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THE COST AND THE CORRUPTION



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OF THE WAR ON IRAQ

A TUCND PAMPHLET
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INTRODUCTION

Our government is now reshaping its armed forces in order to focus upon fighting wars such as the one against Iraq. New Labour clearly envisage such wars on a regular basis and yet we entered this war on a completely false basis. To get us to go along with it we were lied to openly and systematically by New Labour.

This is very dangerous. If our government take us down that route, pushed along by the US administration, we will see groups, encouraged by governments, responding by organising attacks in Britain, adding to the horrors of what is done in our name, by our government, abroad.

The trade union and labour movements must not allow this to happen. It's important, therefore, first of all that we understand exactly what happened with this war.

It hasn't made things better for the people of Iraq and neither has it improved their prospects for the future. It will take generations to overcome the damage British and US policy has done to the Middle East and the policies they are currently trying to impose on the people of Iraq.

Some of those in Parliament who supported the war are now attempting to justify their role by arguing that life has improved for the people of Iraq - that the end has justified the means. In reality, however, the end has not proven to be better than what had existed before and the people of Iraq are, very probably, worse off in the long term than they would have been without the invasion. If they do achieve democracy, it will be in spite of Britain's intervention.

The invasion was an attempt to maintain control in Iraq on behalf of the US business interests. This has put at risk the stability of the whole region, as well as the wellbeing of millions living there. There is now a grave need to extricate the US from its military occupation of Iraq. BUT this doesn't mean the solution is simply a withdrawal of US forces. The desire for power amongst those engaged in the terror war against the occupation are as much part of the problem as the desire by the US administration and New Labour to keep control of Iraq. The British forces in Iraq are also part of the problem but, again, that doesn't preclude them from being part of the solution.

The people of Iraq need something different and they certainly deserve something better. This pamphlet is an attempt to introduce into British politics a vision of what we can do in this country to draw Iraq towards a democratic and equitable society.

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According to Mr Blair's dossier the justification "arises also because of the violent and aggressive nature of Saddam Hussein's regime. His record of internal repression and external aggression gives rise to unique concerns about the threat he poses." But if Iraq had actually had unconventional weapons, the time they would have used them was when they were attacked. So the war could have triggered what it was supposed to prevent. Even by Middle Eastern standards the Baathist regime was unique in the quality of its repression and yet, up to the invasion of Kuwait, Britain was happy to help keep it in power. Britain actually helps keep range of vile and repressive regimes in power. Israel, Indonesia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia to name but a few, are all supplied by British arms manufacturers. Most of those who took part in the world trade centre attack came from either Saudi Arabia or Pakistan and there were close links between Pakistan's security forces and al-Qaida, yet there was no such link with Iraq. The idea, therefore, that this war was a response to terrorism lacks credibility.

Because New Labour were driven by British and US domestic political criteria - as Mr Blair put it "I believe this issue to be a current and serious threat to the UK national interest." there were no clearly defined aims to the war and, therefore, no exit strategy.

The bulk of the membership of the Labour Party and trade union movement in Britain would

see the relationship between the US and British governments as being an advantage if it helps moderate the dangerous excesses of the Bush administration. That is the very least that we expect from our government, to work to avert a war, not the uncritical compliance we saw within parliament.

What was done has scarred politics in Britain for a generation at least.

We now need to see what we can do to help the people of Iraq and to return the Labour Party to democracy. Above all we have to remove the desire for war from our government's foreign and domestic policy.

Background and History

THE NATURE OF THE BAATHIST REGIME AND BRITAIN'S PART IN ITS RISE

To accuse, as some in our government have done, MPs who opposed the war of being naive or of being in some way supportive of the Iraqi regime is simply dishonest. For decades people protested over the nature of the Baathist regime and campaigned vigorously against it, while our government blandly dismissed the campaign. In reality the Baathist regime was a straightforward fascist type government.

It came to power through what was effectively a coup in 1968. Saddam Hussein took over in 1979 through a bloodbath of executions and by murdering people in the Baathist party who opposed him.

There followed a horrific campaign of mass executions, torture and assassinations to suppress any opposition. The Kurdish minority in the North faced widespread repression, with some 4,000 villages and towns raised. Some were forced into what were, in effect, concentration camps. Between 1979 and 1980 roughly a quarter of a million people were subjected to some form of torture, yet Mrs Thatcher's government consistently supported this regime.

It would be a grave mistake to personalise this and focus only on Hussein - he had substantial support in the Baathist party but the Baathist government would probably have been just the same without Saddam Hussein.

Their policy was to establish Iraq as the regional superpower and they were supported in that by Britain and the US. That role had been performed by the Shah of Iran, a vicious, British and US owned, dictator, up until his overthrow in 1979.

The Iraqi regime had no compunction about using chemical weapons or developing biological weapons and Britain and the US had no compunction about providing them with such weapons. It's also worth noting that while this was happening the British authorities allowed the regime to intersperse agents amongst Iraqi students studying here. It's also true that Britain willingly supplied the Baathist regime with information on the activities of Iraqi students in Britain.

The nature of this regime was clear well before Britain and the US supplied them with chemical weapons.

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There is no doubt that the Baathist regime represented a menace, especially to its own people. But it is also clear that this was very probably the result of US and British policy, or, at least, was made possible by British and US help. It is simply hypocritical to use the nature of this regime as a justification for a war against its people. To repeat the phrase Clinton used "we cannot forget that we are not blameless in the misery under which they suffer".

The regime in Iraq was a threat and the people of Iraq desperately needed change. But

there are others countries in the same position in the region which, like Israel, exist solely by the grace of US support. The people of those countries deserve our vigorous support too, in their struggle for democracy.

The invasion was the wrong thing to do to bring stability, democracy and peace to the region. But a change by Britain now, towards support for democracy and away from supporting feudal states or racist governments could make a big difference. The Baathist regime was possible because of British and US readiness to support unpleasant regimes throughout the whole region.

The opposition to the Baathists in Iraq, the most significant and best respected element of which is the Iraqi Communist Party, consistently argued against military intervention. The ICP has not flinched from taking up arms and is the only political group in Iraq which consistently opposed the Baathist regime. The Baathist regime considered the ICP to be its only significant internal threat, outside of the Baathist party itself.

THE IRAN/IRAQ WAR

In 1952 the CIA organised, with British collusion, a coup to remove the popular nationalist government of Mohammed Mosadegh in Iran. They didn't like the independent nature of Mosadegh's government, which threatened the interests of West, particularly Britain, and were worried about the increasing influence of the Iranian Communist Party on Iranian Society and amongst the population overall. The Shah was brought back from Italy and imposed to rule on behalf of US and British interests.

There was nothing benign about the Shah's dictatorship. It survived on a climate of fear. His secret police, Savak, tortured significant numbers of people, sometimes to death, with impunity. In the 1960's, driven by a fear of a popular revolt in favour of Communists taking power, Israel, Britain and the US reorganised and extended Savak. That means they were supplied with the technology for processing information better, and their torture techniques 'improved' in the most terrible ways. Britain had been very successful in suppressing the Communist revolt in Malaya and had developed extremely effective ways of using information to control a population - outlined by Brigadier Frank Kitson in his book 'low intensity operations'. Apparently the US and Israel supplied the bulk of the training in torture, some of which took place in the United States. Armed with this training and equipment Savak were about as awful as one could imagine. Apparently they had no compunction about torturing children, which they did, sometimes, just for fun.

The Shah's regime was overthrown in 1979 by a popular revolt but, while initially the theocracy which took over had the cooperation of many of the progressive forces in Iran, it soon became apparent they were bent on setting up an autocratic and repressive regime. Within about 6 months Savak was dusted off and back in operation and a campaign was organised to kill progressive individuals within the Iranian government. Some of the assassinations were done in the name of a group called the Mujahadin, which gained a fair deal of support amongst the British ultra left and enjoyed some support from MI6 and the British government.

A number of things worried the western powers about the new Iranian regime. One was that they humiliated the US by taking their embassy staff hostage but the big one seems to have been that they were beyond the control of the western governments.

The Carter administration's reaction was to try and undermine the new regime. The regimes reaction was to develop a state under siege, with the US, Britain, France and Israel clearly identified as the enemy. France had close links with the Baathist regime in Iraq.

An oil embargo against Iran was almost impossible while the Soviet Union remained in existence and it's not so easy to change a refinery to produce from a different source of oil, so a lot of the big refineries in the west didn't want to change from Iranian oil. Economic

sanctions were, therefore, not an option.

When the Shah was overthrown the US acted quickly to take away much of the sophisticated weaponry they had supplied to the Shah. The air force was flown off, much of it ending up in the US, and other equipment either stolen or destroyed. The new regime also executed a significant number of the trained military officers. The US therefore believed they were vulnerable militarily.

So, in 1980, less than a year after the Shah had been deposed, the western powers encouraged the Baathist regime in Iraq to declare war on Iran. Saddam Hussein is on record as saying that you either win a war of this nature in the first couple of weeks or you are into a process of attrition. Ruthless and psychotic killers they may have been, but the Iraqi military planners were no fools. It is a fair assumption then that they misjudged the capacity of the Iranian forces and the quality of the equipment Iran had available, because they didn't win in the first few weeks.

Saddam Hussein was promised the south of Iran, giving Iraq access to a deep water port and the ability to establish a significant navy, while presumably they would put the Shah back in power over the rest of Iran. It's worth noting that at no time, in this great game played by Britain and the US, was a democratic government contemplated as part of their scheme of things.

They misjudged the value of their air superiority largely because the Soviet Union quickly supplied Iran with a range of anti-aircraft systems. The systematic bombing campaign carried out by Iraq, therefore, had little military significance because their aircrafts were forced to fly high. Another factor they misjudged was the resolution of the Iranian forces.

In some cases the Iranian forces cleared minefields by getting young men to run through them. They were told they would be martyrs and as such would get into heaven automatically. Some were even given a key symbolising the key to the door of heaven – apparently these tragic little things were made in Hong Kong from plastic.

There followed a gruelling set of battles in which about one million young men were killed on both sides and a deadlock ensued. The advantages Iraq had from information from US spy satellites and from air superiority weren't enough to win.

Britain and the US then organised the supply of chemical weapons to try and break this deadlock. Britain, under Margaret Thatcher, supplied the precursor chemicals while the US supplied the technology and some of the equipment for its production. This was organised very quickly.

Once in production the Baathist regime tested them on a group of Kurdish villages, the largest of which was Halabja. There were two reasons for these attacks in which about 5,000 men, women and children died. One was simply to test the new weapons that Britain and the US had given them. The other was, as with the Fascist forces in the second world war and the Israeli military now, they were seeking to punish communities. Halabja had been overrun by Iranian forces and recaptured by the Iraqis. The population were thought to have not resisted the Iranian forces enough.

Later, in 1987-88, these weapons were widely used against positions of Kurdish Pesh Merga fighters and Communist partisans waging armed struggle in Iraqi Kurdistan. They were also used to terrorize the local population as part of a systematic policy of emptying whole areas in Kurdistan, to try and crush resistance. Chemical weapons were an effective tool during the infamous Anfal campaign, which continued when the Iraq-Iran war came to an end. But all of these were against unprotected populations.

In the field conditions, these weapons didn't prove to be much of a success, even with the US satellite information about Iranian troop positioning. They may kill and maim but these weapons did not break the military deadlock.

In 82 Carter was replaced in office by Regan, who had sought a dialogue with Iran as a way of undermining the Carter administration. Oliver North and MacFarlane visited Iran and

brokered a deal to supply them with large quantities of weapons. The money with which Iran paid for these was then used by North to fund the Regan's covert war against the Nicaraguan government.

Also, because they had been able to maintain their oil industry, Iran could buy weapons from the open market including from countries, such as Britain, who were also supplying Iraq.

