

The Secret War on Iraq

John Pilger

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The American and British attack on Iraq has already begun. While the Blair government continues to claim in Parliament that ‘no final decision has been taken’, Royal Air Force and US fighter bombers have secretly changed tactics and escalated their ‘patrols’ over Iraq to an all-out assault on both military and civilian targets.

American and British bombing of Iraq has increased by 300 per cent. Between March and November 2002, according to Ministry of Defence replies to MPs, the RAF dropped more than 124 tonnes of bombs. From August to December, there were 62 attacks by American F-16 aircraft and RAF Tornados – an average of one bombing raid every two days. These are said to have been aimed at Iraqi ‘air defences’, but many have fallen on mostly populated areas, where civilian deaths are unavoidable. Under the United Nations Charter and the conventions of war and international law, the attacks amount to acts of piracy: no different, in principle, from the German *Luftwaffe’s* bombing in Spain in the 1930s as precursor to its invasion of Europe.

The bombing is a ‘secret war’ that has seldom been news. Since 1991, and especially in the last four years, it has been unrelenting and is now deemed the longest Anglo-American campaign of aerial bombardment since World War Two. The US and British governments justify it by claiming they have a United Nations mandate to police so-called ‘no fly zones’ which they declared following the Gulf War. They say these ‘zones’, which give them control of most of Iraq’s airspace, are legal and supported by United Nations Security Council Resolution 688.

This is false. There are no references to no fly zones in any Security Council resolution. To be sure about this, I asked Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who was Secretary General of the United Nations in 1992 when Resolution 688 was passed. ‘The issue of no fly zones was not

raised and therefore not debated: not a word,' he said. 'They offer no legitimacy to countries sending their aircraft to attack Iraq.'

In 1999, Tony Blair claimed the no fly zones allowed the United States and Britain to perform 'a vital humanitarian task' in protecting the Kurds in the north of Iraq and the ethnic Marsh Arabs in the south. In fact, British and American aircraft have actually provided cover for neighbouring Turkey's repeated invasions of northern, Kurdish Iraq. Turkey is critical to the American 'world order'. Overseeing the oilfields of the Middle East and Central Asia, it is a member of Nato and the recipient of billion of dollars' worth of American weapons and military equipment. It is also where British and American bombers are based. A long-running insurrection by Turkey's Kurdish population is regarded by Washington as a threat to the 'stability' of Turkey's 'democracy' that is a front for its military, which is among the world's worst violators of human rights. Hundreds of thousands of Turkish Kurds have been displaced and an estimated 30,000 killed. Turkey, unlike Iraq, is 'our friend'.

In 1995 and 1997, as many as 50,000 Turkish troops, backed by tanks and fighter aircraft, occupied what the West called 'Kurdish safe havens'. They terrorised Kurdish villages and murdered civilians. In December 2000, they were back, committing the atrocities that the Turkish military commits with immunity against its own Kurdish population. For joining the US 'coalition' against Iraq, the Turkish regime is to be rewarded with a bribe worth \$6billion. Turkey's invasions are rarely reported in Britain. So great is the collusion of the Blair government that, virtually unknown to Parliament and the British public, the RAF and the Americans have, from time to time, deliberately suspended their 'humanitarian' patrols to allow the Turks to get on with killing Kurds in Iraq.

In March last year, RAF pilots patrolling the 'no fly zone' in Kurdish Iraq publicly protested for the first time about their enforced complicity in the Turkish campaign. The pilots complained that they were frequently ordered to return to their base in Turkey to allow the Turkish air force to bomb the very people they were meant to be 'protecting'. Speaking on a non-attributable basis to Dr Eric Herring, a senior lecturer in politics at Bristol University and a specialist on Iraqi sanctions, the pilots said whenever the Turks wanted to attack the Kurds in Iraq, RAF patrols were recalled to base and ground crews were told to switch off their radar – so that the Turks' targets would not be visible. One British pilot reported seeing the devastation in Kurdish villages caused by the attacks once he had resumed his patrol.

