

Tony Blair's Unequivocal Advocacy of the Iraq War (2003)

طوني بلير وحرب العراق (2003)

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Abstract

This article explains the factors that shaped British Prime Minister Tony Blair's decision to undertake the Iraq war in March 2003. Much to his anger, Tony Blair was confronted with a deep and widespread opposition to war. Yet, his support for the invasion of Iraq never wavered. His resolve to go to war with neither a United Nations resolution nor domestic support became a serious concern that led many in Britain and the world to wonder about the real reasons behind Blair's advocacy of the war. As the Iraq war will remain the most controversial part of Blair's foreign policy, this article sheds light on the main factors that play an important role in the explanation of his decision to advocate it.

Key Words: Tony Blair, Iraq war, foreign policy

ملخص

يسُرِّحُ هَذَا الْمَقَالُ الْعَوَامِلُ الْمُكَوَّنةُ لِقَرْأَرِ رَئِيسِ الْوَزَرَاءِ الْبَرِطُونِيِّ طُونِيِّ بَلِيرِ بِخُوضِ حَرْبِ عَرَاقِ 2003، رَغْمَ أَنَّهُ كَانَ بِجَاهِهِ مُعَارِضَةً عَمِيقَةً وَوَاسِعَةً. غَيْرُ أَنْ تَأْيِيدَ بَلِيرَ لِحَرْبِ عَرَاقٍ لَمْ يَتَرَعَّزْ أَبَدًا. لِذَلِكَ فَإِنْ تَصْمِيمَهُ لِخُوضِ الْحَرْبِ بِلَا قَرْأَرِ مِنَ الْأَمْمَ الْمُتَحَدَّةِ أَوْ حَتَّى دَعْمِ شَعْبِيِّ صَارَ مُخْطَطًا اهْتِمَامًا وَأَدَى بِالكَثِيرِ فِي بَرِطَانِيَا وَفِي أَنْحَاءِ الْعَالَمِ لِلتَّسَوُّلِ عَنِ الْأَسْبَابِ الْحَقِيقِيَّةِ خَلْفَ تَأْيِيدِ بَلِيرِ لِحَرْبِ عَرَاقٍ. وَبِمَا أَنَّ هَذِهِ الْأَخِيرَةِ سَتَبْقِي تَشِيرَ الْجَدَلِ فِي سِيَاسَةِ طُونِيِّ بَلِيرِ الْخَارِجِيَّةِ، فَإِنَّ هَذَا الْمَقَالُ يَسْلِطُ الضَّوْءَ عَلَى أَهَمِّ الْعَوَامِلِ الَّتِي تَلْعَبُ دُورًا مُحُورِيًّا فِي تَفْسِيرِ قَرَارِهِ لِتَأْيِيدِ حَرْبِ عَرَاقٍ.

الكلمات المفتاحية : طوني بلير، حرب العراق، السياسة الخارجية

1. Britain's Close Relationship with America

The close diplomatic relationship between Britain and the United States had its origins in the strategic partnership of the Second World War. Although the US congress had passed the Neutrality Act in 1936 to avoid being dragged into European war once again, Britain had only managed to fight Germany in WWII due to financial support from America.¹ Britain fought the war with American guns and survived on American loans. Even during the immediate post-war years, the ability to feed Britain was dependent on American aid. What the British feared after WWII was that the Americans would depart from Europe and leave Britain facing the Soviet Union alone.² The active support of the US was essential if Western Europe was to be protected from Soviet expansion.

The British Prime Minister during the war Winston Churchill passionately believed that Britain's security and prosperity depended on close ties with America. In 1946, he made his famous speech, known as the "iron curtain" in front of the American president Harry Truman, warning the West of a new tyranny just as dangerous as the Nazis. Churchill was the first statesman to single out the Soviet Union as the greatest threat to world peace;³ however, this warning should not obscure what the West owes to the sacrifices made by the Soviets in defeating Germany in WWII. Accordingly, The Americans devised a generous package of economic aid for Europe. It was called the Marshall Plan (led by American Secretary George Marshall), and became officially known as the European Recovery Program of 1948. The program distributed thirteen billion dollars of American aid across Western Europe, and it aimed to distract European countries from the USSR.¹ Britain got its share, and the close relationship with America was sustained by security concerns throughout the Cold War. Yet, as a superpower of the time, Britain traded security for national independence.

