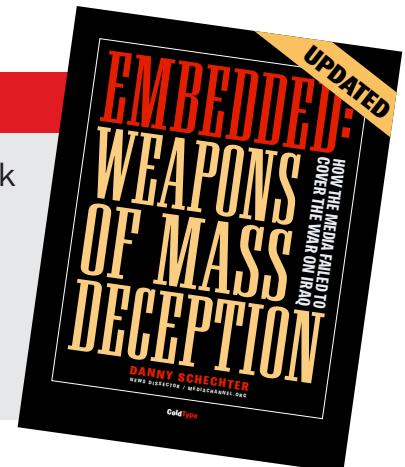
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EMBEDDED: WEAPONS OF MASS DECEPTION

How The Media Failed To Cover The War On Iraq

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The age of disintegration

Patrick Cockburn on neoliberalism, interventionism, the resource curse, and a fragmenting world

Cities like Aleppo in Syria, Ramadi in Iraq, Taiz in Yemen, and Benghazi in Libya have been partly or entirely reduced to ruins

We live in an age of disintegration. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Greater Middle East and Africa. Across the vast swath of territory between Pakistan and Nigeria, there are at least seven ongoing wars – in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, and South Sudan. These conflicts are extraordinarily destructive, tearing apart the countries in which they are taking place in ways that make it doubtful they will ever recover. Cities like Aleppo in Syria, Ramadi in Iraq, Taiz in Yemen, and Benghazi in Libya have been partly or entirely reduced to ruins. There are also at least three other serious insurgencies: in southeast Turkey, where Kurdish guerrillas are fighting the Turkish army, in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, where a little-reported but ferocious guerrilla conflict is under way, and in northeast Nigeria and neighbouring countries where Boko Haram con-

tinues to launch murderous attacks.

All of these have a number of things in common: they are endless and seem never to produce definitive winners or losers. (Afghanistan has effectively been at war since 1979, Somalia since 1991.) They involve the destruction or dismemberment of unified nations, their de facto partition amid mass population movements and upheavals – well publicised in the case of Syria and Iraq, less so in places like South Sudan where more than 2.4 million people have been displaced in recent years.

Add in one more similarity, no less crucial for being obvious: in most of these countries, where Islam is the dominant religion, extreme Salafi-Jihadi movements, including the Islamic State (IS), al-Qaeda,

and the Taliban are essentially the only available vehicles for protest and rebellion. By now, they have completely replaced the socialist and nationalist movements that predominated in the twentieth century; these years have, that is, seen a remarkable reversion to religious, ethnic, and tribal identity, to movements that seek to establish their own exclusive territory by the persecution and expul-

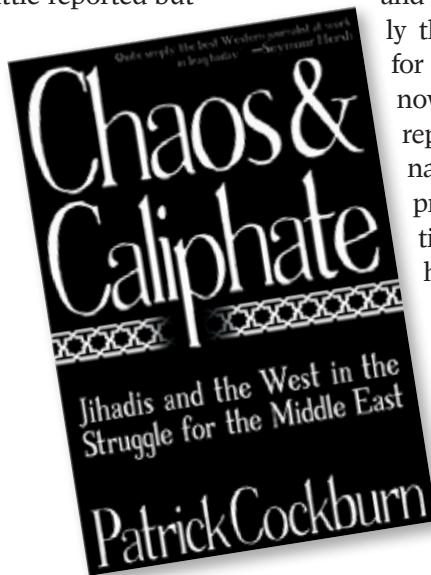
CHAOS AND CALIPHATE

JIHADIS AND THE WEST
IN THE STRUGGLE FOR
THE MIDDLE EAST

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SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION: Iraqi soldiers assigned to the 1st US Marines, clear their way through Fallujah, Iraq, during 2004's Operation New Dawn.

US Marine Corps photo, via Wikimedia

sion of minorities.

In the process and under the pressure of outside military intervention, a vast region of the planet seems to be cracking open. Yet there is very little understanding of these processes in Washington. This was recently well illustrated by the protest of 51 State Department diplomats against President Obama's Syrian policy and their suggestion that air strikes be launched targeting Syrian regime forces in the belief that President Bashar al-Assad would then abide by a ceasefire. The diplomats' approach remains typically simple-minded in this most complex of conflicts, assuming as it does that the Syrian government's barrel-bombing of civilians and other grim acts are the "root cause of the instability that continues to grip Syria and the broader region."

It is as if the minds of these diplomats were still in the Cold War era, as if they were still fighting the Soviet Union and its allies. Against all the evidence of the last five years, there is an assumption that a barely extant moderate Syrian opposition would

benefit from the fall of Assad, and a lack of understanding that the armed opposition in Syria is entirely dominated by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda clones.

Though the invasion of Iraq in 2003 is now widely admitted to have been a mistake (even by those who supported it at the time), no real lessons have been learned about why direct or indirect military interventions by the US and its allies in the Middle East over the last quarter century have all only exacerbated violence and accelerated state failure.

A mass extinction of independent states

The Islamic State, just celebrating its second anniversary, is the grotesque outcome of this era of chaos and conflict. That such a monstrous cult exists at all is a symptom of the deep dislocation societies throughout that region, ruled by corrupt and discredited elites, have suffered. Its rise – and that of various Taliban and al-Qaeda-style clones – is a measure of the weakness of its opponents.

Though the invasion of Iraq in 2003 is now widely admitted to have been a mistake, no real lessons have been learned about why direct or indirect military interventions over the last quarter century have all only exacerbated violence and accelerated state failure

CRAZY WORLD

Why did the opposition to autocracy and to Western intervention take on an Islamic form and why were the Islamic movements that came to dominate the armed resistance in Iraq and Syria win particular so violent, regressive, and sectarian?

The Iraqi army and security forces, for example, had 350,000 soldiers and 660,000 police on the books in June, 2014, when a few thousand Islamic State fighters captured Mosul, the country's second largest city, which they still hold. Today the Iraqi army, security services, and about 20,000 Shia paramilitaries, backed by the massive firepower of the United States and allied air forces, have fought their way into the city of Fallujah, 40 miles west of Baghdad, against the resistance of IS fighters who may have numbered as few as 900. In Afghanistan, the resurgence of the Taliban, supposedly decisively defeated in 2001, came about less because of the popularity of that movement than the contempt with which Afghans came to regard their corrupt government in Kabul.

Everywhere, nation states are enfeebled or collapsing, as authoritarian leaders battle for survival in the face of mounting external and internal pressures. This is hardly the way the region was expected to develop. Countries that had escaped from colonial rule in the second half of the 20th-century were supposed to become more, not less, unified as time passed.

Between 1950 and 1975, nationalist leaders came to power in much of the previously colonised world. They promised to achieve national self-determination by creating powerful independent states through the concentration of whatever political, military, and economic resources were at hand. Instead, over the decades, many of these regimes transmuted into police states controlled by small numbers of staggeringly wealthy families and a coterie of businessmen dependent on their connections to such leaders as Hosni Mubarak in Egypt or Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

In recent years, such countries were also opened up to the economic whirlwind of neoliberalism, which destroyed any crude social contract that existed between rulers and ruled. Take Syria. There, rural towns and villages that had once supported the

Baathist regime of the al-Assad family because it provided jobs and kept the prices of necessities low were, after 2000, abandoned to market forces skewed in favour of those in power. These places would become the backbone of the post-2011 uprising. At the same time, institutions like the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) that had done so much to enhance the wealth and power of regional oil producers in the 1970s have lost their capacity for united action.

The question for our moment: Why is a "mass extinction" of independent states taking place in the Middle East, North Africa, and beyond? Western politicians and media often refer to such countries as "failed states." The implication embedded in that term is that the process is a self-destructive one. But several of the states now labelled "failed" such as Libya only became so after Western-backed opposition movements seized power with the support and military intervention of Washington and NATO, and proved too weak to impose their own central governments, creating a monopoly of violence within the national territory.

