

Iraq Cover-Up Is Cracking In Britain As Well

by Mark Burdman and Mary Burdman

With new revelations emerging daily about how he brought Britain into the illegal military adventure in Iraq, British Prime Minister Tony Blair might be forgiven for having the feeling that he is caught in quicksand. Blair is learning one of the nastier characteristics of quicksand: The more you flail about, the faster you sink.

As February began, Blair—who has proclaimed himself a man with “no reverse gear”—was scrambling to re-take his position on British involvement in the Iraq war debacle. He had staged a self-righteous fit in the British Parliament on Jan. 29, after the release of the final report of Lord Hutton, who had cleared Blair’s 10 Downing Street of all blame in the circumstances leading up to the July 17, 2003 death of British weapons scientist Dr. David Kelly. Hutton had exonerated Blair of using any deceit in getting Britain into the war. In the Parliament, Blair exulted that he was vindicated, and demanded that those who had questioned his motives, and imputed deceit, should immediately apologize. He said then, and in ensuing comments over the Jan. 31-Feb. 1 weekend, that there was no need for a further inquiry into the Iraq matter. But Blair could hold to this position for all of two days. By Feb. 3, he had to tell the Parliament’s Liaison Committee, made up of the chairmen of the House of Commons’ Select Committees, “I accept we now need a further inquiry.”

Anti-Cheney Drive Pulling Blair

What had happened? We leave aside the view of certain experts who, they have told *EIR*, are convinced that Blair is the victim of extreme mood swings. We look at two converging factors, that forced him to eat humble pie.

First, across the Atlantic, the Bush Administration’s propaganda about alleged Iraqi WMD was suffering one blow after another. Most significant, are the attacks on Vice-Presi-

dent Dick Cheney’s rigging of intelligence, attacks that were initiated and catalyzed by the LaRouche movement’s campaigns, inside the United States and internationally, against Cheney. David Kay, the top weapons inspector in the CIA’s Iraq Survey Group, has been confessing that the weapons of mass destruction just are not there.

Moreover, the timing of the Hutton report was all wrong for Blair. He had originally wanted it out in November, before the formal opening of Parliament at the end of that month, when Blair wanted to stage a “re-launch” of himself and New Labour. But Lord Hutton delayed, and by the time he delivered his report, the failure to find any WMDs, and all the rest of the scandalous machinations around Iraq, had become so obvious, that Blair’s triumph could not even qualify as the proverbial “nine-day” wonder.

By the end of January, President George Bush was announcing the formation of an “independent commission,” to look into the problem of those missing Iraqi WMD. The White House’s backtracking forced Blair’s hand, all the more since Blair, unlike Bush, had based his entire case for war on claims of an imminent threat to Britons directly from Iraq. This was codified in the notorious September 2002 dossier presented by 10 Downing Street. Blair signed on to its introduction, which asserted that Saddam Hussein had “existing and active military plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons which could be activated within 45 minutes.”

Just one day before Blair’s retreat on new inquiries, a London insider had told *EIR*, “Tony Blair is in really big trouble, now that George Bush is backtracking on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. This puts immense pressure on Blair. For Bush, this is a much less sensitive issue than it is for Blair. . . . Backtracking on Iraqi WMD is fatal for Blair; it’s the sole basis for having brought Britain into the Iraq war.”

Tory Party leader Michael Howard has not been hesitant to give all the credit for Blair's turn-around to President Bush, noting that, where Bush leads, Blair follows. While Howard is compromised by his own continuing support for the Iraq war adventure, this point will do Blair damage. He is constantly depicted in Britain as the "poodle" of the American President. Now, Blair is being hung out to dry by Washington.

The second factor, is the negative reaction to the Hutton report. It is not astonishing that anyone might have doubts about Hutton's findings. What is astonishing is how fast, how ferocious, and how widespread the negative reactions have been. The view has been expressed throughout British society, by leading figures in the political class, elements of the intelligence services, and the population at large, that it was a "complete whitewash."

Backlash Against the Whitewash

It is nothing new for senior judges in Britain, known as "Law Lords," to run cover-ups in official inquiries. Tony Blair has been obliged to re-open the 1972 inquiry by Judge Widgery into that year's massacre of Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland, known as "Bloody Sunday," because of overwhelming evidence that it was a cover-up. Many in Britain do not find it surprising, that Lord Hutton played a part in the Widgery commission, defending the British soldiers who shot unarmed demonstrators.