Nevertheless, the process of the close relationship between Britain and America was not always a smooth one as British and American interests have not always coincided. At the height of the Cold War, the Suez Canal crisis of 1956 clearly showed that British and American interests were extremely different. When Britain, France, and Israel invaded Egypt in 1956 without consulting

¹ Nicholas John Cull, *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign against American "Neutrality" in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.5.

² Robin Harris, "The State of the Special Relationship," *Policy Review*, (July 2002), p. 29.

³ "Sir Winston Churchill- Sinews of Peace (Iron Curtain) Speech," *YouTube*, uploaded by Westminster College, (4 Mar. 2016), www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QuSXZTo3Uo

¹ Royal Institute of International affairs, *Documents on European Recovery and Defence, (March 1947-April 1949)*. London: Royal Institute of International affairs, (1949), p. 9.

America, President Eisenhower publicly opposed the invasion. He told the invading powers that "... [America did] not accept the use of force as a wise or proper instrument for the settlement of international disputes."² Eisenhower compelled the allies to withdraw without gaining any profit from their misadventure. The events of 1956 were a humiliating lesson for Britain in the harsh new realities of the Cold War. As the Suez crisis unfolded, the limits of British power were painfully exposed. Yet, the close relationship between Britain and America had ultimately survived most of the upheavals of the Cold War.

After the downfall of the Soviet Union in the late 20th century, there was a mutual recognition between Britain and America to co-operate against new threats to their interests. Shortly after being appointed as British Ambassador to the United States in 1997, Christopher Myer stated that "the analysis of the British and American governments... is very close indeed. [They] react instinctively and intellectually very similarly."¹ It is noteworthy that America has always assumed British advocacy of American foreign policy. As there was no prospect of Britain abandoning its ties with America, the concept of a special relationship has always been hardly questioned or debated by Americans.

After the attacks of 11 September 2001, the world, for the most part, responded with great empathy for America. 9/11 attacks brought Prime Minister Blair to instant reaction as he expressed shock and outrage saying that "terrorism is the new evil in our new world...[Britain expresses] deepest sympathy to the American people."² Accordingly, the UK/US relationship became closer than at any time in recent memory. Outraged and stunned, American president George Walker Bush told Blair he would make no distinction between the terrorists and those who harbored them. Blair agreed and made it clear that the "rogue states" harboring terrorists had to choose whose side they were on.³ It is significant to mention that thousands of innocent civilians in different countries paid their lives for what Blair believed to be right.

No foreign leader was committed to standing by America than Tony Blair. He was the only foreign leader at an emergency session of the US congress. Bush admirably said that Britain was America's best ally.¹ Blair's proactive role in the

² Qtd in Philip Skardon, *How America Kept the Peace in the Hungary-Suez Crisis of 1956: A Lesson for Our Times* (Author House, 2010), p. 468.

¹ Myer Christopher, "The US-UK Global Partnership," Speech before the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, (Jan. 1998), www.lawac.org/speech/meyer.html.

² "Terror in America: Unite to Fight the New Evil, Pleads Blair," *The Birmingham Post* (12 Sept. 2001), p.7.

³ "Tony Blair [Worldbeater]," *New Internationalist*, 362:1 (Nov. 2003), p. 29.

