The London bombings
Britain's blood price

by
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"The next time a large bomb explodes in a western city, or an Arab or Muslim regime topples and is replaced by extremists, the Government must consider the extent to which their policy contributed to it. That is why hon. Members should pause and why, unless evidence is produced for a breach and a material threat, my judgment today is that we should not go to war [with Iraq]." (Kenneth Clarke MP, House of Commons, 26 February 2003)

London was bombed on 7 July 2005 because Prime Minister Blair volunteered Britain to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the US after 9/11, and subsequently invaded Afghanistan and Iraq alongside the US. There was no inevitability about London being bombed: it was a consequence of a foreign policy choice made by Blair and endorsed by Parliament. He chose to put Britain in the firing line, and Parliament endorsed his choice.

In a BBC 2 programme broadcast on 8 September 2002, Michael Cockerell asked the Prime Minister whether one of the elements of the UK-US special relationship was whether "Britain is prepared to send troops to commit themselves, to pay the blood price". Blair replied:

> "Yes. What is important though is that at moments of crisis they (the USA) don't need to know simply that you are giving general expressions of support and sympathy. That is easy, frankly. They need to know, 'Are you prepared to commit, are you prepared to be there when the shooting starts?'" [1]

The blood price he was referring to there was military casualties on the battlefield, and that price has been paid to the extent of nearly a hundred deaths and several hundred wounded to date in Iraq. Another blood price was paid in London on 7 July 2005, when over fifty civilians died and several hundred were injured. The price will continue to be paid.

Infallible defence
There is an infallible defence against this terrorism on the British homeland, and it doesn't involve draconian anti-terrorism laws, or searching everybody boarding the Tube, or concrete bollards outside every public building. It is that we stay at home as a country; that we cease stomping round the Muslim world in the wake of the US.

It's a very straightforward, and a very cost effective, counter-terrorism strategy: we don't spend money and blood invading Muslim countries, and we won't need to spend money protecting the British homeland from terrorism emanating from the Muslim world in response. And blood will not be spilled on our streets when the protection proves to be fallible.

Bringing our troops home from Iraq now would make us safer than any homeland security measures we could possibly devise – and would also save the lives of British service men and women.

Fabricated nonsense
Since the bombings in London, the British political establishment has been unanimous that Britain's support for the US in general, and in the invasion of Iraq in particular, played no part in bringing them about. Instead, we are told – as we have been told by Bush and Blair since 9/11 – that Western democracies are all under threat from Muslim extremists, who want to destroy our way of life (whatever that means) and it was simply Britain's turn on 7 July 2005.

The ultimate "proof" of this, all sides say in unison, is that al-Qaida's targets have been many and various, and started long before the Iraq war, as if it were impossible for al-Qaida to take account of ongoing events – such as the support of Britain and Spain for the invasion of Iraq – in choosing targets.

As we will see, this is fabricated nonsense. Bin Laden came to public attention in 1996 with his declaration of war against the American military presence in Saudi Arabia. In this, and in everything he has said since, he has not been concerned with changing Western societies but with ending Western interference in the Muslim world.

As for al-Qaida's targets, up until 9/11, they were US interests abroad, but when other states, including Britain and Spain, chose to make common cause with the US in its invasion of Afghanistan and then Iraq, they became targets too.

Destroying our way of life?
Prime Minister Blair made a statement on the London bombings to the House of Commons on 11 July 2005. He said:

> "Together, we will ensure that, though terrorists can kill, they will never destroy the way of life that we share and value, which we will defend with such strength of belief and conviction that it will be to us and not to the terrorists that victory will belong."

For the Conservative Party, Michael Howard agreed that our "way of life" was under attack:

> "I want to begin by paying tribute to him [the Prime Minister] for the calm, resolute and statesmanlike way in which the Government responded to last Thursday's attack on our capital city, on our citizens and on our way of life. "

Only one MP, Scottish Nationalist leader, Alex Salmond disturbed this mindless consensus. He referred to a remark by the Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, a couple of days earlier, who had blurted out the obvious fact that some countries are more at risk than others:

> "Even intelligence from other countries shows the three Bs—Bush, Berlusconi and Blair—are considered the most exposed to this type of risk."

Salmond asked Blair if Berlusconi had "shared that intelligence information with our Prime Minister", to which he replied:

> "No. The one thing that is obvious from the long list of countries that have been victims of this type of terrorism that I read out is that it does not discriminate greatly between individual items of policy. I am afraid that I must tell the hon. Gentleman that it is a form of terrorism aimed at our way of life, not at any particular Government or policy."

So, Berlusconi is wrong that the US and its prominent allies are most at risk. Is Luxembourg about to be attacked? Or, Sweden? Or, Switzerland?