In many ways, this process began with the intervention of the US-led coalition in Iraq in 2003 leading to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the shutting down of his Baathist Party, and the disbanding of his military. Whatever their faults, Saddam and Libya's autocratic ruler Muammar Gaddafi were clearly demonised and blamed for all ethnic, sectarian, and regional differences in the countries they ruled, forces that were, in fact, set loose in grim ways upon their deaths.

A question remains, however: Why did the opposition to autocracy and to Western intervention take on an Islamic form and why were the Islamic movements that came to dominate the armed resistance in Iraq and Syria in particular so violent, regressive, and sectarian? Put another way, how could such groups find so many people willing to die for their causes, while their opponents

found so few? When IS battle groups were sweeping through northern Iraq in the summer of 2014, soldiers who had thrown aside their uniforms and weapons and deserted that country's northern cities would justify their flight by saying derisively: "Die for [then-Prime Minister Nouri] al-Maliki? Never!"

A common explanation for the rise of Islamic resistance movements is that the socialist, secularist, and nationalist opposition had been crushed by the old regimes' security forces, while the Islamists were not. In countries such as Libya and Syria, however, Islamists were savagely persecuted, too, and they still came to dominate the opposition. And yet, while these religious movements were strong enough to oppose governments, they generally have not proven strong enough to replace them.

Too weak to win, but too strong to lose

Though there are clearly many reasons for the present disintegration of states and they differ somewhat from place to place, one thing is beyond question: the phenomenon itself is becoming the norm across vast reaches of the planet.

If you're looking for the causes of state failure in our time, the place to start is undoubtedly with the end of the Cold War a quarter-century ago. Once it was over, neither the US nor the new Russia that emerged from the Soviet Union's implosion had a significant interest in continuing to prop up "failed states," as each had for so long, fearing that the rival superpower and its local proxies would otherwise take over. Previously, national leaders in places such as the Greater Middle East had been able to maintain a degree of independence for their countries by balancing between Moscow and Washington. With the break-up of the Soviet Union, this was no longer feasible.

In addition, the triumph of neoliberal free-market economics in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse added a critical ele-

ment to the mix. It would prove far more destabilising than it seemed at the time.

Again, consider Syria. The expansion of the free market in a country where there was neither democratic accountability nor the rule of law meant one thing above all: plutocrats linked to the nation's ruling family took anything that seemed potentially profitable. In the process, they grew staggeringly wealthy, while the denizens of Syria's impoverished villages, country towns, and city slums, who had once looked to the state for jobs and cheap food, suffered. It should have surprised no one that those places became the strongholds of the Syrian uprising after 2011. In the capital, Damascus, as the reign of neoliberalism spread, even the lesser members of the mukhabarat, or secret police, found themselves living on only \$200 to \$300 a month, while the state became a machine for thievery.

This sort of thievery and the auctioning off of the nation's patrimony spread across the region during these years. The new Egyptian ruler, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, merciless toward any sign of domestic dissent, was typical. In a country that once had been a standard bearer for nationalist regimes the world over, he didn't hesitate in April to try to hand over two islands in the Red Sea to Saudi Arabia on whose funding and aid his regime is dependent. (To the surprise of everyone, an Egyptian court recently overruled Sisi's decision.)

That gesture, deeply unpopular among increasingly impoverished Egyptians, was symbolic of a larger change in the balance of power in the Middle East: once the most powerful states in the region – Egypt, Syria, and Iraq – had been secular nationalists and a genuine counterbalance to Saudi Arabian and Persian Gulf monarchies. As those secular autocracies weakened, however, the power and influence of the Sunni fundamentalist monarchies only increased. If 2011 saw rebellion and revolution spread across the Greater Middle East as the Arab Spring briefly blossomed, it also saw coun-

If you're looking for the causes of state failure in our time, the place to start is undoubtedly with the end of the Cold War a quarter-century ago

CRAZY WORLD

Neoliberalism was once believed to be the path to secular democracy and free-market economies. In practice, it has been anything but

ter-revolution spread, funded by those oil-rich absolute Gulf monarchies, which were never going to tolerate democratic secular regime change in Syria or Libya.

Add in one more process at work making such states ever more fragile: the production and sale of natural resources – oil, gas, and minerals – and the kleptomania that goes with it. Such countries often suffer from what has become known as “the resources curse:” states increasingly dependent for revenues on the sale of their natural resources – enough to theoretically provide the whole population with a reasonably decent standard of living – turn instead into grotesquely corrupt dictatorships. In them, the yachts of local billionaires with crucial connections to the regime of the moment bob in harbours surrounded by slums running with raw sewage. In such nations, politics tends to focus on elites battling and manoeuvring to steal state revenues and transfer them as rapidly as possible out of the country.

This has been the pattern of economic and political life in much of sub-Saharan Africa, from Angola to Nigeria. In the Middle East and North Africa, however, a somewhat different system exists, one usually misunderstood by the outside world. There is similarly great inequality in Iraq or Saudi Arabia with similarly kleptocratic elites. They have, however, ruled over patronage states in which a significant part of the population is offered works in the public sector in return for political passivity or support for the kleptocrats.

In Iraq, with a population of 33 million people, for instance, no less than seven million of them are on the government payroll, thanks to salaries or pensions that cost the government \$4-billion a month. This crude way of distributing oil revenues to the people has often been denounced by Western commentators and economists as corruption. They, in turn, generally recommend cutting the number of these jobs, but this would mean that all, rather than

just part, of the state’s resource revenues would be stolen by the elite. This, in fact, is increasingly the case in such lands as oil prices bottom out and even the Saudi royals begin to cut back on state support for the populace.

Neoliberalism was once believed to be the path to secular democracy and free-market economies. In practice, it has been anything but. Instead, in conjunction with the resource curse, as well as repeated military interventions by Washington and its allies, free-market economics has profoundly destabilised the Greater Middle East. Encouraged by Washington and Brussels, 21st-century neoliberalism has made unequal societies ever more unequal and helped transform already corrupt regimes into looting machines. This is also, of course, a formula for the success of the Islamic State or any other radical alternative to the status quo. Such movements are bound to find support in impoverished or neglected regions like eastern Syria or eastern Libya.

Note, however, that this process of destabilisation is by no means confined to the Greater Middle East and North Africa. We are indeed in the age of destabilisation, a phenomenon that is on the rise globally and at present spreading into the Balkans and Eastern Europe (with the European Union ever less able to influence events there). People no longer speak of European integration, but of how to prevent the complete break-up of the European Union in the wake of the British vote to leave.

The reasons why a narrow majority of Britons voted for Brexit have parallels with the Middle East: the free-market economic policies pursued by governments since Margaret Thatcher was prime minister have widened the gap between rich and poor and between wealthy cities and much of the rest of the country. Britain might be doing well, but millions of Britons did not share in the prosperity. The referendum about continued membership in the Euro-

pean Union, the option almost universally advocated by the British establishment, became the catalyst for protest against the status quo. The anger of the “Leave” voters has much in common with that of Donald Trump supporters in the United States.

The US remains a superpower, but is no longer as powerful as it once was. It, too, is feeling the strains of this global moment, in which it and its local allies are powerful enough to imagine they can get rid of regimes they do not like, but either they do not quite succeed, as in Syria, or succeed but cannot replace what they have destroyed, as in Libya. An Iraqi politician once said that the problem in his country

was that parties and movements were “too weak to win, but too strong to lose.” This is increasingly the pattern for the whole region and is spreading elsewhere. It carries with it the possibility of an endless cycle of indecisive wars and an era of instability that has already begun. **CT**

Patrick Cockburn is a Middle East correspondent for London's *Independent* newspaper, and the author of five books on the Middle East, the latest of which is *Chaos and Caliphate: Jihadis and the West in the Struggle for the Middle East* (OR Books). This essay originally appeared at www.tomdispatch.com

The referendum about continued membership in the European Union, the option almost universally advocated by the British establishment, became the catalyst for protest against the status quo

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Amro's victory

Israeli troops refused to allow a Palestinian activist through a checkpoint.