¹ Alex Barnett, *Words That Changed America: Great Speeches That Inspired, Challenged, Healed, and Enlightened* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2003), p. 316.

war against terrorism brought new vigor to the Anglo-American relationship. He used all his capital to help the US as he travelled for numerous meetings with other world leaders; some of whom the Americans could not or would not engage with themselves.² Blair's commitment helped to sustain international support for the military action in Afghanistan. Yet, having no targets to attack in Afghanistan, American Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld ordered strike plans for Iraq. Although Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11 attacks, this would not make much difference. Rumsfeld said: "Go massive... sweep it all up. Things related and not."³ Blair's commitment to the war on terror on the American side did not mean absolute support for immediate American plans for Iraq. He felt it better to focus operations against Taliban since there was no evidence linking Saddam to the 11 September attacks; no Iraqis were among the 9/11 hijackers, for example. Indeed, most of them were Saudis of the Wahhabi faith.⁴

Astonishingly, Blair was secretly in discussions with the Americans about the Iraq war in the spring of 2002. His preferences were clearly for an international consensus for action against Iraq. Therefore, going through the UN mechanism was critical. On April 6, 2002, Bush and Blair met in Texas, and a private deal was struck. Blair agreed to go to war alongside America on one critical condition: Bush would try first to work through the authority of the UN to disarm Saddam.¹ For Blair, a legitimized action by international law would force the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein to cooperate unconditionally or stand down from power.

As the British public was against any intervention in Iraq, seeking international support for the invasion was also a step to placate domestic opposition. As a great persuader, Blair set out to scare Britain into agreeing with him, saying that "Iraq answer[d] a real and unique threat to the security of the... world, and Saddam Hussein [was] continuing in his efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction."² The American president George Bush was also prepared to

² James K Wither, "British Bulldog or Bush's Poodle? Anglo-American Relations and the Iraq War," *Parameters*, 33: 4 (2003), p. 67.

³ Qtd in Robert Joel. "Plans for Iraq Attack Began on 9/11," *CBS News* (4 Sept. 2002) www.cbsnews.com/news/plans-for-iraq-attack-began-on-9-11/

⁴ Peter Riddell, *Hug Them Close: Blair, Clinton, Bush and the 'Special Relationship'* (London: Politico's, 2004), p. 240.

¹ "The Crawford Deal: Did Blair Sign up for War at Bush's Texas Ranch in April 2002?," *The Independent* (27 Feb. 2005), www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/the-crawford-deal-did-blair-sign-up-for-war-at-bushs-texas-ranch-in-april-2002-485041.html

² "Blair: Why Saddam and his Weapons have to be Stopped," *The Guardian* (25 Sep. 2002), www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/sep/25/uk.iraq

listen to Blair; however, it is rare of British diplomacy to have a direct impact on the US. Moderate figures in the American establishment, like Secretary of State Colin Powell, already advised Bush to take the case of Iraq to the UN. Accordingly, the UN Security Council passed a resolution in September 2002 threatening Saddam with grave consequences if he failed to disarm. This was crucial for Blair so that his legal justification for war would gain more credibility.

2. Traditional Anglo-American Security Cooperation

Within barely a decade after WWII, Britain was supplanted by America as the dominant power in the world. Accordingly, British policymakers found out that Britain's economic, political, and security survival relied heavily on collaboration with the Americans. Thus, the sustainability of fundamental security cooperation with the United States mattered greater to Britain than to the United States.¹ In some circumstances, the results of not cooperating with the United States proved to be total humiliation for Britain. In 1956, the American political response to the Suez Canal crisis dominated the political scene in Britain. When America felt infuriated, Britain was forced to withdraw its troops from Egypt, and PM Anthony Eden was forced to resign. While the Suez crisis showed that the Anglo-American relationship was not so special, British politicians recognized the necessity to make more efforts than their American counterparts to prevent a breakdown in Anglo-American relations in the future.

During the second half of the twentieth century, British economic hardships and the mutual recognition of the urgent need to contain the USSR kept the vital security relationship vivid. The most intriguing aspects were sharing intelligence and nuclear cooperation. However, the process of nuclear collaboration was not easy: When the British PM Harold Macmillan wanted his country to join the nuclear club in 1962 immediately after the Cuban Missile Crisis, President John Kennedy was reluctant to sell Britain nuclear missiles. It was only after tough negotiations that the American president accepted to provide Britain with the missiles.¹ It can be easily argued, then, that Britain's security relationship with America has always been stimulated by self-interest and fear of Soviet expansion in Western Europe.