None of the Labour MPs who opposed the invasion of Iraq disturbed this mindless consensus. One of their number, the normally rational Tony Wright, explicitly signed up to it, saying:

> "As one of those who opposed the military action in Iraq, may I ask whether my right hon. Friend agrees that those who have been arguing over the past few days that what happened took place only because of that action are talking not only nonsense but dangerous nonsense? We are dealing with a group of Islamo-fascists who are against any form of democratic politics, and on that we should all be united. "

Needless to say the Prime Minister agreed. In a sense, Wright is right: London didn't get attacked "only" because of Britain's support for the invasion of Iraq, but because of a history of supporting US foreign policy in the Muslim world, of which the invasion of Iraq is but the latest example.

Even Ken Livingston has joined the mindless consensus. Before the invasion of Iraq he warned:

> "An assault on Iraq will inflame world opinion and jeopardise security and peace everywhere. London, as one of the major world cities, has a great deal to lose from war and a lot to gain from peace, international cooperation and global stability." (quoted by Tariq Ali in The Guardian on 8 July 2005)

But now he pretends with the rest of them that objective of the London attack was "to destroy our free society" (Press Statement, 7 July 2005 **[2]**).

What does it mean?
The mantra that al-Qaida is out to destroy our way of life is repeated over and over again from all parts of the political spectrum, but what does it mean? Are these people killing themselves because they object to our electing our leaders? Or to our reading The Guardian? Do they want the whole Western world to convert to Islam? And order our societies according to Islamic law? And how many bombs in Western cities is it going to take to bring this about?

This is mindless nonsense, and the Government knows it's mindless nonsense. The truth cannot be admitted, since to admit the truth would be to admit that the Government's actions in the Muslim world have caused these awful events to be visited upon London.

The plain truth is that al-Qaida is not concerned with changing Western society. Its objective is to change US foreign policy towards the Muslim world. That is why it attacks the US and states allied to the US in pursuing this policy.

This is clear from the many public statements by bin Laden and his associates. He is concerned with American foreign policy towards, and American actions in, the Muslim world – with US support for Israel in its ongoing theft of Arab land; US support for corrupt and repressive regimes in the Muslim world (Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states); and so on. Post 9/11, the US has added to an already long list of Muslim grievances by occupying Afghanistan and Iraq.

Before looking at some of bin Laden's statements, let me quote from two impeccable sources, which advance this view.

Michael Scheuer
First, from Michael Scheuer, who worked for the CIA for 22 years, and was the first head of its al-Qaida desk, serving in this capacity for two years. While still working for the CIA, he wrote a book entitled *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is losing the War on Terror*, which was published in 2004. His view, as summarised in this book, is as follows:

> "… the greatest danger for Americans confronting the radical Islamist threat is to believe – at the urging of US leaders – that Muslims attack us for what we are and what we think rather than for what we do.

> "Rhetorical political blustering 'informs' the public that Islamists are offended by the Western world's democratic freedoms, civil liberties, intermingling of genders, and separation of church and state. However, although aspects of the modern world may offend conservative Muslims, no Islamist leader has, for example, fomented jihad in order to destroy participatory democracy, the national association of credit unions, or coed universities. …

"Al-Qaida's public statements condemn America's protection of corrupt Muslim regimes, unqualified support for Israel, the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, and a further litany of real-world grievances. Bin Laden's supporters thus identify their problem and believe its solution lies in war.

"[Scheuer] contends they will go to any length, not to destroy our secular, democratic way of life, but to deter what they view as specific attacks on their lands, their communities and their religion. Unless US leaders recognize this fact and adjust their policies abroad accordingly, even moderate Muslims will be radicalized into supporting bin Laden's anti-Western offensive."

US Defense Science Board
A similar view was expressed in a report **[3]** in September 2004 from the US Defense Science Board, which exists to provide independent advice to the US Secretary of Defense. The report is on Strategic Communications, that is, the means whereby the US gets its message to the world. It concludes bluntly that communicating with the Muslim world is impossible at the present time:

"Thus the critical problem in American public diplomacy directed toward the Muslim World is not one of 'dissemination of information', or even one of crafting and delivering the 'right' message. Rather, it is a fundamental problem of credibility. Simply, there is none – the United States today is without a working channel of communication to the world of Muslims and of Islam." (page 41)

And, according to the report, the US is not believed because of its policy towards the Muslim world, and the problem has got much worse since the US invasion of Iraq:

"American direct intervention in the Muslim World has paradoxically elevated the stature of and support for radical Islamists, while diminishing support for the United States to single-digits in some Arab societies.

"Muslims do not 'hate our freedom', but rather, they hate our policies. The overwhelming majority voice their objections to what they see as one-sided support in favor of Israel and against Palestinian rights, and the longstanding, even increasing support for what Muslims collectively see as tyrannies, most notably Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan, and the Gulf states.