Ben Ehrenreich tells what happened after the man refused to leave

All through the winter, several Palestinians were being killed each week, sometimes a few a day, most of them in Hebron or the towns and villages surrounding it

I was surprised a few weeks ago to find everyone I knew in Hebron feeling cheerful. Perhaps it was the weather. Four months had passed since my last visit to the city, the largest, and lately the bloodiest, in the West Bank. It was January then, and cold, and everyone had seemed distant and shaky, glassy-eyed with trauma.

The previous November, most of the neighbourhood of Tel Rumeida had been declared a closed military zone, a convenient legalism that allows the Israeli army to exclude Palestinians – and journalists and foreign activists – from a predetermined area for a predetermined period. In this case the zone was a large one. Those who happened to live inside it were issued numbers and instructed to call them out each time they crossed through Checkpoint 56, at the base of Shuhada Street, where the section of Hebron inhabited by Israeli settlers is sealed off from the rest of the city.

All through the winter, several Palestinians were being killed each week, sometimes a few a day, most of them in Hebron or the towns and villages surrounding it. Almost without exception, the Israeli press described the killings as incidents of terror: Palestinians armed with kitchen knives, scissors or screwdrivers shot while attacking – or apparently intending to attack – Israeli soldiers or civilians.

That wave of violence, which flared up

most recently in Tel Aviv, began in Hebron on September 22 last year, when soldiers stopped an 18-year-old girl named Hadeel al-Hashlamoun at Checkpoint 56. She was standing three or four metres away from them when they shot her in the leg. She fell. One eyewitness told Amnesty International that she dropped a knife. Another said she never had one. Either way, her hands were empty when the soldiers shot her nine more times.

By the time I arrived in January, at least eight other Palestinians had been killed within a half-mile of that spot. February and March brought still more deaths, including the execution of 21-year-old Abdel Fattah al-Sharif, shot in the head as he lay unarmed and bleeding on the ground. That killing was caught on video, prompting the arrest of the soldier who delivered the fatal shot. The subsequent outpouring of public support for the arrested soldier was one of the factors that led Netanyahu to fire his hawkish minister of defence, Moshe Ya'alon, replacing him with the still more hawkish Avigdor Lieberman.

But there hadn't been another killing in Hebron since then. The shootings in Tel Aviv hadn't happened yet. Neither had Lieberman's subsequent decision to flood the southern West Bank with troops and to seal off all exits from both Gaza and the West Bank. It was sunny and warm when I ar-



SYMBOL OF OCCUPATION: Israeli checkpoint in Hebron's old city.

Photo: Mohamed Yahya (via Flickr.com)

rived, the violence was still at an ebb, and the closed military zone order had been allowed to lapse.

Issa Amro, a local activist I had known for several years, was in a far better mood than I was accustomed to. I even caught him smiling, and without the tense and bitter irony that usually lifts the corners of his mouth. On the way to the checkpoint, he stopped to speak with three women. One of them was a teacher at the local girls' school across the street from the settlers' flats in Beit Hadassah. The other women lived behind the school. They complained that now, only the teacher was allowed to use the stairs that climbed the hill across from the settlement. None of the other Palestinians who lived nearby, and that included the other two women, was allowed through: they had to walk in a long loop to get to their homes.

Inside the checkpoint – the one where al-Hashlamoun had died – we pushed through a turnstile, removed our belts, passed through a metal detector and held

our IDs up against the thick bulletproof glass for a soldier to inspect. On the other side, Amro, a young Danish woman and I walked down Shuhada Street, which was as ghostly and calm as ever, the shops sealed shut by military order more than a decade earlier, rust showing through the green paint on the collapsing metal awnings.

'Let's take the stairs,' Amro said, and grinned.

At the base of the staircase across the street from Beit Hadassah was another checkpoint, this one a simple guard booth. From that point eastward, Shuhada Street – once Hebron's busiest commercial thoroughfare – was closed to Palestinians, and only to Palestinians, and had been since the Second Intifada. Until November, the stairs, which led to the Qurtuba Girls' School and beyond it to the neighbourhood of Tel Rumeida, had been open to settlers and Palestinians alike. (In October, 19-year-old Farouq 'Abd al-Qadr Sedr was killed where we were standing and Fadel al-Qawasmeh, 18, was shot by a settler a few metres down

Inside the checkpoint – the one where al-Hashlamoun had died – we pushed through a turnstile, removed our belts, passed through a metal detector and held our IDs up against the thick bulletproof glass for a soldier to inspect

PAPER TRAIL

Amro sat on the curb and began making phone calls. He called an Israeli lawyer, an Israeli journalist, and an Israeli human rights group

the road.) This was how so much of the city had already been lost – metre by metre, one block or one house at a time. Amro did not intend to let the closure slide.

The young soldier manning the checkpoint inspected our IDs and told us that the Danish woman and I could pass, but Amro could not. “You have to go around,” he said in halting English. Only teachers employed at the school would be allowed through.

Amro asked the soldier why the Dane and I were allowed to pass.

“They are tourists,” the soldier answered. I didn’t correct him.

“Tourists can go and I cannot?” Amro asked. “Why can I not go?”

“Because you are . . .” The soldier stopped. He didn’t seem to want to finish the sentence. Eventually he found the courage. “Because you are Palestinian. This is a problem here,” he explained.

Amro asked to see a written order. If no formal order had been issued, he explained, he could not be legally prevented from passing. The soldier seemed puzzled. His word, surely, was law enough. But Amro wouldn’t leave, he made it clear, until the soldier produced something in writing.

“I know they don’t have it,” he confided to me, “and if they don’t have it I can take them to court.”

A man with a long white beard interrupted us. “He’s a liar,” the man shouted in American-accented English, pointing to Amro. “He’s also a terrorist. He’s not allowed to be here.” He stood a metre or two behind the soldier, a pistol tucked into the waistband of his trousers. I recognised him as David Wilder. He lived across the street, in Beit Hadassah. When I first met him two- and-a-half years earlier, he had been the spokesman for the Hebron settlers.

Wilder and Amro knew each other well. Soon Wilder was shouting that Amro should move to Iraq, and threatening to post photos of Amro’s wife on the internet.

Amro baited him back: “Why aren’t you

the spokesman anymore, David? Why did they fire you?”

The soldier said nothing to Wilder, but ordered us to step five metres back. “You’re trying to make a mess,” he said to Amro, and frowned. A few Palestinians from the neighbourhood gathered: women, children, old men. More soldiers arrived. I counted 11, one with a tear-gas launcher, the others holding Galil assault rifles, their fingers flat against the trigger guards.

Again Amro told the checkpoint soldier that if the staircase was closed he had a right to see the order.

“You don’t have any rights here,” Wilder yelled. “Go to Iraq.”

The soldier seemed sincerely confused. “What are you trying to do here?” he asked. “I don’t understand.”

Amro repeated: “I want to see a written order.”

Half a dozen Europeans in blue and grey uniforms walked over and leaned against a wall on the far side of the street. They were members of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, or TIPH, an international observer force with no police powers and no authority to do anything other than file reports. Their reports are not made public.

Amro sat on the curb and began making phone calls. He called an Israeli lawyer, an Israeli journalist, and an Israeli human rights group. An older European couple, tanned and smartly dressed, strolled down from the checkpoint with two TIPH observers. Wilder drove slowly past in a white sedan and stopped for the Europeans. He rolled down a window and chatted amiably with the smartly dressed man. They seemed to know each other. Wilder drove off and the smartly dressed man introduced himself to Amro. His name, he said, was Pietro Pistolese. He had been one of the founders of TIPH in 1994. “I was here during the curfew,” he said, referring to the bad days of the Second Intifada, when Palestinians here were forbidden to leave their homes for weeks and sometimes months at a time.