Even in the early years of the twenty-first century, the Anglo-American security cooperation still receives considerable attention. For many reasons, Britain still continues to be a strong ally of the United States. In oral evidence

¹ Harold Raugh, "Great Britain, the United States, and the Security of the Middle East," *The Middle East Journal*, 53: 3 (1999), p. 497.

¹ Conrad Crane, "Counterinsurgency Wars and the Anglo-American Alliance: The Special Relationship on the Rocks," *Parameters*, 48: 2 (2018), p. 104.

taken from the UK Secretary of Defence Geoffrey Hoon in May 2003, he made the following comment: "I can assure you that there was excellent co-ordination at every level between the Ministry of Defence and the Pentagon."² Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld shared the same attitude of the British counterpart. He said: "Our two nations stood together during two world wars, the Cold War, in Afghanistan and in the global war against terror. Today, we stand together again."³ To implement successfully the Anglo-American agendas in the new century, practical diplomacy required more effective security cooperation and intelligence sharing from Britain and the US.

Prime Minister Tony Blair told the BBC in an interview ahead of talks on Iraq with American president Bush in September 2002 that Britain had to be prepared to pay a "blood price" to secure its special security partnership with the US.¹ A month later, Blair, additionally, stated in his speech at the Labor party conference that he "believe[d] in this alliance and he [would] fight long and hard to maintain it."² Undoubtedly, the prospect of war on Iraq tightened the security and intelligence relationship between Britain and America.

Desperate to turn public opinion and fit American claims, Blair published an intelligence-based dossier on September 24, 2002, that exaggerated the case for war in Iraq. The dossier asserted that Iraqi troops could fire chemical shells within 45 minutes of an order to do so. Blair said:

Today we published a 50-page dossier, detailing the history of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programme... The dossier is based on the work of the British Joint Intelligence Committee... It concluded that Iraq has chemical and biological weapons... which could be activated within 45 minutes... In addition, we know that Saddam has been trying to buy significant quantities of uranium from Africa.³

The base for Blair's conclusion was very frail. In his book, *The point of Departure*, the former British foreign secretary Robin Cook revealed that the dossier used to justify a war against Iraq was based on unreliable information.⁴

² UK Parliament, House of Commons, oral evidence taken from Defence Secretary Geoffrey Hoon before the Defence Committee on 14 May 2003.

³ Qtd in Fareed Zakaria, "The Real World of Foreign Policy," *Newsweek International*, (8 Oct. 2001), p. 15.

¹ "Britain Will Pay Blood Price-Blair." *BBC News* (6 Sept. 2002), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2239887.stm

² "Blair's Speech at the Labor Party Conference in Blackpool." *The Guardian Newspaper* (1 Oct. 2002), www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/oct/01/labourconference.labour15

³ "Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction." Blair's Speech to the House of Commons, vol: 390, (24. Sept. 2002), publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmhsrd/vo020924/debtext/20924-01.htm

⁴ Robin Cook, *The point of Departure* (Simon and Schuster, 2003), p.216.

Despite being told that Blair's claim was false, Bush repeated it in his January 2003 State of the Union speech, citing British intelligence as his source. Bush said: "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."¹ On May 29, 2003, the BBC defense correspondent Andrew Gilligan questioned whether Blair's government had deliberately 'sexed up' that dossier about Iraq's alleged weapons of destruction. The correspondent's claim was that Blair's government had knowingly misled the public. A British intelligence officer with a high reputation as an arms inspector called Dr. David Kelly was the source of information. He had suggested that the 45-minute claim came from an Iraqi military officer; the claim had not been corroborated and should, therefore, not have been portrayed as a hard fact.² In other words, to bolster support for the Iraq war, Blair intentionally deceived the British public.