American pilots who fly in tandem with the British, are also ordered to turn their planes around and turn back to Turkey to allow the Turks to devastate the Kurdish 'safe havens'. 'You'd see Turkish F-14s and F-16s inbound, loaded to the gills with munitions,' one pilot told the *Washington Post*. 'Then they'd come out half an hour later with their munitions expended.' When the Americans returned to Iraqi air space, he said, they would see 'burning villages, lots of smoke and fire.'

The Turks do no more than American and British aircraft in their humanitarian

guise. The sheer scale of the Anglo-American bombing is astonishing, with Britain a very junior partner. During the 18 months to January 1999 (the last time I was able to confirm official United States figures) American aircraft flew 36,000 sorties over Iraq, including 24,000 combat missions. The term 'combat' is highly deceptive. Iraq has virtually no air force and no modern air defences. Thus, 'combat' means dropping bombs or firing missiles at infrastructure that has been laid to waste by a 12-year-old embargo. The *Wall Street Journal*, the authentic voice of the American establishment, described this eloquently when it reported that the United States faced 'a genuine dilemma' in Iraq. After eight years of enforcing a no fly zone in northern (and southern) Iraq, few targets remain. 'We're down to the last outhouse,' one US official protested.

I have seen the result of these attacks. When I drove from the northern city of Mosul three years ago, I saw the remains of an agricultural water tanker and truck, riddled with bullet holes, shrapnel from a missile, a shoe and the wool and skeletons of about 150 sheep. A family of six, a shepherd, his father and his wife and four children, were blown to pieces here. It was treeless, open country: a moonscape. The shepherd, his family and his sheep would have been clearly visible from the air.

The shepherd's brother, Hussain Jarsis, agreed to meet me at the cemetery where the family is buried. He arrived in an old Toyota van with the widow, who was hunched with grief, her face covered. She held the hand of her one remaining child, and they sat beside the mounds of earth that are the four children's graves. 'I want to see the pilot who killed my children,' she shouted across to us. The shepherd's brother told me, 'I heard explosions, and when I arrived to look for my brother and family, the planes were circling overhead. I hadn't reached the causeway when the fourth bombardment took place. The last two rockets hit them. At the time I couldn't grasp what was going on. The truck was burning. It was a big truck, but it was ripped to pieces. Nothing remained except the tyres and the number plate. We saw three corpses, but the rest were just body parts. With the last rocket, I could see the sheep blasted into the air.'

It was not known if American or British aircraft had done this. When details of the attack were put to the Ministry of Defence in London, an official said, 'We reserve the right to take robust action when threatened.' This attack was significant, because it was investigated and verified by the senior United Nations official in Iraq at the time, Hans Von Sponeck, who drove there specially from Baghdad. He confirmed that nothing nearby resembled a military installation.

Von Sponeck recorded his finding in a confidential internal document entitled 'Air Strikes in Iraq', prepared by the UN Security Section (UNOHCI). He also confirmed dozens of similar attacks and these are documented – attacks on villages, a fishermen's wharf, nearby a United Nations food warehouse. So regular were the attacks that Von Sponeck ordered UN relief convoys suspended every afternoon. For this, Von Sponeck, a senior United Nations civil servant with a distinguished career all over the world, made powerful enemies in Washington and London. The Americans demanded that Kofi Annan, the United

Nations Secretary General, sack him and were surprised when Annan stood by his chief representative in Iraq. However, within a few months, Von Sponeck felt he could no longer run a humanitarian programme in Iraq that was threatened both by the illegal bombing and by a deliberate American policy of blocking humanitarian supplies. He resigned in protest, just as his predecessor, Denis Halliday, a Deputy Under Secretary of the UN, had done. Halliday called the United States and British-driven embargo 'genocidal'.

It is now clear from official documents that the United States is preparing for a possible slaughter in Iraq. The Pentagon's 'Doctrine for Joint Urban Operations' says that unless Baghdad falls quickly it has to be the target of 'overwhelming firepower'. The resistance of Stalingrad in World War Two is given as a 'lesson'. Cluster bombs, deep penetration 'bunker' bombs and depleted uranium will almost certainly be used. Depleted uranium is a weapon of mass destruction. Coated on missiles, and tank shells, its explosive force spreads radiation over a wide area, especially in the desert dust.