Iran then looked as if it was going to acquire an air force, opening the possibility that Iraq's oilfields could be attacked, undermining their ability to pay for their weapons. Even without that it looked as though Iraq could well be broken financially because of the war. The possibility of Iran actually winning, therefore, began to emerge.

Rather than see the possibility of another hostile Islamic regime emerging in the Middle East, the Regan administration brokered a conference of the western powers, and including the Soviet Union. At the conference a deal was organised where the two combatants would disengage, withdrawing to the 1979 borders. The underlying threat was that the world's major arms manufacturers would agree not to supply weapons, making it impossible for Iran and Iraq to continue the war anyway.

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In the year following the Baathist regimes gas attack on Kurdish villages, Britain sold Iraq an estimated £300 million worth of war materials, including chemicals for the production of more chemical weapons, while the United States sold them the equivalent of £1 billion. One of the effects of this war was to leave Iraq bankrupt. They went from having a surplus of about \$35 billion before the war to a deficit of roughly \$80 billion at its end. It is estimated Iraq's losses in the war were in the region of \$288 billion and an additional \$8.2 billion's worth of damage had been done to strategic economic projects. In the year following the end of the war inflation rose to 45%. Debt repayments were running at \$8 billion a year and the country was having to import 80% of its food, at a cost of between \$3 and \$4 billion. On top of this the regime were spending \$4 billion a year on weapons (they spent something like \$100 billion on weapons during that war), of which over half was going to western manufacturers. Given that Iraq's income from oil was only \$11 billion pa its clear the regime was running on a deficit.

It is clear that Iraq's western backers had hugely misjudged the possibility of a military victory and that the resulting war had bankrupted Iraq.

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Iran and Iraq had fought a useless, gruelling and terrible war entirely due to the game played by western powers. In reality these powers failed to get what they wanted, which was the re-establishment of a regime in Iran servicing their economic interests.

The war was catastrophic for both Iraq and Iran. Half a million Iraqis were killed or wounded in the war and 70,000 were taken prisoner. Internal repression was stepped up. The Baathist militia were told to shoot anyone involved in protests against the war, and they did. The sense of terror this was intended to project in the population was in part the motivation behind the gassing of a number of the Kurdish villages.

THE INVASION OF KUWAIT

The reason why the Iran/Iraq war has been omitted from the indictment against Saddam Hussein is because that war was fought at the direct instigation of the US in order to achieve their own political and economic aims. It's not on the indictment because it would be an indictment of the US government. And yet one of the consequences of the war was to create a dire need within the Iraqi regime for another war, a war of acquisition.

By 1989 Iraq's debts had become effectively unmanageable. The bulk of its borrowing had been from 'western' banks to fund the war with Iran and so it is inconceivable that the

regime had not discussed their proposed solution with the governments of those countries carrying their debt.

The regime effectively demanded that Gulf states and Saudi Arabia scrap its debts, estimated at about \$50 billion. Saddam later accused Kuwaiti rulers of deliberately lowering price in oil markets and siphoning oil from Iraqi fields across the border. A demand was also made for handing control of a Kuwaiti island called Warba, to provide Iraq with an outlet to the Gulf etc.

The response was negative. Again it is inconceivable that the Gulf States didn't discuss Iraq's demand, and the threat underpinning it, with the US government.

By invading Kuwait the Baathist regime were also hoping to take control of Kuwait's assets abroad, estimated at something like \$100 billion. It is glaringly obvious that the plans to invade Kuwait were discussed thoroughly with the US government before it took place.

The US ambassador to Iraq, Ms April Glaspy, met Saddam Hussein a few days before the invasion of Kuwait. She was latter reprimanded and demoted for apparently giving him the green light for an invasion. When asked by Saddam, "what the reaction would be from the US" if he opened a sea port (on the Gulf) through Kuwait, Ms Glaspy replied that "The US had no special interests" in Kuwait.

The movement of troops by Iraq in preparation for the invasion would have been apparent from US satellite monitoring. Again it is inconceivable that the US government didn't discuss the situation with Ms Glaspy, including her responses to Saddam Hussein's questions. Its obvious, therefore, that the US administration knew of the Iraq's proposed invasion. It was clear what was about to happen and it was clear why it was going to happen and yet the US, Britain and the rest did absolutely nothing to prevent it. And then, with flamboyant outrage, claimed they were surprised and appalled by the result.

Following the invasion of Kuwait there were a number of things which could have been done to deal with the situation. A significant part of the justification for this war was the perceived threat to Saudi Arabia, which was frankly unrealistic.

Thus it is clear that the first Gulf War was unnecessary and came about because of the manoeuvring and manipulations of a number of western governments. Not least in this dishonourable midden of governments was our own.

COLLABORATING WITH FACISTS

During the first Gulf War it became fashionable among some on the 'left' in Britain to see the Baathist regime as not so bad, that there are problems with it but this isn't a justification for war. In the Gulf war several far left parties, such as the SWP, produced pamphlets which came close to arguing that Iraq had been justified in the invasion of Kuwait - that the Iraqi regime was opposing imperialism and therefore should be supported.

George Galloway MP attended a conference in Baghdad in Dec 1999, organised by the government to coincide with the International Day for Human Rights. Mr Galloway said, according to Reuters, that yes, there were violations of human rights in Iraq, but they paled into insignificance compared with the deaths caused by economic sanctions. He also briefed Tareq Aziz, the Baathist regime's foreign minister, about his efforts internationally. This isn't justifiable. In reality, rather than opposing imperialism, the Baathist regime was more a tool of imperialism, helping shape the politics of the Middle East around US interests. It owed its existence to US and British policy and that policy sustained it in existence. The use of chemical weapons against their own people, the Anfal genocide campaign, the physical liquidation of tens of thousands of opponents, draconian laws which didn't spare families and relatives, dragging the country into wars over 2 decades - this really was a fascist type regime.

NEW LABOUR'S JUSTIFICATION FOR WAR

"I believe this issue to be a current and serious threat to the UK national interest". This is a key phrase in the justification Tony Blair has put forward for going to war yet it is not a valid reason. It is a breach of international law.

Part of New Labour's justification was to say that Iraq represented a military threat to Britain. That would have been legal, but it hasn't been proven - and in failing so dramatically to prove that Iraq did represent a threat to Britain, New Labour has, in practice, proven they didn't present a threat. Their war was, therefore, illegal.

New Labour circulated a dossier outlining the threat which the Iraqi regime presented.

Based on the 'intelligence' information available, what they felt the Baathist regime had in terms of weapons of mass destruction was outlined. But what was described in the dossier really couldn't be regarded as a serious threat to the neighbouring states and or to Britain and the US. In other words the New Labour supporters of the war did not consider the evidence put before them critically, yet a war was declared as a result. Mr Blair's '45 minutes' claim was so transparent that its worrying that the bulk of our MPs are dumb enough to believe such stuff.

The dossier was subsequently proven to have been largely plagiarised from an out of date student thesis - and yet the campaign for a war persisted. It was 'sexed up' at the behest of Alistair Campbell and the government went to incredible lengths to discredit the sources which showed the justification to be a sham. And yet MPs still doggedly supported the Prime Minister.

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According to the dossier Iraq may have had a couple of hundred tons of chemicals. That is the difference between the amount they bought to make these weapons before the 1991 Gulf War and the amount that had either been used or was destroyed after that war. MI6 knew these figures because it was Britain who sold them it.

That amount would make enough for a couple of gas attacks such as those in the Iran/Iraq war. Mr Blair's dossier says that "Iraq used significant quantities of Mustard, Tabun and Sarin during the war with Iran resulting in over 20,000 Iranian casualties". 20,000 deaths were the result of using several thousand tons of chemical weapons.

Mr Blair's dossier says "that Iraq has refurbished sites formerly associated with the production of chemical and biological agents" and yet the UN Inspectors have said this was not the case and they have since been proven right.

To be a threat to its neighbours Iraq would have had to have substantially more than the 300 tons in Mr Blair's dossier. However, even if they had had several thousand tons, they would still need a method of delivering the weapons to their target.

Mr Blair's dossier speculated that Iraq might have about 20 Scud missiles hidden, although no evidence existed for this.

Before the first Gulf war Iraq had a programme to produce its own missiles, with a much longer range than the 500km or so the Scud missiles were capable of. But developing a missile and an engine capable of such a long range would be a considerable technical feat, which makes the dossier's claim just look silly - the UN inspection process failed to find any capacity in Iraq to build them. Iraq might be able to hide the missile factory, but not the missiles themselves as they were deployed for use. And it wouldn't be possible to hide a test flight, without which they couldn't go into full scale production. The suggestion, therefore, that such a programme might exist was simply dishonest. The failure to find any real evidence was, in practice, proof that a missile programme didn't exist.

This means the prime Minister, his staff, the military and intelligence personnel involved were aware that the actual evidence contradicted their justification for this war.

Assuming they did have the 20 missiles, for which no evidence existed. The payload

capacity of the remaining 20 Scud missiles is about 5 tonnes. Nasty weapons, but it is simply unrealistic to present this as being weapons of mass destruction, or of any real military significance.

Another method of delivery would be through artillery and Iraq had lots of sophisticated artillery. A problem for the US in the first Gulf War was Iraq's batteries of South African made G5 and G6 155mm guns, which are the longest range guns available. These have a longer than anything the US or any other members of the coalition had. Had the US forces come into range of these guns, they would have had nothing with a long enough range to retaliate. The guns would have been 'dug in' which means it would have been difficult to knock them out from the air. So this is a potent set of military hardware.

However, these have a maximum range of around 40Km. They would have been able to deliver chemical weapons in a battle but they couldn't realistically be used to attack neighbouring states.

The most common method of delivery for both chemical and biological weapons would be aircraft. But Iraq couldn't use what military aircraft it had or arrange for a civilian aircraft to over fly either the troops massed against it or its neighbouring states. In reality, therefore, even if they had chemical weapons, they couldn't have delivered them to neighbouring states or to Britain and the US.

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A great deal of alarmist hype was been generated in the press about these weapons, but that is all it is, alarmist hype.

Chemical weapons were effective in demoralizing Iranian troops in the Iran/Iraq war. They were also effective when used against unprotected troops, such as the battle for the Fao peninsula. Also, one of the reasons why Saddam didn't use them in the Gulf War in 1991 is because of the thinly-veiled threat made by US State Secretary James Baker during his meeting with Tariq Aziz in Geneva on the eve of war - any use of such weapons would unleash a massive retaliation by the US, strongly implying that a nuclear strike would be involved. This same threat was used on the eve of the last war, through statements by US officials in response to questions about such possibility. It is clear then, that the US didn't believe Iraq was in a position to use these weapons against them in the first Gulf War, let alone the second.

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The only evidence from history of extensive use of biological agents being used in warfare was by Japan against Russian and Chinese troops in the Second World War and by the US against Chinese and North Korean troops in the Korean War.

In the WW2 Japan spread disease carrying lice over some towns in China but these killed civilians rather than the troops dispersed in the countryside. In the startlingly dramatic advance of the Red Army through China at the end of the war biological weapons were expected and countermeasures, such as the extensive use of flame throwers, were taken. In the Korean War General MacArthur arranged for large numbers of disease carrying rats to be dropped onto concentrations of Chinese and Korean troops. There is very little information about the effects of this exercise but it is clear it had little or no impact on the course of that war.

Although biological weapons are frightening, they are an inefficient way of killing people and have had little military impact where they have been used.

This isn't just clear to the initiated, it's also very clear to our government. For instance, at the end of January 2003 Prof Oxford, an expert on the smallpox virus said he did not recognise 'the virus I know' in the government propaganda material, and especially that coming from the US, about the possibility of smallpox being used as a weapon. Those involved in biological research became concerned over resources being diverted away from real natural killers like TB, HIV and Influenza to research what they saw as a mythical

threat. At the same

time Tom Inch, chair of the UK chemical weapons convention advisory committee was quoted as saying that if terrorists used a chemical agent in a confined space such as the London Tube "Some people would die but not huge numbers — high explosives would be far more dangerous."