"Thus when American public diplomacy talks about bringing democracy to Islamic societies, this is seen as no more than self-serving hypocrisy. Moreover, saying that 'freedom is the future of the Middle East' is seen as patronizing, suggesting that Arabs are like the enslaved peoples of the old Communist World — but Muslims do not feel this way: they feel oppressed, but not enslaved.

"Furthermore, **in the eyes of Muslims**, American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq has not led to democracy there, but only more chaos and suffering. U.S. actions appear in contrast to be motivated by ulterior motives, and deliberately controlled in order to best serve American national interests at the expense of truly Muslim self-determination.

"Therefore, the dramatic narrative since 9/11 has essentially borne out the entire radical Islamist bill of particulars. American actions and the flow of events have elevated the authority of the Jihadi insurgents and tended to ratify their legitimacy among Muslims. Fighting groups portray themselves as the true defenders of an Ummah (the entire Muslim community) invaded and under attack — to broad public support.

"What was a marginal network is now an Ummah-wide movement of fighting groups. Not only has there been a proliferation of 'terrorist' groups: the unifying context of a shared cause

creates a sense of affiliation across the many cultural and sectarian boundaries that divide Islam." (pages 40-41)

When George Galloway expressed similar views in the House of Commons a few hours after the London bombings, the Government accused him of "dipping his poisonous tongue in a pool of blood".

Bin Laden statements
Now let us look at a few of bin Laden's public statements.

He first came to public attention with his declaration of war against the US military presence in Saudi Arabia issued in August 1996 (see, for example, **[4]**). Its central theme is that "the people of Islam have suffered from aggression, iniquity and injustice imposed by the Zionist-Crusader alliance and their collaborators" and says:

> "It is the duty now on every tribe in the Arabian peninsula to fight jihad and cleanse the land from these Crusader occupiers."

The only demand made of the US and its allies is that they go home. There is nothing about how they should live their lives at home.

Likewise in another fatwa from February 1998 (see, for example, **[4]**), which says:

> ". . . the killing of Americans and their civilian and military allies is a religious duty for each and every Muslim to be carried out in whichever country they are until Al Aqsa mosque [in Jerusalem] has been liberated from their grasp and until their armies have left Muslim lands."

Again, there is nothing in it about destroying our way of life in the West.

More recently, in a video message broadcast on al-Jezeera on 1 November 2004 just before the US presidential election (transcript at **[5]**), he addressed the American people and explained why America was attacked on 9/11 and what Americans must do in order to avoid another attack. The message begins:

> "People of America this talk of mine is for you and concerns the ideal way to prevent another Manhattan, and deals with the war and its causes and results.

> "Before I begin, I say to you that security is an indispensable pillar of human life and that free men do not forfeit their security, contrary to Bush's claim that we hate freedom.

> "If so, then let him explain to us why we don't strike, for example, Sweden. And we know that freedom-haters don't possess defiant spirits like those of the 19 – may Allah have mercy on them.

> "No, we fight because we are free men who don't sleep under oppression. We want to restore freedom to our nation, just as you lay waste to our nation. So shall we lay waste to yours.

> "No one except a dumb thief plays with the security of others and then makes himself believe he will be secure. Whereas thinking people, when disaster strikes, make it their priority to look for its causes, in order to prevent it happening again.

> "But I am amazed at you. Even though we are in the fourth year after the events of September 11th, Bush is still engaged in distortion, deception and hiding from you the real causes. And thus, the reasons are still there for a repeat of what occurred."

Blair and the whole political establishment are hiding "the real causes" of the London bombing from the British people, and therefore the reasons for a repetition still exist.

His final words to the American people were:

"In conclusion, I tell you in truth, that your security is not in the hands of Kerry, nor Bush, nor al-Qaida. No. Your security is in your own hands. And every state that doesn't play with our security has automatically guaranteed its own security."

The message is clear: leave the Muslin world alone and you will be left alone.

On 29 November 2004, a video tape by Ayman al-Zawahiri was broadcast on al-Jezeera. For the first time, to the best of my knowledge, an al-Qaida tape was widely reported in the West as stating that the issue at stake was US foreign policy towards the Muslim world. It was widely reported in this way because the Associated Press report **[6]** on it began:

"In a video tape aired Monday, Osama bin Laden's top lieutenant vowed to continue fighting the United States until Washington changed its policies."

It was prepared before the US presidential elections, of which it said:

"The results of the elections do not matter for us. Vote whoever you want, Bush, Kerry or the devil himself. This does not concern us. What concerns us is to purge our land from the aggressors."