Professor Doug Rokke, the United States army physicist in charge of cleaning up depleted uranium in Kuwait told me, 'I am like most people in southern Iraq. I have 5,000 times the recommended level of radiation in my body. What we're seeing now, respiratory problems, kidney problems, cancers are the direct result. The controversy over whether or not it's the cause of these problems is a manufactured one. My own ill-health is a testament to that.'

The most devastating weapon of mass destruction was briefly in the news when Unicef, the United Nations Children's Fund, released its annual State of the World's Children report. The human cost of the American-driven embargo of Iraq is spelt out in statistics that require no comment. 'Iraq's child mortality rate has nearly tripled since 1990 to levels found in some of the world's least-developed countries', said the report. 'The country's regression over the past decade is by far the most severe of the 193 countries surveyed. Unicef said that a quarter of Iraqi babies were now underweight and that more than a fifth were stunted from malnutrition.' Under the rules of the embargo, Iraqis are allowed less than £100 per person with which to sustain life for an entire year. To date, the cost of the current 'secret' and illegal British bombing of Iraq is a billion pounds.



Lies, Damned Lies and Terror Warnings

On November 7, 2002, the day before the United Nations Security Council voted on a resolution that made an American and British attack on Iraq more than likely, Downing Street began issuing warnings of imminent terrorist threats against the United Kingdom. Cross-Channel ferries, the London Underground and major public events were all said to be 'targeted'. The anonymous Government sources described 'emergency security measures' that included a 'rapid reaction force of army reservists' and a squadron of fighter jets 'on constant standby'. Plans were being drawn up to 'evacuate major cities and deal

with large numbers of contaminated corpses'. Police snipers were being trained 'to kill suicide bombers' and anti-radiation pills were being distributed to hospitals. By November 11, Tony Blair himself was telling the British public to be 'on guard' against an attack that could lead to 'maximum carnage'.

Curiously, the national state of alert for a likely attack, colour-coded amber, which such a grave warning would require, was never activated. It remains on 'black special', which is just above normal. Why? Urgent questions remain unanswered. Now health service teams are to have smallpox vaccinations to 'meet the threat of a germ warfare attack'; and the Foreign Office has produced a remarkable video suggesting that Britain is about to attack Iraq because of its concern for that country's human rights record. (This must mean Britain will soon attack other countries because of their human rights records, such as China, Russia and the United States).

The absurdity of all this is becoming grotesque, and the British public needs to ask urgent questions of its Government. Where is the evidence, any evidence, for a national 'alert' that borders on such orchestrated hysteria? And what explains its uncanny timing with the American and British machinations at the United Nations on Iraq? Lying as government strategy is known as black propaganda. The British invented its modern form. Josef Goebbels, the Nazis' propaganda chief, was full of admiration for the British model. Since September 11, 2001, every attempt by black propagandists in Whitehall and Washington to justify an unprovoked attack on Iraq by linking the regime in Baghdad with Al-Qaeda terrorism has failed.

First, there was the charge that Iraq was responsible for last year's anthrax scare in the United States, then it was claimed that Mohammed Atta, one of the alleged September 11 hijackers, had made contact with Iraqi intelligence in Prague. Both claims have been proven false, along with stories planted in newspapers by American intelligence that Iraq has been training Al-Qaeda terrorists at a secret base. Surmounting the truth that the secular Iraqi regime actually fears and loathes Osama bin Laden and his Islamic militants has always been difficult for American and British propagandists – even though George W Bush currently babbles nonsense about 'exporting this evil Al-Qaeda threat to the world'.

Blair is more careful; but his implied message is the same: that the 'scourge' of world-wide terrorism is linked to Saddam Hussein, whose demonology must now rival that of the 'baby-eating Boche' during the First World War, an early triumph of black propaganda. These deceptions and outright lies are aimed at the great majority of the British people who, as the polls show, are opposed to attacking Iraq, a country that offers them no threat. However, if you frighten the public with apocalyptic warnings about evacuating cities and incessantly link Iraq, September 11 and the Bali bombing, then people may change their minds and be ready for war – or so the propagandists bargain. 'It's a softening up process,' says a former intelligence officer familiar with the black art, 'a lying game on a huge scale'. It is also an indication of the Blair government's

desperation. Blair knows that, however successful his enfeeblement of parliamentary democracy, public opinion matters and, at times, has unforeseen power. So as an antidote to the 'softening up' of public opinion, I offer this pocket guide to the current lying game.