To get a new Bloody Sunday inquiry took 30 years. But the outrage over the new Hutton report started within hours of its release.

Within the political class, typical is the cover-story in the Jan. 31 *Spectator* magazine, "The Great Whitewash." Rod Liddle, a former BBC correspondent, wrote: "Lord Hutton has flung the whitewash around with a copiousness, a completeness, which must have surprised even the inhabitants of Downing Street. . . . At every possible point, Lord Hutton gave the government the benefit of the doubt, sometimes to the extent of appearing either hopelessly naive, or maybe a visitor from a gentler, kinder planet where chicanery never takes place." The Feb. 2 London *Observer* ran a piece by intelligence expert Henry Porter, entitled, "Are We All Mad, Or Is It Hutton?" In the population, poll results released Feb. 2, only five days after Hutton unveiled his findings, showed a clear majority of respondents declaring the Hutton conclusions to be a whitewash, with a significant percentage favoring Blair's resignation.

All of this will make it all the harder for the new inquiry called by Blair to produce another cover-up—whatever Blair's intentions.

Those do not look good. Officially, the inquiry is to investigate intelligence coverage on WMD programs in "countries of concern," and to investigate the accuracy of intelligence on Iraqi WMD up to March 2003. It will then look at any "discrepancies" between that intelligence, and what the Iraq Survey Group has found on the ground.

This sensitive work is to be done by a five-member committee of privy councillors, led by former Cabinet Secretary Lord Butler, who served Margaret Thatcher and John Major in this senior bureaucratic position. The group will take evidence in private, and its brief will be restricted, for the greater part, to "intelligence failures"; i.e., there will apparently be an effort to scapegoat the intelligence services for the disastrous policies of the political leadership. The report is to be ready by July, before Parliament goes into Summer recess.

That another cover-up won't wash, was stressed by leading British historian Correlli Barnett, of Cambridge University, in a Feb. 3 discussion. Professor Barnett told *EIR*: "The reality is, the whole case for the Iraq war is collapsing. . . . We have just been through the Hutton report, which was intended as a damage-limitation exercise, and it didn't work, it only generated more doubts. Of course, it is a whitewash, but more interesting than that as such, is that, from all indications, there is a general agreement across the country, that it is a whitewash.

"There is greater mistrust in the government. The Hutton report has damaged the ability to have another damage-control exercise. There will not be agreement that an inquiry have limited terms of reference, only looking at intelligence failures. . . . There is doubt about the government's motives in the entire affair."

The same essential point was made by Simon Jenkins, senior political commentator for the London *Times*, in a Feb. 4 piece, "No More Inquiries, Now Parliament Must Do Its Job." He wrote: "Panic reigns at Government House. A towering wall of water spotted off at sea is racing toward the shore. I have sought a less pompous name for this cataclysm but must call it nothing less than the truth." He charged Blair with a "now Herculean effort to avoid admitting he misled his people and Parliament"; but "this whole fantasy of denial is staggering to an end. . . . The public was told a monumental lie."

Among political leaders, Liberal Democratic Party chief Charles Kennedy has been pointing out the real issue: That the Iraq conflict is "the wrong war, prosecuted at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons." The new Butler inquiry is so limited that it is "unacceptable," Kennedy said in Parliament the day it was announced. The Liberal Democrats, the third-largest party in Britain, will not participate in the committee, although the Tories will. Lib Dem foreign affairs spokesman Sir Menzies Campbell said that the Butler inquiry's charge "deals neither with the workings of government, nor with the political decision-making based on intelligence. Don't you understand . . . that following the public response to the Hutton report, an inquiry that excludes politicians from scrutiny is unlikely to command public confidence?"

'Greatest Scandal in Modern Times'

In the current extraordinary atmosphere in the United Kingdom, there is a revolt brewing in the intelligence agen-

cies, against attempts by Downing Street to narrow discussion to “intelligence failures” rather than the political spin which took Britain into the Iraq war.

The Feb. 3 *Guardian* reported: “There is widespread resentment among intelligence officials about the role played by Downing Street as [the September 2002 dossier] was being drafted. The intelligence community is now blaming politicians for hyping up the claims.”