It concluded:

"Either you choose to treat us with respect and based on an exchange of interests ... or we will continue to fight you until you change your policies."

Could al-Qaida's objective be clearer? It is not about forcing us to convert to Islam and making us accept Islamic law: it is about ending Western, particularly US, interference in the Muslim world.

9/11 was before Iraq
To any suggestion that Britain's participation in the invasion of Iraq played any part in provoking the London bombings, the reply from Government and Opposition alike has been: "Don't you remember that the greatest atrocity of all, in New York on 9/11, took place before the invasion of Iraq?", as if this had some bearing on the issue.

On BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme on 9 July 2005, James Naughtie gently asked Blair:

"Have you ever worried in the last two days - has it crossed your mind just as an individual – that if you hadn't gone to war that we might have been spared this?" (see transcript at **[7]**)

He replied:

"What was interesting, round the table [at the G8] was, if you take President Putin, who was passionately opposed to the war in Iraq, and yet suffered Beslan, if you think of Bali, and what happened there, if you think that even after the change of government in Madrid, the terrorists there were planning further terrorist acts before they were caught, fortunately for the people of Spain, and if you remember that September 11, that was the reason we went into Afghanistan, September 11 happened before Iraq, before Afghanistan, before any of these issues, and that was the worst terrorist atrocity of all."

(To emphasise the point that al-Qaida's targets have been many and various, a list has now been published on the Downing Street website at **[8]**, beginning with the attack on the World Trade Center in 1993. The list is not complete. Although it doesn't say so, the list doesn't contain any attacks in Afghanistan or Iraq, presumably to keep the length of the list within bounds – and to avoid the unwelcome conclusion that US/UK military action in these countries has provided a stimulus for al-Qaida activity, from which it takes but a small mental leap to arrive at the conclusion that it may also have stimulated al-Qaida activity outside Iraq and Afghanistan, including in Britain.)

On BBC Radio 4's *Any Questions* on 8 July 2005, David Cameron, a contender for the leadership of the Conservative Party, faced with the apt question: "Are we starting to reap that which we have sown?", sang from the same hymn sheet (see transcript at **[9]**):

"I don't think, I don't think that's the right way to look at it. … we've got to be clear about this, the 9/11 attacks, the bombs in the Kenyan embassy, the Tanzanian embassy, the first World Trade Center bomb, the attack on the USS Cole, all happened before the Iraq war."

Absolutely true, but absolutely irrelevant. All of these attacks were on US interests. None of them was on British interests. Al-Qaida or al-Qaida inspired groups did not attack British interests, until after Blair volunteered Britain to support the US in the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. British interests – the British consulate and a branch of the HSBC bank in Istanbul – were first attacked on 20 November 2003 when Bush was visiting Blair in London.

A few weeks earlier, on 18 October 2003, in a message to the American people about the US invasion of Iraq broadcast on Al Jezeera television (transcript at **[10]**), bin Laden specifically warned that US allies in Iraq would be attacked, saying:

"We reserve the right to retaliate at the appropriate time and place against all countries involved, especially the UK, Spain, Australia, Poland, Japan and Italy, not to exclude those Muslim states that took part, especially the Gulf states, and in particular Kuwait, which has become a launch pad for the crusading forces."

Following this message, 19 Italian Carabinieri were killed in Nasiriyah in Iraq on 12 November 2003, British interests were attacked in Istanbul on 20 November 2003, and nearly 200 people were killed in the Madrid train bombings on 11 March 2004. Later, in a tape broadcast on al-Jezeera on 15 April 2004 (partial transcript at **[11]**), bin Laden addressed America's European allies, saying:

"Our actions [on September 11 and March 11] come in response to your actions of destroying and killing our people in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine."

He then offered a truce:

"I offer a truce to them [European states] with a commitment to stop operations against any state which vows to stop attacking Muslims or interfere in their affairs, including [participating] in the American conspiracy against the wider Muslim world. …

"And the announcement of the truce starts with the withdrawal of the last soldier from our land, and the door is open for three months from the date of the announcement of this statement."

Note, these countries were not required to convert to Islam as a condition for al-Qaida stopping operations against them. All they had to do was withdraw their soldiers from Muslim lands.

There is not much doubt that Italy, Britain and Spain were attacked because of their part in the occupation in Iraq. In the case of Italy, it can hardly be denied since the attack took place in Iraq

itself. Blair asserted then, as he does now about the London bombings, that the targets in Istanbul and Madrid were randomly selected by Islamic extremists opposed to Western values of freedom and democracy. The evidence to the contrary is persuasive.