He put his hand on Amro's shoulder. "Believe me," he continued, "I know the situation better than you."

Amro, on the curb, gazed up at him in silence. A smile crossed his lips and quickly disappeared.

"We are trying to manage the situation," Pistolese went on.

"You are not doing it very well," Amro observed.

"You will see results," Pistolese promised, "but not immediately." And, with that, he walked off past the checkpoint and the staircase and strolled on into the section of the city forbidden to the Palestinians who live here. No one stopped him.

Amro told the soldier that he had phoned the police and been informed that a commander would be arriving soon with a copy of the order.

"Don't talk to me," the soldier said.

"I am being respectful," Amro protested. "I am talking to you as a human being."

"But I am a soldier," the soldier said.

More soldiers arrived, and an officer with three stripes on his shoulders, and a smiling settler with an M16. The police came and went without a word to Amro. Zidan Sharabati, who lived next door, poured coffee from a jug into small paper cups. Amro offered some to the soldiers. They looked away. The officer spoke with Amro in Hebrew, telling him that if he didn't leave, the army would close the entire area. Amro seemed pleased. "Let them close it," he said. "I'll come back tomorrow."

A boy with long forelocks ran between the soldiers' legs with a water gun, threatening to spray them. A few metres away, Palestinian kids kicked a soccer ball. The Danish woman passed around a giant bag of sunflower seeds. Off-duty soldiers jogged by in running shorts, their rifles bobbing on their backs. Wilder drove past again, rolled down his window and asked Amro how many tickets he wanted to Iraq. Still more soldiers came. They took our photos. A little boy begged me to play soccer

with him. The settlers' children brought the soldiers a tray of brightly coloured frozen drinks. They didn't turn them down. Young Ahmad Azzeh, who lived up the hill, swept the sunflower shells from the pavement. More than an hour had gone by. Amro still sat on the curb. "I'm waiting," he told me. "I'm not leaving. A lot of things come to me like that."

Finally, three-and-a-half hours after we arrived, an armoured police vehicle pulled up in front of us. The police inside it conferred briefly with the army officer. When they drove off again, the officer was holding several fresh sheets of paper. He approached Amro, escorted by five of his men with their guns at the ready. He pushed the papers in Amro's face. One sheet was printed in Hebrew. The other was a map of the area, with a circle drawn in magic marker around the staircase and the field just above it. "Closed military zone," the officer announced. "You have 10 minutes."

In fact, the order wouldn't take effect for another hour and did not include the street on which we were standing, but no one felt like arguing. Amro grabbed his backpack. I grabbed mine. We dodged into a doorway and climbed onto the roof of the Sharabati house and from there to the top of the staircase, from where we could see the soldiers chasing everyone – at this point mainly women and children – into their homes. Everyone but the settlers, that is. Still, Amro was happy. It didn't feel like one, but it was a victory of sorts. He had forced them to draft a fresh order, which was as good as an admission that none had existed before. And as soon as he finished work the next day, Amro promised, he would be back.

More soldiers arrived, and an officer with three stripes on his shoulders, and a smiling settler with an M16. The police came and went without a word to Amro

CT

Ben Ehrenreich's *The Way to the Spring*, based on his reporting from the West Bank, will be published later this year. He is the author of two novels, *Ether* and *The Suitors*. This article originally appeared in the London Review of Books – www.lrb.co.uk

A life in exile

A photograph capturing a moment of solemnity and remembrance. In the foreground, a woman's profile is shown in profile, her gaze directed upwards and to the right. She holds a small child in her arms, and a bright flame from a candle illuminates the child's face and the woman's shoulder. To the right, another person's hands are visible, one holding a small child. The scene is set against a dark background, with the warm glow of the candles providing the primary light source.

BODH GAYA, BIHAR, INDIA - A Tibetan woman with her two children during a candlelit vigil to mourn and honour Tibetans who have carried out self-immolation in protest at the Chinese occupation.

IN THE PICTURE



KATHMANDU, NEPAL - An elderly nun prostrates herself at Boudhanath, one of the largest and holiest Buddhist stupa in the world.

Ten years in the making, an outstanding book by Italian photographer **Albertina d'Urso** captures the life and hopes of a people in exile

For more than 10 years Albertina d'Urso has been following in the footsteps of Tibetans forced to escape from their homeland almost 60 years ago. Many of the refugees crossed the Himalayan range by foot, to defend their cultural and religious identity, their traditions and their language from Chinese repression.

In her latest book, *Out Of Tibet*, d'Urso has documented their new lives throughout the world, including several areas of India (Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Sikkim, Darjeeling, Ladakh, Bodhgaya), as well as in Nepal, Taiwan, New York, London, Paris, Zurich, Rome, Brussels, Amsterdam and Toronto.

It is a moving exploration of their culture and traditions in the country where they now live. Portrayed in their homes, during their private moments and at celebrations

IN THE PICTURE



DHARAMSALA, HIMACHAL PRADESH, INDIA - Tsering Phuntsok, a Tibetan monk who escaped from Tibet after the 2008 uprising, rests at McLeod Ganj reception centre for exiled Tibetans, the first place of refuge for new arrivals from Tibet. Like most of the refugees who escaped from their homeland, 19 year old Phuntsok, crossed the hazardous terrain of the Himalayas, mainly at night and slept in caves. During the journey the extreme climatic conditions caused him to lose his eyesight and become blind.

of Tibetan culture, d'Urso focuses on their emotions and their continued attachment to their homeland, bringing together, visually, the many Tibetans in exile who are displaced all around the world – a unique defacto state with no land.

The Dalai Lama and Lobsang Sangay, the Prime Minister of the Central Tibetan Administration, have contributed forewords to the book, and many Tibetan exiles contribute their own thoughts and experiences.

In his introduction, the Dalai Lama writes: "I believe the purpose of our coming into exile was not only to alert the world to what was going on in Tibet, appealing for help to stop it, but equally important to set about preserving our traditions as best we could.



ZURICH, SWITZERLAND - Tibetan performing artists in traditional costume, backstage in Bulach Stadthalle at an event to celebrate the 75th birthday of the Dalai Lama.

IN THE PICTURE



DHARAMSALA, HIMACHAL PRADESH, INDIA - A young Tibetan refugee child looks out from a window that reflects the Dhauladhar range of the northern Indian Himalayas.

IN THE PICTURE



ROME, ITALY -
Commemoration of the 53rd
anniversary of the Tibetan
National Uprising Day.
Tibetan refugees and their
supporters shout slogans
of freedom



LONDON, UK - Exiled Tibetans, Dolma (right) and her friend Pema (left) practise their English.

"We have achieved much that we can be proud of and much that we can look forward to, contributing positively to life in Tibet one day."

Photographer, Italian born, Albertina d'Urso has worked on many social and humanitarian reportages and has received several awards including Canon Young Photographer, Lens Culture International Exposure Award, and has exhibited internationally.

Her previous book *Ti Moun Yo, Children of Haiti*, was voted documentary book of the year at the International Photography Awards.

CT

Out of Tibet

Albertina d'Urso



OUT OF TIBET

Albertina d'Urso

Published by Dewi Lewis Publishing

Price: \$52 (Amazon)

- Albertina d'Urso's work is also featured in ColdType in a 16-page photo essay, *East Timor Dances Alone*. Download a pdf at www.coldtype.net/Assets.13/PDFs/0213.TimorHi-Res.pdf

Has Brexit triggered a UK 'Colour Revolution'?

Brexit was the result of a miscalculation by the British establishment, which is now trying to pin the blame on Jeremy Corbyn, writes **Kit Knightly**

A gang of ravenous Tory cockroaches tussle over the scorched bones of their leader. Sliming and biting their way to a seat of power they will probably hold for less than six months

t's important to remember, it was never supposed to get this far.