Tony Blair and his staff were outraged by the accusations. Blair's political advisor Alastair Campbell launched a war of his own against the BBC. As the political storm intensified, Dr. David Kelly was subjected to humiliating questioning by a parliamentary committee in early July 2003. Unhinged by the ordeal, he committed suicide. Nobody was to blame for his death, but the BBC Corporation suffered its worst day ever as its DG Greg Dyke and Chairman Gavyn Davies resigned almost immediately. Alastair Campbell was dismissed from his job.³ Weapons of mass destruction never turned up, and Blair's claim of Iraq's capabilities was a mass deception. A year after the war, Blair told the House of Commons that nothing had been found in Iraq.¹ This confession was shattering to the reputation of Blair who traded in the currency of trust with the British public. It was almost impossible for Blair to build that bond of trust again.

Still worse, when criticism in America grew over Bush's statement in his State of the Union address that was based on false intelligence, National security adviser Condoleezza Rice said on 13 July 2003, that President Bush accurately stated what British intelligence was saying.² In other words, it was Britain that was held responsible for American biased intelligence reports. To be cast as

¹ "George Bush 16 Words-Sought Significant Quantities of Uranium from Africa," *YouTube*, uploaded by CheneyWatch 1, (2 Nov. 2009), www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvvXnVyJ8lA

² Jane Mo Sharp, "Tony Blair, Iraq and the Special Relationship: Poodle or Partner?," *International Journal*, 59: 1, (1 Jan. 2004), p. 59.

³ John Cassidy, "The David Kelly Affair Letter from London," *The New Yorker*, 79: 38, (8 Dec. 2003), p. 90.

¹ "Blair Defiantly Insists War Right," *BBC News*, (14 July 2004), news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/3893987.stm

² Mathew Evangelista, *Partners or Rivals?: European-American Relations after Iraq* (Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 128.

being responsible for providing false intelligence to the Americans was extremely embarrassing for British intelligence and for Blair's staff. The gravest point was that close security cooperation with America required more than supportive rhetoric. Despite being under political pressure, a necessary measure was to strictly get British troops embroiled in the war. With or without Britain, the United States was already prepared to go to war against Saddam Hussein. Britain's participation on the ground would be of minute importance for the Bush administration. American Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld simply stated the truth when he announced at a Pentagon press conference on March 11, 2003, that the US was prepared to go to war without the British.³ Rumsfeld's remark sparked shock and confusion in Britain. Blair had the opportunity to disengage from the invasion, yet he did not.

3. Seeking a Leading Role for Britain

Before 9/11 and the accumulation of events that led to the Iraq war, Tony Blair tried to define a grand strategy for more active international role in the international community. He wanted his country to engage more effectively in the world affairs, articulating passionately his vision of Britain:

It is to use the strengths of our history to build our future not as a superpower but as a pivotal power, as a power that is at the crux of the alliances and international politics which shape the world and its future. Engaged, open, dynamic, a partner, and, where possible, a leader in ideas and in influence, that is where Britain must be.¹

Playing a central role required Blair's government to change Britain's discourse toward its European neighbors. The explanation of that new positive policy with Europe is that Blair's government perceived that having a wider positive role in Europe would be crucial for British economic prosperity and the welfare of British citizens. Yet, further economic integration with Europe did not necessarily mean that Britain would accept the role of a middle power or an equal partner in Europe. Blair indicated his unwillingness to give up Britain's status as a "pivotal power." He saw his country playing a world role, not just another European nation.