The Scud missiles which hit Saudi Arabia and Israel in the first Gulf War were loaded with high explosives because high explosives would kill more people than these non conventional weapons.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

These are a different category, one relatively small device can be seen as a threat to its neighbouring states but it would also be suicidal to use it. Making nuclear weapons is relatively straightforward. Take the final year group of a university physics department and they would know how to do it. But they would need a significant nuclear industry, which would be impossible to hide, to produce the material and to work it into shape for use in a bomb.

Iraq was in the process of developing a nuclear programme when in the 1980's Israeli warplanes bombed the nuclear power station they were in the process of constructing. It is also clear that prior to the Gulf War they were making efforts to develop a bomb without using a large nuclear reactor, although that too involved a huge amount of equipment. The reason for this programme was not to threaten the US or Britain but because Israel has an extensive nuclear weapons programme, (which it hasn't been able to hide) and has threatened to use nuclear weapons.

But if they had had such bombs, what would have happened if they had used them against either Israel or one of its neighbours?

In the 1980's in conjunction with Apartheid South Africa and with covert support from Britain, a range of nuclear bombs were developed by Israel. The Apartheid regime was particularly interested in developing a Neutron version of hydrogen bombs, which would kill but leave property largely intact. The two regimes cooperated and Israel now has both missiles (the technology supplied for this by the United States), and aircraft capable of attacking Iraq. Israel has almost certainly, a larger arsenal of nuclear weapons than either Britain or France.

Using a small bomb against it would be rather like firing an airgun at someone pointing a tank gun back at you. The outcome would be a forgone conclusion.

The suggestion, implied by the government, that Iraq posed a threat from its nuclear weapons was, therefore, obviously unrealistic.

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A point worth noting here is that all those within our government who opposed the war, and who have subsequently been proven correct, have resigned, leaving a cabinet of people who opposed the will of the population and have been proven wrong.

IF THE INVASION HADN'T TAKEN PLACE

The Baathist regime in Iraq was a fascist regime. It was a brutal, repressive regime which systematically tortured and murdered large numbers of people. But to judge if the situation for the people of Iraq would have been better if the invasion hadn't taken place, you also have to take into account the possible alternatives to the invasion.

The regime toppled without much of a fight. No one in the Middle East expected it to be able to win against the US but, similarly, no one expected an Arab regime not to put up a fight against the US. The fact they didn't fight is very revealing about the grip the Baathist

regime had on power. It is evident then that there were alternatives available to remove the Baathist regime.

The situation created at the end of the first Gulf war was that the Baathist regime were left in power, but were controlled in terms of their potential impact on the region as a whole. In other words the regime in the 1990's was designed by the US and shaped around its interests. The ready collapse of the Iraqi military shows that its soldiers didn't support the regime.

The Baathist regime parasited on, and butchered, the people of Iraq with a mean and vindictive cruelty. But nothing has changed with the invasion. Arrest without trial continued. Torture continued despite the public outcry in the west when servicemen and women, began selling photographs of people being humiliated. Women, and apparently some men and boys, are raped in prison.

The country's resources are not being used for the benefit of the population, just as it was under the Baathists. Large scale murders of political dissidents are not taking place, although it is apparent that people are being murdered by the US security personnel. On the other hand significant numbers are being killed by the US military air strikes and by terrorists. So people are killed at random, or because they want a job, rather than because they were members of the Communist Party or other opposition forces.

The infrastructure of the country was deteriorating under the Baathist regime, partly because of the sanctions imposed following the first Gulf War. The way the invasion was organised involved the large scale destruction of infrastructure. Power and communications were seen as legitimate targets in the war. Because insufficient troops were deployed to control the situation and those deployed were organised to protect themselves rather than protect the country's resources. Hospitals, schools and economic installations were looted systematically.

There is some evidence to suggest that the looting of art and archaeology was actually coordinated from the US. The US has traditionally been the biggest market for artefacts taken in this way.

The offices in government administration buildings were looted. Very little of this damage has been repaired since the invasion. None of this would have happened had there not been an invasion.

Up to the end of July 2004 between 11,000 and 14,000 people had been killed in this war, more than half after the regime had actually collapsed.

An aspect of the way in which the war in Afghanistan was run gives an indication of what would have been possible in Iraq, to topple the regime without an invasion.

In Afghanistan the major military advances were achieved not by airpower, but by the supply of military equipment to the Northern groups to counter the military equipment the US had supplied the Taliban the previous years. Through Pakistan the US had deliberately built up the Taliban's military capacity in the year before to help in their war against the groups in the north. The equipment supplied to defeat the Taliban came principally from Russia. It was costed at about £40 million worth of medium tanks, multiple launch rockets, mountain howitzers, ammunition etc, and came from Russian army reserve stocks. So, for the Taliban were defeated for the same amount that it costs Britain to run its intervention in Iraq for ten days.

In Nicaragua, in the 1980's, the US poured arms, funds and training into insurgent groups to depose the leftwing regime there. In fact that was the pattern for wars in South America since the 1950's - the US pumping resources into such insurgent groups to destabilise regimes there. There is a well established tradition in the CIA of bringing governments to their knees this way. It was a conscious choice, therefore, by the Bush administration, to invade which means it was about something other than simply bringing the government down.

There are other examples of major military powers being defeated by guerrilla war. Of all countries the US should appreciate this because they have destabilised a number of countries by creating guerrilla wars against what were well established and popular governments. And also because their own defeat in the Vietnam War was exactly such a situation.

During the 1990 gulf war, large numbers of the people were encouraged by the US to rise against the regime but were subsequently left to be crushed by the regime. The 'west' didn't support them, and stood by while the regime butchered them with impunity.

The scale of the popular uprising which swept 14 out of 18 provinces took the US by surprise. The US wanted a defeated Iraqi army to itself eventually topple Saddam. (This view, a so-called "silver bullet solution" through a palace coup, was prevalent throughout the 1990s, under Clinton's policy of "containment" and destabilization) The uprising however was not under their control and threatened to bring to power forces that may be hostile to US interests. A power vacuum and instability in Iraq were also considered not to be in the US's interests, thus allowing Iran to play a dominant role in the region. Saudi Arabia, and other Arab states, also feared the consequences. All these factors contributed to US decision to allow Saddam the means to crush the uprising. The number of civilians killed in that repression was much greater than those killed during military operations in the Gulf War. The uprising, and its aftermath, had a deep impact on Iraqis' view of US policies. Full of suspicion, many were convinced that it was in collaboration with Saddam.

What that uprising, however, clearly does show is that it would have been possible to raise a large scale armed opposition to the regime itself. So there were alternatives available which would have toppled the regime.

The only conclusion one can draw from the fact the US didn't involve the population of Iraq in the downfall of the Baathist regime was because it is extremely unlikely to have produced a situation where Halliburton, and other US interests, would then have been in possession of the country's oil resources.

But there were clearly military alternatives to an invasion.

But it's worse than that. There have been a number of significant invasions in history, which have initially succeeded militarily, only to fail in retaining control. For instance, following the Russian revolution a coalition of powers invaded. At one stage the coalition and their clients controlled three-quarters of the country while the military forces opposing them were poorly trained and had a massive disadvantage in equipment. Yet the invasion was defeated. The invading forces but had no vision of a government for the areas they took over and it was that lack which made their military defeat inevitable. They had no political solution. The fact that Iraq is so similar to other events in history suggests that the US administration and New Labour simply didn't think through what they were doing.

A further factor in assessing whether the invasion had any positive benefits is the increased tension and instability in the region as a whole. The US and Britain have seen instability as a useful tool in retaining control in some countries. But this level of instability, and the area it affects, is out of control. The risk generated by the instability this war has created outweigh the gains our government claim for Iraq. In other words it has backfired.

So balancing the good and the bad things that have come about in Iraq, it's very clear the population have suffered more as a result of the invasion than if it hadn't happened, that the possibility of a progressive government hasn't been enhanced compared to what would have happened without western intervention and that there were very clearly alternatives to an invasion.

COSTS AND CORRUPTION

The first Gulf War cost Britain in the region of £2.5 billion or well over £3 billion at today's

prices. But other states, who didn't send troops, paid money over to the British and the US, so this wasn't the cost to the British taxpayer. This time round, no one is contributing, the scale of the commitment was greater because the British and the US were the only troops involved and there was no exit strategy, which means an expensive long term commitment. Mr Blair's 2003 pamphlet, "The courage of our convictions" argues that the reason why we have to accept significant dismantling of the welfare state is because we do not have the resources to be able to continue funding at this level. Balanced against the problems we face in, for instance, funding pension provision on the scale of our European partners, healthcare, education, transport, support for industry, local authority funding - it is actually very difficult to see how the invasion of Iraq can be justified.

The US and Britain organised the invasion on the cheap, partly due to difficulties in getting enough men and equipment to the area, because of opposition from regimes in the area. They were extremely lucky not to have seen very significant numbers of their young men returning in body bags.

New Labour couldn't be up-front about what it would cost the people of Britain - current estimates put it at about £6 billion. By mid July 2004, some were putting the figure at about £250 million per month.

The fact that the invading forces had insufficient resources to maintain control, let alone establish an infrastructure capable of supporting the reconstruction, came about because the US did it on the cheap. To overcome the resultant risk to US personnel, they risked the lives of large numbers of Iraqi people. So the way the US organised the invasion, and the way it was fought, killed lots of Iraqis but didn't leave the US with sufficient resources to maintain control and this has actually increased the cost in the medium to long term. The resentment created by the 'shoot anything that might be a threat' policy means that, in the long term more US troops are going to die.

In May 2004 Gordon Brown asked Parliament to increase the funds available for the war in Iraq. It was estimated at the time that this was costing £4m a day. This would mean that the Chancellor's original £3.8bn fund to pay for operations in Iraq would have been exhausted by January or February, if the scale of British involvement was to be maintained. Geoff Hoon, when pressed, agreed that the figure of £125m a month were "roughly consistent". A fair estimate now of the overall cost to Britain of this adventure is about £6bn if troops remained in Iraq through 2006.

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In terms of the cost to Britain an issue we should recognise is that the true cost is not only in pounds. Each of the wars recently engaged in has left us with the need to maintain a military commitment to these areas for an extended period of time. There is a sense in which, the cost of this war has been the need to abandon the plan to do away with student fees, to shed 100,000 civil service jobs and a substantial hike in council tax for middle class areas.

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Added to that there is the danger of economic damage to the US caused by the huge costs of the occupation and the long-term effect of the war on the global economy. Instability in the Gulf increases oil prices and American borrowing to fund military action is threatening to increase long-term interest rates. The Guardian quotes one expert as saying huge US military spending in Iraq is helping to fuel the American budget deficit. "When you stack all of this spending up in the context of the widening fiscal deficit, there are wide implications for the rest of the world, building up long-term interest rates which everybody ultimately has to pay."

Also the Bush administration didn't plan what it would take to put the country back on its feet. Some of this has to do with the power struggle between the Pentagon and the State Dept regarding Iraq. The State Department, for instance, hosted workshops for "Future Iraq

Project" over a whole year before war, but all these plans were shelved when the Pentagon took over both the political planning and administration as well in late 2002. This explains a lot of the zig-zags in US policy on Iraq after the war, and continues to this day.