The prime minister didn't want it. The chancellor of the exchequer didn't want it. The Queen didn't want it. The opposition didn't want it. The president of the United States didn't want it. JP Morgan didn't want it. Goldman-Sachs didn't want it. Parliament didn't want it.

None of the heads of state of Europe wanted it. None of the banks wanted it. None of the corporate oligarchs wanted it. None of the corporations wanted it. The International Monetary Fund didn't want it. NATO didn't want it.

JK Rowling didn't want it. David Beckham didn't want it. Bob Geldof didn't want it. Eddie Izzard didn't want it. Lily Allen didn't want it. George Soros didn't want it.

And yet it happened....

Experts with scary numbers were on the BBC. Smiling pro-European Union columnists snidely mocked from almost every paper. Trendy celebrities tweeted their complex political views in 140 characters or less. There were lots of hashtags, a lot of memes. Leavers were mocked and patronised. Marches ignored, speeches unreported, politicians misquoted. Facts made up. An MP was martyred, and a movement blamed for her murder. There was a lot of name-calling, and more fear-mongering.

That's usually all it takes, to stop a movement.

And yet it happened....

The chaos that followed – that still persists – is all the evidence you need to show just how shaken Britain's political establishment has become. The portraits are askew along the corridors of power. For once the term “political fallout” does not seem like a dramatic metaphor. No institutional plan still stands. There is only a wasteland, pock-marked, cratered and scorched. The survivors shamble about, unsure what to say or do. Deformed. Cancerous.

A gang of ravenous Tories tussle over the scorched bones of their leader. Sliming and biting their way to a seat of power they will probably hold for less than six months. It would be amusing to watch, if it wasn't so nauseating.

A deep-rooted pocket of Blairites, a hold-out from a war long-since lost, have launched an assault on the only man left standing in the maelstrom, hoping to drag him down and take his place before he can implement the democratically ascertained will of the people.

It was never supposed to go this far. And now it must be stopped.

Let us imagine, for a short while, that this isn't Britain. That the vote, rather than being on EU membership, was instead about

leaving the OAS or joining NATO. That Jeremy Corbyn is a Bolivarian socialist or David Cameron a post-Soviet oligarch. Let's imagine that none of this happened in a Western democracy, but in a struggling banana republic, or a mewling new-born Balkan state. Imagine this is not here, but over there. Not us, but them.

Let us pretend this is one of those countries where these things happen.

The country's fate was, ever so briefly, put in the hands of the people. They were being tasked with voting on an issue that could destroy trade agreements set to make many multinational companies billions of dollars, an issue that poses a direct threat to America's financial and Imperial interests, an issue that is an existential threat to NATO itself.

You can't leave that to chance.

The people must be controlled. They are pressured and coerced by the media, scared by their leaders and gently instructed by the empire.

But they don't listen. They vote the wrong way, and in such numbers that the usual checks and balances, all the little tweaks in the process, and lost ballots and "accidents" STILL don't swing the vote.

Now it's all in pieces, all coherence gone. You have to move. You have to put his right.

The prime minister has resigned, and his replacement, Home Secretary Theresa May, has just been selected to fill his post

The popular socialist opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn has come under constant attack from ambitious neoliberals in his own party and the vast majority of the press, all funded and connected by a PR firm with strong connections to an ex-PM and war criminal. All evidence points to this being a coup.

All the while, lawyers and politicians are arguing over the legality of the referendum, the demographics of the vote, the nature of a parliamentary democracy. Thousands of

people march through the capital, a supposed grassroots movement, supplied with loudspeakers and stages and a big screen from . . . somewhere.

The Leavers are denounced as racists, xenophobes and nationalists; or patronised as idiots who "didn't understand their own interests." A hashtag appears, and starts trending, suggesting those who voted out have all changed their minds. A huge multinational law-firm comes forward, on behalf of "clients who wish to remain anonymous," to challenge the legality of any parliamentary action on the back of this referendum. The president of the United States "calls for calm," and his secretary of state declares that the vote can be "overturned"

Columnists from all over the press, all owned by a handful of millionaires (all of whom wanted the opposite result), start questioning the nature of a referendum. Is a binary vote truly democratic? Is there a danger of a tyranny by the majority? Doesn't parliament have a duty to protect a country from its own people? Should we bow to mob rule?

We know this process, we've seen this happen. It has been Orange, Green and Rose. It has sprouted Jasmine, Lotus and Cedar. They are stage-managed revolutions, psychological, emotional and media-driven movements that seek to undermine the democratic process of sovereign states via astroturf movements and "student" protests. A low-cost high-yield crop always repays its subsidies, and where you always, always, reap what you sow.

I'm not suggesting that London will become Kiev, or that military police will march down Oxford Street to quell the rebellion. I highly doubt it will come to that, too many rich people own too many nice cars in this part of the world. Too many townhouses would find that street battles spoil their views.

Don't shit where you eat, as the saying goes.

The people must be controlled. They are pressured and coerced by the media, scared by their leaders and gently instructed by the empire. But they don't listen . . .

AFTER THE VOTE

The tabloid hitmen are aligning their rifle-sights. The machine has clicked into motion, and its churning gears cannot stop until ABC (anyone but Corbyn) is leader of the Labour Party

But make no mistake, since the Brexit result was announced, British democracy has been under a sustained, all-out attack. The narrative has been set: That Brexit is already a catastrophe, is now beyond question. The discussion is not “What we do now?,” but rather who is to BLAME for Brexit? The answer is apparently Jeremy Corbyn.

For the as-yet-colourless British revolution to succeed, Corbyn must be removed. The shrieking media banshees are out in force. The tabloid hitmen are aligning their rifle-sights. The machine has clicked into motion, and its churning gears cannot stop until ABC (anyone but Corbyn) is leader of the Labour Party. Nothing makes this more apparent than the Parliamentary Labour Party, and their failed and desperate coup, where 172 MPs demanded that Corbyn stand down in favour of To Be Determined.

Hilary Benn has gone into hiding, everyone has forgotten what Liz Kendall looks like, Yvette Cooper is crying in the bathroom because Twitter was mean to her, Chuka Umunna is busy editing his Wikipedia page and nobody copied Andy Burnham into the memos . . . so he accidentally chose the wrong side. Options are thin on the ground.

Polly Toynbee, writing in the Guardian, puts forward Angela Eagle as leader (presumably she finds her charismatic, although God knows why). She praises Eagle’s “rhino hide,” and derides Corbyn’s character by suggesting he is being controlled by a “consiglieri” [sic] who have “screwed his courage to the sticking point [sic].” Not once in her column, does Toynbee mention Eagle’s vote FOR the Iraq war, or that she was one of the 180-plus MPs who shamefully abstained from the welfare bill vote under Harriet Harmon’s brief, craven, leadership.



Labour leader
Jeremy Corbyn.

Art: Tony Jenkins

Elsewhere, and on laughably flimsy evidence, Corbyn has been accused of antisemitism, attacking a reporter and hiding from Tom Watson. He is a weak but decent man, but at once also ambitious and conceited. He is all faults to all men.

Media commentator Will Hutton has added his voice to the chorus, his bilious out-pouring all but calling for Corbyn to be violently overthrown. One thing is sure – the Corbyn Phenomenon must never happen again. A new-New Labour is needed: “A well-led Labour Party with a crafted cluster of policies to secure a better capitalism. . . . Its constitution would put the election of its leader in the hands of the parliamentary party.”

In other words, the workers’ party must be reformed as a capitalist party, and it must remove the choice of leaders from the unreliable hands of its members.

Hutton concludes: “The Labour party must be reclaimed – for the sake of British values, for British democracy and for the very future of our country.

Nothing less will do.”

He doesn’t say who the party is being reclaimed by, or from whom it is being reclaimed. He simply, and in purely Orwellian language, demands that the minority overrules the majority for the sake of “democracy.”

