

Tony Blair's 'Great Deception' Unmasked

by Mark Burdman

In the ten days following the heated June 4 British House of Commons debate on whether the Tony Blair government had falsified intelligence about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, in order to manipulate Britain into joining the United States in war against Iraq, Blair and his entourage, as well as compliant elements of the British media, went into a total mobilization, to bury the issue.

The line went out, that “Blair had weathered the storm,” that concern over the matter was “dying out,” and that “weapons will inevitably be found.” The government launched a series of high-profile diversionary political maneuvers, including a substanceless “declaration of policy” about Britain’s orientation toward the euro currency, and a clumsily implemented reshuffle of Blair’s Cabinet, to draw attention away from the Iraqi WMD matter.

By mid-month, however, it was clear, that the June 4 debate had only been the first shot, in a political-intelligence war that is entering a bitter new phase.

This reality was underscored by stories in the widely read June 15 Sunday weeklies. Under the headline, “Iraqi Mobile Labs Nothing To Do With Germ Warfare, Report Finds,” the *Observer* asserted that “an official British investigation into two trailers found in northern Iraq has concluded they are not mobile germ warfare labs, as was claimed by Tony Blair and President George Bush, but were for the production of hydrogen to fill artillery balloons, as the Iraqis have continued to insist.” The paper affirmed that this finding is “hugely embarrassing for Blair,” not only because he “justified the case for going to war” against Iraq based on such WMD claims, but because this hydrogen-producing system had been sold to the Iraqi Army, by Britain’s own Marconi Command & Control firm!

The *Observer*, close to Blair’s “New Labour,” had been editorially supportive of war against Iraq. A paper that had been even more strongly for the war, Rupert Murdoch’s *Sunday Times*, had further devastating information for Blair, on June 15.

Under the headline, “Weapons Hunters Watch Movies as Trail Goes Cold,” Baghdad correspondent Christina Lamb reported that “specialist search teams in Iraq” have run out of places to look for weapons of mass destruction, and are spending their time, as one “disgruntled” such specialist put

it, “mostly sitting around watching DVDs and doing laundry.” Lamb wrote: “A senior British official in the new Iraq administration has told Alastair Campbell, the Prime Minister’s director of communications, that a ‘backlash’ is likely as it becomes increasingly clear that, if Saddam Hussein did have chemical or biological weapons, nobody knows where to find them.”

Such reports are having yet greater effect, because the British media are filled with reports on the disastrous situation on the ground in Iraq. While much of the coverage, not without justification, is attacking the American administration in Iraq for creating a “shambles” there, there is also a growing recognition that the situation in the British occupation zones, in and around Basra in southern Iraq, is hardly better. This is fuelling anger against Blair, and, according to *EIR*’s sources in Britain, the scandal over “Iraqi WMD,” is the main channel by which this anger is being expressed, by top levels of the British military and intelligence services.

Echoes of Mark Antony

On June 17, Blair was dealt a severe blow, when two former members of his Cabinet—International Development Secretary Clare Short, and House of Commons party leader, recently Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, testified before the House of Commons All-Party Select Foreign Affairs Committee, and systematically exposed how Blair had lied and obfuscated to get Britain into war. The London *Independent*’s lead article on June 18 was headlined, “Exposed: Blair, Iraq and the Great Deception.” The *Times*’ editorial-page cartoon showed Short and Cook preparing their testimony, with the caption, “Weapons of Blair Destruction.” Underneath it, an acerbic op-ed by writer Simon Jenkins was entitled, “This Parody of a Banana Republic Led by a Monkey.”

Short, who resigned in May in protest against the war, made a devastating attack, using a method that was evidently lifted from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, in the famous speech by Mark Antony in Act 3, Scene 2. Beginning with the words, “Friends, Romans, countrymen,” Mark Antony turns the tables on Brutus and the co-conspirators who murdered Julius Caesar, by constantly, and ironically, referring to Brutus as “honorable.” By the end of the oration, the Roman mob, which had initially expressed its love for Brutus, was whipped up into a frenzy, to hang him.

In her testimony, Short charged that Blair and “his close entourage” had used “a series of half-truths, exaggerations, reassurances that were not the case, to get us into conflict by the Spring.” She revealed that she had seen raw intelligence reports, and was briefed repeatedly by the MI-6 foreign intelligence service and the Defence Intelligence Staff before the war, and that there was no indication of any alarm about Iraqi weapons.

Short said: “I believe that the Prime Minister must have concluded that it was honorable and desirable to back the U.S., in going for military action in Iraq, and therefore, it was

honorable for him to persuade us through various ruses and ways to get us there—so for him, I think it was an honorable deception.”

No educated Briton listening to or reading this testimony, could miss the point.

Such “honorable deception,” Short insisted, goes a long way to explaining the “chaos” now unfolding, on the ground, in occupied Iraq, as it is obvious, that no adequate preparations were made for dealing with the post-war situation.

Short also lambasted the second “Iraqi weapons dossier” issued by the Prime Minister’s office at 10 Downing Street. This has become known as “the dodgy dossier,” because, after its release in February 2003, and after it was effusively praised by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, it was revealed that the material in it was lifted from a 12-year-old PhD thesis, and that information in that thesis was twisted, to exaggerate the Iraqi threat. Said Short: “To think that in the run-up to a declaration of war, where people’s lives are at stake, to lift a prior PhD thesis, and to distort it. . . . I think it is shocking.”

‘No Weapons of Mass Destruction’

Cook, who resigned as Leader of the House of Commons in March, in protest against the Iraq war before the war broke out, told the Committee: “I fear the fundamental problem is that instead of using intelligence as evidence on which to base a decision about policy, we used intelligence as the basis on which to justify a policy on which we had already settled.” He called this a “grievous error.”

Cook further said he believed Saddam “did not have an immediate threat capability” in the run-up to the war, and he doubted whether investigators would find evidence of substantial chemical and biological arms programs in Iraq, asserting, “Such weapons require substantial industrial plant and a large workforce. It is inconceivable that both could have been kept concealed for the two months we have been in occupation of Iraq.”

Having seen all intelligence reports on Iraq between 1997 and 2001, Cook revealed that concerns about Iraq had eased to such an extent, in the late 1990s, that Britain considered “closing the files,” on Saddam’s nuclear and long-range missiles programs.

Cook also revealed that he had met the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), who coordinates all intelligence for the Prime Minister. Said Cook, referring to this meeting: “I heard nothing to contradict anything I said in my resignation statement, that Iraq does not have weapons of mass destruction, in the understood sense of the term.” That contention on his part had come “almost word for word” from a member of MI-6, he declared.

Cook estimated that Blair acted in “good faith,” but was somehow misled. It is not to be excluded that he, like Short, meant that ironically. It is the season now, in Britain, where “the knives are out.”