This was further elaborated, inside the paper, by Richard Norton-Taylor, the Security Affairs Editor, usually a reliable source on intelligence matters. He wrote: “Blame the Masters, Not the Servants,” with the subtitle, “Downing Street Bullied the Spooks to Get the War Dossier It Wanted.” Norton-Taylor wrote, “Blair and his closest advisers were determined to abuse intelligence, to produce a document to try and convince parliamentary and public opinion to back an invasion of Iraq. A train of events was set in motion leading to the greatest scandal involving the intelligence agencies in modern times.”

Norton-Taylor added that both Clare Short and Robin Cook, former members of the Blair Cabinet, who were privy to the available intelligence on Iraqi WMDs, had said that it would be wrong to blame the agencies for exaggerating the threat. “Just as the CIA was bullied by elements in the White House and Pentagon, here senior intelligence officials succumbed to pressure from Downing Street. They say the hyping was done by the politicians, not by them.” All of this is of great importance, he concluded, given that Blair has adopted the Bush Administration doctrine of “pre-emptive strikes, whose success or failure—and legality—will depend on accurate, not politicised, intelligence.”

A similar point was made on Feb. 3 by Sir Rodric Braithwaite, former head of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and former British Ambassador to Moscow, who has been a critic of the Iraq war. He warned that an inquiry “could become a mere device for making scapegoats out of the intelligence people, and diverting the primary responsibility from the politicians.”

The Jones Bombshell

The next day came a new shocker. Dr Brian Jones, former head of Britain’s Defence Intelligence Staff Scientific and Technical Directorate for WMD, charged, in a commentary in the London *Independent*, that not a single defense intelligence expert—from among “the foremost group of analysts in the West on nuclear, biological and chemical warfare intelligence”—backed the claims in the Blair dossier. They saw no strong evidence of the continuing existence of weapons and agents, nor any substantive evidence regarding production and storage of such weapons, but were “overruled in the preparation of the dossier in September 2002, resulting in a presentation that was misleading about Iraq’s capabilities.”

Jones, who retired in January 2003, wrote that it would be a travesty to “scapegoat” intelligence analysts. This, he stressed, is why he is now going public: “I foresaw that after

the likely invasion and defeat of Iraq, it was quite possible that no WMD would be found. If this happened, scapegoats would be sought, so I decided that we should record our concerns about the dossier.” The Defence Intelligence Agency Staff is a sub-division of the Defence Intelligence Service, the British equivalent of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency.

Jones wrote that the doubts his experts expressed were countered by some “other intelligence,” so sensitive that they were not allowed to see it. “My experience of the intelligence process made me suspicious,” Jones wrote. Now, it is clear that the DIS experts were right to be cautious. Therefore, “now might be a good time to open the box and release from its compartment the intelligence that played such a significant part in formulating a key part of the dossier.”

The *Independent* lead front-page article described Jones’ assertions as a “bombshell.” Indeed, it is having that effect in Britain. It also damages the Hutton findings. Jones had testified to the Hutton inquiry on Sept. 3, and had seriously undermined the September 2002 dossier by charging that there was “the tendency . . . to, shall we say, over-egg certain assessments, particularly in relation to the production of chemical weapons.” He was buttressed, then, by a “Mr. A,” a serving top expert at the DIS, who attacked the “spin merchants” who determined how the Iraqi WMD matter would be conveyed to the public, and affirmed: “The perception was that the dossier had been round the houses several times, in order to find a form of words which would strengthen certain political objectives.”

In other words, the Blair entourage “sexed up” the dossier, which is the central issue that Lord Hutton was called upon to judge.

Hutton, however, omitted the most salient parts of Jones’ testimony, and the entirety of Mr. A’s testimony, from the final report, and came up with the absurd formulation that Blair and his team may have done nothing more than possibly “subconsciously influence” the Joint Intelligence Committee’s final judgments.

But the whitewash is rubbing off. In Parliament on Feb. 4, Blair was forced to answer a question about the Jones article, and ended up admitting that he had not known that the “45 minute” claim only referred to Iraqi battlefield weapons—i.e., nothing that would be any danger to Britain! Of course, as Robin Cook immediately pointed out, he, and Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon *had* known this, so it were more than odd, if Blair did not.

With each passing day, Blair’s position looks more untenable. It’s that sinking feeling.

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