A last-second plan has been hastily assembled from the broken pieces of the status quo. A three-step plan that involves a discredited referendum being ignored, and a newly castrated opposition being re-staffed with millennial Blairites. These steps are secondary of course: First, Corbyn must go. They don’t know which colour our revolution will be, as yet. But they will make damn sure it isn’t red.

CT

Kit Knightly is co-editor of Off-Guardian, at www.offguardian.org

The myth of an unelectable left

Daniel Margrain on democracy, the media and the strange contortions of Britain's Parliamentary Labour Party

In 1978, the Australian social scientist, Alex Carey, pointed out that the 20th-century has been characterised by three developments of great political importance: “the growth of democracy; the growth of corporate power; and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy.” The corporations that now dominate much of the domestic and global economies recognise the need to manipulate the public through media propaganda by manufacturing their consent in order to defend their interests against the forces of democracy. This is largely achieved as a result of coordinated mass campaigns that combine sophisticated public relations techniques.

The result is the media underplay, or even ignore, the economic and ideological motivations that drive the social policy decisions and strategies of governments. Sharon Beder outlines the reasoning behind the coordinated political, corporate and media attacks on democracy: “The purpose of this propaganda onslaught has been to persuade a majority of people that it is in their interests to eschew their own power as workers and citizens, and forego their democratic right to restrain and regulate business activity. As a result the political agenda is now largely confined to policies aimed at furthering business interests.”

This is the context in which the UK po-

litical and media establishment is attacking Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership and demeaning the membership that had the temerity to vote for him, securing the biggest electoral mandate of any Labour leader in British political history. It’s the possibility that Corbyn will break the iron-clad neoliberal consensus that scares the establishment the most.

The significant role the media have played in undermining Corbyn’s leadership, as well as their failure to explicitly acknowledge the establishment coup against him, can be traced back until at least April. But the plot to oust Corbyn began the moment he became leader after a hardcore group that included shadow chancellor Chris Leslie, shadow education secretary Tristram Hunt, shadow communities secretary Emma Reynolds and shadow defence secretary Vernon Coaker refused to serve under him. Others who refused to serve included shadow transport secretary Michael Dugher, shadow chief secretary to the Treasury Shabana Mahmood, shadow international development secretary Mary Creagh and shadow Cabinet Office minister Lucy Powell.

The corporate media also played its part in what has been the most vitriolic and biased reportage ever witnessed against any British political figure in recent history. What press watchdog Media Lens accurately described as a “panic-driven hysterical hate-fest” right across the corporate media

The significant role the media have played in undermining Corbyn’s leadership, as well as their failure to explicitly acknowledge the establishment coup against him, can be traced back until at least April

LABOUR WOES

The focus of these attacks included such banalities as to what colour poppy Corbyn would wear, his refusal to sing the national anthem, whether he would wear a tie or do up his top button

spectrum” began during Corbyn’s campaign to become leader. As Media Lens’s co-editor David Edwards noted at the time, “the full extent of media bias against Jeremy Corbyn can be gauged simply by comparing the tone and intensity of attacks on him as compared to those directed at the other three candidates: Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall.”

The intensity of the media attacks on Corbyn increased after the election, although he secured the largest mandate ever won by a party leader. The focus of these attacks included such banalities as to what colour poppy Corbyn would wear, his refusal to sing the national anthem, whether he would wear a tie or do up his top button. All of this was granted national news headlines and incessant coverage. Not to be outdone, in October last year, the BBC’s political editor Laura Kuenssberg featured in an almost comically biased, at times openly scornful, attack on Corbyn’s reasonable stance on nuclear weapons. The BBC then broadcast five senior Blairite Labour figures, all of whom opposed Corbyn, without any opportunity for an alternative viewpoint.

Kuenssberg followed up this hatchet-job three months later when she helped to orchestrate the resignation of Labour shadow foreign minister Stephen Doughty live on the BBC2 Daily Politics show as a prerequisite to accusing Corbyn’s team of running unpleasant operations and lying. Then came the non-story about Corbyn’s state-funded salary and pension initially reported in an article in the Daily Telegraph on April 12.

Allied to all this, have been attempts by the Blairite Friends of Israel rump within the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) to topple Corbyn, using the spectre of antisemitism as a blunt weapon.

Among the most comprehensive analyses of the McCarthyist witch-hunts undertaken so far have been made at the Electronic Intifada web site by Tony Greenstein (who has been at the forefront of moves to combat genuine cases of antisemitism on the fringes

of the Palestine solidarity movement), and by the journalist Asa Winstanley.

In an excellent piece, also published by the Electronic Intifada, on April 28, 2016, Winstanley outlined the links between right-wing, anti-Corbyn Labour and the pro-Israel lobby within the party. He meticulously shows how this lobby manufactured an antisemitism crisis, pinpointing the individuals involved, the tactics and dirty tricks used, and the connections to powerful individuals whose ties lead to pro-Israel groups both in London and Israel.

The latest attack on Corbyn centred on another contrived antisemitism accusation, this time made by Jewish-Zionist Labour MP, Ruth Smeeth, who, according to WikiLeaks, is a “strictly protected” US informant. Smeeth staged a highly publicised walk-out during Corbyn’s launch of a review into the Labour party’s supposed antisemitism crisis on June 30 which, as writer Jonathan Cook pointed out, was in fact, “a crisis entirely concocted by a toxic mix of the right, Israel supporters and the media.”

A few days earlier, another manufactured anti-Corbyn story made the headlines. This time it centred around a Corbyn heckler at London Gay Pride, who, as blogger Craig Murray observed was Tom Mauchline, who works for the public relations firm, Portland Communications, whose strategic counsel is Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair’s former media chief who helped to sell the disgraced prime minister’s illegal invasion-occupation of Iraq.

In addition to all of this, Corbyn’s pro-Remain position at the EU referendum has provided his critics with more manufactured ammunition to undermine him further. Chief among these critics is Angela Eagle, one of many Blairite plotters who resigned her post in order to challenge Corbyn for party leadership.

According to a recent YouGov poll, Eagle commands just six percent support from Labour members, while an overwhelming majority said they would vote for Corbyn were

he were to stand again.

This grass-roots popularity for Corbyn must be seen against a backdrop in which the Labour Party gained 60,000 members in the week after the attempted coup against him. Membership of the party currently stands at almost 600,000 – much more than its peak of 405,000 members under Tony Blair's leadership.

This would almost certainly translate into Corbyn receiving more general election votes than his Blairite predecessor Ed Milliband did at the last election. With the proportion of the Labour vote increasing under Corbyn, the two main parties are neck-and-neck at 32 per cent. This undercuts the recent claims of elder statesmen including David Blunkett and Neil Kinnock that Corbyn is an electoral liability for Labour.

This narrative is consistent with the notion that the left is unelectable. Such a narrative is a myth. As Craig Murray writes, the idea that you have to be right-wing to win elections is belied by the fact that the SNP under Nicola Sturgeon won the people of Scotland over on a left-wing ticket. He sensibly points out that there is no point being elected just so you can carry out the same policies as your opponents. Murray also writes that the British public's enthusiasm for Blair in 1997 was not based on the policies now known as Blairite.

As Murray astutely points out: "The 1997 Labour Manifesto was not right-wing. It did not mention academy schools, private finance initiatives, tuition fees, NHS privatisation, financial sector deregulation, or any of the right wing policies Blair would usher in. Labour actually presented quite a left wing image, and figures like Robin Cook and Clare Short were prominent in the campaign. There was certainly no mention of military invasions. It was only once Labour was in power that Blair shaped his cabinet and his policies on an ineluctably right wing course and Mandelson started to become dominant. As people discovered that New Labour were 'intensely relaxed about people

getting filthy rich,' to quote Mandelson, their popular support plummeted. 'The great communicator' Blair was, for 90 percent of his prime ministership, no more popular than David Cameron is now. 79 percent of the electorate did not vote for him by his third election."