An organisation styling itself the Secret Organisation of al-Qaida Jihad in Europe claimed credit for the London bombings on an Islamist website on the day they occurred. This claim (see BBC website **[12]** for transcript) said that the bombings were "in retaliation for the massacres Britain is committing in Iraq and Afghanistan", adding:

> "We continue to warn the governments of Denmark and Italy and all the Crusader governments that they will be punished in the same way if they do not withdraw their troops from Iraq and Afghanistan."

Some of the "Crusader" governments – Italy, Australia and Denmark – have taken this warning seriously. According to a Guardian report of 23 July 2005, Italy and Australia are going to "introduce sweeping new anti-terror laws in the wake of the London bombings" and Berlusconi is talking (not for the first time) about beginning the withdrawal of Italian troops in September 2005.

BBC Panorama journalist, Peter Taylor, wrote in the Guardian on 8 July 2005:

> "The common denominator in London and Madrid is undoubtedly Iraq. The Madrid bombers planned to force the Spanish government to withdraw its troops from Iraq - and succeeded. London has long been in jihadi sights because of Tony Blair's unswerving support for George Bush. The former head of the CIA's bin Laden unit, Mike Scheuer, tellingly told me that al-Qaida's policy was to launch warning attacks against countries helping America in Iraq and Afghanistan: 'At one point bin Laden and Zawahiri [his number two] named 23 countries that deserved to be punished. All 23 have been hit. It's a pretty good record of consistency.'" **[13]**

I am not in a position to name these 23 countries or to say when they were threatened and when they were attacked. But, Peter Taylor is a reputable journalist and Michael Schauer is in a position to know, so this is probably accurate. The notion that al-Qaida targets, including London, have been selected at random is unsustainable.

(Blair's citing of the Beslan siege as "proof" that the British invasion of Iraq was irrelevant to the London bombings was bizarre. He said that President Putin had suffered Beslan, even though he had been passionately opposed to the war in Iraq. This seems to put Russia in the camp of Western democracies under general threat from Muslim extremists opposed to our way of life, and which was randomly selected for attack at Beslan in September 2004, just as Britain was selected in July 2005. Sensible people will continue to think that the Beslan siege was the work of Chechnyan separatists, who don't care how Russia governs itself – they just want it to leave Chechnya.)

Berlusconi was right
Today, in the wake of the bombs in London, Prime Minister Blair refuses to admit that standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the US in the so-called "war on terror" increased the threat to Britain. But last autumn the Government expressed a contrary view. It did so before the House of Lords in attempting to justify detention without trial.

Then, echoing Silvio Berlusconi's recent remark, the Attorney-General, Lord Goldsmith, argued that our special relationship with the US put us in special danger, that we were under greater threat from al-Qaida than any other of the 45 signatories to the European Convention on Human Rights, including Spain that has experienced al-Qaida attacks. This is why, he said, we alone had found it necessary to derogate from the Convention in order to introduce detention without trial.

We know this from the House of Lords judgment on 16 December 2004, which found the indefinite detention of foreign nationals without charge or trial to be incompatible with the Convention. Lawyers for the detainees naturally questioned why Britain alone had found it necessary to derogate from the Convention in order to introduce detention without trial. The Attorney General's response, as summarised by Lord Bingham in his Opinion, was:

> "Insofar as any difference of practice as between the United Kingdom and other Council of Europe members called for justification, it could be found in this country's prominent role as an enemy of Al-Qaida and an ally of the United States." (paragraph 25)

So, there you have it: last autumn, the Government stated that being the special friend of the US increased the threat to the British homeland to such an extent that, unlike any other signatory to the Convention, we needed detention without trial.

Silvio Berlusconi was right, after all.

UK under threat before 9/11?
In September 2001, Blair went to considerable lengths to "prove" that Britain was already under threat from al-Qaida. His motivation was presumably to convince the British public that standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the US after 9/11 was in Britain's self-interest, and not just a disinterested act of friendship towards the US. It also allowed him to give the impression to the British public and the world that in attacking Afghanistan Britain was acting in self-defence, albeit in pre-emptive self-defence.

But perhaps there was another motive: perhaps, he was preparing a defence against the charge that his actions had put Britain on al-Qaida's target list, the defence being that Britain was always on al-Qaida's target list – which is the defence he employs today.

Be that as it may, on 4 October 2001, a few days before the US/UK started bombing Afghanistan, the Government published a document entitled *Responsibility for the terrorist atrocities in the United States, 11 September 2001*. An updated version of this is on the Downing Street website at [4].

I was puzzled when I heard that the British Government was going to publish such a document. Why was the British Government doing it, and not the American? The attack took place on American soil and was being investigated by the FBI, which along with the CIA was bound to be the source of the "evidence" about who was responsible. So what business was it of the British Government?

The answer became clear on reading the document. It has four conclusions. The first two are that bin Laden and al-Qaida were responsible for the attacks and that they are capable of mounting further attacks. The third is the reason why the document was published: it is that "the United Kingdom, and United Kingdom nationals are potential targets" for al-Qaida.