What Bush and Blair want us to forget...

The Love Affair

The present Iraqi regime is a product of the Ba'athist Party, which the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) helped bring to power. The CIA officer in charge of the operation described it as 'my favourite coup'. During the 1980s, America and Britain supplied Saddam Hussein with every weapon he wanted, often secretly and illegally. The relationship was known cynically in Washington as 'the love affair'.

When Blair and Bush incessantly refer to Saddam 'using chemical weapons against his own people', specifically the Kurdish village of Halabja in 1988, they never explain that Britain and America were accomplices. Not only did both governments secretly and illegally approve the sale of chemical weapons' agents; officials in Washington and Whitehall tried to cover up the Halabja atrocity, with the Americans even faking a story that Iran was responsible. And while the gassing was going on, Saddam Hussein was being congratulated on his wise leadership by David Mellor, a Foreign Office minister, whose turn it was to sit at the feet of the dictator. Almost as a reward, the Thatcher governments gave Saddam £340million of British taxpayers' money in export credits. When Bush and Blair call Saddam 'a threat to his neighbours', they never mention that George Bush Senior, as head of the Central Intelligence Agency and later President, pushed Iraq to attack Iran and supplied crucial intelligence to the Iraqi military that ensured the war went on for eight years. The result was millions of dollars in profits for American and British arms firms, and a million young men dead on both sides. A congressional investigation, long forgotten, described this as a 'great crime'.

Hypocrisy Unlimited

On September 12 2002, George W Bush appeared before the United Nations General Assembly and asked dramatically: 'are Security Council resolutions to be honoured or cast aside?' The answer came a few weeks later when the Security Council passed Resolution 1435, which demanded that 'Israel immediately cease measures in and around Ramallah including the destruction of Palestinian civilian and security infrastructure' and withdraw its 'occupying forces from Palestinian cities towards the positions held prior to September 2000'. The resolution was passed 14-0 with one abstention, the United States. Israel dismissed it; and nothing happened. This was no surprise. The Israelis have defied at least 40 Security Council resolutions and scores of General Assembly resolutions: a record of dishonouring and 'casting aside' the law (to quote Bush) unequalled by any nation since the United Nations was founded.

Like Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the 1980s, Israel's defiance is rewarded with

all the weapons and fighter aircraft it wants. Just as Britain used to supply Saddam with the means of making chemical bombs, so the Blair government currently supplies the Israeli regime of Ariel Sharon with chemical warfare technology. This includes 'PCPs' which can easily be turned into lethal sarin nerve gas which, next to nuclear weapons, is the most feared weapon of mass destruction.

The Real Reason for Attacking Iraq

America burns a quarter of all the oil consumed by humanity. A study sponsored by the United States Council on Foreign Relations says that 'the American people continue to demand plentiful and cheap energy without sacrifice or inconvenience'. Transport in the United States alone burns 66 per cent of America's petroleum.

One estimate is that the world's oil reserves will begin to decline within five to 10 years at the rate of about two million barrels a day. In the Middle East, the only country capable of significantly increasing its production is Iraq, once described by Vice President Cheney as 'the great prize'. At present, America depends on Iraq's neighbour Saudi Arabia, not just for oil but for keeping the price of oil down. However, Saudi Arabia is the home of Al-Qaeda, and Osama bin Laden and 15 of the alleged September 11 hijackers. The grievance against the Americans for their imperial interventions in the Middle East is said to be deepest in the country that was invented by British imperialism and has since been maintained by the US as an oil colony. If America installs a colonial regime in Baghdad, certainly its dependence on Saudi Arabia will be dramatically eased, and its grip on the world's greatest oil market will be tightened. The price, for the people of the region, for Americans and the rest of us, will be an enduring turmoil similar to that of Palestine, exemplified by the terror bombing of an Israeli hotel in Kenya.