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When the Baathist regime fell, the US occupation forces appointed a US governor for Iraq, General Jay Gardner. He was quickly replaced by Paul Bremer as the head of what was called the Coalition Provisional Authority. On the 28th of June, 2004, he slipped away, nominally handing power to an Iraqi interim government. The CPA was quite determined to turn Iraq's wealth country over to US companies, often run by people close to Bush himself. But it was also astonishingly inept. Several sources are now reporting that the way in which the US authority ran the country left it in a worse condition than under the Baathists. There were two levels of the impetus behind this process. One was base greed, in that figures in the Bush administration, such as Vice President Dick Cheney, were intent on making as much as they could out of Iraq. The other was based on the concept that the most efficient form of administration is through the open market, with as little governmental 'interference' as possible.

General Gardner says he was sacked because he fell out with the Bush Circle over his desire for free elections and dislike for an imposed programme of privatisation. In an interview with BBC's Newsnight on March 18th 2004 he said: "My preference was to put the Iraqis in charge as soon as we can, and do it with some form of elections ... I just thought it was necessary to rapidly get the Iraqis in charge of their destiny."

What actually happened was that the original plan was for orchestrated "conferences" for Iraqi "representatives", carefully selected to strengthen pro-US groups, culminating with a Baghdad Conference, similar to the Bonn Conference for Afghanistan. When the US administration realized the Pro-US groups had no effective power base, they changed tack. Initially, the US accepted the demand of an overwhelming majority of Iraqi forces for a broadly based national conference, which would elect a coalition government to run the country over a transitional period, prepare a draft constitution and then prepare for general elections. But by mid May 2003 a policy shift had taken place which led to the imposition of an occupation authority. The US organised for the UNSCR 1483 resolution in late May, getting "international legitimacy" for its occupation and for the CPA.

In May 2003 the Bush administration established an 'advisory board' to oversee the reconstruction and operation of Iraq's oil industry. It was headed by Philip Carroll, formerly an executive at Shell, and US engineer/contractor Fluor. On May 4th 2003 the Observer quoted one oil industry expert as saying "... Look at Halliburton [the company, formerly headed by Vice President Dick Cheney, which won contracts to repair war-damaged oil wells]. Look at who this guy Carroll is. To bring production up to 3.5 million barrels a day will cost \$3bn. If Fluor gets any of that work, what credibility will the US have?"

The press in Britain were already ridiculing the corruption associated with this set up and ridiculing Tony Blair for supporting it. In his Observer column on the 4th of March 2003 Terry Jones said "he's put his name to a plan that is not just plain stupid but is actually wicked, and in return? Zilch. All the contracts for reconstructing Iraq are to go to American companies - preferably ones like Halliburton, which remain such good friends with their old boss vice-president Dick Cheney. But not a single British company is to benefit from all the mayhem and destruction that the bombing is going to cause. Poor old Tony doesn't even get a bone."

This view has persisted. For instance Suzanne Goldenberg writing in the Guardian on October 27, 2003 reports "Several congressmen have asked what Halliburton has done with the money from the contracts. Mismanagement and corruption in the rebuilding of Iraq are the topic of this week's cover story in Newsweek magazine. Among the lucrative business opportunities in Iraq's reconstruction, KBR (a British subsidiary of Halliburton) has

been paid \$1.59bn (£938.5m) to refurbish Iraq's oil installations. It has also been awarded projects to rebuild Iraqi schools." So the system was openly, overtly and unashamedly corrupt and yet the British government did nothing to prevent it developing.

..... According to the US based Open Society Institute's Iraq Revenue Watch program the CPA "launched a last-minute spending spree using Iraq's oil money ... committing billions of dollars to hastily conceived projects" just before the authority was due to close up shop. On May 15th 2004, the CPA's spending arm, the Program Review Board, approved nearly \$2 billion in expenditures for "a host of poorly planned projects" without even consulting the relevant Iraqi ministries, the Iraq Revenue Watch report said. The report, titled "Iraqi Fire Sale," criticizes the CPA's "rush to commit Iraqi oil funds to projects already funded by the U.S. government, instead of waiting for the interim Iraqi government to make these budgetary decisions when it assumes power."

Christian Aid also criticised "the U.S.-controlled coalition in Baghdad" for "handing over power ... without having properly accounted for what it has done with some \$20 billion of Iraq's own money."

In May 2003 the United Nations Security Council established the Development Fund for Iraq to collect Iraq's oil revenues, repatriated funds previously held by Saddam Hussein, and transfers from the UN Oil-for-Food program, which ended in November 2003. This money was to be spent in the interests of the Iraqi people, and be independently audited. Since its inception, the DFI has received \$19.3 billion. As of June 9, \$10.1 billion was left. The U.S. has spent half of the DFI money and used up almost all of approximately \$2.7 billion in assets the U.S. confiscated from the Baathist regime, according to a June report by the US General Accounting Office.

In fact, the U.S. occupation spent far more of Iraq's money than its own, the GAO report shows. As of the end of April, the CPA signed contract commitments for only \$8 billion, about one-third of the \$24 billion allocated by the U.S. Congress for Iraq's reconstruction and humanitarian needs. But it signed contracts committing about \$15.5 billion, more than two-thirds of the \$21 billion in available Iraqi funds.

Furthermore, the GAO said, "Transactions worth billions of dollars in Iraqi funds have not been independently reviewed or the results reported."

According to Christian Aid, "It took until April 2004 to appoint an auditor leaving only a matter of weeks to go through the books. Early reports of the audit indicate strong criticisms of the CPA's handling of Iraq's money. But the CPA is not going to be around to be held accountable." Christian Aid has been consistent in its concern over the US handling of Iraq's resources. In October 2003 they revealed that an "astonishing" \$4 billion of Iraq's oil revenues and other funds were unaccounted for.

At the beginning of August 2004 the Washington Post carried an article detailing some of the problems which justifies a long quote - "The CPA has said it awarded about 2,000 contracts with Iraqi money. Its inspector general compiled records for the major contracts, which it defined as those worth \$5 million or more each. Analysis of those and other records shows 19 of 37 major contracts paid for with Iraqi money went to U.S. companies and at least 85 percent of the total \$2.26 billion was obligated to U.S. companies.

That analysis and several audit reports released by September 2004 shed new light on how the occupation authority handled the Iraqi money it controlled. They show the CPA at times violated its own rules, authorizing Iraqi money when it didn't have a quorum or proper Iraqi representation at meetings and kept such sloppy records that the paperwork for several major contracts could not be found.

During the first half of the occupation, the CPA depended heavily on no-bid contracts that were questioned by auditors. The transfer of projects which were publicly announced to be

financed by U.S. money to financed by Iraqi money prompted the Iraqi finance minister to complain that the "ad hoc" process put the CPA in danger of losing the trust of the people. Kellogg, Brown & Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton, was paid \$1.66 billion from the Iraqi money, primarily to cover the cost of importing fuel from Kuwait. The job was tacked on to a no-bid contract which was subsequently the subject of several investigations following allegations that a subcontractor for Houston-based KBR overcharged by up to \$61 million for the fuel.

Harris, a Melbourne, Fla., company, got \$48 million from the Iraqi oil funds to manage and update the formerly state-owned media network, taking over from Science Applications International Corp. of San Diego."

In some cases US companies were charging 10 times the going rate for similar work done by Iraqi companies. The handling of the setting up of the new media services has drawn particular criticism for being mouthpieces for the occupation forces. It got beyond the joke when an examination of expenses revealed that a jet had been chartered to fly in a Hummer H2 and a pickup truck for the program manager's use.

When Bremer left office they said, "We still do not know exactly how Iraq's money has been earned, which companies have won the contracts that it has been spent on, or whether this spending was in the interests of the Iraqi people."

People within Iraq are now calling for an independent auditing commission to go through all the accounts and contracts set up by the CPA, with authority to revoke or modify these to ensure they serve the interests of the Iraqi people.

What is particularly galling about this disgustingly corrupt mess is that only a fraction of the work which desperately need to be done, is actually being done. The failure of the reconstruction program is fuelling the discontent which provides the basis of the terrorist activity in Iraq. Because of the failure of this reconstruction program, people are going to die.

One of the most significant political forces in Iraq is the Iraq Communist Party. They argue that it is now vital that - "real economic control must be transferred to the Iraqi government," While achieving security is the top issue for the Iraqi people it is closely intertwined with the country's economic situation. The US occupation forces have become synonymous with waste, inefficiency and corruption, "If a strong Iraqi government can utilize fully the oil revenues, we can do far better than what U.S. companies and the CPA have done so far. Political initiative must be taken back from the Americans."

THE CONDUCT OF WAR

There have been three major wars which New Labour has embroiled us in over the last five years. Each at the behest of the United States. There are a number of features of the process in each case which are deeply worrying.

One is military incompetence. In Britain the military planners are, on the whole, well trained and rational. The question then is why they get into such horrendous situations.

For example, the war against Yugoslavia over Kosovo. Had that actually developed into an invasion it is unlikely the NATO forces would have won an easy victory and even possible that they would have faced an ignominious defeat. What is certain is that there would have been heavy losses.

The Yugoslav army withdrew something in the region of 60,000 troops and a great many tanks. NATO had expected in the region of 40,000 and far less tanks. The heavy air bombardment of Yugoslav army positions - in the region of 8,000 sorties - appeared to have had a minimal effect - 11 knocked out tanks were reported. One of the things this revealed is that NATO had no real intelligence of the opposing troops deployment. This says a) the NATO invasion was being organised in support of people who had no real roots

in the Kosovo society - the KLA proved incapable of providing effective intelligence. and b) the Yugoslav forces were fooling the electronic surveillance methods so favoured by the US.

Situations such as this have what should be a chilling history. At the battle of Austerlitz Napoleon fooled the Russian and Prussian's into thinking he had have half his real compliment of troops and butchered them as a result. Wellington used essentially the same strategy at Salamanca to defeat Napoleon's army in the peninsula war.

After the Kosovo war it became clear the Yugoslav's were listening to Britain's radio communication. In the First World War Tsarist Russian troops initially made considerable inroads into Germany. One of the things which turned the tide and led to their crushing defeat was the fact that the Germans were able to listen to unencrypted Russian radio communications.

There was a well recorded situation where General Wesley Clarke was demanding troops be ferried by helicopter to confront Russian troops who had taken the town of Pristina. Had that resulted in fighting, the NATO troops, in this case British troops, would not been cut off without heavy armour and facing a well equipped, determined group of professional troops. The two principle options would have been to either surrendering or be butchered. The Russian move to Pristina clearly had significance politically but, in practice, very little militarily.

Political pressure meant the problem of duff equipment wasn't addressed. Following the war General Jackson was 'not able to recall' that there were such problems. That came from the fact that Britain is a major exporter of weapons and is thus unable to admit that its equipment is junk.

One of the most lucid critiques of allowing such political criteria to dominate tactical military decisions comes from the Chinese manual 'The Art of War' - written about 3,000 years ago. The type of mistakes NATO and Britain made in Kosovo have been described for 3,000 years - the major one being allowing domestic political criteria to define military strategy.

The US defeat in the Vietnam War produced a huge problem for the US. Military projects abroad are viewed with deep distaste in the US, especially where they involve large scale casualties amongst their own personnel. Situations which imply steady US casualties are simply politically unacceptable. There was clearly the hope in the US that attitudes might change in the aftermath of September the 11th but Bush's inability to draw a link between its military adventures and the September 11th attacks has dissipated this change.

Since its inception in the mid 1930's some have believed that airpower can win wars. That it is possible to achieve military and political control over a country by using bombing, rather than ground troops. In the Second World War the bombings by Britain and the US of German cities was intended to do this. Initially it was described as pinpoint accuracy. When this didn't work the trend drifted to mass bombing of economic targets and from there into mass bombing for vengeful reasons. The bombing of Dresden, for instance, was of virtually no military significance but killed tens of thousands of people. Both Dresden and Hiroshima were, in reality, intended as a threat to the Soviet Union.