This was based on two statements by bin Laden (see paragraph 22). First, the declaration of war against the US military presence in Saudi Arabia from August 1996 (see above), which talks about the "aggression, iniquity and injustice imposed" on the Muslim world "by the Zionist-Crusader alliance and their collaborators". Second, the fatwa issued in February 1998 (see above), which calls on Muslims "to launch the raid on Satan's US troops and the devil's supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them".

The Government concluded from this that:

> "Although US targets are Al Qaida's priority, it also explicitly threatens the United States' allies. References to 'Zionist-Crusader alliance and their collaborators', and to 'Satan's US troops and

the devil's supporters allying with them' are references which unquestionably include the United Kingdom." (paragraph 24)

This was a doubtful conclusion: Britain isn't mentioned explicitly in either of the two statements by bin Laden. Interestingly, in the updated version of this document, which is now on the Downing Street website, paragraph 24 has been extended to include the following explicit threat against Blair:

> "This is confirmed by more specific references in a broadcast of 13 October, during which Bin Laden's spokesman said: 'Al Qaida declares that Bush Sr, Bush Jr, Clinton, Blair and Sharon are the arch-criminals from among the Zionists and Crusaders . . . Al Qaida stresses that the blood of those killed will not go to waste, God willing, until we punish these criminals . . . We also say and advise the Muslims in the United States and Britain . . . not to travel by plane. We also advise them not to live in high-rise buildings and towers'"

This explicit threat against Blair was made on 13 October 2001. It could conceivably have been prompted by the US/UK bombing of Afghanistan, which began on 7 October 2001.

That the Government added this explicit threat to the document shows that it was very keen to prove that the Britain was under threat from al-Qaida. It also shows that it knew its case was flimsy prior to Britain's participation in the attack on Afghanistan – after which Britain certainly was on al-Qaida's target list.

Increased risk warning
Prior to the invasion of Iraq, many opponents of the action warned that it would give a stimulus to al-Qaida and associated groups. For example, speaking in a debate in the House of Commons on 26 February 2003, Kenneth Clarke said:

> "The next time a large bomb explodes in a western city, or an Arab or Muslim regime topples and is replaced by extremists, the Government must consider the extent to which their policy contributed to it. That is why hon. Members should pause and why, unless evidence is produced for a breach and a material threat, my judgment today is that we should not go to war." **[14]**

By contrast, Blair presented the action as a necessary counter measure against al-Qaida, so much so that a major part of his public case for military action was that there was "a real and present danger" that chemical and biological weapons (remember them?) would find their way from Iraq to al-Qaida or associated groups. For example, on 18 March 2003 he told the House of Commons:

> "The key today is stability and order. The threat is chaos and disorder—and there are two begetters of chaos: tyrannical regimes with weapons of mass destruction and extreme terrorist groups who profess a perverted and false view of Islam. …

> "Those two threats have, of course, different motives and different origins, but they share one basic common view: they detest the freedom, democracy and tolerance that are the hallmarks of our way of life. At the moment, I accept fully that the association between the two is loose —but it is hardening. The possibility of the two coming together—of terrorist groups in possession of weapons of mass destruction or even of a so-called dirty radiological bomb—is now, in my judgment, a real and present danger to Britain and its national security."

The Intelligence & Security Committee report **[15]** published in September 2003 revealed (paragraphs 125-127) that, when Blair said this, he was aware that the intelligence services had no evidence that Iraq had considered using chemical and biological agents in terrorist attacks or had passed such agents on to al-Qaida. He was also aware that, in the judgment of the intelligence services, a collapse of the Iraqi regime would **increase** the risk of chemical and biological warfare

technology or agents finding their way into the hands of al-Qaida or associated groups, whether or not as a deliberate Iraqi regime policy.

Understandably, Blair chose not to divulge this information to Parliament, since it blew a hole in an important part of his public case for taking military action.

The intelligence services also judged that al-Qaida and associated groups continued to represent by far the greatest terrorist threat to Western interests, and that threat would be **heightened** by military action against Iraq, as many opponents of such action suggested.

Understandably, the Prime Minister chose not to divulge this to Parliament either.

On 19 July 2005, the New York Times published **[16]** leaked extracts from an assessment by the UK's Joint Intelligence Analysis Centre, in which the police and customs are represented along with the intelligence services. This assessment, which was prepared less than a month before the London bombings, stated unequivocally that:

"Events in Iraq are continuing to act as motivation and a focus of a range of terrorist related activity in the UK"

(The same assessment concluded that "at present there is not a group with both the current intent and the capability to attack the UK", which prompted the British government to lower its formal threat assessment one level, from "severe defined" to "substantial".)