This is the hidden agenda of the 'war on terrorism' – a term that is no more than a euphemism for the Bush administration's exploitation of the September 11 attacks and America's accelerating imperial ambitions. In the past 14 months, on the pretext of 'fighting terror', US military bases have been established at the gateways to the greatest oil and gas fields on earth, especially in Central Asia, which is also coveted as a 'great prize'. In Afghanistan, the president, Hamid Karzai, guarded by 46 American special forces troops, was employed by a subsidiary of Unocal, the American oil company. The post-Taliban United States ambassador is a senior executive of Unocal, and a pipeline to carry lucrative oil and gas across the country from the Caspian Sea will be built by Unocal.

The majority of Bush's cabinet are from the oil industry, which has made them extremely rich. Bush's father is still a consultant for the huge oil services company, the Carlyle Group, and his personal clients include the family of Osama bin Laden. One of the reasons the Americans attacked Afghanistan was not to liberate women but to liberate the pipeline deal. As the BBC reported on September 18, 2001: 'Niaz Niak, a former Pakistani foreign minister, was told by

senior American officials in mid-July (2001) that military action against Afghanistan would go ahead by the middle of October'. It was Naik's view that Washington would not drop its war against Afghanistan even if bin Laden were to be surrendered immediately by the Taliban. Remember, he said this before the attacks of September 11 had happened.

Only a pittance of the millions of dollars pledged to rebuild Afghanistan has arrived. As many as 20,000 people, estimates *The Guardian*, if you count those bombed to death and who starved during the bombing, died so that the West could re-conquer Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden was nowhere to be seen.

Secrets and Consequences

While Saddam Hussein's crimes against his own people are well known, those of the West in Iraq are generally suppressed. The suffering of ordinary Iraqi people is never mentioned by Bush and Blair, and only rarely by the media. This is not surprising. Under a United Nations blockade that resembles a medieval siege, devised and controlled by the United States and Britain, Iraq is allowed to spend little more than £100 per person on sustaining the life of each of its citizens for one year. This is less than half the annual per capita income of Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. It is less than the amount the United Nations spends on food for dogs used in Iraqi de-mining operations.

A recent comprehensive investigation by an American academic, Professor Joy Gordon, has revealed that the United States has placed 'on hold' more than \$5billion worth of humanitarian goods that should have gone to Iraq. All the goods were approved by the United Nations and financed from the sale of Iraqi oil. They include flour, medicines, medical equipment, milk production equipment, fire-fighting equipment, water tankers. 'Over the last three years,' wrote Professor Gordon, 'I have acquired many of the key confidential United Nations documents concerning the administration of Iraqi sanctions. What they show is that the United States has fought aggressively throughout the last decade to purposefully minimise the humanitarian goods that enter the country. And it has done so in the face of enormous human suffering, including massive increases in child mortality and widespread epidemics.'

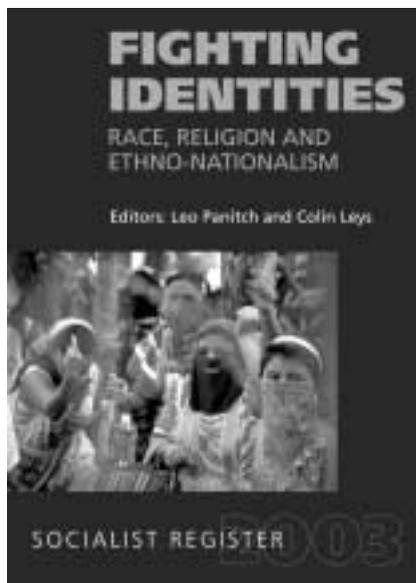
These are the people, more than half of them children, whom Bush and Blair are planning to attack once the United Nation's weapons inspectors have outlived their usefulness. The one connection between international terrorism and Iraq will be the undoubted consequence of an Anglo-American attack. Nothing will do more to convert Al-Qaeda from a relatively small gang to a fanatical international jihad, or network. Nothing will do more to create a generation of anti-Western bitterness and recruits for terrorism. When Blair warns about the threat of terrorist 'carnage' in Britain, the terrible irony of his predictions is that they are likely to be self-fulfilling if he involves the British people in a criminal foreign adventure. For this irresponsible act, he will place at risk every British citizen at home and abroad. It will spread fear and foster ethnic division. Such is the true measure of his fawning devotion to great power. The people of Britain should not allow it.

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