In the Kosovo war bombing was initially represented as highly accurate, surgical strikes. But then car factories, electricity distribution equipment etc., some distance from the area of potential military conflict were systematically attacked. In other words Yugoslav faced the destruction of its society rather than defeat in a military campaign. This strategy isn't overtly admitted to, because it's illegal under international law. The allies hanged people after WW2 for pursuing just such a policy. But then, why else bomb bridges in Belgrade?

This strategy is nowhere near as effective as its advocates would have one believe. Despite the extensive use of airpower in the military campaign in Afghanistan the actual military defeat of the Taliban came from the Northern Alliance troops rather than from bombing. In

the campaign in Kosovo NATO bombed its own side on a number of occasions. The technique is described by Marshal Chuikov in his account of the early stages of defence of Stalingrad. At that time the German forces dominated the air space. The Russian troops would instigate a fire-fight and give ground quickly. Air support had been summoned to attack their positions which were, by the time they arrived, occupied by Germans. It makes the use of close air support problematic. The Yugoslav army did this several times in Kosovo, resulting in NATO planes bombing KLA positions.

After the Bosnia campaign General Michael Rose commented that 3,000 sorties had been flown against Serb forces, "mostly against empty buildings", because they didn't have good enough intelligence.

Without first class intelligence and coordination, close air support will always be something considerably other than a war winning tool.

In Afghanistan some of the local feudal leadership have clearly used their contacts with the US to bomb feudal rivals, fundamentally undermining the credibility of the US in the area.

But there is another vulnerability which is more significant for the British than the US.

During the Falklands war aircraft carriers were essential to the way Britain fought that war. Yet Argentina came very close to destroying the Hermes with Exocet missiles. At one stage Argentina managed to hard wire the launch and guidance systems for some of their Exocets into a container on the back of a truck, which gives an indication of the flexibility of the type of weapons available on the open market. What happened to the Atlantic Conveyor gives a taste of what could happen to an aircraft carrier and knock out the aircraft carrier and you've won the war. China now sells on the open market large torpedoes specifically designed to attack Aircraft Carriers. The US surrounds their 12 carriers each with a 'battle group' of up to 50 other ships, but Britain doesn't have that luxury.

New Labour are planning 2 new aircraft carriers which should be ready by 2012, but the technology already exists which makes these ships sitting ducks.

The policy of depending on air power is flawed militarily but it also implies a high rate of casualties amongst the civilian population. The fact the US sent fewer troops than were necessary to seal the borders and control Iraq after the war contributed to the way the security situation, by Autumn 2004, had deteriorated to dangerous levels.

What the US has done is to resort to military strategies developed by the Israeli military in their occupation of Arab lands. That is to shoot anything which you consider to be a threat, or just anything that moves. To justify this to their own troops requires them to see those who oppose them in a particular way - as a threat and as inferior.

Such a strategy guarantees the reaction which we can see today happening in Iraq, just as it has in Palestine.

So the strategy, of an overdependence on airpower, is borne from a desire to avoid casualties amongst your own troops. While in practice there is little evidence it does this, there is lots of evidence that it kills large numbers of civilians, that it isn't effective militarily and that it seriously undermines the possibility of a political settlement. Without a political settlement situations like Iraq, and Israel, become a cycle of violence and destruction with the occupying force eventually being forced to withdraw.

DEPLETED URANIUM

As with chemical weapons and landmines, there are a number of weapons systems which have such vile long term effects they are regarded as unacceptable in the modern world. Depleted Uranium (DU) is used in British and US anti-armour weapons and, together with cluster bombs, clearly falls into this category. The US use DU extensively, in the form of

30mm cannon ammunition fired from aircraft. The only other country to use it is Britain. DU is a very hard and dense material. When the 'penetrator', a rod of DU, hits a target its kinetic energy turns to heat, which softens the armour plate allowing the penetrator to punch a hole through it. As it enters the vehicle some of the DU starts to burn, causing an intense fire inside the vehicle, killing everything in it. The US and Britain have lots of DU, a waste product from the nuclear industry, so we consider it a cheap alternative to the materials used by other countries for such weapons. The problem is that its radioactive. The tanks knocked out with it become what is, in practice, medium level radioactive waste. The smoke from the fire inside contains small particles of Uranium Oxide. The effect of breathing in such a particle is a slow and painful death over anything up to a ten year period. Battlefields with this material in it effectively contain elements of radioactive waste. Following the first gulf war nothing was done to clear up this material by either the US or the Iraqi authorities.

Because of its cheapness the US also used it as a stabiliser in Cruise missiles, which means there will be areas of Baghdad itself which have been contaminated. More of this ammunition was used in the recent war against Iraq than has ever been used before. Again there are no plans to clean it up.

In the ten years or so following the first gulf war large numbers of badly deformed babies were born in areas near battlefields where this material was used. Large numbers of children, they appear to be particularly vulnerable, living close to such battlefields have contracted types of cancer normally associated with radiation.

DU may also be associated with the Gulf War syndrome. Following the first Gulf War the US modified their practices for handling this material. Britain denies there is a problem and therefore has declined to modify their methods.

Warfare is, by definition, an inhuman, brutal, cruel and ruthless business, which is why there is a need for international law operating outside of the influence of the combatants. The way the US has behaved over the Geneva conventions concerning prisoners from Afghanistan, the sale of weapons such as gas to Iraq, the use of cluster bombs and DU demonstrate that there is a desperate need for laws to control governments such as our own and the Bush administration.

Yet Britain has vociferously defended the use of both cluster bombs and DU and British ministers have systematically supported the US in the illegal detention of prisoners on Cuban territory.

Of all places then there is a need in Britain to raise a protest against such 'weapons' and to develop a means of controlling our government within the democratic process.

THE THREAT TO IRAN

Bush has threatened both Iran and Syria with military attack.

Syria is a secular regime and there are considerable political differences between it and Iran. Yet, despite the ideological differences, since the 1980's, the two have developed a sophisticated strategic alliance. This had a significant impact during Iran-Iraq war and in the civil war in Lebanon. Being a "secular" regime has not prevented Syria from forging such relationships with Iran or Islamic movements when it comes to strategies for survival.

Both Syria and Iran have potent military capacity. To make war on either would require considerably more resources than were committed to the war against Iraq and a war with either would either mean large sums of money to buy off the other or fighting a war against both. A bombing campaign against one or the other while the US has forces in Iraq would trigger an intensification of the terrorist war against the US occupation, to a point where they would simply not be able to retain any semblance of control.

Invading Iraq has cost Britain in the region of £6 billion and there is no end in sight. So,

from Britain's point of view, the threat of a further war against Iran is simply unrealistic, even for New Labour.

For the Bush administration's point of view, however, the threat to Iran is real. But the reason why the Bush administration made the threat was to develop a level of stability in the region based on fear of their military might. The threat was made because there are forces within Iran who have been encouraging Islamic fundamentalists in Iraq. But Bush has threatened the Iranian government rather than those terrorist forces. The effect hasn't been to reduce support for the terrorism in Iraq and probably bolstered support for those forces supporting the terror war from Iran.

The long term impact of this threat will be to strengthen the hand of right wing clerics in Iran and weaken the attempts to bring about a more democratic government there. The Bush administration may be happy with that, but making threats of this nature can mean you have to carry it out. The threat alone could trigger a war the US couldn't afford and couldn't win.

What is certain is that Iranian military planners will have studied the way the invasion of Iraq was carried out and will be trying to learn from it, so that it can develop a military strategy to meet such a threat.

It is difficult, therefore, to see at what level the threat to Iran achieved a positive result, which suggests the threat was based more on bravado than on a process of thought. In other words the US behaved like a thick and thuggish bully. Given the volatility of the area making threats like this has to be seen as astonishingly foolish.

What is clear from the recent history in Iraq is that you can't bomb a country into submission, yet, according to the US press, Bush is proposing to renew these threats against Iran if he wins a second term in office.

THE PHONEY WAR ON TERROR

There is no large scale threat from terrorism, certainly nothing sufficient to justify the scale of the reaction from the Bush administration. Aside from the attacks on the world trade centre, the IRA proved a much more dangerous threat than anything we currently face. And yet the reaction from the Bush administration has been out of all proportion in comparison. The events on September the 11th 2001 themselves need careful consideration. What is clear is that the spin placed on the events by the US administration does not give an accurate picture of what happened or of their meaning. There is also a great deal which links the US secret services directly to the groups which carried out the attack, although this is not to suggest that the attacks were perpetrated by the Bush administration. Al-Qaida, for instance, was created by the CIA and continued to be funded by them up to the September 11th attacks.

At the onset of the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan, the US paid large sums of money to support the establishment of militant Islamic terrorist groups to attack the government of Afghanistan. What followed was the reduction of that society from a progressive and enlightened, but poor, country, into a barbaric place run by feudal warlords. Brezinski was the head of national security in the white house responsible for persuading Carter to agree to this and is unrepentant. It was worth the degeneration of Afghanistan in order to bring down communism, he argues.

In the early stages of that operation, while the US and Saudi governments were establishing al-Qaida, considerable efforts were made to get a Saudi prince to perform the lead role. None could be found prepared to take on the role so the next best thing was someone from one of the prominent families in Saudi Arabia and Osama Bin Laden fitted that bill well. Mr Bin Laden's family construction firm had been recruited to facilitate the building of extensive bomb proof networks in Afghanistan to supply, house and train the

terrorists recruited to fight there. This was a large scale operation, with something like 100,000 people from 60 different countries passing through their hands, receiving training and spending a year or so fighting the Russians.

In August 2001 the head of Saudi Arabia's secret services paid a visit to the Afghanistan and, although he denied meeting Bin Laden, at the end of August al-Qaida took delivery of 500 pick up trucks, still bearing Saudi number plates. The relationship between the Saudi government and the CIA is sufficiently robust to suggest since they were aware of al-Qaida's strategy, they would have made the CIA aware of it too. So it is clear that al-Qaida remained a part of the CIA, ISI (Pakistan's secret security service), Saudi network in the region and its strategy was integrated with them – up to the attack on the world trade centre.

The Taliban itself was very much a product of US foreign policy. They had had significant military successes in 1998/9, against the coalition of forces ranged against them. By 1998 the US had successfully persuaded Russia and Iran, who had been selling weapons to those opposing the Taliban, to stop the supply on the pretext that by doing so the civil war would peter out. However, through the ISI, large quantities of weapons were channelled to the Taliban in 1999 and 2000. The ISI also had in the region of 5,000 men fighting with the Taliban and supplied crucial resources such as technicians for the Taliban air force etc.

One of the more significant things they supplied were tank transporters, allowing the Taliban armour a degree of fluidity and manoeuvrability. The net result had been the Taliban had gained almost 90% of the land mass in Afghanistan by 2000 and looked likely to win the rest. The Taliban too were, therefore, an integral part of the US foreign policy strategy, up to the point where the US decided to declare war on them.

The Republican congressmen who challenged the US strategy of supporting the Taliban described this policy as treasonable.

There were links between the ISI and the individuals who carried out the attacks on the world trade centre. In fact the Times of India reported that \$100,000 was transferred to one of the attackers, Mohammad Atta, from the ISI by Lt General Mahmoud Ahmad, early in September 2001. At the time Lt Gen Ahmad was in the US consulting with the CIA. He was sacked on October the 7th following the revelations in the Times of India. The ISI is generally regarded as a wholly owned subsidiary of the CIA.

President Mubarak of Egypt has said he personally warned the US of the possibility of such an attack. A number of foreign secret services warned the US that a major attack was being planned by al-Qaida, the most prominent of which was the French secret services. They also reported that the US ambassador to Kuwait visited Osama Bin Laden in the Hospital in Dubai, in early July 2001, where he was undergoing treatment for his rather serious kidney condition. CIA officials visited him again in a hospital in Pakistan on September the 10th, 2001. This was reported in the French press after the September 11th attacks. Given that Mr Bin Laden was quite high on the US most wanted list, because of al-Qaida's attacks on two US embassies in the late 90's, it does suggest this 'War on Terrorism' is an illusion, aimed more at creating a climate of fear than actually preventing terrorism.