Iraq: the main battleground
Given that, from the outset, President Bush presented the invasion of Iraq as an integral part of the "war on terror" against al-Qaida, it is strange that Prime Minister Blair is so reluctant to acknowledge any connection between the events in London on 7 July 2005 and the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

In his address to the nation on 19 March 2003, after military action had started, Bush told the American people that he was taking action in order to eliminate terrorists who would otherwise attack the US homeland. He said:

"We will meet that threat now, with our Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines, so that we do not have to meet it later with armies of fire fighters and police and doctors on the streets of our cities." **[17]**

Later in the year, he became more explicit: the military action in Iraq was said to be essential to the "war on terror", for example, in a speech on 28 July 2003, he said:

"… our current mission in Iraq is essential to the broader war on terror; it's essential to the security of the American people." **[18]**

Later still in 2003, he deemed Iraq to be the "central front" and/or the "main battleground" in the "war on terror". Two years later nothing has changed: in his address to the nation on 28 June 2005, he told the same story:

"Iraq is the latest battlefield in this war [on terror]. Many terrorists who kill innocent men, women, and children on the streets of Baghdad are followers of the same murderous ideology that took the lives of our citizens in New York, in Washington, and Pennsylvania. There is only one course of action against them: to defeat them abroad before they attack us at home." **[19]**

The purpose of describing the war in Iraq in this way is, of course, to connect in the minds of Americans a relatively unpopular war with 9/11. It worked sufficiently well to get him re-elected.

Prime Minister Blair has, on occasions, followed the President's lead in this matter, for example, on 20 November 2003, a few hours after the bombing of British targets in Istanbul, standing shoulder-to-shoulder literally with President Bush in Downing Street, he said:

> "And what this latest terrorist outrage shows us is that this is a war, its main battleground is Iraq. We have got to make sure we defeat these terrorists, the former Saddam people in Iraq, and we must do that because that is an essential part of defeating this fanaticism and extremism that is killing innocent people all over our world today." **[20]**

So, according to Blair, the bombings in Istanbul in November 2003 and in London in July 2005, are subsidiary incidents off the "main battleground" in the "war on terror" in Iraq. But, they're all connected, aren't they?

(The great success of the US/UK invasion of Iraq has been to transform Iraq from a "terrorist free zone" into the "main battleground" in the "war on terror").

Defence in the World
By coincidence, on the afternoon of the London bombings, a "defence" debate was scheduled to take place in the House of Commons. The title of the debate – *Defence in the World* – went some way to explain why the British homeland had been bombed a few hours earlier. In the plain meaning of the term, defence is about securing one's national territory against all forms of attack. But, in Britain's case, "defence" means interfering in the world along with the US.

As a possessor of the ultimate means of self-defence, that is, nuclear weapons, Britain is not going to be subject to military invasion by other states, as Iraq was invaded in March 2003 (unless the US takes away our US-maintained Trident delivery systems). Defence against other states is not a problem, since they can be threatened with annihilation. The only significant threat to the British homeland is from non-state actors, who cannot be deterred in this way. It is lunatic therefore that what purports to be a defence strategy has the effect of stimulating a threat against which there is no infallible defence.

As befits a debate entitled *Defence in the World*, it was not concerned with the breach in our homeland defence that had occurred a few hours earlier, but with our great success in stomping round the world, and how our military machine needs to be improved in order to do the job better.

It began with John Reid, the new Secretary of State (and ex member of the Communist Party), giving his personal justification for this British imperialism in the modern world. He said:

> "Let me set out in simple terms my own view of Britain's role in the world. … We are citizens of the world, a world that is shrinking almost visibly before us. Acts which, long ago, could be branded as something happening in faraway countries of which we knew little and for which we cared even less are now brought before our eyes every day through new technology and communications. Transportation systems take us from one part of the world to another in unbelievably short times. If we ever believed that our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world were no responsibility of ours, it gets harder by the year to do so. Therefore, in the international community and as a citizen of the world, this country has our rights to defend, our interests to maintain and also our responsibilities to discharge. In doing that, we sometimes have to use diplomacy, finance, aid and trade—all the matters that are being discussed at the G8—and also fighting power. Sometimes we have to use fighting power to separate others, and sometimes to bend others to our will. That is the general approach that I take." **[21]**

Bend others to our will? It's just like the days when the sun never set on the British Empire, isn't it, except that this time round we have to play second fiddle to the US in the business of bending others to our will.