Controversially, Britain proved to be a reluctant European when issues were related to its security and foreign policy, and Tony Blair as Prime Minister was

³ "US ready to fight 'without UK,'" BBC News, (12 Mar. 2003) http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/2838593.stm

¹ Speech by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, Guildhall, London, (22 Nov. 1999), www.fco.gov.uk.

not ready to jeopardize or abandon his country's special relationship with America. Even Britain's foreign policy decisions have always been influenced by this unique relationship. Thus, to make a balance between more integration with Europe and closer ties with the US, Blair had frequently spoken of his country as a bridge between America and Europe. "[Britain] can indeed help to be a bridge between the US and Europe," observed Blair in his address to British ambassadors, "... Europe should partner the US, not be its rival."¹

Blair's vision clearly aimed to make Britain play the role of a unifier to reach a consensus over Iraq. Admittedly, he had a key role in the process of war on Iraq, yet he kept his European partners in the dark. The decision to go to war was secretly finalized with the American president George Bush between April 2002 and September of that year.² Then, it is either Blair was deliberately deceiving his European neighbors about his real intentions or he was not capable of handling effectively his country's bridging policy between the US and the EU. Consequently, the attempt to reach international consensus proved to be a serious test for Blair's ability to realize his grand vision. An explicit authorization from the UN was necessary for building the international consensus that was vital to Blair's diplomacy toward Iraq. Everything depended on a UN resolution as Blair heavily insisted: "America should not be forced to take this issue on alone. We should all be part of it. Of course, it should go through the UN."¹ In early March 2003, Blair's team went to America to put his case to the UN Security Council. The UN resolution was vital to make the removal of Saddam Hussein look legitimate in the eyes of the world, to carry British public opinion behind the war, and to control the Labor party.

Disappointedly, it was not an easy task for Blair to convince his European neighbors of his own convictions. Having been denied in the war process, Britain's major partners in Europe Germany and France- as well as most of the Security Council- refused to support the war. The German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder announced his country's opposition for military action in Iraq. "We will not be part of it," he vowed.² Blair's adversary, the French president Jacques Chirac, emphasized his country's position on March, 10, 2003, on French Television. He said: "France will vote no because it considers... that there are no

¹ "Address to British Ambassadors in London," *The Guardian*, (7 Jan. 2003), www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/jan/07/foreignpolicy.speeches

² Alan Bennett, "Diary of a Shameful Year," *London Review of Books*, (8 Jan. 2004), entry for 10 Apr. 2003, p. 5.

¹ "Address to British Ambassadors in London," *The Guardian*, (7 Jan. 2003), www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/jan/07/foreignpolicy.speeches

² Bruce Jacobs, "2002 in Review: a Year Marked by a New Currency, Old Tensions, and Expanded Alliances," *Radio Free Europe*, www.rferl.org/features/2002/12/17122002170625.asp

grounds for waging war in order to achieve the goal we have set ourselves; i.e. to disarm Iraq.”³ The permanent seat of France at the Security Council gave a veto to France. Acting like a counterweight to America rather than an ally, the French president destroyed what remained of the already slim chance of getting a UN resolution for war against Iraq. It was also crystal clear that the Anglo-French rivalry over the leadership of Europe took a negative turn, yet this parting of ways was inevitable.

Tony Blair attempted to position his country between America and Europe as a transatlantic power. Yet, Blair’s bridge between America and Europe fell down. In the end, Blair succeeded in building up his reputation as America’s most credible ally, yet he miserably failed to convince the European major powers of the necessity of military action in Iraq. America, in response, was furious and Secretary of State Rumsfeld exploded in anger: “you are thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don’t. I think that’s old Europe.”¹ Yet, the clash of interests between Europe and the America would not prevent the US from implementing its agenda. America was willing to act against Iraq, with or without Europe. For Germany and France, Britain clearly favored its relationship with America over any other European major power. They were even stunned that Blair was ready to risk his political career to stand by America in Iraq.