Murray continues: "Michael Foot consistently led Margaret Thatcher in opinion polls – by a wide margin – until the Falklands War. He was defeated in a victory election by the most appalling and intensive wave of popular war jingoism and militarism, the nostalgia of a fast declining power for its imperial past, an emotional outburst of popular relief that Britain could still notch up a military victory over foreigners in its colonies. It was the most unedifying political climate imaginable. The tabloid demonisation of Foot as the antithesis of the military and imperial theme was the first real exhibition of the power of Rupert Murdoch. Few serious commentators at the time doubted that Thatcher might have been defeated were it not for the Falklands War – which in part explains her lack of interest in a peaceful solution. Michael Foot's position in the demonology ignores these facts. The facts about Blair and about Foot are very different from the media mythology.

"The reality, as one commentator put it, is that in corporate media and political establishment parlance, 'unelectable' is mediapolitical code for 'likely to be highly electable but 'will not serve elite interests.'"

This description applies to Corbyn. The unelectable left meme is likely to intensify the longer Corbyn manages to hang on. In these unsettling and unpredictable times, it's the one propaganda weapon the establishment is certain to cling to as their means of attempting to prevent democracy from breaking their grip on power.

The idea that you have to be right-wing to win elections is belied by the fact that the SNP under Nicola Sturgeon won the people of Scotland over on a left-wing ticket

Daniel Margrain, who lives in London, has a master's degree in globalisation, culture and the city. More of his political articles may be found at his blog at www.danielmargrain.com

Fast times with Grace Ivey

Eggs are a big problem for **Dell Franklin's** only regular customer

Grace exits the low white picket fence gate, stoops to latch it closed, and I am out of the cab like a millionaire's flunky chauffeur

At exactly 3:45 each Friday afternoon I pick up Grace Ivey. I do my damndest to be on time, because Grace is an old-fashioned stickler. She's a bookkeeper, and my task is to drive her to a department store in the big mall off the freeway, where she does the books. After finishing that, she treks to the supermarket where I pick her up at six.

Grace – my only regular customer is a long-time divorcee in her mid-50s. She wears old-fashioned clunky platform heels, thickflesh-coloured hose, dark, ankle-length, dresses and ruffled white blouses, buttoned at the throat. Her wavy hair is short and greying, and she has rimless glasses. Her face, though wintry, has fine blunt features, and her grey eyes sparkle when her commentary – or mine – becomes barbed. She reminds me of a Polly Puritan I was in love with in high school, a predicament that provoked self-loathing in me at the time.

I make it on time – exactly 3:45 – and feel good about pleasing Grace, who is always understanding when I'm late and blame my tardiness on the dispatcher or traffic. I never have to honk the car horn, because Grace always emerges the moment I pull up, turning to lock the oak door, then walks along the green synthetic mat that runs along the veranda and front yard of her 1920s white wood-frame

home. There are flower boxes beneath dark blue shuttered windows, and a trusty rocking chair on the veranda. Thick curtains behind the big front window obscure any glimpse of the interior. The grassless yard is of evenly-graded pebbles and cacti and succulents. Nothing is out of place. Nothing ever changes.

Grace exits the low white picket fence gate, stoops to latch it closed, and I am out of the cab like a millionaire's flunky chauffeur to open the rear door of my cab. She niftily

tucks up her skirt before sitting down, while I gently close the door and scurry to get behind the wheel.

"Well, how are you doing this afternoon, Dell?" Grace asks.

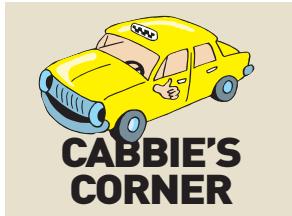
"Hectic as always on Fridays, Grace, but I'm bearing up. How's

it going with you?"

"Oh, about the same. I'm keeping busy."

"I'm glad. The Lord wants no idle hands in his kingdom."

She chuckles, appreciation of my ironic wit showing in her voice, and places her hands primly on her knees. Grace and I usually have pretty much the same conversation, unless I indulge her with a humorous, passably risqué cab story. Grace has long since told me about her ex-husband – a high school sweetheart who, by turns, tended bar, drove a cab, painted houses, dug post-holes, rooted out sewers, pounded nails, baked donuts, and flirted with



various other vocations, almost always quitting or getting axed, always late with alimony and child support, until there was neither, so that Grace raised her son alone. The husband, a drifter/drunk, still lives in the area; the son, married with his own family, is an insurance adjuster in Seattle.

"I'm still looking for a bartender gig, Grace," I say, taking the usual route through sluggish Friday afternoon traffic.

"Well, I certainly do not see why you're not hired. You're punctual, efficient and polite. You certainly have the personality and experience. I would hire you if I owned a bar. Ha ha. Of course, I don't go into bars."

"I've been trying for a year now, Grace. I worked clubs for 17 years down south, have excellent references, but they don't want southerners. They want local pretty boys half my age, or young women with big breasts, not guys like me, with funny stories and an attitude."

"Well, as much as I'd like to see you get the job you covet and deserve, I would miss not having you as my cab driver on Fridays."

"Yeh, but you survived before I came along, didn't you?"

"Sam Sanchez took me for years. He was courteous and punctual, and his cab was immaculate, but he retired, and, of course, he recommended you, and for that I am thankful. I do miss Sam."

As I negotiate the mile-and-a-half ride, I say: "Well, there's always Jeff. He's not a bad guy."

"The man never says a word. Never opens the door for me. He's some kind of... screenwriter? Where does he get his material if he doesn't talk to people?"

"He doesn't talk to any of us, either – very secretive."

"Well, I don't see how he ever sells a screenplay," Grace huffs.

"In any case, if I do manage to land a bar gig, there's always Jay." I glimpse the rearview to observe her reaction.

"Oh my God," she groused sourly. "The man is so . . . full of it! Honestly, I wish HE would be quiet and secretive, like Jeff, instead

of yapping. And he claims to be some kind of . . . comedian?"

"I heard he's booked at the local comedy club from time to time as a fill-in."

"Well, they must be pretty hard-up for laughs around here," Grace chirps.

"Well, there's always Harley Hunter." I keep my eye on her and traffic. "He's an excellent cab pilot."

"Cab pilot? Huh! Please Dell, do not get me started on Harley. I know his mother. The man is 45 and still lives at home! I already know his life story and his political beliefs, and I'm up to here with his complaints about his stepfather . . ."

"The retiree from the electric company who listens to Rush Limbaugh and those right-wing nuts all day and won't mow the lawn . . . poor Harley has to do all the household chores after he gets home from hacking."

"Why doesn't Harley just move out?"

"You'll have to ask him that question, Grace."

"Harumph! You ask him a question and he'll never shut up . . . he talks more than that damn Jay."

"Well, there's always true-blue Will."

"Now that man, you know, he was the most evil drunk in San Luis Obispo before he became saved and quit drinking. There's not a person in town who didn't hate him, including his ex-wife, whom he beat. And now, oh my God, he's so self-righteous; and he knows I know him, and we do not talk. I just will not get in the same cab with the man, Dell."

"Well, as a last resort, Ray, the golf pro, is harmless and cordial."

"Yes, but he refuses to pick me up, and why I do not know."

"Sam Sanchez says he only wants the big rides. Sam says he's the cheapest person he's ever known, and Sam's 70. Ray's on the satellite golf tour. He's so cheap he brings his own vegetarian lunches, and he doesn't want to be friendly with fellow cabbies because he's afraid he might have to buy you a coffee if you buy him one. He drives to tourna-

**"I'm up to here with his complaints about his stepfather . . .
The retiree from the electric company who listens to Rush Limbaugh and those right-wing nuts all day and won't mow the lawn . . . poor Harley has to do all the household chores after he gets home"**

ON THE ROAD

Appalled when I told her I felt I had money coming, Grace offered to do my taxes

ments on weekends in his tiny pick-up and sleeps in it."