Very large amounts of money were made by people selling shares of companies with offices in the World Trade Centre. In other words people trading in the stock market had foreknowledge of the attack. The no 3 Executive Director of the CIA is A B Krongard. Until 1998, when he joined the CIA, he was the chair of one of the banks which made huge sums from trading shares in American Airlines and United Airlines, around 9/11, which means some at the bank knew what was about to happen. Since people in the banking world knew exactly what was going to happen, then so did the CIA. Yet they did nothing to stop it. Normally such attacks should not have been possible. The US has airbases sited near both

Washington and New York specifically to defend them against such attacks yet no coherent explanation has been offered as to why neither were scrambled in time. Their planes are five minutes away yet an hour passed between the first plane hitting the World Trade Centre and the plane crashing into the Pentagon. The fact that it was possible to reach the Pentagon without being destroyed is also quite astonishing. The Russian military have suggested that this wasn't possible without the collusion of the US military.

These attacks were possible because of a truly astonishing lack of coherence or competence within the US military.

Al-Qaida poses a serious threat to the US public only insofar as the US administration has proven astonishingly incompetent in dealing with it. And yet the September 11th attacks have been used as a justification for two major wars and the killing of tens of thousands of people unconnected with the groups involved in the September 11th attacks.

Mr Bin Laden comes from a family with close ties to Bush, which is one of the things highlighted by Michael Moor in both his recent book and his film. The US government had 23 members of the Bin Laden family secretly flown out of the US on September the 12th, in government chartered jets.

In the run up to the 2000 presidential election in the United States a group called Project for a New American Century began campaigning for a war against terror. This, it was argued, would allow increased military spending (to Reganomics levels), repressive measures in the US and a program of military interventions for thinly disguised imperialists reasons. The PNAC even suggested that a catastrophic terrorist attack could well justify such a war against terrorism.

It would be wrong to suggest that the United States is dominated by raving lunatics such as PNAC. For instance one of the most ardent sources of criticism for their military theories has been the US Army War College. But they have had a significant impact on the Bush administration's policy. Jeb Bush, for instance, is one of its founders and remains prominent in it.

In real terms the IRA posed a much more potent threat than al-Qaida has proven capable of presenting, yet there was never a suggestion that the RAF should bomb Dublin because of possible links between sections of the Irish government and the IRA.

There is no real threat from terrorism on a scale that could justify this 'war on terrorism'. But there is a political project trying to use the hysteria and fear generated by the world trade centre attacks for a range of political measures in the United States and internationally. This political project has not been debated in Britain. It has not been processed through any democratic process. It is based on an illusion, is falsely argued and has been used to justify measures far out of proportion to the threat even New Labour can conjure from the ether.

NEW LABOUR'S ROLLING PROGRAM OF WAR

Since 1997 Britain has been directly involved in three major wars, but one of the first crisis's to hit New Labour when they were elected was the revelation that Britain had illegally intervened in Sierra Leone and had sold large amounts of ammunition etc to Nigeria, who were at the time, subject to an international arms embargo. Robin Cook objected to this but Mr Blair supported it. This showed a fundamental ideologically based rift in the cabinet which Mr Blair and New Labour won.

When soldiers leave the SAS they are encouraged to sign up with mercenary companies,

who are then contracted to fight in wars which our government would not wish to be directly associated with. These wars are paid for by other people and Britain benefits from a foreign policy which is a bit too dirty to be made public. This was one of the reasons why the SAS were set up in the way they were. The first time they were used in this way was in the Yemen in the 1950s, where they successfully helped reinstate a feudal monarchy. That exercise was funded by Saudi Arabia. When Thatcher's government wanted to supply aid to Pol Pot in Cambodia, they used this method.

In Sierra Leone diamond mining interests paid for the British mercenaries and Nigerian troops. The Royal Navy performed a role which no one admitted to. A British company, De Beers, has a world monopoly on diamond sales and, to this day, little or none of the wealth drawn from the diamond mines goes back to the people of Sierra Leone. Mr Blair justified his position by arguing that the end had justified the (illegal) means.

In 97 the Labour government inherited disarray in the military. The armed forces simply incapable of doing what they were supposed to be able to do in a range of areas. A comprehensive review took place and some of this mess was actually addressed. But pretty soon the MOD was put in the politically safe, but desperately incompetent, hands of Mr Hoon.

Part of the party's policy when they took power was for 'arms conversion'. There was a recognition that the British economy was very badly distorted by the Thatcher policies. We had a huge weapons export business to some of the most disgusting regimes in the world and the weapons industry was the only area where Britain had a surplus in the Balance of Trade. New Labour decided not to change this and we still do have this massively imbalanced economy.

The need for an expanded merchant marine, recognised by the incoming government was addressed by an insanely ineffective and costly PFI scheme. For ideological reasons the possibility of using the weapons industrial base as a springboard for the expansion of the rest of the manufacturing base was simply lost.

The monetarist policies of this government mean that very little support is directed at industry. Buy a machine tool in Britain and you pay 26% tax. Buy the same machine in Japan and its tax exempt, plus there are some subsidies. In Japan manufacturers have access to well funded research facilities in universities. In some industries, interest free loans are available to Japanese companies, if the product they buy is made in Japan. Thus, despite the recession, shipyards in Japan still have years of work while there isn't a yard in Britain with more than six months.

When Amicus organised a demonstration highlighting the problem faced by manufacturing at the TUC in 2003 Gordon Brown's response emphasised a possible order for 2 aircraft carriers. Aircraft carriers are very much a part military strategy aimed at intervening throughout the world but it is also an order which the labour movement desperately need. So the government are locked into making weapons.

Because of the design costs of modern weapons systems, we can't afford to buy enough such systems to cover their design costs, which means we have to export, to bulk up the production run and reduce the proportion of the cost of each unit which goes on design. So a large army implies the need to export.

This need to export has made the sale of weapons both a tool and an aim of British foreign policy. Because we have difficulty competing we work with dictatorial and repressive regimes, who need weapons to maintain control of their populations. So when the Indonesian government unleashed a killing spree against the people of East Timor, despite an international outcry, Britain did nothing to stop the flow of weapons to the Indonesian military.

In effect New Labour's ideological commitment to monetarism, to a low tax, low spending government and a low wage economy has also locked them into a dependency on the

export of weaponry. In turn that locks us into supporting repressive regimes as a market for weapons and also as a trade partner.

Because of the disadvantage industry faces in competing we also bully countries into compliance, especially with the very damaging monetarist policies pressed by Britain and the US through institutions such as the World Bank. To bully effectively you have to carry out the threat of violence regularly, to make the threat credible, which is what is now happening. All three of the major wars we have engaged in have had an economic reason at their core.

Bullying is something you have to maintain by violence. The US now openly puts out a hit list of countries it might decide to bomb or invade. North Korea, Syria, Iran, Cuba, Venezuela - Libya was on the list for a while. Threats were made to Brazil before their last elections, not to break with the monetarist policies. This is creating a reaction - and an unstable economic environment.

Britain is a potent military power, but nowhere near potent enough to bully countries on our own, which means that we are firmly lashed to the US foreign policy.

Thus it is more or less inevitable that Britain will be involved in a steady flow of wars, predominantly with the US. The core reason for this is the ideological commitment of New Labour to an extreme form of monetarist economic policies. In this we differ from the bulk of the rest of the EU and a wide range of other capitalist nations as well as, in many respects, the US under Clinton. Other major economies in Europe, despite their significant problems, are in real terms much healthier than Britain's.

The key to this is the British government's attitude to support for the domestic industry. In other words, if we are to prevent Britain being involved in a rolling program of unjust wars, we have to change our government's attitude to industry.

BRITAIN'S TREATMENT OF EX-SERVICE PERSONNEL

Roughly 40% of British ex army personnel, will fall foul of the authorities because of mental illness, domestic violence, homelessness, alcoholism as a direct result of their experiences. The impact of the trauma of fighting wars will show itself in a range of ways. Yet there is no mechanism in place for dealing with this within the British military system. Nothing is done to deal with the long term effects of training someone to make sure they will kill without hesitation.

A significant number of those who fought in the first Gulf War also face a mysterious illness called Gulf War syndrome. The US have carried out extensive research into what this is and into what might have caused it. They have also sought to change their practices to try and avoid a repetition in this last war.

The British MOD denies that there is such a thing as Gulf War syndrome, have refused to investigate it or to moderate the practices to avoid it.

THE BRITISH ARMY BOOT

It was clear in this war, as it has been in all the recent spate of military adventures New Labour have embroiled this country in, that there are serious flaws in the quality and quantity of equipment supplied to our troops.

For instance, British army boot. Following a New Labour competitive tendering process the contract to manufacture these went to Brazil. When the MOD were asked what measures were taken to ensure no child labour was used in their production, their response was that it was written into the contract. When pressed over what verification systems were used, their

spokesman became upset and abusive.

The boot itself failed in Afghanistan, in Kosovo and extensively in trials which led up to the war in Iraq. So New Labour's ideologically guided procurement process produced something that doesn't work and may well be made by child labour. The competitive tendering process was meant to resolve the problem of the British army boot which has been apparent for at least 15 years now, and it failed.

This fundamental contempt for servicemen is not a new phenomenon in Britain. In the First World War it was the practice to regularly try young men for cowardice and to shoot them, as a way of maintaining discipline amongst the ranks. Some of the 'trials' were nothing more than judicial murder. At the same time blatant cowardice or incompetence amongst higher ranks was ignored. Despite the fact that all of the other combatant nations who used this practice have posthumously pardoned those who were shot, Geoffrey Hoon has refused to do so.

So the political and military decisions about the lives of tens of thousands of civilians and thousands of British military personnel are in the delicate hands of men who have proven unable to organise the procurement of a decent boot and appear unable to make coherent moral decisions.

ON RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

In world politics today religious fundamentalism, Jewish, Islamic, and Christian is being used to further political and economic interests. To put it bluntly it is often used as an instrument of social control by anti democratic and repressive forces. That is how it is being used in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Israel and now in Iraq. It is a political tool which the US Government itself uses systematically to further its own interests.

It is also an issue in the peace movement and, therefore, its relevant to look at exactly what the modern versions of religious extremisms represent.

What makes religious fundamentalists different is that they present a text, such as the bible, as the revealed truth. The words in the text are presented as being the word of god.

Therefore, to oppose political measures which use the text as justification is, it is argued by fundamentalists, to oppose the word of god.

They claim the text can not be interpreted, but must be accepted as a literal truth.

Challenging their interpretation of the text, therefore, makes you a significantly bad person in their eyes, justifying measures against you which the text simply doesn't justify. In so doing fundamentalism, whether Christian, Jewish, Hindu or Muslim stands in contradiction to the actual meaning of the texts, such as the bible, used to justify it.

Christian fundamentalism is a fundamental attack on what the bible says Jesus was all about. Similarly Jewish fundamentalism is an aberration of the Old Testament and Islamic fundamentalism an insult to the Koran.

Hindu fundamentalists use early Hindu texts and traditions to justify exclusivism whereas the great majority of Hindu's see their religion as inclusive and tolerant. For the bulk of Hindu's, being a Hindu is to be someone who is seeking after the truth. Hindu fundamentalists on the other hand see it as a justification for political violence and intolerance.

The question here, therefore, is what differentiates a religion from an ideology. At what point does the attempt to justify repressive political movements become an ideology rather than a religion.

Any sacred text is rooted within specific historical context and reflects that context. To honestly represent the message that the Bible has today means looking at the context in which it was formulated. Using the text, and its derivative, as a literal justification for

violence and repression is actually to use it to justify an ideology, rather than a religious belief.