4. Iraq as a Threat to Anglo-American Interests

For British politicians, removing Saddam was an unfinished business that went back years to the Iraq-Kuwaiti war of 1990, and the propaganda campaign since then rested mainly on the false claim that Iraq posed a security threat to the Middle East region and to the stability of the world. When tensions flared between Iraq and Kuwait, the US ambassador to Iraq April Glaspie (1988-1990) personally assured Saddam Hussein in July 1990 that the American president George Bush (1989-1993) wanted better relations and had no opinion on Iraq’s border dispute.² The urgent issue for the US at that time was the Soviet Union and the formation of eastern European countries. Neither America nor Britain made any efforts to stop the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, yet when Saddam Hussein took over Kuwait with little resistance, American president George Bush, long desiring a strong footprint in the Middle East, repeatedly compared Saddam to Hitler. Bush said: “We’re dealing with Hitler revisited.”¹ The Anglo-American

³ Qtd in John Chilcot et al, *Chilcot Report: Executive Summary* (Canbury Press, 2016), p. 52.

¹ “Defence Secy comments on Europe, France, Germany,” *YouTube*, uploaded by AP Archive, 30 July 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0GnRJEPXn4

² Pierre Salinger, “The United States, the United Nations and the Gulf War,” *The Middle East Journal*, 49: 4, (1995), p. 595.

¹ Qtd in Dennis Piszkewicz, *Terrorism’s War with America* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), p. 76.

intervention in the war, led by the claim that Saddam had chemical and biological weapons, destroyed the Iraqi infrastructure. It is of capital importance to mention that while the Anglo-American intervention was seen as a necessary act of international retribution against the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, the American allies in the Middle East like the leader of Saudi Arabia Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz and the Amir of Kuwait Jabir Al-Ahmed were also despots who hardly believed in democracy for their people.

Soon after Blair took office in 1997, evidence of Saddam Hussein's interest in weapons of mass destruction was shown to Blair. Stated differently, even before 9/11 attacks, Iraq was very high on Blair government's agenda. Accordingly, British Royal Air Forces and American planes launched attacks for four days in December 1998 to strike military and security targets in Iraq, without a UN resolution. The justification was that Iraq refused to comply with the UN inspection team.² The military campaign was deemed a success, but the Duelfer Report concluded in 2004 that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capability "was essentially destroyed in 1991,"³ during the Iraq-Kuwaiti war. As an American partner, the reason of weapons of mass destruction would be Blair's political justification for invading Iraq in 2003. Yet, many who stood against the invasion argue that economic and geopolitical interests, such as controlling Iraqi oil and establishing permanent military bases at the heart of the Middle East, were the primary motives.¹ Neocon Dick Cheney made his intentions clear in 1999 to oil industry executives when he said: "the Middle East with 2/3 of the world's oil and the lowest cost is still where the prize ultimately lies."² Oil, then, was the prime motive at least for the American administration.

By the late 20th century, the project for the new American century, called Rebuilding America's Defenses, contained that "the process of transformation... is likely to be a long way... like a new Pearl Harbor."³ The group of neoconservatives included several politicians like Donald Rumsfeld and John

² Matthew Evangelista, *Partners or Rivals?: European-American Relations after Iraq* (Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 112.

³ Nimah Mazaheri, "Iraq and the Domestic Political Effects of Economic Sanctions," *The Middle East Journal*, 64: 2, (2010), p. 253.

¹ Dawn L Rothe, *State Crime: Current Perspectives*, Edited by Christopher W. Mullins (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), p. 94.

² Full text of Dick Cheney's speech at the IP Autumn lunch is available at <http://web.archive.org/web/20000414054656/http://www.petroleum.co.uk/speeches.htm>

³ Sidney Blumenthal, *The Rise of the Counter-establishment: The Conservative Ascent to Political Power* (Somerville, MA: Union Square Press, 2008), p. 339.