Grace nods knowingly as we pull into the Mall. "I knew there was something wrong with that man the moment I sat in his cab the first time. I can't stand a cheap man. I will say one thing about my ex-husband – deadbeat that he is: When he had it he spent it."

I pull up to the glass doors of the chain store, jump out and open the door for Grace, who totes her over-size handbag stuffed with ledgers and stuff. She always has exact change – a five, a single, and a quarter dug out of her change purse for a \$5.50 ride. I hear she tips the other cabbies no more than 50 cents and sometimes less. I get the extra 25 cents, of course, because I'm special, and possibly for entertainment value. Yes, I think, I may be no good for women, at least I'm amusing.

I'm supposed to get off at six, but since Grace considers sitting in the cabs of fellow drivers akin to swallowing lye, I hang around to oblige her, even though I'd rather get the hell out of town and drink with the happy hour crew in the Cayucos Tavern, where Fridays are festive and the mating ritual is in full bloom.

About six months or so ago, I told Grace quite casually that I had not turned in my income tax in seven years. Appalled when I told her I felt I had money coming, she offered to do my taxes. I brought her a sheaf of pay vouchers and tax forms, and the following week when I picked her up she handed me a neatly-compiled form to send to the IRS, informing me I had almost \$,500 coming. I was thrilled! When my money finally came, Grace wanted no pay for her services, but when I insisted, she told me to give her "what I could afford." So I gave her a crackling fresh \$100 bill, and she was thrilled!

While the early swing-shift drivers tool around with fares, I take it easy and drive to the supermarket for Grace, hoping she is not waylaid by a long, slow line. She is usually waiting beside her shopping cart out front when I pull up. I get there at 5:50, knowing

that if I can hustle her home early, get to the compound and log in and rush home, I can salvage at least a half-hour of happy hour.

I sit and wait. At six, I get out and peek inside the supermarket. It is packed, but I spot Grace and her cart at the end of a long line. Finally, at 6:15, she emerges. I get out of the cab, open the trunk, wedging the cart against the bumper of the car while Grace hovers.

"Be careful with the eggs, Dell," she says, looking concerned.

I have picked her up on this identical trip almost every Friday for at least a year, and not once has she failed to warn me to be careful with her eggs. I understand that Grace doesn't think I'm so stupid that I can't remember previous warnings, but that it is her nature to be extra cautious, and that she is obsessed with "making sure."

On the drive to her home, in heavy traffic, I am tense and in a hurry – frustrated by pokey drivers and long lines of cars bottled up behind street lights, but I refrain from my usual cursing, honking and savage name-calling, out of respect for Grace, who, I know, also wants to get home as quickly as possible.

When I pull up in front of her house, I jump out, first to open her door, and then to open the trunk and quickly carry out her few bags and place them on the seat of the rocking chair.

"Now be careful with those eggs," Grace warns, fretting.

"Your eggs are in safe hands," I say. "The other night I woke up in a cold sweat, Grace, around three in the morning. I had this recurring nightmare – somehow, again, I dropped all your eggs and every one cracked, and there was yolk everywhere, on the ground, on your shoes, on my shoes, on your dress, on my pants . . ."

Grace roars with surprisingly bawdy saloon gal laughter. Her wintry face spreads into a web of smile lines and her eyes twinkle.

"God," she murmurs as she pays me the usual \$6.25. "It's frightening. You remind me so much of my ex husband, Virgil. But I know you're not really like him at all."

CT

Dell Franklin is a journalist and founder of the Rogue Voice literary magazine. He blogs at www.dellfranklin.com

Why do conspiracy theories abound nowadays?

A poem by **Philip Kraske**

Conspiracies abound, and I like mine juicy,
With grammar atrocious and middling spoofy,
Here a fact turned and there a vid squibbed,
Making you wonder if you're not getting ribbed,
With "blatant," "obvious," "clear," "unimpeachable":
Sales reps of truth, that phantom unreachable.

I wonder why now they bloom so full rife,
In an age when the networks toot so-loud fife,
Covering the sex jollies of every famed clown,
Scrying odd cancers lest our health is cut down,
Speculative waxing on the Donald's blond hair,
And wondering wisely on the CO2 scare.

Perhaps the reason's they fall silent en masse,
Whenever great tragedy does come to pass,
When madmen shoot kids or towers get whacked,
They feel a duty to be sure it gets flacked
As authorities present it and not how it looks,
And not grill the parents or check their checkbooks.

Take Sandy Hook and the media unbound,
Did nobody notice no children around?
A storm of kids should squall through the news:
The runny-nosed squeal of 400 buckaroos.
Yet the whole thing came off with the greatest aplomb,
A statement from cops, at most a sad mom.

Or take the Pulse killings, and the uniform show,
Of the same three victims lacking any blood flow,
All carried back in the direction of crime,
And yet no news editor even had time
To see in the distance the huge P of the place,
For the only thing sought was the classic vid ace.

The worst one, of course, is old 9-11,
Which surely wins out as conspiracy heaven,
For rare is the aspect that stands a hard look,
From towers' collapse to M. Atta's flight book,
Not a syllable of which have reporters e'er deigned,
To review or research or say needs be changed.

So into the breach have the vigilant leapt,
Not all fair, not all smart, and many inept,
And plagued good ol' YouTube with video galore,
Charging the government with treason and more,
And saying the media must be in cahoots,
Glad to spin tales and take in big loots.

The Info Age is thus quickly becoming,
Victim of vile informational slumming.
What's true and what's not on the state of affairs,
Depends on hobbyists who work from armchairs.
And much to blame are reporters fair-faced,
Filing big scoops with bold cut-and-paste.

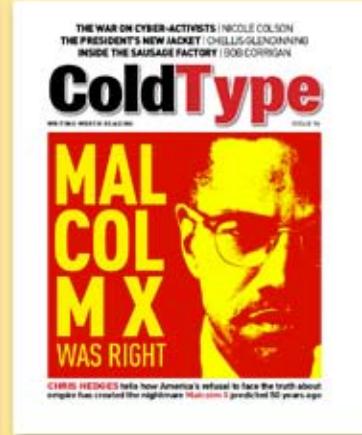
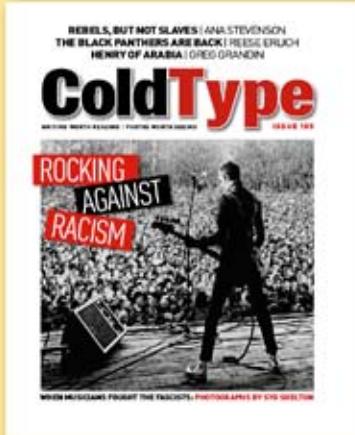
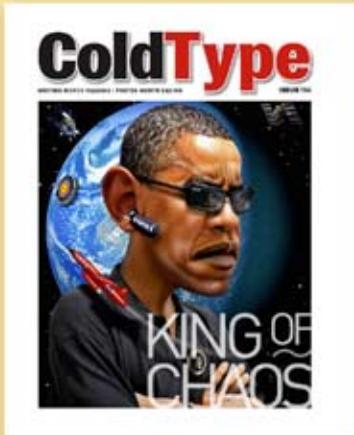
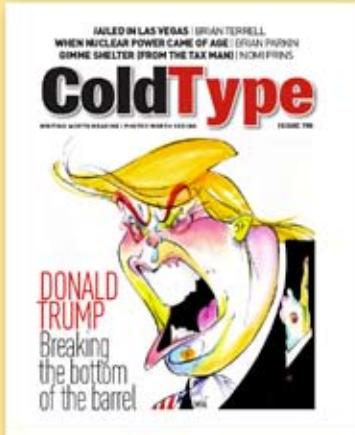
Philip Kraske lives in Madrid, Spain, where he teaches English on a freelance basis and does some translation.
His four novels, of varied plots but centring on American politics and society, began to appear in 2009.

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