

Blair Must Be Impeached

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Later today, the Chilcot Inquiry in to the 2003 invasion of Iraq publishes its report. If it says what it is widely expected to say, it could pave the way to a former Prime Minister being impeached by Members of the House Of Commons for possible war crimes. It would be an action so momentous, it could be described as unprecedented. The Article of Impeachment has not been used since the Napoleonic Wars, while a former Prime Minister being arrested for supposed misconduct in high office has never happened.

Tony Blair, the former Prime Minister under discussion, would not be the first in history who probably *should* have gone to prison, but he is potentially the first who will. His own successor as Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, is almost certain to argue for it.

While most people arguing that any Western involvement in the Middle East is “all-about-oil” usually mean it in an over-simplistic way, the war of 2003 was certainly strongly connected to oil. It is in the context of the region’s history with oil that the possibility of Blair’s impeachment must be studied.

Oil was first discovered in Mesopotamia in 1902. Before that time, Britain’s interests in the Middle East were somewhat sporadic. The UK’s main concern there was controlling the Suez Canal; so long as the Suez was in British hands, it kept open communication and transport links to India, and gave a channel from which to counter potential threats to India from the Russian Empire. (This was the reason why Benjamin Disraeli, Prime Minister in 1878, took control of Cyprus from the Ottoman Empire at the Congress of Strasbourg. The deal gave Britain a base from which to guard the Suez, and in exchange Disraeli agreed to extend military support to Turkey in the event of a war against Russia.)

But after 1902, British fascination with the Middle East, particularly Mesopotamia, increased instantly and dramatically, and has been an almost-constant feature of international affairs ever since. It played dominant roles in the aftermath of each World War. Indeed, it was the British who partitioned Mesopotamia and renamed the bulk of it ‘Iraq’.

In the 114 years since oil was discovered there, the British have been at war with, or occupying, Iraq, for, by my calculations, 56 of them – almost exactly half of the region’s ‘Oil Age’. I would suggest that that is long enough to count as an outright colonisation.

Now Tony Blair always maintains that his wish for war in 2003 was based on a moral desire to see a brutal dictator – Saddam Hussein – removed from power. That claim on his part is probably true, and his calamitous behaviour is more a matter of naivety – seeing complex international concerns as *Star Wars*-style battles between good and evil – than greed.

But the fact that it was possible for Blair to take the country to war cannot be put down just

to the fact that he was Prime Minister. Many, many other elements, within the state, within commerce, within financial elites, would have had to be in favour too, and their motives will probably not have been the same as Blair's. Their approval would more likely have fitted into the past pattern of domination, resource-greed, and cynical economic interests. Certainly a key concern among war-mongers in the USA would have been preserving the oil-dependent value of the otherwise almost-useless American dollar; it is only because, since the early-1970's, oil transactions have had to be carried out in US dollars, and every country needs constant supplies of oil, that American currency is still worth anything at all. Iraq, between 2000 and 2002 had attempted to switch from trading oil for dollars to trading oil for euros.

Other interests would have seen the opportunities for Western construction firms to make a killing rebuilding a post-war Iraq. And of course many more simply would have seen a grand opportunity to control Iraq's oil exports, and keep them from ending up in the hands of Communist China. It all fits in with the British (and latterly American) pattern of the last 114 years in Mesopotamia and Iraq perfectly.

When looking at that pattern, Blair's perspective looks utterly skewed. He saw the Ba'athist regime, and Saddam Hussein, as cancerous monstrosities turning Iraq into a 'problem state'. What he failed to notice was that Iraq was no problem to the British. Iraq has never invaded Britain, it does not steal resources from Britain, it does not interfere in Britain's processes of government. On the contrary, *it is Britain that has long been the problem for Iraq*. Even the Ba'athist regime was propped up by the military supplies of the British arms industry.

But the patronising mentality of former Imperial powers made it impossible for Blair to see the relationship in that way. The British were the rich, mighty country, long firmly-established among the world's elite powers, the country that was more advanced, the country that was ahead, the country that had 'made good'. Therefore Iraq simply *had* to be the country that was doing everything wrong, therefore Iraq *had* to be the problem and the paternalistic British Government *had* to be 'the solution'. Britain therefore had to help Iraq to 'grow up', had to teach it how to behave.

In Blair's mind, anyone against this was obviously equally as 'immature' as Saddam's regime. So Blair thought it was acceptable to lie, to exaggerate, to present flimsy evidence as unassailable truth, to throw away any number of innocent lives in both countries and others, and above all to try and scare his own population with fantasy stories about a military threat posed by Iraq, all in order to teach Iraq its lesson. In truth, that threat had been neutered by the First Gulf War in 1991, and kept suppressed by brutally harsh sanctions imposed at Anglo-American insistence. Most people realised it; any chemical weapons still in Saddam's possession would be long past their expiry dates, and would no longer be effective. But the lie was justified to Blair, the sacrifice of lives was justified to Blair, the scaring of the public was justified to Blair, because he just knew better than everybody else. It is a familiar mindset among devoutly religious people, and Blair has never made any secret of his Christian faith.

That brand of violent arrogance, even if it has a moral aim at its root, simply cannot be tolerated in a Prime Minister. It is the tipping point where a Prime Minister in a secular democracy assumes his religious beliefs mean he is unaccountable to his people. That is the antithesis of secular democracy. When that behaviour becomes evident, it must be clamped down on, hard enough to deter any subsequent Prime Minister from assuming he or she can

behave similarly. If it leads a Prime Minister to declare a poorly-planned and deeply-destabilising war, against the public's wishes, then he has undoubtedly become a war criminal.

That is why, should Chilcot's findings prove strong enough, I want Tony Blair to be impeached.

And yes, eventually, I want him to go to prison.

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