Bolton who would later serve in the administration of George W. Bush, and they feverishly advocated regime change in Iraq. 9/11 was a terrible tragedy for Americans, yet it provided the neocons with the right opportunity to implement their agenda. As America had no targets to attack in Afghanistan, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld ordered strike plans for Iraq only two days after the attacks. Rumsfeld said: “Go massive-sweep it all up. Things related and not.”¹

In Britain, Blair’s buildup for the war became increasingly alarming as he tried to convince his government that Saddam was an urgent threat. Accordingly, when Blair published the dodgy dossier in September 2002 claiming credible evidence for the allegations against Iraq, many MPs in his government doubted his version, and it was revealed later that the dossier plagiarized a PhD thesis found on the net.² This brought the dossier’s credibility under question and showed that it was not the sole work of the British intelligence. While the British and American intelligence services were deliberately misleading the world by their false claims over Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, the US administration went through the mechanisms of the UN Security Council to legitimize the case of war against Iraq. In November 2002, UN Resolution 1441 called on Iraq to allow UN inspectors back in the country and comply with all disarmament resolutions related to weapons of mass destruction.³ Despite Iraq’s acceptance of the resolution, America and Britain were dissatisfied with the compliance and insisted on toppling Saddam Hussein’s regime.

Accordingly, Tony Blair continued to imply a link between Iraq and 9/11 attacks though there was no evidence that Iraq had a relationship with Al-Qaeda. British Intelligence told Blair only a month before the invasion of Iraq that there was not any evidence that Al-Qaeda was provided by chemical or biological materials from Iraq. The Intelligence also warned that Al-Qaeda and Islamic radicalism were the greatest threat to western security, and that “threat would be heightened by military action against Iraq.”¹ In other words, Iraq posed no imminent threat to Britain’s security.

¹ “Blogger Bares Rumsfeld’s Post 9/11 Orders,” *The Guardian*, (24 Feb. 2006), www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/24/freedomofinformation.september11

² Chris Ames, “How the War Was Spun: The Foreign Office Has Been Ordered to Release an Early Secret Draft of the WMD Dossier,” *New Statesman*, 127: 4882, (4 Feb. 2008), p. 12.

³ Patrick McLain, “Settling the Score with Saddam: Resolution 1441 and Parallel Justifications for the Use of Force against Iraq,” *Duke Journal of Comparative & International Law*, 13: 1, (2003), p. 223.

¹ Jon Schwarz, “British Intelligence Warned Tony Blair of Manchester-Like Terrorism if the West Invaded Iraq,” *The Intercept*, (23 May. 2017), <https://theintercept.com/2017/05/23/british-intelligence-warned-tony-blair-of-manchester-like-terrorism-if-the-west-invaded-iraq/>

By mid-March 2003, British parliament was preparing for its critical vote on whether to go to war. Blair's political career was at stake as it was not an easy task to convince the majority of MPs to stand with him in the House of Commons. On March 17, 2003, parliament began its two-day debate on the Iraq war. It became again an institution of supreme importance. Tony Blair made one of the most important speeches of his career, stating that "weakness in the face of a tyrant is the surest way to conflict... we will confront the tyrannies and dictatorships and terrorists who put our way of life at risk."² On 18 March, Blair won the vote though many of his Labor MPs rebelled. He had survived the revolt against his government, and the final obstruction to war was lifted. However, Blair's determination to go to war with neither a UN resolution nor public support led to the immediate resignation of the leader of the House of Commons Robin Cook.³ Blair had already known that Saddam was not the threat he was made out to be. He had taken responsibility over the war without having much power over its consequences. Later, Blair was accused of leading Britain into an illegal war.

Conclusion

The road to the Iraq war revealed Blair in his truer colors: stubborn, zealous, and probably principled. However, his immense contribution to the invasion alongside the United States with neither a UN resolution nor domestic support made him the object of intense loathing. It is true that Blair's successful leadership has had its great impact on the pre-war process, but it is surely not enough to convince the British parliament to vote in favor of the war. Given the US leading position as the most powerful nation in the world, it was unavoidable for Blair to engage more passionately with G.W. Bush and forge a more fruitful relationship. Certainly, the foundation of this relationship has always been security cooperation which might result in maintaining British national security. Furthermore, Tony Blair was driven by his vision of Britain, playing a leading role in the face of major changes in world politics. The invasion of Iraq was, accordingly, in harmony with his view that the removal of Saddam Hussein was an urgent necessity for British interests. All these factors led Blair into a faithful alliance with the United States and war against Saddam Hussein.

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