This is something which has dogged religions for some considerable time. In the fourth century, for instance, Christianity was reshaped to support political realignment. At that time it was the ideology underpinning emergent feudalism, a less destructive system than the slave based tribal system which preceded it. It was at this point, 400 years after Christ, that repressive attitudes towards sexuality became a feature of Christianity and it was important in defining who should inherit what, an important feature of feudalism. This aspect was part of the ideology it was used to support. Religion was used as an instrument of social control, an ideology rather than a religion.

Issues such as celibacy in the priesthood and the view of sexuality you see in the latter church isn't present in the life of Jesus and doesn't make sense in terms of the message he put to the oppressed slave society which he preached to. But it does make sense for a state religion/ideology intended to support the feudal state.

Apparently the pope has said of the Mel Gibson film about the death of Jesus that this is how it happened. The message Jesus put forward in the Sermon on the Mount was of tolerance and forgiveness, of collectivism and of mutual support for those about you, especially those unable to support themselves. The film, however, concentrates on the violence of his death ignoring the transcendence of that violence in the Bible. The emphasis of the film is to put the blame for the death of Jesus on Judaism. That has a meaning here and now, an overtly anti-Semitic meaning, which is wholly out of sync with the message Jesus put forward.

It's difficult to see how the pope can say such a thing anyway. No records exist of the Jerusalem church, the movement of which Jesus was a part, and which was dominated by the apostles. Nevertheless, the first extant Christian texts, (the book of acts and letters attributed to Paul) clearly emphasise the resurrection as central to the message Christianity projects. While the violence of Jesus' death is within the context of what was a violent society, the overall message was one of forgiveness and tolerance and that through that you can transcend the very worst of the horrors of this life.

Mr Gibson's little nasty doesn't exist in isolation; it has been done in the context of a growing religious intolerance and at a moment when religion is used for hate, repression and genocide. And the same can be said of fundamentalists who use other religions to justify repressive ideologies here and now.

Islamic fundamentalism as a significant trend is about 100 years old, but in its current form it's about 30 years old and developed with the ascent to power of Khomeini in Iran and the coup which put Zia in power in Pakistan. In both cases it very clearly became a tool for repression.

A good, if somewhat complex, example is Egypt. From the death of Nasser onwards Socialists and progressives were, over a long period of time, progressively repressed. Democratic structures were subverted or dismantled. The rights of women were slowly undermined. Coupled with this was the dismantling of state structures which socialists advocated such as education, healthcare, the use of natural resources for the common good. The reason why communists and socialists were suppressed was to prevent a reaction against this trend towards market capitalism. The only structures which offered support, and talked of justice, for the poor were fundamentalist Islamic structures. Similarly in Turkey although the rise of fundamentalist Islamic groups was seen by the state as a threat, it was the inevitable result of the exploitation of the country's resources by the western countries who backed the Turkish state, coupled with the suppression of political opposition.

Very often these religious fundamentalist groups were established to divert attention from the need for a rejection of the government's policies. It is no accident that Mossad, Israel's

secret services, funded the creation of Hamas and is perversely nurturing it by bombing its senior activists.

Fundamentalism doesn't arise naturally, it's an artificial creation. Huge sums of money went into the development and maintenance of Madrassers, the fundamentalist Islamic schools, in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The funds came directly from the CIA – the CIA even printed the school books Afghan Madrassers worked through. A violent perversion of Islam was deliberately created, to support the US interests in the area.

Despite the truly horrific consequences of the fundamentalist government for the people of Afghanistan the US support for the infrastructure of fundamentalism has not been removed. The schoolbooks produced by the CIA for the Taliban have been replaced by new ones advocating exactly the same violent fundamentalism. Not to put too fine a point on it, some Fundamentalist states have all the hallmarks of fascism.

The role the ultra left in Britain are currently playing has been to support some of these trends. That is, they are supporting the rightwing, semi-fascist groups in the Middle East and that is a problem we have to address.

EQUALITY FOR WOMEN AND PEACE

Equality for women has been compromised by the behaviour of some of the leadership of the peace movement, which is why it is important to look at its significance here.

The left in Britain fought within the trade union movement for equality over a considerable period of time. Inequality is no longer acceptable within the politics which unions promote or their internal organisational practices. Discriminating against people on the basis of sex or sexual preference in either job or wage rates is now largely outlawed by law, thanks largely to campaigning carried out both within trade unions and by them in the community as a whole.

There was systematic discrimination in Britain, supported by the legal structures and prejudice remains as a residual element within our culture. The need for change developed momentum in the early 1970's and it would be difficult to underestimate how important the campaign for change was. The changes to our culture, and to our society, brought about by this process have had a huge impact on our lives, very much for the benefit.

Those who resisted this, including some significant figures who claimed to be of the left – in fact some even claimed to be the left – based their argument, by and large, on prejudice. In the less strident forms this claim came out as the desire to defend tradition and culture.

Some even sought to defend inequality as part of a 'working class' culture.

That culture had its roots in a division of labour within the family which was no longer necessary by the early 70's. Washing machines made it unnecessary to spend a day washing clothes. Joseph Cedric Brown removed the necessity for long hours of manual labour. Fridges meant it wasn't necessary to shop every day or to spend great stretches of time preparing food. Working class life went through a revolution in the post war years which, by the late 60's, produced a sexual revolution. A culture based on a division of labour between men and women in the home, which did have coherence in the pre-war world, was no longer relevant. The political meaning, therefore, of the argument to either promote or tolerate inequality between men and women is now fundamentally different. To argue now for a difference in the way society treats women and men or that women should have a fixed role determined by their gender, is to argue for a subservient role for women.

The subjection of women is a tool for repression. The vision of a society which uses the available scientific and industrial development for the benefit of everyone has inherent within it the assumption that men and women are equal. The argument deployed by Gandhi for simplicity and self reliance was based largely upon the desire to get their society away

from a dependence on the relationship with Britain as the imperial power. It wasn't an argument for a tradition or in defence of a culture, but used tradition etc as a political tool within a particular context to work for change.

Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, where women are beaten by religious guardians, will remain violent and unstable places. Beheading a woman who those guardians consider to be in an adulterous relationship is just as barbaric in Saudi Arabia as a racist judicial system in Texas or Tell Aviv. Societies based on such principles will remain unjust, dangerous, unstable and violent places and remain a threat to the rest of the world.

There are dividing lines here. The belief, for instance, that it is a woman's right to choose whether she will have a child or not is not synonymous with the campaign to rid the world of nuclear weapons. But then again, a campaign against war which is used as a platform to promote the repression of women is a contradiction.

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In Iraq there is currently a heated debate over the status of women. There was, for instance, an attempt by some Islamists, late in 2003 to pass a reactionary decree (Decree 137) in the Iraqi Governing Council, which discriminated against women. This met fierce resistance from democratic women organisations, as well from supporters of their cause within the Council itself. The decree, supported by some Islamic groups, would have effectively abolished important gains achieved by Iraqi women in a Personal Status law adopted in 1959, and meant a return to religious court in matters of inheritance and divorce (i.e. a return to religious law). Public meetings and protest pickets were immediately organised by women and their supporters, and the issue was fiercely debated in local media and Arab satellite TV. Many members of Governing Council also ardently opposed the Decree. Bremer, the head of CPA, could not therefore put his signature to it. Eventually, just before concluding discussions in the Governing Council on the Transitional Administration Law (the interim constitution), in March 2004, the issue was once again debated and the Decree was thrown out with a big majority (15 to 10). To quote one progressive Iraqi group "This was an important victory for women and democratic rights overall, won under extremely difficult conditions. It highlights the importance of social issues, and the fight for political and social democracy, in the battle to end foreign occupation and build the foundations for a modern democratic state. While this episode highlighted the potential that exists in Iraq for a broad democratic movement, enormous challenges lie ahead and a lot of work is needed to build such a movement with women playing a crucial role."

Another important gain for women rights was achieved in the Transitional Administration Law (the interim constitution), which prohibits discrimination based on gender, and upholds international declarations on basic human rights. Furthermore, it stipulates that the Election Law must ensure that the proportion of women in the transitional national assembly (to be elected by January 2005) should be at least 25%.

This also reflected the desires of the overwhelming proportion of the population there. It is a tragedy that some of the 'left' in Britain haven't understood the importance of this issue and, instead, have chosen to support what are extremely rightwing forces in Iraq.

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Discrimination against or the repression of a sector of any society is a tool which is used to justify war. It is inconsistent, and probably incoherent, therefore, to allow the campaign for peace to embrace such repression.

In reality the struggle for peace and the struggle for equality is indivisible.

MISDIRECTING THE PEACE MOVEMENT & COMPROMISING CORE PRINCIPLES

The war in Iraq happened because of domestic US and British political dynamics, which means it cuts deep. There are, therefore, no quick fixes in terms of campaigning for peace. Partly because CND failed to take an effective lead over the first gulf war, and in a number of subsequent wars, a loose coalition has developed to take the lead. Thus at the end of the march from Aldermaston to London in May 2004 the group which responded to the press comprised the chair of CND, the leaders of the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) and a rep from the Muslim Association of Britain, although these groups had had no role in the march itself. This is the way the leadership of the peace movement is currently represented in Britain.

The STWC is a coalition of far left parties which itself creates big problems. It couldn't develop a membership base, because this would imply a democratic structure and thus threaten the dominant role played by these parties, the biggest being the SWP. It doesn't, therefore, have an income capable of sustaining the organisation at times when Britain is not about to go to war.

In order to retain a relationship with the Muslim community in Britain the STWC leadership felt they had to accept a position in relation to women and equality issues reflecting that adopted by a number of rightwing Muslim clerics. Also homophobic attitudes have been allowed to go unchecked, what are openly anti-Semitic attitudes were expressed in some meetings and they went unchecked. In some areas anti-war meetings were organised where the audience were divided according to gender. This relationship was consolidated during the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan where support from people who were actually supportive of the Taliban was encouraged.

The compromises made by the STWC leadership in order to retain some sections of their support, in practice, has tainted the whole movement. The reason why this includes the leadership of CND is because it failed to challenge the expression of such political positions. Its failure was in practice a development from its earlier failure to offer significant leadership in the anti-war movement.

Part of the opportunism inherent on the left in Britain, and the US, has caused a de-linking of the issue of peace in the Middle East with the issue of Palestine. The people of Palestine are 'represented' within Britain by religious groups.

This doesn't reflect the desires and aspirations of the people of Iraq or of the Middle East. For instance, on the 5th of April the Guardian reporting elections in Dhi Qar, a southern province of Iraq, said - "Neither of the two Islamist candidates was among the 10 elected. A woman teacher got in, the first female councillor in the province. Other winners included an agricultural engineer and three businessmen. In Shatra, a town of 250,000, the Communist Party won four seats and independents seven. Partly because of their popularity for stopping the looting which followed the overthrow of the old regime, the Islamists had a majority in the former council which was appointed last summer. After the election they were cut back to four seats out of 15."

Thus it is clear that progressive politics in Iraq are not reflected in the leadership of the anti-war organisations in Britain.

In the build up to the Euro and local elections in Britain the leadership of the STWC reformed itself into a political party called the Respect Coalition, which again embraced the same opportunist compromises promoted in the leadership of the anti-war movement. In those areas where there is a strong Muslim section of the community Respect managed about 20% of the vote. In the London Mayoral election Respect polled about 1%. That reflects the level of support for fundamentalists groups within the Middle East. It reflects the

sort of level Hamas has in parts of Palestine and, as the Guardian reported, support for the Islamic parties in Iraq - that is not above 20%.