No MP – apart from one very unwelcome intruder - objected to this principle that Britain's "defence" policy was about interfering in the world to the greatest possible extent, and not about defending the British homeland. Beginning with John Reid, they all mouthed the usual empty platitudes about the attack on the British homeland a few hours earlier but ignored it from then on and went on to deliver their prepared speeches on the state of our armed forces and the great progress we have made in bringing enlightenment to Afghanistan and Iraq. And, as John Reid told the House, those are but two of the far flung parts of the world, where our forces are "defending our country and our security":

> "Moving on from Afghanistan, I want briefly to remember members of our forces serving in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Cyprus, the Falkland Islands, Sierra Leone and elsewhere. … I can assure the House that, although those people may not be in the headlines at present, their contribution to defending our country and our security has not been forgotten."

No MP – apart from the unwelcome intruder - was so crass as to mention Afghan or Iraqi casualties, or even British casualties. American casualties were mentioned by John Reid, who commended "the US armed forces and the population" for their "resilience and courage in Iraq" in the face of nearly 1,800 killed. You would think the Americans had been coerced into invading Afghanistan and Iraq.

The unwelcome intruder was, of course, George Galloway, who said that the morning's events couldn't be separated from the political backdrop:

> "They did not come out of a clear blue sky, any more than those monstrous mosquitoes that struck the twin towers and other buildings in the United States on 9/11 2001. …
>
> "Does the House not believe that hatred and bitterness have been engendered by the invasion and occupation of Iraq, by the daily destruction of Palestinian homes, by the construction of the great apartheid wall in Palestine and by the occupation of Afghanistan? Does it understand that the bitterness and enmity generated by those great events feed the terrorism of bin Laden and the other Islamists? Is that such a controversial point? Is it not obvious?
>
> "When I was on the Labour Benches and spoke in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 … I said that if they handled that event in the wrong way, they would create 10,000 bin Ladens. Does anyone doubt that 10,000 bin Ladens at least have been created by the events of the past two and a half years? If they do, they have their head in the sand."

He also pointed to the double standard applied in the House to the deaths of Iraqi and British civilians:

> "When the US armed forces, … systematically reduced Falluja, a city the size of Coventry, brick by brick and killed an unknown number of people—probably the number runs to thousands, if not tens of thousands—not a whisper found its way into the Chamber. I have grown used to that. I know that for many people in the House and in power in this country the blood of some people is worth more than the blood of others."

The House didn't want to hear any of this. Winding up for the opposition, Julian Lewis agreed with Galloway that "there would be an air of unreality about a defence debate taking place on such a day if it did not in any way allude at least to the type of conflict of which we have seen such a terrible and despicable manifestation in the streets and on the tube network of London today". Lewis alluded to it to the extent of saying that the US/UK killed civilians in Iraq and elsewhere according to the "laws of war" but "what happened today was not part of any recognised law of war".

Neither Lewis, nor anybody else, tried to answer Galloway's his central point that the events of 7 July 2005 in London had political antecedents in our actions along with the US in the Muslim world – because it is unanswerable.

Winding up the debate, Defence Minister, Adam Ingram gave the Government's "answer". It was:

> "I think that the hon. Gentleman is dipping his poisonous tongue in a pool of blood, and I think it is disgraceful."

This was said at the very end of the time allotted to the debate, so as to prevent Galloway responding (though he did manage to call Ingram a "thug").

Double standard

Over 50 people were killed in London on 7 July 2005. For them, the Prime Minister and the House of Commons, and people around Britain and further afield, stood in silence a week later.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed in Iraq since the US/UK invasion in March 2003. But the Prime Minister, who was responsible for Britain taking part in the invasion, and the House of Commons, which blessed it on 18 March 2003, has yet to stand in silence for any of them, not even for the dead British servicemen.

Plainly, as George Galloway said, the blood of some people is worth more than the blood of others.

Before the invasion, the Prime Minister assured us that civilian deaths in the conflict would be fewer than Saddam Hussein regularly killed in a year. He told the House of Commons on 19 March 2003:

> "Of course, I understand that, if there is conflict, there will be civilian casualties. That, I am afraid, is in the nature of any conflict, but we will do our best to minimise them. However, I point out to my hon. Friend that civilian casualties in Iraq are occurring every day as a result of the rule of Saddam Hussein. He will be responsible for many, many more deaths even in one year than we will be in any conflict."

Amnesty International estimated that "scores of people, including possible prisoners of conscience, were executed" in 2002 **[22]**, a similar number in 2001 **[23]** and "hundreds" in 2000 **[24]**, and nobody can accuse Amnesty International of being soft on Saddam Hussein.

Had Saddam Hussein been left in place perhaps two hundred people would have been killed by his regime in the interim, compared with the tens of thousands of extra deaths as a result of his overthrow. It would have taken Saddam Hussein's regime hundreds of years to match the carnage produced by Bush and Blair in just over two.

David Morrison
Labour & Trade Union Review
July 2005

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