The Socialist Workers Party, which dominated the STWC, took the initiative in organising a broad movement against the war and they should be thoroughly commended for this. They did the people of this country and immense service in doing so. But the shallow opportunism of their analysis of that war, and of what is happening in the Middle East now, is a betrayal of the vast bulk of the people in the Middle East struggling for peace and for democracy. The attempt to translate the wave of popular revulsion against the war into an electoral platform for a raft of far left groups was a huge disservice to the peace movement.

THE DAMAGE TO DEMOCRACY

The Iraq war, and New Labour's attempts to defend itself, has seriously damaged democracy in Britain.

Lord Hutton, delivered what could only be described as whitewash and this is exactly how it was seen by the public. The press mocked it as such. In the 80's, Mr Hutton was the Barrister who presented the government's case to the Widgery committee, set up to exonerate the officers responsible for the killing of unarmed people on Bloody Sunday, in Northern Ireland - so his trade is that of a whitewasher. In setting up a judicial whitewash New Labour has seriously undermined public confidence in the judiciary as politically impartial. This was further compounded by what came out of the Butler report into the handling of intelligence in the run up to the war.

What is also important here is that the bulk of the public believed they were systematically lied to by the government about the war and rejected the government's rationale for pursuing it. New Labour felt they could ignore this overwhelming flood of public indignation because once troops were there, and being killed, the public would feel an obligation to support their forces in Iraq. That is what the rather worried Labour back-benchers were being told, to get them through the process.

The fact that there is no effective or credible opposition to New Labour's policies means that they feel they can legitimately ignore the wishes of the vast bulk of the population. Two million people went on the streets to protest against the war and yet the government were able simply to brush it aside.

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The quality of the press and media is central to democracy. People make choices based on the information they are given and this comes through the press and the media. One of the few media institutions in Britain which is free from commercial control is the BBC. New Labour have, therefore, fundamentally compromised the fabric of democracy by its attack on the BBC coverage of the war on Iraq.

The BBC was not unsupportive of the government. Just prior to the war, for instance they sacked two leading journalists in the Arab section of their world service. In doing so the BBC broke a number of agreements with the NUJ, as well as the law. The Journalists have since been reinstated but without an explanation.

The Hutton report clearly showed the government altered, 'sexed up', its dossier. When the BBC revealed this the government heatedly denied it and extreme pressure was placed on the BBC's source, David Kelly, who later died as a result of this pressure. An enquiry established to look into his death revealed that the wording had been changed (sexed up) at the behest of No 10 but, Hutton asserted, this didn't constitute 'sexing up' and that therefore the BBC was remiss in carrying the story. No 10 demanded the head of the journalist who had prepared the piece and then sacked the two most senior figures in the BBC when they refused to comply.

This means that the BBC is now required to follow the political line of the government even

where their policy is illegal, their statements are dishonest and the public have comprehensively rejected their reasoning.

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New Labour occupies a place on the political landscape reserved for a left of centre party, but in practice they represent the hard right of politics. Rather than deliver what the public want, the government lie consistently about its real agenda, and trade on the fact the conservative party are seen a gruesome throwback to a dark age while the liberals are seen as being unrealistic opportunists. They have been able to do this because of a degree of support from the within the media.

By brushing aside the public abhorrence over the war, New Labour have undermined public confidence in politics as a whole. By organizing judicial whitewashes they have undermined confidence in the courts. By their brutal attack on the BBC they have fundamentally undermined its independence.

Because of the depth New Labour sank to over this war, British politics can never be the same again. For the progressive movement in Britain there is a vital point here in that what we need now is a campaign to change the BBC into something that is genuinely politically independent body.

PALESTINE AND PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Peace is not an abstract moral issue. War doesn't occur in isolation from the rest of society and peace can't be achieved in isolation. Instability in the Middle East is inextricably linked to what is happening to Palestine and a hugely important factor, therefore, is the nature of the regime in Israel. Peace in areas such as Iran and Iraq is linked directly to that situation. Israel clearly believes it can do to Palestinians what the US did to Native American Indians in the 19th century. That, if they keep up the repression and the killings, then Palestinians will either leave or die. This lines up almost exactly with the definition of genocide in the UN charter.

Israel's government persists in policies which are in direct defiance of a range of UN resolutions yet in reality Israel cannot exist in the long term without peace and peace is only possible if it's negotiated with the Palestinian people.

The Sharon government came to power in the midst of what is a major, deep seated, economic crisis for the Israeli economy. Essentially agricultural based it has depended on cheap labour. It began to slip into crisis a number of years ago and so they changed the law to allow labourers to be imported on short term contracts. These are paid 'third world' wages and were intended to displace Palestinian labourers. As a separate Palestinian economy began to evolve it became a significant threat to Israel – why else has Sharon organised the bulldozing of close to 9 million olive trees.

What Sharon has done is to try and resolve Israel's economic problems by military repression but in the process he's created more even more problems. Not only has his government failed to deal with the problems the economy now appears, according to the Gerald Kaufman MP, to be sliding out of control. Unemployment is now at record heights. A significant number of Israelis are becoming destitute. Tourism has been badly effected by the fear of attack but also from a general dislike of what the Israeli government are doing. In many respects the economy is now seen as being in freefall.

Israel exists on huge subsidy from the United States and, possibly more importantly, a hidden subsidy from the EU. The EU allows Israel a tariff free access to European markets, allowing it to compete with third world producers. It also turns a blind eye to a number of scams operated within this process.

The Israeli people voted for Sharon because they believed, thanks to the support from the

EU etc, that violent repression might work. However, the Israeli economy can only be made viable if it has the massive burden of its defence spending lifted.

One of the principle supporters of this hidden subsidy from the EU is the New Labour Government. It is entirely feasible, therefore, that Britain could play a major role in forcing the hand of the Israeli government, with or without Sharon. That alone could be a major contribution to peace and stability in the region.

What is clear is that the problem of Israel, and its repression of the Palestinian people has to be resolved.

THE NEED FOR PEACE AND TO CREATE DEMOCRACY IN IRAQ

The only way to adequately resolve the situation in Iraq is for a democratic government to be put in power, working on behalf of the Iraqi people rather than on behalf of US economic interests. But the primary concern of both the Bush administration and New Labour is clearly to create a society where the US economic interests are the primary concern. This isn't what the ordinary people of Britain, or the membership of the Labour Party, want. Similarly it would be a mistake to see the United States as being synonymous with the far right of US politics in the shape of the Bush administration.

It is possible, therefore to make a fundamental contribution to the peace in the Middle East by influencing the behaviour of our government in Britain.

In Iraq there are groups of people who have engaged in armed attacks against the US occupation. In Britain these have been represented by both the press and the ultra left as being the 'resistance', in the same way that the groups my relatives were involved in were referred to as the 'resistance' in their struggle against the fascism. This is a misnomer.

There are several forces involved in this terrorist war against the US and its partners in Iraq. Some are religious based rightwing groups who have seen this war as an opportunity to gain power. Some of their support comes from the rightwing groups in Iran, whose agenda relates to trying assert a rightwing agenda in Iran. Presenting themselves as fighting the US is a message which such people find useful and the reaction by the US, in threatening Iran, also is useful to these groups. Ironically the right in Iran actively supported the US, with intelligence etc, during the invasion.

Some of those doing the killing are former Baathist groups who see this war as a way of regaining power. The US regime in Iraq proved to be just as corrupt as the Baathists, which has helped their support to rise. The US and Britain, appear intent on making sure that revenues from oil will not be used for the benefit of ordinary Iraqis. All of this is helping recreate a base for a repressive government in the future in Iraq.

If these groups do manage to gain power eventually, Iraq will again be a rigidly repressive society. Both the Islamic fundamentalists in Iran and the Baathists in Iraq depended heavily on the use of secret police, on torture, on the murder of political opponents and on systematic repression of ordinary people. In Afghanistan the groups who took power depended on systematic repression in order to retain power. They gained power by terror and maintained it by systematically terrorising the population. In the case of Iran and in Afghanistan the ideology used to justify this terror drew heavily on the repression of women's rights.

The US is quite comfortable with such societies. They created and nurtured the fundamentalist groups in Afghanistan. The dictatorship in Pakistan and the feudal monarchies in Saudi Arabia and Morocco are supported systematically with the sale of weapons and by diplomatic support. Repressive governments of this nature are fine by New Labour, so long as the right economic interests are served.

In March 1991, immediately after the first Gulf War, urged on by the US, the population rose against the Baathist regime. It became clear that if the Baathist regime were toppled by this rising, the probable result would be an independent Kurdish state in the North, a strong Shia Muslim presence in the government of the rest of the country and the oil wealth used to support Iraq rather than the US. Saudi Arabia objected to the possibility of a Shia base on their borders and Turkey is implacably opposed to a Kurdish state, laying claim to the oil rich southern part of what is currently Turkey. The reason the US helped the Baathist regime to remain in power, and crush the popular uprising, was that the only change they wanted was of few senior figures and to be organised through a palace coupe carried out by the army. A popular rising would open the door to an unknown alternative, out of their control, threatening US strategic interests in the region. It was quite clear at the time (and confirmed throughout the 1990s with the US policy of "dual containment" and the sanctions regime imposed on Iraq), that the US administration preferred maintaining the status quo, with Saddam contained and used as a pretext to maintain control of the region, until conditions were right for a "silver bullet" solution through a palace coup. This would effectively keep his regime in power while changing only its top echelons. The situation changed with the neo-cons coming to power and then with 9/11 providing the pretext for implementing policies aimed at using violence and war to extend US influence over international trade.

The Bush administration don't appear to have understood the risks in terms of the reaction to the war in other states in the region where they have substantial influence, such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

This pattern, of an autonomous or separate state in Kurdistan and a government including Shia Muslim parties in the rest, is almost inevitable. If it evolves through violence it will produce a dictatorial government based again on terrorising the population. It will be a threat to the already fragile Saudi state and implies civil war in the southern part of Turkey. The Bush administration may believe they can do business with another repressive state in Iraq, but the impact on the rest of the region is quite frightening. It is obvious, therefore, that New Labour and the Bush administration made a huge miscalculation in invading Iraq.

The only possibility for long term peace in the region is if a democratic and popular government is elected into power. But if foreign troops are removed before the Iraqi domestic government have sufficient security personnel to bring stability, then there will be simply a return to the type of government they had before. Six months after it takes over the same secret police, using the same level of torture for the same purposes will be back in place, just as the Savak returned in Iran.

The way in which Britain and the US have systematically opposed a UN role in the interim government helped this instability. They did it because they want country used to support US economic interests.

The people of Iraq don't need, and are vociferously opposed to, the US policy in occupied Iraq, deliberately aimed to turn the country into a battlefield for US so-called war on international terrorism (fighting "the enemy" far away from the America). The Iraqi people have been the principal victim of this warmongering policy.

The transition to a democratic government in Iraq needs security forces to help foil the attempts to destabilise it. The threat to peace in Iraq doesn't come from the presence of US or British troops, but from the naked exploitation of the country's wealth and the imposition of economic policies so clearly wholly inappropriate in this context.

Some of the 'left in Britain have been calling for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops. In practice that means imposing on the people of Iraq the same type of government they had before the invasion.

Progressive Iraqi's are calling for a multinational force to oversee the transition to democracy, under the auspices of the UN, and without preconditions as to how they run

their economy. This is what the progressive movement in Britain should be supporting. What is needed in Britain is firm and effective support for Iraqi people's desire for exercising real sovereignty, empowering them to decide their own destiny freely, through democratic elections. This requires active solidarity with the democratic forces inside Iraq, that combine the fight to end the occupation and achieve true independence, with the fight to build a democratic Iraq.

Democracy in Iraq is essential to stability in the region and to the eventual aim of peace in the Middle East. It is the only way that a transition to an equitable and democratic governments in other states in the region creating the possibility of peace in the long term for the middle east. If the progressive and trade union movement in Britain can be drawn behind that aim, they will do the world and immense service.